

DECRYPTING THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE'S DIMINISHING ELECTORAL PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The Congress of the People's (Cope) 7,42 per cent support in the 2009 general elections was followed by diminishing electoral prospects, which started to emerge as a trend in the 2011 local government elections. Its performance spiralled to its lowest ebb in the 2014 general elections. Because of this, an inevitable question is: What is the fate of Cope? Attempts to answer this question abound, largely ascribing Cope's woes to the leadership contestations that fragmented the party along the Mosioua Lekota and Mbhazima Shilowa binary. This is a dominant narrative, with explanations that the leadership contestations inhibited the efficiency of Cope's machinery to contest elections. Much is written about these aspects, including Cope's ideological question and its internal organisation. This article reconsiders Cope's electoral history to establish a context for yet another account for its diminishing electoral prospects, perhaps beyond the dominant narrative. An electoral prospect is a function of the history of an electoral performance. Electoral statistics are analysed to explain Cope's electoral performance. From this exercise, the article contends that the diminishing electoral prospects of Cope are the consequences of how it fared in the 2009 general elections.

Keywords: Congress of the People, diminishing electoral prospects, electoral performance, splinter formation, skewed political landscape

INTRODUCTION

Following its performance in 2009, Cope's electoral prospects diminished drastically in 2014. Its decline started to emerge in 2011. Because of this, an inevitable question is: What is the fate of Cope? This article examines this question. Its 'unit of analysis' is the 'electoral performance' of Cope. It is important to underscore at the outset that this article is not about the leadership contestation and internal organisation of Cope. For these are already extensively covered in the existing body of literature on South African electoral politics. Instead, this article focuses on the ultimate arbiters of the fate of Cope – voters in terms of their electoral behaviour and political choices. Voter behaviour is evinced in the electoral performance of the parties that contest the elections. This makes electoral performance an important 'unit of analysis'. For comparative and contextual purposes, the article starts by historicising the electoral performance of Cope. It analyses how this party fared in the 2009 and 2014 general elections.

For a comprehensive understanding of how it lost votes garnered in 2009, which became a gain for other parties, Cope's performance in the 2011 local government elections is considered. This is to establish a trend, which is important to predict the fate of a party. Greben (2007, 232) defines 'trends as progressive changes in a particular phenomenon', which in this article refer to the electoral performance of Cope. In other words, this article uses trend analysis to indicate how Cope's votes as garnered in the 2009 general elections were distributed among other parties in the 2011 local government elections and 2014 general elections. This exercise assumes a largely quantitative approach. Its results are used to attach meaning to the results of the quantitative analysis of the electoral performance of Cope. Towards the end of the article a conclusion is reached. It is argued that the fate of Cope is fade.

HISTORY OF ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

Following its establishment in 2008, with most analysts giving positive analytical prediction of its electoral prospects, Cope participated in the general elections for the first time in 2009 and managed to get 7,42 per cent of the national votes. It got 30 seats in the National Assembly. Contrary to what most analysts predicted about Cope being destined to change the African National Congress' (ANC) electoral hegemony, its performance fell below expectations. The 58,48 per cent margin of variation between Cope's 7,42 per cent and the ANC's 65,9 per cent in the 2009 general elections was just too wide for any significant impact in changing the political landscape. Its promising show in 2009 started to diminish in the 2011 local government elections, a downward trend which the outcome of the 2014 general elections confirmed. It plummeted to 0,67 per cent in 2014. Its electoral performance and fate should be understood within the context of its emergence in the skewed political landscape. Cope came into existence to compete in a political context of

single party domination, with the organisation from which it splintered being the dominant party (the ANC).

Suttner (2006, 277) predicted that the ANC's 'future defeat cannot be envisaged or is unlikely for the foreseeable future'. The ANC continues to win elections while the opposition parties struggle to survive at the periphery; some are fading, especially those that fail to secure the threshold of representation in the legislative bodies. Those that still exist because of the benevolence of the electoral system of proportional representation are many and fragmented. Their capacity to challenge the dominance of the ANC is depleted. This consolidates the dominant party system and the skewed political landscape in South Africa (Giliomee, Myburgh, and Schlemmer 2001, 163), which some analysts thought that Cope would change. Despite the system of multi-partyism in South Africa the ANC continues to, since it came into power in 1994, 'direct the political system and is firmly in control of state power', with the opposition parties making 'little if any dent on [its] political hegemony' (Matlosa and Karume, 2004, 10). Much has been written about the ANC's dominance of electoral politics in South Africa. Its truncated consideration in this article is to establish a premise for the analysis, which for comparative purpose, contextualises and historicises the electoral performance of Cope. Table 1 show the asymmetry of the dominant party system, where the opposition parties, since 1994–2014, failed to dislodge the ANC's hegemony.

Table 1: Trend of dominance and skewed political landscape

1994			1999				2004				2009				2014			
Party	per cent vote	no. seats	per cent vote	no. seats	per cent G+	per cent L-	per cent vote	no. seats	per cent G+	per cent L-	per cent vote	no. seats	per cent G+	per cent L-	per cent vote	no. seats	per cent G+	PER CENT L-
African National Congress (ANC)	62,65	252	66,35	266	+3,7	0	69,69	279	+3,34	0	65,9	264	0	-3,79	62,15	249	0	-3,75
National Party (NP)	20,39	82	6,87	28	0	-13,52	1,65	7	0	-5,22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	10,54	43	8,58	34	0	-1,96	6,97	28	0	-1,61	4,55	18	0	-2,42	2,40	10	0	-2,15
Freedom Front (FF)	2,17	9	0,80	3	0	-1,37	0,89	4	+0,09	0	0,83	4	0	-0,06	0,90	4	+0,07	0
Democratic Party (DP)	1,73	7	9,56	38	+7,83	0	12,37	50	+2,81	0	16,66	67	+4,29	0	22,23	89	+5,57	0
Pan Africanist Congress of Azania(PAC)	1,25	5	0,71	3	0	-0,54	0,73	3	+0,02	0	0,27	1	0	-0,46	0,21	1	0	-0,06
African Christian Democratic Party(ACDP)	0,45	2	1,43	6	+0,98	0	1,6	7	+0,17	0	0,81	3	0	-0,79	0,57	3	0	-0,24
United Democratic Movement (UDM)	0	0	3,43	14	0	0	2,8	9	0	-0,63	0,85	4	0	-1,95	1,00	4	+0,15	0
Federal Alliance(FA)	0	0	0,54	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minority Front (MF)	0	0	0,34	1	0	0	0,35	24	+0,01	0	0,25	1	0	-0,1	0,12	0	0	-0,13
Afrikaner Unity Movement (AUM)	0	0	0,29	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo)	0	0	0,17	1	0	0	0,25	1	+0,08	0	0,22	1	0	-0,03	0,11	0	0	-0,11

Independent Democrats (ID)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,73	7	0	0	0,92	4	0	-0,81	0	0	0	0
United Christian Democratic Party(UCDP)	0	0	0,78	3	0	-0,97	1,75	3	0	-0,03	0,37	2	0	-1,38	0,12	0	0	25
Congress of the People(Cope)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,42	30	0	0	0,67	3	0	-6,75
African People's Convention (APC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,20	1	0	0	0,17	1	0	-0,03
Economic Freedom Fighters(EFF)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,35	25	0	0
National Freedom Party (NFP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,57	6	0	0
African Independent Congress(AIC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,53	3	0	0
Agang SA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,28	2	0	0

The ANC lost 3,79 and 3,75 per cent of votes in 2009 and 2014 respectively. Some characterise this as a downward trend. This observation needs to be contextualised. For, in 1999 and 2004 the ANC increased its voter support by 3,7 and 3,34 per cent respectively. This followed its good performance in the founding elections in 1994, despite the attempts to reduce its anticipated landslide victory to below the two-thirds majority. Peter Harris revealed in his book, *The conspiracy to stop the '94 election*, that some parties feared that the ANC would use its majority to change the constitution. To ensure that this did not happen the electoral counting programme was hacked. The votes for the Freedom Front (FF), National Party (NP) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) were multiplied to neutralise the ANC's anticipated landslide victory (Harris 2010, 268–269). In spite of this, the ANC still emerged victorious. It garnered 62,65 per cent of the national vote in 1994. The ANC's loss of votes in 2009 and 2014 did not result in the changing of the skewed political landscape.

In 2004, the ANC reached the threshold of two-thirds majority, with 279 seats allocated to it in the National Assembly. Because of this, the article characterises the ANC's electoral performance since it became a governing party in 1994 as, in the parlance of speciation theory, 'punctuated equilibrium', not necessarily a downward trend. In other words, its electoral performance fluctuated with progressive or regressive changes in the discrete time intervals of the cycles of elections not significantly impacting on its electoral hegemony. In this context, Cope's 7,42 per cent of electoral support in 2009 is analysed to trace the history of Cope's electoral performance from its first participation in electoral politics.

Cope's electoral performance in the 2009 general elections

Based on the results of the analysis of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research's (CSIR) electoral data, Booyesen (2010) determined that 4,61 per cent of Cope support in the 2009 elections came from the ANC. In the 2009 general elections the ANC lost 3,79 per cent of the national vote. This was ascribed to the

emergence of Cope, which garnered 7,42 per cent. In the proportion of the whole, 62,21 per cent of Cope support came from ANC. But where did the other 2,81 per cent come from? Kotzé observed that 'more than one-third of Cope's support did not originate from the ANC' (2012, 176), but from other opposition parties, namely the Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the United Democratic Movement (UDM), the Independent Democrats (ID), the New National Party (NNP) and the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP). Against how these parties fared in 2004, with the emergence of Cope, the IFP lost 2,42 per cent in the 2009 general elections, of which 0,02 per cent went to Cope. It constituted the proportion of 7,42 per cent that Cope had garnered in 2009. In the proportion of the whole, Cope voters who came from the IFP constituted 0,27 per cent. Of the 1,95 per cent that the UDM lost, Cope benefited 0,59 per cent, which made part of the proportion of its 7,42 per cent. In the proportion of the whole, Cope voters who came from the UDM constituted 7,96 per cent.

The ID lost 0,81 per cent, from which Cope took 0,41 per cent. This constituted the proportion of Cope's 7,42 per cent, which, to the proportion of the whole, amounted to 5.53 per cent. UCDP lost 0,19 per cent to Cope. Its total loss in the 2009 general elections was 1,38 per cent, of which 0,19 per cent went to Cope's 7,42 per cent. In the proportion of the whole UCDP lost 2,56 per cent to Cope. The NNP faded before the formation of Cope in 2008, following the reversal of its electoral prospects in 1999 and 2004. NNP lost 13,53 per cent of the national vote in 1999, followed by a further loss of 5,22 per cent in 2004. This loss of support was huge and therefore not sustainable. The NNP disbanded in 2005. In 2009 Cope gained 0,15 per cent of votes that came from the 5,22 per cent the NNP lost in the 2004 general elections. This 0,15 per cent constituted the proportion of Cope's 7,42 per cent. In the proportion of the whole, NNP constituted 2,02 per cent of Cope support. The DA lost 0,98 per cent to Cope, which, in the proportion of the whole, was 13,26 per cent (see Table 1).

What does all this mean? The answer is simple: Cope ate into the electoral base of the opposition parties. Mangcu put it bluntly: Cope 'massacred' them (2009, 128). This is why they performed badly in 2009. The DA was the only party that increased its support in 2009. The support base of all other parties that Cope benefitted from declined. This included the ANC. However, Cope's gain was not to the extent of contesting the hegemony of the ANC. The 7,42 per cent voter support it garnered in 2009 was too small for this. Contrary to the popular expectation, following its establishment, that it was destined to disentangle the ANC's hegemony, Cope instead 'reinforced the asymmetry of dominant party system' (Mozaffar and Scarritt 2005, 412). The ANC remained a dominant party with 65,9 per cent voter support. Table 2 shows where the votes of Cope in 2009 came from.

Table 2: Origin of Cope votes in 2009

Political Party	Proportion of 7.42 per cent	Proportion of the whole
African National Congress	4,61 per cent	62,21 per cent
Democratic Alliance	0,98 per cent	13,26 per cent
Inkatha Freedom Party	0,02 per cent	0,27 per cent
United Democratic Movement	0,59 per cent	7,96 per cent
Independent Democrats	0,41 per cent	5,53 per cent
New National Party	0,15 per cent	2,02 per cent
United Christian Democratic Party	0,19 per cent	2,56 per cent

Source: Booysen (in Kotzé 2012, 176)

Perhaps for contextual reasons, it is important to bring in another dimension to further explain the fate of Cope by making reference to the DA again. As pointed out above, since it became the official opposition party in 1999, its support has been increasing consistently (see Table 1), but not to the extent of amassing the amount of votes that can change the template of single party domination. The dimension the article brings here is aptly captured in the 2014 Research Report of Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) on voting patterns in South Africa: 'Historically, most of the smaller parties have been in decline, cannibalised by the larger opposition party, the DA' (Ndletyana et al. 2014, 6). From this observation the Report infers that 'the rise and fall of breakaway groups from the ANC such as UDM and Cope [are] linked to this phenomenon, with these parties acting as transit for voters disgruntled – for whatever reason – with the ANC' (ibid).

What does this mean? Cope came into existence in the context of the ANC's political hegemony and the DA's burgeoning electoral strength. The intersection of these realities minimised the electoral prospects of other opposition parties, including Cope. It therefore stood no chance. Its 7,42 per cent vote was too small to change the ANC's political hegemony. As Habib (2009, 12) observed, following the declaration of the results of the 2009 general elections, the leaders of Cope 'were at pains to point out [that this per centage] was not a bad electoral support to achieve if one takes into account that the party [was then] only a mere six months old'.

Some analysts shared this view, which its performance in the subsequent elections disproved it. Because of this, the argument shifted to leadership contestations as the reason for the reversal of its electoral prospects. This ignores the meaning encrypted in Cope's 7,42 per cent of electoral support. Often when the question about the fate of Cope is asked, based on its electoral performance in the subsequent elections, a counter question is: How do you explain its performance of 2009? This question is based on the false assumption that Cope performed well in the 2009 general elections. It did not. Cope 'performed more badly' in 2009 (Habib 2009, 12), far below expectations. Mangcu made the same observation: 'Cope fell far short of what its leaders had expected' (2009, 131). These observations are important to explain the fate of Cope, which other analysts do not emphasise with the same tone as they did in their positive analytical predictions of the electoral prospects of this splinter formation based on the Markinor Surveys just before the 2009 elections. This makes the question that Mbithi wa Kivilu and Mmotlane (2010) asked in their article in the *Journal of African Elections* very important: Are surveys 'scientific predictions or navel gazing?' Their article adequately answered this question, which is referred to here only for contextualising earlier predictions of the electoral prospects of Cope.

Southall (2009, 173) argued that 'Cope holds the promise to become a substantial challenger to the ANC because of its shared liberation credentials and constituencies'. Mashele (2009, 17) agreed, in a metaphor that Cope is 'the turbulence that hit the ANC jet in flight'. Maserumule and Mathekga (2011, 1183) characterised Cope 'as one of the major shifts in South Africa's political landscape since the collapse of the apartheid regime', which, as a splinter party from the ANC, had the potential to move into the ANC's traditional and untraditional constituencies. According to Habib (2009, 13), compared to the ANC and DA, Cope's 'demographic base [was] much more diversified', with 65 per cent of its support base being black African and, 'in proportional terms, its support base within the white community [was] much larger than that of the ANC'. The geographical spread of the support base of Cope in all the provinces was said to have indicated that this formation had a national base. Much of this analysis was based on the Markinor survey, which turned out to be, in the words of Mbithi wa Kivilu and Mmotlane (2010), 'navel gazing'.

In his article that analysed the actual performance of Cope in the 2009 general elections, Habib (2009) conceded that political commentators, including himself, inflated the electoral prospects of Cope. It performed below expectations or badly, especially as measured against the fanfare associated with its formation and the expectations it generated in the South African body politic. However, its 7,42 per cent was ahead of 'some of the older and more experienced post-apartheid parties': Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), Independent Democrats (ID), United Democratic Movement (UDM) and Freedom Front Plus (FF+) (Ndletyana, 2010, 45). In 'less than six months Cope outperformed these parties' (ibid). Its highest support base, as the Independent Electoral Commission's electoral data indicated, was in the Northern Cape, at 16,67 per cent, followed by the

Eastern Cape and Free State, respectively at 13,67 and 11,61 per cent. In North-West, Gauteng, Western Cape and Limpopo, Cope got more than 7 per cent. Its performance in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal was less than 3 per cent (Independent Electoral Commission 2011). Cope became the official opposition party in five (5) provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, Northern Cape and North-West (Booyesen 2009, 450–452). This means, as Ndletyana (2010, 45) observes, that in 2009 'Cope won the third-highest number of votes of the 26 parties which participated in the election, behind the two established parties, the incumbent ANC and the leading opposition party, DA'.

The votes that Cope garnered in 2009 were not adequate to change ANC's dominance. Instead, what Cope achieved in 2009 was, as Mangcu argued, to redefine 'the landscape of oppositions politics' (2009, 128), not to change the ANC's dominance of the electoral politics. This is where the origin of Cope's diminishing electoral prospects lies, in its electoral performance in 2009. It failed to live up to the expectations of its originative historical foundation, which was to disentangle the ANC's political hegemony. Before this article expands on this aspect, it is perhaps important to engage the mainstream narrative ascribing the diminishing electoral prospects of Cope to the leadership contestations that fragmented the party along the Mosioa Lekota and Mbhazima Shilowa binary. This binary narrative preponderates in the public intellectual space and is abundantly rehearsed in the existing body of literature on electoral politics. Kotzé doubts the validity of this narrative. In the analysis of Cope's electoral performance in the 2011 local government elections Kotzé posed the question: 'Is it justified to expect that turmoil amongst a party's national leaders will necessarily affect its support?' An answer is implied in his example that in 2009 the ANC was in the 'immediate aftermath of its succession struggle dating back to at least 2005' (Kotzé, 2012, 177), which however did not have much impact on its voter support.

In 2009 the ANC lost only 3,79 per cent of the national vote, but comfortably maintained its majority support with 65,9 per cent. The article agrees with Kotzé's perspective, but for a reason different from the context in which it was advanced, which contested the suggestion that Cope's loss of support in the 2011 local government elections 'signal[s] its absolute demise' (2012, 173). It contends that the diminishing electoral prospects of Cope lie primarily in how it fared in the 2009 elections. The contention behind this draws insights from Duverger's electoral theory, specifically the proposition that a party that performs badly in elections, which, as argued above, Cope did in 2009, generates a psychological effect on voters that voting for losing parties is a waste of votes (Duverger 1951, 256). As Mangcu (2009, 129) observed, those that voted for Cope in 2009 genuinely believed that the 'ANC was on its knees' and therefore believed that it could be defeated. This did not happen. The ANC returned to power with 65,9 per cent of votes, while Cope could only achieve 7,42 per cent. Despite its decline by 3,79 per cent in 2009, with Cope cited as part of the reason for this, the ANC continued to assert its electoral hegemony.

Cope's 7,42 per cent was paltry, and therefore, as argued above, represented poor performance, especially as measured against the expectation that it was set to disentangle the ANC's hegemony. Following the logic of Duverger's theory, this article argues that Cope's electoral performance in 2009 had a psychological effect on its supporters, who in the subsequent elections changed their voting preferences, with some abstaining from voting. The leadership contestations and the institutional problems that beset its existence exacerbated its diminishing electoral prospects. Empirical evidence gleaned from the electoral performance of Cope in the 2011 local government elections and 2014 general elections confirms the contention of the article. Cope's diminishing electoral prospects are the consequence of how it fared in the 2009 general elections. The electoral prospects of a party are a function of the history of its electoral performance. In order to validate this argument, the article analyses the electoral performance of Cope in the 2011 local government and 2014 general elections.

Cope's electoral performance in the 2011 local government elections

In 2011, Cope lost 5 per cent of the votes it got in the 2009 general elections. Kotzé (2012, 173) described Cope's loss as 'substantial'. Coupled with the increase in voter turnout, which stood at 57,6 per cent (Independent Electoral Commission 2011), the DA appeared to have been the main beneficiary of Cope's loss in 2011 (Kotzé 2011). This confirms an earlier observation about the DA's burgeoning electoral support base. Cope garnered 23,9 per cent while the ANC, with 62 per cent, won the highest votes. Cope's electoral support was at 2,1 per cent, with 236 seats allocation, compared to 5 633 of the ANC and 1 555 of the DA. The IFP performed better than Cope. With the support of 3,6 per cent, IFP took control of five (5) councils. The ANC secured 198 councils, followed by the DA with 18. The NFP took control of two (2) councils, whereas the remaining two went to other parties. In the provinces where Cope performed well in 2009 general elections, its support declined in the 2011 local government elections, with the exception of Northern Cape, where its electoral support stood at 12 per cent. Table 3 shows how Cope fared in the 2011 local government elections.

Table 3: 2011 Local government elections

Name of the Political Party	Number of Municipal Councils Won	Seats	Won per cent Support
African National Congress	198	5633	62 per cent
Democratic Alliance	18	1555	23,9 per cent
Inkatha Freedom Party	5	352	3,6 per cent

Congress of the People	0	236	2,1 per cent
National Freedom Party	2	224	2,4 per cent
Other Parties	2	140	2 per cent
United Democratic Movement	0	65	0,6 per cent
Independent Democrats	0	45	1,1 per cent
Pan-Africanist Congress	0	40	0,4 per cent
African Christian Democratic Party	0	40	0,6 per cent
Vryheidsfront Plus	0	38	0,5 per cent
African People's Convention	0	28	0,38 per cent
United Christian Democratic Party	0	25	0,2 per cent
Azanian People's Organization	0	15	0,2 per cent
Total	225	8436	

Source: *Independent Electoral Commission 2011*

Out of 39 municipalities in the Eastern Cape, Cope secured representation in 22 councils. It failed to pass the threshold of representation in 17 municipalities. Free State had 20 municipalities. Cope managed to get representations in 16 of them. It failed to achieve representation in four (4) municipalities. In Gauteng, Cope got representation in eight (8) municipalities. It failed to get any representation in two (2) municipalities. Gauteng had 10 municipalities. Cope's representation in Kwazulu-Natal was the lowest. Out of 61 municipalities, Cope achieved representation in only two (2) councils. It lost the elections in 59 municipalities. In Limpopo, Cope achieved representation in 21 municipalities out of 25. Its representation in Northern Cape, as compared to other provinces, was the highest. It achieved representation in 25 municipalities. It lost in only one municipality, namely Richtersveld. In North-West, Cope's representation was in 16 municipalities. It failed to secure representation in three (3) municipalities. In the Western Cape, Cope achieved representation in 17 municipalities. It failed to secure representation in eight (8) municipalities. Cope's low representation in Mpumalanga is similar to that of Kwazulu-Natal. Out of 18 municipalities, Cope secured representation in only six (6) of them. Table 4 shows the number of municipalities where Cope either secured or did not secure representation in the different provinces.

Table 4: Number of Cope's representations in the municipalities per province

Province	Number of municipalities where Cope has representation	Number of municipalities where Cope does not have representation
Eastern Cape	22	17
Free State	16	4
Gauteng	8	2
Kwazulu-Natal	2	59
Limpopo	21	4
Mpumalanga	6	12
North West	16	3
Northern Cape	25	1
Western Cape	17	8
Total	133	110

Source: Kotzé 2012, 183

Cope's performance in the 2011 local government elections stands in contrast to its performance in 2009. Because of the huge percentage at which it dropped, an inevitable question arose: Was Cope joining the ranks of those, in the words Mozaffar and Scarritt (2005, 414), 'larger number of smaller third-tier parties', which are 'inconsequential', with some of them fading? The answer to this question differed. Maserumule and Mathekga (2011) answered this question in the affirmative. They characterised the future of Cope as 'bleak', with the contention that it was 'most likely to disappear from South Africa's political radar' (Maserumule and Mathekga 2011, 1182). Their prediction went as far as suggesting that 'the future of Cope beyond 2014 seems far-fetched'. Kotzé differed. He argued that 'although Cope lost substantial support in 2011, the election did not signal its absolute demise' (Kotzé 2011a, 173). Cope managed to participate in the 2014 general elections. Some analyses remained optimistic about the future of Cope, despite its loss of electoral support in the 2011 local government elections. That it could form coalitions in other municipalities was considered as a reason this splinter formation could not just simply be wished away. It formed coalitions with the DA in five (5) municipalities, with the position of mayor of Karoo Hoogland in Northern Cape given to it.

The DA and Cope had seat allocations of two (2) each, whereas the ANC had three (3). Their coalition outnumbered the ANC. Even though coalitions are important, the mere fact that they are formed does not necessarily imply the significance of the parties involved in terms of governance and legislative impact. Some coalitions are formed for narrow political ends (to simply oust the governing

party), while others could become impotent because of the 'discordant voices' that 'each party brings' into 'coalition politics' (Mangcu 2009, 131). Cope's loss of votes in the 2011 local government was a manifestation of a downward electoral trend. This validates the argument that a party that fails to achieve the electoral outcomes which its supporters expect is most likely to be shunned by voters in the subsequent elections. Cope's electoral performance in the 2011 local government elections is the consequence of how it fared in 2009. Cope's electoral prospects plummeted to their lowest proportions in the 2014 elections.

Cope's electoral performance in the 2014 general elections

The outcome of the 2014 general elections consolidated a downward electoral trend for Cope. Its electoral prospects diminished drastically, almost proving Maserumule and Mathekga's 2011 prediction, based on their analysis of its electoral performance in the local government elections, that 'the future of Cope beyond 2014 seems far-fetched' (2011, 1182), correct. As Mbete (2014, 278) observed, probably against the history of its performance, 'Cope was undoubtedly the biggest casualty of the 2014 elections, even more than Agang' – a party Ramphela Mamphela established in 2013 to contest the elections. This is despite the fact that Cope 'received 4,1 per cent media coverage' (Raudu and Bird 2014, 230). It missed the threshold of obliteration by an inch. Because of this, the narrative on the future of Cope changed completely. It shifted from Cope's prospects of breaking the ANC's cycle of dominance to an ability to sustain its existence, which hangs by a string. Its loss of 6,75 was a deep decline, which as measured against its electoral performance of 2,1 per cent in the 2011 local government elections, showed a loss of 1,43 per cent. From being the third largest party in 2009, Cope became the eighth lowest in 2014. Its decline by a sizeable per centage was similar to that of the NNP, which in 1999 lost 13,52 per cent, followed by 5,22 per cent in 2004. This loss of votes became untenable and it disbanded in 2005. Cope seems destined to the same fate. It lost votes by a huge per centage. From this, as the electoral statistics suggest, a deduction is that Cope does not resonate with a significant population of voters anymore.

A year before the 2014 general elections, the population of South Africa was recorded to be at 52, 98 million people, half of whom were, according to the IEC, registered as voters for the 2014 general elections (25 388 082). Those who cast their votes were 18 654 771. This represented a 73,48 per cent voter turnout, which was the 'lowest since the elections in 1999 when registration was introduced' (Ndletyana et al., 2014, 4). Cope garnered only 123 235 of the national vote. This was in contrast to its electoral performance of 7,42 per cent in 2009. Its loss of support in 2014 became a gain for the ANC, albeit marginally, and other opposition parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), DA and UDM. The EFF took Cope's place as the third largest political party. It entered electoral politics for the first time in

2014. The EFF ate into Cope's electoral base. It got 6,35 per cent, which translated into 25 seats in the National Assembly. The DA increased its support by 5,57 per cent. It garnered 22,23 per cent of the national vote and qualified for 89 seats. The UDM increased its support by 0,15 per cent. This was ascribed to Shilowa's faction, which just before the election, following Lekota's re-election as the party's leader in January, joined the UDM. The DA, UDM and FF+ were the only parties that increased their voter support in 2014.

The UDM and FF+'s increased electoral support in 2014 did not result in an increase of seat allocation. They retained their four (4) seats they had in 2009. The DA appeared to have regained its loss of votes to Cope in 2009, which was 0,98 per cent. ANC got 62,15 per cent. Its electoral support dropped by 3,75 per cent. This is ascribed to the emergence of the EFF. In 2009, the ANC's decline by 3,79 per cent was attributed to Cope's emergence. Its gain from Cope's losses in the 2014 general elections was not adequate to restore the electoral performance it showed in 1994, 1999 and 2004. Cope's 3 seats in the national assembly, compared to the 30 it had following the 2009 general elections, or its 0,67 per cent electoral performance, compared to its 7,42 per cent in 2009, showed a deep decline. In Table 5 Cope's national support is disaggregated into provinces, with an indication of voter turnout to illustrate the extent its support base shrunk.

Table 5: Cope's national support and voter turnout in the 2014 national elections

Province	Registered voters	Total votes cast	Valid votes	per cent voter turnout	Cope's votes	per cent Cope votes
Eastern Cape	3,320,059	2,278,555	2,243,497	70.32 per cent	26,580	1.18 per cent
Free State	1,449,448	1,051,027	1,034,337	72.51 per cent	14,613	1.41 per cent
Gauteng	6,063,739	4,638,981	4,592,219	76.50 per cent	23,203	0.51 per cent
KwaZulu-Natal	5,117,131	3,935,771	3,874,833	76.91 per cent	5,553	0.14 per cent
Limpopo	2,438,280	1,543,986	1,523,169	63.32 per cent	12,478	0.83 per cent
Mpumalanga	1,860,834	1,408,269	1,385,407	75.68 per cent	3,931	0.28 per cent
North West	1,669,349	1,147,786	1,126,691	68.76 per cent	8,540	0.76 per cent

Northern Cape	601,080	443,714	436,065	73.82 per cent	14,452	3.31 per cent
Western Cape	2,941,333	2,188,236	2,168,147	74.40 per cent	13,833	0.64 per cent
Out of country	6,789	18,446	18,132	N/A	52	0.29 per cent
Total	25,388,082	18,654,771	18,402,497	73.48 per cent	123,235	0.67 per cent

Source: Independent Electoral Commission 2014

Contrasting the national votes with provincial votes for Cope to determine the possibility and implication of tactical voting does not change the outlook of its electoral performance. However, in the Eastern Cape Shilowa's faction of Cope increased the UDM's electoral support. The UDM became the third largest party in the Eastern Cape provincial legislature, with 10 seats. Cope failed to reach the threshold for representation in six (6) provincial legislatures. This included provinces where in 2009 it was the official opposition party. It was only in three (3) provinces where Cope achieved the barest representation in the form of one (1) seat in the provincial legislature: Northern Cape, Limpopo and Eastern Cape. Cope was the official opposition party in these provinces in 2009. It performed better in the provinces than it did at the national level in 2009. Such performance was better than that of the ANC and the DA whose share of the provincial vote was less than their performance in the national election (Lemon 2009, 5).

The Eastern Cape had a registered population of 3 240 059, of which 2 213 121 cast their vote in the 2014 general elections. Voter turnout was 68,3 per cent. Cope got only 26 129 votes, which was 1,2 per cent of the total votes cast. Based on this electoral performance, Cope could only get one (1) seat in the Eastern Cape provincial legislature. This was a decline from the 13,67 per cent garnered in 2009, which translated into nine seats in the provincial legislature. Cope was the official opposition party in the Eastern Cape following the 2009 provincial elections. The DA took this position in 2014. It is now the official opposition party in the Eastern Cape.

In the Free State 1 449 488 voters registered to participate in the 2014 elections. A total number of 1 029 297 cast their votes. This represented 71,01 per cent voter turnout. Out of this, Cope captured only 16 516 votes, which was 1,63 per cent of the total votes cast. This performance was below the required threshold and therefore no seat was allocated to Cope in the Free State provincial legislature. In 2009 Cope got 120 018 votes, which represented 11,61 per cent of the votes cast. It was allocated four (4) seats and was the official opposition in the Free State provincial legislature. In Gauteng 6 063 739 people registered to vote. The total of 4 424 424 voters cast their votes. This represented 72,97 per cent voter turnout. Cope only got 21 652

votes. This was 0,49 per cent of the total votes cast. Its performance fell below the required threshold and therefore no seat in the Gauteng provincial legislature was allocated to it. In 2009 Cope captured 323 327 votes in Gauteng. This was 7,78 per cent of the total votes cast. It was allocated six (6) seats in the provincial legislature.

In Kwazulu-Natal a total number of 5 117 131 people were registered to participate in the 2014 elections. 3 887 840 votes were cast. This represented 75,98 per cent voter turnout. Only 5 968 voters voted for Cope. This means 0,16 per cent of the total votes cast. Because of this poor performance, Cope does not have any seat allocation in the Kwazulu-Natal provincial legislature. In 2009 Cope captured 44 890 votes in Kwazulu-Natal. This was 1,29 per cent of the total votes cast. It only had one (1) seat. Only 12 573 voters voted for Cope in Limpopo. This represented 0,86 per cent of the total votes cast. Limpopo had a registered population of 2 438 280, of which 1 480 595 cast their votes. This meant 60,72 per cent voter turnout. Its 0,86 performance secured only one (1) seat in the Limpopo provincial legislature. In 2009 Cope had four (4) seats, following its support of 112 325 voters. This represented 7,53 per cent of the total votes cast. In Mpumalanga only 4 288 votes went to Cope. This was 0,32 of 1 355 592 of the total votes cast. A total of number of 1 860 834 people registered to participate in the 2014 elections. The voter turnout was 72,85 per cent. Cope does not have a seat in the Mpumalanga provincial legislature. It had one (1) seat in 2009, following 37 789 votes it garnered, which represented 2,91 per cent of the total vote cast.

In North-West Cope captured only 8 692 votes, which was 0,80 per cent of 1 107 079 of the total votes cast. It could not secure any seat allocation in the provincial legislature. The North-West province had 1 669 349 registered voters, with voter turnout of 66,32 per cent. In 2009 Cope in the North-West was the official opposition, with three (3) seats in the provincial legislature, its capturing of 89 573 votes represented 8,33 per cent of the total votes cast. In the Northern Cape, Cope got 15 214 votes, which was 3,60 per cent of 428 537 total votes cast in a population of 601 080 registered voters. Voter turnout was 71, 29 per cent. Its performance secured only one seat in the provincial legislature. In 2009 Cope was the official opposition in the Northern Cape provincial legislature, with five (5) seats allocated to it because of the 67 416 votes it got – 16,67 per cent of the total votes cast. In the Western Cape Cope could not secure any seat allocation. It garnered only 12 520 votes, which was 0,59 per cent of 2 140 090 total votes cast. In the Western Cape 2 941 333 voters were registered to vote and the turnout was 72,76 per cent. In 2009 Cope garnered 152 356 votes, which represented 7,74 per cent of the total votes cast. It had three seats in the Western Cape provincial legislature. Table 6 shows Cope's performance in the 2014 general elections in the different provinces, compared to how it fared in 2009.

Table 6: Cope's performance in the provinces

2009	per cent Support	Number of Seats	2014	per cent Support	Number of Seats	P+ P-
Eastern Cape	13,67	9	Eastern Cape	1,20	1	12,47
Free State	11,61	4	Free State	1,63	0	9,98
Gauteng	7,78	6	Gauteng	0,49	0	7,29
Kwazulu-Natal	1,29	1	Kwazulu Natal	0,16	0	1,13
Limpopo	7,53	4	Limpopo	0,86	1	6,67
Mpumalanga	2,91	1	Mpumalanga	0,32	0	2,59
North-West	8,33	3	North-West	0,80	0	7,53
Northern Cape	16,67	5	Northern Cape	3,60	1	13,07
Western Cape	7,74	3	Western Cape	0,59	0	7,15

Source: Own, developed from IEC statistics

P+ stands for 'per centage gained', while P- is for 'per centage lost'. The electoral prospects of Cope diminished in all the provinces, with the EFF emerging as the actual beneficiary of its losses. The EFF achieved the status of being the second official opposition party in the Free State, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Western Cape. It achieved the same status in Parliament. In Limpopo and North-West, the EFF is the official opposition party. It replaced Cope, which held this status following its performance in the 2009 general elections. In the Eastern Cape, Cope's losses were a gain shared between the DA and UDM.

Why did this article take this long statistical detour? The answer is simple: To demonstrate Cope's electoral performance trend. From the analysis of electoral statistics, a definitive aspect which characterises the electoral performance of Cope since its formation can easily be discerned: A downward trend. The diminishing electoral prospect of Cope is the consequence of how it performed in the 2009 general elections, which was far below expectation. Because of this, voters in the subsequent elections shunned it. Duverger's electoral theory explains the reason for this electoral behaviour. Although in some provincial legislatures Cope was the official opposition party, it became a third party in Parliament. This was far below the expectations of its supporters. Its electoral prospects plummeted to their lowest in 2014, therefore joining the 'larger number of smaller-tier parties, which are inconsequential' (Mozzaffar and Scarritt 2005, 414). Against this background the question is: What does Cope's downward trend, which hit its lowest point in 2014, portend? The answer is simple because 'numbers don't lie'. But, perhaps before this question is answered, it is important to reflect on Cope's support base. In other words, what was Cope's political market?

COPE'S SUPPORT BASE

Analysts differed in their segmentation of Cope's support base. Some argued that it comprised the middle class (Ndletyana 2009; Southall 2009) while others indicated that its constituency came from those who were in the lower social strata in the urban areas (Booyesen 2009), especially in Gauteng. From the synthesis of these observations, it can be said that in the 2009 general elections the urban-based middle class, the urban-based unemployed, and the poor constituted the support base of Cope. It is not easy to define the middle class, as different conceptions of this concept exist. For the purpose of this article, Southall's explanatory attempt appears useful. He disaggregates this phenomenon into 'new' and 'old'. The new middle class is explained as 'typically in government or corporate employment, [and] shares many of the characteristics of the classic proletariat, notably in the sense that it has no direct ownership of the means of production and is in a subordinate relationship to capital-owning employers' (Southall 2004, 521). These are, as Southall further explains, 'salaried employees [who] often enjoy a higher income than members of the old middle class, which is typically composed of middle to small-scale owners of capitalist enterprises and often employs others in production' (2004, 521–522).

The middle class is the type of political market whose loyalty is contingent upon the satisfaction of its expectations, where voting decisions transcend historical and political affinities. Voters in this category easily switch loyalty when their parties disappoint them. Some abstain from voting. The urban-based unemployed and the poor's voting behaviour is influenced by their socio-economic circumstances. These refer to those who felt neglected by the ANC, but did not consider the DA as an option as it is widely considered a white liberal party. They would also not go for an organisation with a history of liberation struggle such as the PAC and Azapo as they failed to establish themselves as functional parties in post-apartheid South Africa (Kondlo 2009). Parties with ethnic dispositions were also not an option for this category of voters. Cope came as an option, even for members of the DA who saw it as the party that projected the possibility of a 'real non-racial alternative to the ANC' (Mangu 2009, 29).

In wooing members of the ANC, Cope projected itself as the true custodian of the values of the ANC. Issues that undergird its originative historical context resonated with the discontent in the middle class, the urban-unemployed, and the poor, with the former mostly being concerned with ethical leadership and governance whereas the latter blamed the ANC for their socio-economic situation. These categories of voters that constituted the support base of Cope in the 2009 general elections are not static; they are variable. In other words, to quote Schlesinger and Schlesinger, voters in these categories 'weigh their options, assess their relative chances of winning, and trade whatever they can in order to come as close as possible to their desired ends' (2006, 62). They tried Cope as what it offered resonated with their expectations. Its electoral performance fell far below those expectations. Their electoral choices changed in

the subsequent elections. Some became either 'least interested' in electoral politics or 'indifferent' (Daalder 1984, 101). They abstained from voting. Why is this part of the article interested in the character of Cope's political market or support base? The answer is: to establish a context for yet another important question. By targeting the middle class and urban-based unemployed, was Cope not placing its electoral prospects in an unpredictable political market, which is sensitive to disappointment? In other words, did Cope not bet on a dangerous horse, which at slightest provocation could throw it off its back? This question is asked against the backdrop of how Cope in the subsequent elections was shunned in the urban and metropolitan areas, where its stronghold was said to be located, especially in Gauteng.

As Kotzé (2012, 187) observes, in 2011 Cope's support base shifted from the middle class and urban-based unemployed to the low-income earners in the rural areas. Its loss of votes in 2011 was largely among the poor urban and metropolitan voters (Kotzé 2012, 187). Cope's support base shifted to the rural parts of Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape. But what did this shift mean for Cope? The answer appears to be fairly simple: A deepening diminishing electoral prospect. The 2014 general elections confirmed this. Perhaps before expanding on this aspect, it is important to mention that, as a manifestation of its electoral shift to the rural areas, in the 2014 general elections Cope was obliterated in the provinces where the major cities (Buffalo City, City of Cape Town, City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, Ethekwini, Mangaung, Nelson Mandela Bay and Tshwane Metro) are situated. Going back to the meaning of the electoral shift of its support base, Cope faced stiff competition in the rural areas. This is because the ANC's support had also shifted to the rural areas. As Mistra's Research Report indicated, 'unlike in the previous elections, the accent of the ANC's popularity, in relative terms, is shifting decisively towards rural areas' (Ndletyana et al. 2014, 8). The Report further showed that, in the 2014 general elections, the ANC lost drastically 'in four, out of eight, metros by an average 9 per centage points' (ibid). However, it commands large support in most rural areas dispersed across the different provinces, with the exception of the Western Cape where the DA enjoys the largest support in most rural based municipalities. In some rural parts of the Eastern Cape, the ANC regained the support it lost in the previous elections.

The Mistra Research Report made a very interesting observation: 'It would seem that, in NMB (Nelson Mandela Bay) and the Eastern Cape as a whole; the ANC was able to regain the support that had haemorrhaged to Cope' (Ndletyana et al. 2014, 13, 15). However, a caveat in this observation is that, in NMB, the ANC gained far less than Cope in the previous elections. This means Cope supporters either abstained or went to the DA and UDM (Ndletyana, et al. 2014, 14). In rural Northern Cape the picture was more interesting, with the intersection of the electoral strengths of the ANC, DA and EFF wiping Cope off of the scene. Electoral statistics indicated that the ANC and DA regained the support lost to Cope in 2009. The EFF gained from Cope's electoral losses. For instance, in Ga Tlhoase/Kollie the ANC's

support increased by 20 per cent. In 2009 the ANC garnered 52 per cent while Cope achieved 24 per cent. In 2014 the ANC garnered 72 per cent, followed by the DA with 14 per cent. The EFF got 10 per cent. Cope shared the remaining 4 per cent with other parties. In Longlands, the ANC garnered 60 per cent, an improvement of 2 per cent from the 58 per cent it achieved in 2009. The DA garnered 35 per cent. In 2009 Cope garnered 30 per cent. In 2014 Cope shared 5 per cent of votes with other parties. The DA increased its support by 27 per cent. In Pniel the DA increased its support by 28 per cent. Its electoral performance in 2009 was 48 per cent. It went up to 76 per cent in 2014. The ANC dropped by 4 per cent in Pniel. Its electoral support in 2009 was 22 per cent. It went down by 18 per cent. This was not a gain for Cope, which still performed badly despite the ANC losing support. Cope shared 6 per cent with other parties. In 2009 Cope's electoral support was at 17 per cent. In Gong Gong, the DA achieved 54 per cent; followed by the ANC with 42 per cent. In 2009 the ANC achieved 67 per cent while Cope followed at 26 per cent (Independent Electoral Commission, 2014).

The analysis results of the 2014 general elections confirm that the shift of Cope's support base to the rural areas meant a deepening diminishing electoral prospect for this splinter formation, especially in the rural areas of the provinces where it claimed to have had support: Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. The ANC and DA made significant inroads into Cope's support base. The EFF gained from Cope's electoral losses. Cope's woes in the rural areas were complicated by the fact that 'because of relatively high levels of deprivation [in the rural areas], the rural folks have a much larger reliance on state largesse' (Ndletyana, et al. 2014, 10). Because of the fact that Cope never governed the country like the ANC, or a province like the DA, it stood no chance of making a significant electoral impact in the rural areas, especially in competition with the governing parties whose governance record in dispensing largesse put them in a favourable electoral position. So, what does this portend for Cope? The answer is simple: Cope is destined to fade. 'Numbers don't lie'. In less than 10 years of its existence, Cope lost 6,75 per cent of the 7,42 per cent it once had of the national votes. This was a deep decline with a huge per centage point within a very short period of time. In the history of electoral performances of the parties that secured thresholds of representation by more than 5 per cent since the post-1994 electoral democracy in South Africa, Cope appears to be the only party that lost a huge per centage point in a single electoral cycle of five years. The NNP disbanded while it had 1,65 per cent (see Table 1). Cope's electoral performance in 2009 was poor. That in 2014 it plummeted from that poor performance meant it was fading. As Schlesinger put it: 'A political party which fails to win election, and even more important, holds no prospects of winning in the future, also faces collapse' (1984, 382). This is the fate that awaits Cope.

CONCLUSION

This article decrypted Cope's diminishing electoral prospects. It focused only on its electoral performance. Its main contention is that Cope is the victim of its own originative historical context and of the fanfare associated with its formation, which generated an expectation which it failed to live up to: Disentangling the ANC's political hegemony. An observation was made, which most scholars of electoral politics in South Africa share, that those who voted for Cope genuinely believed that it could achieve the originative historical mission of challenging the ANC. This did not happen. Cope became a 'third party' in the 2009 elections. This was not what its supporters expected. Being a 'third party', especially against the background of the fanfare associated with its formation and the huge expectation it generated about its electoral prospects, destined Cope for the ranks of the 'larger number of smaller third-tier parties' rife in Africa, which are 'inconsequential' (Mozaffar and Scarrit 2005, 414). The article argued that the diminishing electoral prospects of Cope lie in how it fared in the 2009 elections. It historicised the electoral performance of Cope, for the purpose of contextualisation and comparative analysis, to validate this contention. Duverger's electoral theory that voting for 'a third party' is considered by voters as a waste of votes was used as the epistemological basis in validating the argument of the article (1951, 256). In moving towards its conclusion, the article considered the support base of Cope, which it argued initially comprised the middle class and urban-based unemployed and the poor, largely in the metropolitan areas. The article explained that this category of voters 'weigh their options, assess their relative chances of winning, and trade whatever they can in order to come as close as possible to their desired ends' (Schlesinger and Schlesinger 2006, 62). They are sensitive to disappointment. Their loyalty transcends historical and political affinities. They easily change their loyalty when the party that they voted for disappoints them.

By placing its electoral prospects in this category of voters, Cope placed its hope in an unpredictable political market. Because of this, some of its supporters in this political market shunned it in the subsequent elections while others abstained from voting. The outcome of the 2011 local government elections indicated that Cope's support base shifted to the rural areas – rural low-income earners. This support was analysed with a specific focus on the provinces in which Cope claimed its rural support base was situated: the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape. In most of the rural parts of these provinces Cope's support base was reduced drastically by the ANC, DA and EFF. The ANC and DA regained some of their electoral losses to Cope in 2009. In a province like the Eastern Cape, the UDM also gained from Cope's losses. Because of this, the article asks an inevitable question: What is the fate of Cope? In answering this question, the article triangulated electoral statistics with theoretical insight from Duverger's electoral theory: 'A political party which fails to win election, and even more important, holds no prospects of winning in the

future, also faces collapse' (Schlesinger 1984, 382). With this quotation, the article ends with the contention that the fate of Cope is to fade.

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