
**AN EVALUATION OF COPE'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
FOR THE 2011 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN
IN THE NORTHERN CAPE**

Communitas
ISSN 1023-0556
2012 17: 93-112

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ABSTRACT

The article is guided by the following research question: What factors found expression, and influenced the extent to which COPE's 2011 municipal elections campaign in the Northern Cape met the objectives set in the developed communication strategy? Following the framework of systems theory, the developed communication strategy included an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing COPE prior to the election, as well as recommendations for the messages the campaign would use to persuade voters; the techniques it would use to reach them; and a targeting strategy that aimed to identify the priority localities where campaign resources should be focused in order to reach the required number of votes to achieve the campaign's objectives and goals. The success of the communication strategy was then evaluated post-election by explaining to what extent the campaign was able to meet the objectives and goals set for it. The main factors influencing COPE's election outcome were found to be non-adherence to targeting strategy; lack of national media coverage; poor distribution of campaign resources; state resources and patronage; insufficient visibility in targeted areas; COPE's poor campaign organisation; the Mompoti defection; and insufficient training.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate a developed communication strategy for the Congress of the People's (COPE) 2011 municipal elections campaign in the Northern Cape.

The 2011 election in the Northern Cape was one in which party-affiliated and independent candidates competed for seats on local and district councils as established by the Municipal Structures Act, No. 17 of 1998 and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996. For this type of election, a mixed electoral system is used: first-past-the-post for ward candidates as well as proportional representation for the allocation of seats to political parties on councils. After the election, elected councillors would have constitutional duties related to overseeing the governance of a municipality.

The development of the communication strategy was undertaken prior to the elections and its evaluation took place after Election Day, using data and experience gathered before, during and after the course of the campaign's implementation.

Currently, no detailed analysis of the political landscape in the Northern Cape, either past or present, exists in the public domain. This is problematic because in an environment of limited resources for campaigning, communication strategies need to be efficient and effective in order to strengthen democratic processes through increased competition.

As the party with the second highest proportion of the provincial vote in the 2009 national and provincial elections, COPE became the official opposition in the Northern Cape legislature. As a fledgling party with a damaged public image nationally, it faced an acid test in the 2011 municipal elections. Limited finances and a barrage of negative media coverage resulting from public battles for the control of the party by its leaders, had left it in a precarious position (Phakati 2011).

The party was formed largely by the members of the losing faction aligned to Thabo Mbeki in the wake of the African National Congress's (ANC) leadership contest at the Polokwane conference in 2007 (Booyesen 2009: 85-92).

In the 2009 national and provincial elections, COPE managed to accumulate up to 33% of the vote in a number of municipalities in the western half of the Northern Cape. Based on these results, as well as its presence in many communities where potential opposition voters outnumbered those of the incumbent, a base existed to generate some gains in 2011. The party also had to compete with the ANC and Democratic Alliance (DA), with both of these parties being better funded and organised on a national level.

The Northern Cape presented a unique environment for which to develop a communication strategy for an election campaign. The vastness of the landscape and the near inaccessibility of areas where potential voters reside, are major obstacles to successful communication.

Because the strategy was tailored to a municipal election campaign, notable peculiarities were considered. Not the least of these was the emphasis on certain communication means, due to their suitability given the limited geographical scale of the individual local council campaigns. Traditional methods such as rallies, volunteer work, and proliferation of pamphlets amongst other techniques become more important to a communication strategy (Maarek 1995: 211).

While communication strategies may vary in their comprehensiveness, typically they include the campaign messages, techniques, schedule, budget, and campaign organisation required for fulfilling this purpose (Gainer n.d.; Green & Gerber 2008; O'Day n.d.).

The recommendations for a communication strategy in this study focused on who the campaign's target voters should have been, the messages the campaign should have conveyed to them, and the techniques that should have been used to reach voters. The finer details, therefore, of budgeting for the campaign and the scheduling of campaign activities were only considered in a general sense as part of the strategic recommendations.

Voters were studied primarily on the basis of political affiliation per geographic area through a voting district (VD) analysis, and in a broad socio-economic sense. Research into the attitudes and opinions of voters in each locality was beyond the limits of this study.

Similarly, in evaluating the success of the campaign against the objectives set for it in the communication strategy, the analysis does not extend to the nature of the individual campaign's run in each locality. Instead, the key factors influencing the provincial campaign effort as a collective were assessed. Campaigns are presented as operating within a system that must be affected to its advantage (Rensburg & Angelopulo 1996: 7-9; Steinberg 1976: 89-132). The socio-political landscape was studied to develop and evaluate the communication strategy.

Given the above, the research problem that pertained to this study was: What factors found expression and influenced the extent to which COPE's 2011 municipal elections campaign in the Northern Cape met the objectives set in the developed communication strategy?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were used to develop the communication strategy. The research began with a review of literature on campaign planning in order to provide a theoretical and methodological framework for the study.

For the situation analysis that followed, qualitative research techniques were primarily used. The regulations and legislation on local government elections were consulted to understand the rules and nature of this type of election. Demographic data and relevant literature on the Northern Cape were considered in order to provide the context of the election. Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) reports on past voting outcomes in the province were studied alongside the available literature on past elections, to analyse trends in the political landscape of the Northern Cape. Literature on the main parties contesting the election, including academic and journalistic texts as well as documents produced by the parties, was studied to provide a background on each.

The media landscape in the province was assessed using the marketing profiles of each platform and knowledge from communication practitioners in the province. Anecdotal experience from being in the employ of COPE also proved to be useful.

Quantitative research techniques were used to set the campaign's goals and objectives, and to determine where the target voters of the campaign were to be located. A voting district analysis was used to analyse the balance of support for each of the main contesting parties, down to the smallest geographical unit – the voting district.

The objectives for the campaign were set at a local and district council level in terms of the number of seats on municipal councils COPE should have aimed to win in the election. Objectives were calculated using the legislated formula for local government seat allocation along with data from past voting records. Factors such as the strategic importance of a given council and the strength of the party's grassroots campaign organisation in each locality were also taken into account.

Goals that support the objectives were set at all levels – from voting district, to ward, to local and district council – and were measured in votes. Data generated by the voting district analysis was used for this purpose.

A SWOT analysis was used to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing COPE prior to the 2011 elections. Field observations of by-elections in the run up to the election provided useful information on the campaigning habits of COPE's main competitors.

The literature review, situation analysis, SWOT analysis and results of the objective calculations and voting district analyses were then used to make recommendations for a communication strategy.

Recommendations were made on campaign messages and communication channels to be used to convey them. Voting districts that needed to be targeted by the campaign in order to meet objectives were also recommended.

The results of the election were then recorded against the campaign's objectives and the main factors in the campaign's implementation that influenced the outcome were discussed. Practical experience of having worked on the campaign, reports from grassroots activists, and literature and press clippings were the main sources used for this purpose.

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The communication strategy is a comprehensive plan for all organised communication activities aimed at contacting target voters up until Election Day. As noted above, the development of the communication strategy for COPE was limited to the messaging, targeting voting districts (VDs) and techniques for contacting the voter.

Campaign messaging

Campaign messaging involves the choice of words and visuals the campaign plans to communicate, but does not include the techniques selected for communication or how the message will be packaged into different formats for each technique (Moffitt 1999: 139).

A message is the "single thought, idea, concept, truth or meaning" the campaign will use to persuade its target voters (Fourie 1975: 10). Answering the question "why should I support you?", as if it was coming from the potential voter, is a useful exercise for developing the message (O'Day n.d.: 21).

The campaign message should also set the tone for the campaign. Tone is the manner in which communication is phrased and delivered that must run consistently through the issues the campaign chooses to speak on, called campaign themes, and how they are addressed. A campaign should choose only a limited set of themes, and especially those that are important to its target voters (Maarek 1995: 47-48).

All themes must be constantly linked back to the campaign message during the course of the campaign. It must be kept in mind that the theme is not the problem itself, but the solution to the problem that is important to the voter (O'Day n.d.: 26). The International Republican Institute (IRI 1996: 43) states that besides the

candidate's position on an issue, another factor in theme selection is whether the candidate or party is best qualified to address the issue.

Luntz (2007: 1-33) provides rules for the effective use of language in a campaign message. The message should be simple, short, credible (believable) and consistent in its repetition throughout the campaign. It should be novel or new, and speak to the voter's aspiration in a relevant context. It may also include a powerful question, distinctive sound or texture. A good message can also show contrast between the candidate or party and their opponents by highlighting the positives of the former and the negatives of the latter, or simply by demonstrating difference. Finally, a message must be targeted to the voters a campaign plans to persuade to achieve its objective (O'Day n.d.: 22-23). The campaign message need not ascribe to all of the aforementioned criteria, but should at least possess a fair number of these characteristics to be successful.

An important aspect to consider in developing a message is that of credibility, i.e. how believable or trustworthy a party is in the eyes of the voter. How much negativity a campaign should allow, or how much time it should spend attacking the opponent in an attempt to lower their credibility is dependent, firstly, on the tone that has been set for the messaging and, secondly, on how the campaign is faring in comparison to its viable opponents in the run-up to Election Day (Morris 1999; O'Day n.d.).

Messages have to be targeted and delivered to the potential voter via various techniques.

Targeting voting districts and techniques for contacting the target voter

Targeting voting districts means prioritising which voting districts should be given special attention in a campaign. Four factors usually come into play: the number of registered voters in a VD; the predicted turnout; the size of the campaign's base vote in the VD; and the amount of swing potential of a VD.

A high number of voters prevalent in one or more of these factors in a particular VD suggests that it should be prioritised when setting vote goals above other VDs where one or more of these factors are not numerically significant to achieve the objective.

In general, it is easier to target base voters and swing voters than it is to go after an opponent's base vote (Shaw 2010: 165-208). There are times, however, where the dynamics of a VD that must be won demand that the campaign must go after the opponent's base voters, in which case the availability of resources is assessed to determine to what extent its base vote can be neglected in order to pursue the opposition's base.

While the communication strategy is the plan through which the campaign will achieve its goals and objectives, techniques are the means by which this will be accomplished, i.e. the activities or methods that will be undertaken to implement a strategy (IRI 1996: 10). Each technique for contacting the voter “can accomplish three things to varying degrees – persuade target voters; identify base voters (supporters), swing voters and the opponent’s base voters; and turnout the vote” (O’Day n.d.: 30-31).

Persuading target voters generally applies to convincing either the opponent’s base voters to switch allegiance or getting swing voters to lean toward the campaign. Turning out the vote, otherwise known as the get-out-the-vote phase of the campaign, takes place in the close run-up to Election Day and is aimed at mobilising sufficient voters to go to the polls and cast their vote for the candidate or party.

There are a large variety of techniques that can be employed to contact the voter. A distinction can be made between techniques that allow indirect contact, such as mass media coverage, and direct contact with the voter, which includes personal contact methods like door-to-door canvassing for example (Maarek 1995: 89-98).

The purpose of describing the various techniques below is not to debate their merits or effectiveness in various contexts, but instead to represent the range of options that may be considered for a communication strategy.

One of the traditional techniques for voter contact is door to door canvassing, involving volunteers and/or the candidate making personal contact with the voter. Canvassing generally involves three concurrent phases that need to be planned for and a final get-out-the-vote phase.

First, VDs need to be canvassed street by street in order to identify supporters, take requests for more information or campaign branding material from supporters, and to note where follow-up visits need to be made. Interpersonal contact is made with the voter by the candidate or volunteer canvassers on a door to door basis. Second, the same areas need to be re-canvassed in order to visit homes where target voters were not reached the first time around. Third, canvassers need to make good on the required follow-ups (Burton & O’Shea 2010: 193-196). The fourth phase which occurs shortly before and on Election Day is the get-out-the-vote phase. This involves contacting supporters to urge them to vote and arranging the logistics for people requiring assistance to get to the polling station. This phase requires careful planning as the costs tends to run very high, something which many campaigns do not take seriously enough during the earlier phases (Green & Gerber 2008).

Closely related to canvassing is the literature drop where campaign literature is left at the household for later perusal. Literature can also be handed out at strategic locations such as busy intersections, known as a literature hand-out.

Phone banks, teams of people who are either paid staff or volunteers tasked with telephonically contacting voters, may be employed to monitor support levels; respond to queries raised during canvassing efforts; remind people to vote; or to persuade voters to consider the campaign's candidate.

Automated calls, called robo-calls, can be programmed to deliver a generic message to a voter, but this is neither effective nor cost-effective according to the findings of numerous studies (Green & Gerber *ibid.*).

A popular form of personal contact is for the candidate to attend coffees to meet supporters and interested parties in an intimate setting such as a supporter's home. Of course, the idea of a coffee-drinking session does not fit all cultural and social contexts. This idea can be adapted to any slightly smaller, more intimate gatherings. Other examples include braais (barbeques) and day-time yard meetings with homemakers or younger voters.

Supporters may also be requested to endorse the candidate to their friends through the use of a card template provided by the campaign. Endorsements from influential figures in a community, or celebrities in the case of high-profile campaigns, are another form of this technique.

Civic organisations such as churches or special-interest groups may also be willing to endorse a candidate or offer their time and people for canvassing and other tasks on a voluntary basis. This is a viable option in some instances, but campaign planning should consider two factors in this regard.

First, civic organisations are external to the campaign organisation and therefore outside of its planning. This may result in uncoordinated or even tactically incorrect activities taking place. Secondly, these groups often come with their own political baggage and may end up hurting a campaign's image.

There are two types of techniques related to events. The first is preset events which are not organised by the campaign, that the candidate attends and possibly addresses, such as gala dinners, debates or funerals, either by careful planning or invitation from an individual or organisation. The second is the created event, which is organised by the campaign. The most common form is the rally where larger numbers of supporters are addressed by the candidate (O'Day n.d.: 48-49).

Visibility is a technique that is more about creating an impression of an outpouring of support for the campaign rather than persuading voters. It aims to create a tangible presence for the campaign in a given area (Shaw 2010: 348-349). This

can be achieved in any number of ways, most commonly through T-shirts, posters, bumper stickers and other branding material.

Finally, both paid and earned media form an integral part of any campaign's techniques, especially in media-centred democracies where most political decisions made by the public are influenced by information gained through mass media.

Paid media refers to advertising in the press, on radio or online. Earned media refers to the publicity a campaign generates, generally through press releases, interviews, events and mentions in editorials and reports.

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES VS. THE 2011 ELECTION RESULTS

Objectives and municipal vote goals that would enable COPE to lead a governing coalition in twelve local councils were set as a result of the VD analysis showing the party to be within striking distance of realistically achieving this. The councils were: Nama Khoi, Kamiesberg, Hantam, Karoo Hoogland, Khai ma, Mier, Kai Garieb, Khara Heis, Kheis, Renosterberg, Thembelihle and Siyathemba. There were also prospects for COPE to lead a governing coalition in the Namakwa district and an outside chance of this occurring in the Siyanda and Pixley ka Seme districts. The party had to adhere to the recommended targeting strategy by focusing its campaign resources primarily in target VDs in order to achieve this.

COPE contested the election in the Northern Cape with limited resources relative to the other two main competitors, the DA and ANC. It was recommended that these resources be directed to localities where the party would be able to make a significant impact. As a result, objectives, vote goals and target VDs were not allocated to three of the four local councils in the Frances Baard district and all three local councils in the John Taole Gaetsewe district. It was recommended that COPE refrain from contesting these areas due to VD analysis data indicating low base votes, low swing potential and high numbers of ANC base votes relative to the rest of the province.

In the Namakwa district, 84% of the total vote goal was located in just 31 target VDs out of a district total of 101 VDs. In the Pixley ka Seme district, 60% of the total vote in the district was concentrated in just 25 target VDs. In the Siyanda district, 74% of the total vote goal for the district was concentrated in just 27 target VDs. In the Frances Baard district, 67% of the total vote goal for the district was located in just 25 target VDs. All 25 of these VDs were located in the Sol Plaatje local council, which governs the largest provincial centre of Kimberley.

It was recommended that swing voters in eight local councils that showed significant past support for the Independent Democrats (ID), should be reached

with a tailored provincial campaign message that complemented COPE's national campaign message: "Another five years of the ANC in charge is a lifetime too long. Only if COPE and ID supporters stand together in this election will it be possible to remove the ANC from power in this council. By voting COPE we can govern together to the benefit of the community."

This message, it was recommended, would focus on ID voters, most of whom the analysis of past election results had revealed to have been voting for the opposition since 1994, by compelling them to vote COPE as the opposition party with the most support and best chance of defeating the ANC, based on the 2009 election results in these local councils.

The message purposefully acknowledged these voters and their value in contrast to the DA who, in the wake of the party's merger with the ID, had chosen not to include any of the party's symbols or colours in its campaign material, or refer to these voters directly in its campaign messaging.

Techniques for reaching voters, and target voters in particular, in each district were recommended. Door-to-door canvassing coupled with literature drops and hand-outs as well as preset events were recommended techniques for all districts. The provincial campaign message was to be communicated to swing voters in target VDs in eight local councils and the national message to voters in the remainder of the province.

COPE President Mosiuoa Lekota was to campaign at preset events in at least one main centre of 11 of the 12 local councils where COPE was set winning campaign objectives, as well as in the Sol Plaatje local council. Provincial and national leaders were to campaign in the remainder of the localities with a specific focus on target VDs.

The campaign was to focus on achieving visibility through posters and T-shirts specifically in target VDs in a manner that it enabled COPE to at least match its competitors in this regard. Minimal amounts of this campaign material were to be directed to non-targeted VDs to enable the campaign to focus on appearing as a viable competitor where it counted.

It was recommended that paid media coverage be pursued on billboards in Kimberley and Upington, commercial radio in the form of RSG, community radio in the form of NFM 98.1 in the Namakwa district and Radio Riverside in the Khara Heis local council, as well as in *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, a commercial newspaper in the Sol Plaatje local council. Earned media coverage was to be sought in all community and commercial media in the Namakwa, Pixley ka Seme, Siyanda and Frances Baard districts in cases where a policy of carrying political news was in place.

The overall outcome of the election reinforces the trend of support in the province being consolidated around three parties. Collectively, the DA, ANC and COPE accounted for 97% of the vote in the 2011 election (94% in 2009). The ANC was the biggest beneficiary (60% to 63% of the total provincial vote for the 2009 and 2011 elections respectively) of the decline of COPE (the party's proportion of the provincial vote dropped from 17% to 12% over the same two elections). In 2011, some councils were, nevertheless, won by the opposition as a result of coalitions between COPE and the DA, albeit far less than what appeared to be possible prior to the election. In Nama Khoi and Hantam, the DA leads a coalition government with COPE, while in Karoo Hoogland, COPE leads a coalition with the DA. All three councils are in the Namakwa district.

COPE failed to achieve its campaign objectives in all local and district councils the party contested. The party also chose to ignore the campaign objectives and targeting strategy recommended by this study, instead taking the decision to contest all councils and a total of 189 out of 194 wards in the province (it was recommended that the party contest 147 out of 194 wards in order to enable it to focus its limited resources in target VDs).

The significant disparity between the objective for seats on the Namakwa district council and the actual result (six and one respectively) reflects the inability of the party to win sufficient representation in the four local councils where it had the potential to lead a governing coalition. This resulted in the failure to garner four seats on the district for district representatives from each of these councils; namely, Nama Khoi, Kamiesberg, Khai ma and Karoo Hoogland.

While COPE achieved the mayoral position in Karoo Hoogland, the district representative seat was negotiated away to the DA because COPE had not won an outright majority in the council that would have allowed the party to take both positions (Julies 2011). Similarly, the disparity between the objective for seats on the Pixley ka Seme district council and the actual result (seven and two respectively) is a consequence of the party's failure to meet vote goals in councils where winning objectives were set in the eastern portion of the district, namely: Renosterberg, Thembilihle and Siyathemba. A significant drop in support in the Emthanjeni local council also cost the party a district representative seat for that council.

The narrative is the same for the Siyanda district (an objective of seven versus an outcome of two seats) where the party failed to meet vote goals in councils where winning objectives were set in the western portion of the district, namely: Mier, Kai Garieb, Khara Heis and Kheis.

In the Frances Baard district, COPE lost a large chunk of support in the Sol Plaatje local council – just five seats were achieved against an objective of 12 (the party would have achieved nine hypothetical seats in the 2009 election).

Councils were contested by COPE contrary to the recommendations of the study. Three of these were in the Frances Baard district (Dikgatlong, Magareng and Phokwane) and the three in the John Taole Gaetsewe district (Moshaweng, Ga Segonyana and Gamagara). The party was able to manage a total of seven seats from these five councils as well as a seat on the John Taole Gaetsewe district council.

MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING THE OUTCOME

There appeared to be eight major factors that were common to all localities in the province in influencing the outcome of COPE's provincial campaign. While many emanated from within the system of the campaign organisation itself, some factors were beyond the control of the party at a provincial level, emanating from the external environment within which the campaign system operated.

Non-adherence to targeting strategy

The reasoning behind the recommendation for COPE to abstain from contesting in selected councils was that the party would likely have contested the election with very limited resources. Spreading campaign material in the form of posters, T-shirts, flyers and the like too thin across the entire province would result in smaller quantities being available in targeted territories where it counts, with the natural consequence of a lesser impact on voters.

The decision by the party to put added pressure on its finances by contesting an additional 42 wards in areas where it stood little chance of making inroads in all probability partially explains the reason why objectives were not achieved in seemingly winnable councils where voters needed to see and feel the presence of the COPE through campaign material. Ultimately, the party funded the campaign entirely on provincial finances (Van Niekerk 2011). Unlike its main competitors, the ANC and DA, COPE received almost no financial assistance from its national structure and should have taken more care to concentrate its resources in targeted areas more effectively.

Lack of national media coverage

The SABC all but ignored the participation of COPE in the 2011 elections. Unfortunately for the provincial campaign, the source of this problem lay between the party's national campaign organisation and the public broadcaster. COPE appeared on just two of the Sunday night election debates scheduled during the course of the months preceding the election (Dexter 2011). This could have

occurred either through the bias of the SABC or the incompetence of the party's national campaign organisation.

Besides the lack of earned media coverage on the radio and television platforms of the public broadcaster, paid media coverage was severely lacking in comparison to the ANC and DA who ran extensive campaigns on both platforms.

No advertising campaigns were run by COPE on television, in national print media or on any national radio station (Dexter *ibid.*). Given that most of the Northern Cape population relies on SABC news or radio for news and entertainment, the provincial campaign understandably suffered from the lack of coverage in comparison to its main competitors.

Poor distribution of campaign resources

Closely linked to the spreading of campaign resources too thinly by contesting in non-targeted areas, the distribution and procurement systems in place to ensure that campaign material arrived in each locality on time and in the right quantity were severely lacking.

Procurement of all T-shirts, flyers, backing boards and posters was done locally in Kimberley or delivered to the city before being distributed to the rest of the province. Immense distances therefore needed to be covered in order for the campaign material to arrive in the Namakwa district and western portions of the Pixley ka Seme and Siyanda districts.

Transport systems were lacking in that local leaders from the various municipalities were expected to arrange transport of the goods from Kimberley to their area without a subsidy for this expense from the party. The end result was that, due to the proximity to Kimberley, councils in the predominantly non-targeted east of the province were able to covet most of the campaign material at the expense of the predominantly targeted western councils, ultimately causing campaigns in those localities to suffer. In practice, this constituted an almost exact reversal of the recommended targeting strategy.

State resources and patronage

As predicted in the SWOT analysis, the ANC supplemented its already well-funded campaign by using government departments to disguise campaign activities as state-funded service delivery programmes. Besides the R10 million allocated by the Premier and Provincial Treasury to be shared among councils where the ANC exhibited a 2009 performance of 55% of the vote or less (Wyngaard 2011), there are also examples of the probable abuse of state resources during the 2011 campaign.

For a period of two weeks stretching from late April to early May 2011, as the election neared in mid-May, the Department of Social Development deployed a large delegation of officials alongside ANC politicians to the Karoo Hoogland municipality for what was termed a “winter-relief programme”. The premise, as explained by the Department, was to provide “poverty relief” in one of the coldest parts of the Northern Cape during winter (Cloete 2011). The council also happened to exhibit the lowest percentage of ANC support in 2009, namely 33%. Blankets, scarves, food parcels and the like were distributed en masse to residents of Williston, Fraserburg and Sutherland as ANC politicians reportedly extolled the virtues of the party alongside government officials (Julies 2011).

Insufficient visibility in target VDs

Due to the poor distribution systems and the spreading of resources too thinly by contesting in non-targeted areas that characterised the COPE campaign, the ANC and DA were able to capitalise by running far more visible campaigns by comparison in targeted localities.

By 19 March 2011, the DA had managed to line the streets of every locality in the country with significant numbers of election posters (Zille 2011). Due to high-quality printing, the posters did not fade at all through sun and rain, easily maintaining their brightness and colour into Election Day. Albeit slightly later and with a lesser quality poster that was prone to colour fading, the ANC was able to accomplish the same (Letsoalo 2011).

Both of COPE’s main opponents were also able to ensure significant numbers of T-shirts bearing party logos and slogans reached localities that COPE should have been focusing its resources on according to the recommendations of this study. The effect was that COPE’s message of being the more viable option for former ID voters to choose based on 2009 electoral strength, was not reflected in what was visibly apparent to voters in each locality.

COPE’s poor campaign organisation

COPE’s campaign in the Northern Cape also suffered from a significant lack of support and disorganisation within the party’s national campaign organisation. In contrast to the “war rooms” of the ANC and DA (Boyle 2011) from which campaigns were coordinated at a national level, COPE barely had a national campaign organisation to speak of (Khalipa 2011).

The effects of a disjointed approach by its national structure were keenly felt by COPE in the province. A clear deployment schedule for national leaders, including the party’s president Mosiuoa Lekota, to campaign in the province was non-existent. Lekota turned out to be the only national politician to campaign in

a province where a significant number of councils appeared to be winnable based on past performance. While Lekota was able to make campaign stops in many of the targeted councils, the uncertainty of when he would arrive and how many days he would stay in the province negatively affected the ability of local leaders to confidently mobilise voters to attend rallies without the absolute surety of a reliable schedule from the national structure.

The momentum of the party's 2009 election campaign, where it managed to hog 34% of SABC coverage (Media Monitoring Africa 2009) was clearly not evident in 2011. While it can be argued that factional battles within the party had contributed to a hostile media environment, very little was done by the party in terms of pro-actively mitigating this during the 2011 campaign.

The Mompoti defection

An unfortunate setback for COPE was the defection of Neville Mompoti, its leader in the provincial legislature and one of its most high-profile politicians, to the ANC in late April (Kwon Hoo 2011). Besides the dismay this would have caused amongst grassroots politicians of the party, the defection was in all probability keenly felt in terms of party support in Galeshewe, Kimberley, where Mompoti remains popular (Kies 2010). COPE achieved just five seats on the Sol Plaatje local council in 2011 compared to the nine hypothetical seats it would have won in 2009.

Given the timing of just over two weeks before the election, it appears that Mompoti collaborated with the ANC to ensure that his defection would have the maximum detrimental impact possible on the COPE campaign. Mompoti in all likelihood conveyed confidential information to the ANC about COPE's campaign strategy, including the recommendations of this study to which he was privy.

Within days of his defection, Mompoti hit the campaign trail on behalf of the ANC – holding rallies specifically in targeted municipalities where the ANC was under threat of losing control. Rallies were held in Keimoes in the Kai Garieb council, Fraserburg in the Karoo Hoogland council as well as extensive radio appearances on NFM, the community radio station broadcasting to most of Namakwa district (Julies 2011; Maphanka 2011; Newman 2011). Local leaders reported that Mompoti's message was specifically tailored to discourage voters from supporting COPE, along the lines of his initial pronouncements made when his defection was announced at an ANC press briefing at Luthuli House (Mammburu 2011).

Insufficient training

Besides the lack of political buy-in on a provincial level for the targeting strategy recommended by this study, insufficient training was provided to regional and

local structures on how the targeting strategy would affect the approach to the individual local campaigns. In total, five training sessions, one per district, were held in March and a manual was produced by the party to explain how campaigns should be conducted on a local level. Given the vastness of the province, however, even a session in each district is insufficient to reach grassroots activists in far-flung localities.

A targeting strategy has significant implications for scheduling, resource allocation to voting districts and wards, and many other campaign activities in each locality. If the strategy is not sufficiently familiar to local campaign organisations then the tactics employed by them are not likely to reflect the strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on campaigning in the Northern Cape Province in particular. For campaigns to be successfully waged there in decades to come, professional campaign planning and management will be required. To achieve this, a number of research avenues will need to be explored in future studies.

Continued work on voting district analyses is important to ensure an on-going monitoring of shifts in party support on a micro-scale in order to develop targeting strategies as the basis for future campaigns. More knowledge of the provincial population, its needs and opinions, is also necessary. The themes on which the various local campaigns should be run must be identified by research into what concerns people on a micro scale. For the rural towns, villages and surrounding farms this can be done on a centre by centre basis. However, for more densely populated centres such as Upington and Kimberley, important townships with large electorates like Pabalelo and Galeshewe would need to be considered on a block by block basis to ascertain what the needs and aspirations are of people, many of them migrants, based on what standard of living they currently have and what they expect from a party in government.

Besides a geographic-based approach to acquiring knowledge of the electorate, enquiry should also be made into the various demographic groups residing in the province in order to understand them on a similar basis and to creatively define the population in new ways by identifying fresh groupings for targeting purposes.

Consistent polling of the electorate's opinions would enable parties to test and refine campaign messages and candidates for political office; attitudes amongst their opponent's base voters; and what positions parties and candidates should take on the burning issues of the day.

A specific sector which deserves mention is the commercial farming network. Helpful knowledge to accumulate would constitute: who owns what farm and

where; what issues concern them; what assistance can they provide to campaigns in their locality; how many people they employ; and the migration patterns of workers and whether they are documented, registered voters. Campaigns would benefit financially and politically from a greater knowledge and understanding of this important demographic.

Campaigning would also be aided by research aimed at developing professional systems for campaign organisations. This can extend from operational systems for door-to-door work – a staple technique for rural campaigning – to developing organograms for hierarchies within a campaign organisation and the various roles and responsibilities of each.

While not a factor for the 2011 campaign, the use of social media as a communication channel for future campaigns in Kimberley and Upington in particular, may show enough potential to warrant a study as popularity and access to this platform grows amongst urban youth.

Field observations should also be a staple form of intelligence-gathering. Continuous case studies based on the campaign strategies of the main contesting parties in the province, whether in by-elections, municipal or provincial elections, would yield valuable information about the habits of each party including the type of tactics, schedule and quality of campaigns they are likely to roll-out in various localities. This form of research would, in all probability, also reveal the means to combat the use of state resources for campaigning purposes – a form of patronage put to formidable use currently by the ANC, the incumbent party at most levels of government.

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