

COPE

Founded:	2008
Leader:	Mosiuoia Lekota
Political position:	Centre left
Ideology:	Liberal social democracy



History

The Congress of the People (COPE) is another ANC breakaway formed in 2008 by former Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota and former Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa after the rise of Jacob Zuma as party leader and the demise of Thabo Mbeki as State President. The party's constitution describes COPE as centrist and non-racist and committed to the values of freedom, equality, and solidarity (30). It promotes itself as a reliable, accountable, and incorruptible political alternative. In the party's early years, it seemed to be a winning formula as the party enjoyed significant success in the 2009 general election with over 7 per cent of the vote, securing 30 seats in parliament. However, the party has been wracked by infighting and has been in terminal decline ever since. Shilowa was expelled from the party in 2011 and Lekota is currently disputed as leader by a significant membership of the party. In the 2019 ballot, COPE only mustered 0,27 per cent of the vote and two seats in the national assembly.

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Electoral record (31)

- 2009: 7.42%
- 2014: 0.67%
- 2019: 0.27%

Positions

(Source: Interview with party leader Mosiuoa Lekota)

Economic growth and job creation

COPE advocates for inclusive economic development policies that prioritise job creation, poverty alleviation, and social equality. The party believes borrowing to fund government programmes forces the country into a perpetual debt cycle and prevents South Africa from reaching its full potential. A COPE government would crack down on corruption as the first step in balancing the budget while investing in infrastructure—especially in rural and underdeveloped areas—and offering tax breaks to companies to create jobs and upskill the unemployed. The party also wants to create more entrepreneurs by offering grants to anyone wanting to start a business.

Safety and security

COPE wants to depoliticise the police and intelligence services as part of establishing and maintaining a professional civil service. A COPE government would require that national and other police commissioners possess suitable qualifications, experience, and skills in relevant fields before their appointment. The party would also establish an independent anti-corruption team to investigate corrupt practices and organised crime without fear or favour. COPE would also enact legislation to establish maximum sentences for drug trafficking and the killing of endangered wildlife species.

Foreign affairs

COPE's foreign affairs policy revolves around a human rights-based approach, aiming to restore South Africa's international standing and regain trust and respect. A COPE-led government would use international relations as a force for progressive change, advocating for a stronger South Africa, a progressive Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, a better Africa, and a more humane world. Practically, they would focus on enhancing cooperation with all African countries to accelerate continental development and address challenges, such as poverty and conflict through expanded trade.

Energy security

COPE's energy policy is to introduce competition, diversity, and increase generation in the sector with the first step being the unbundling of Eskom, leaving it only with a distribution function. A COPE government would aggressively invest in rooftop solar for industries and businesses while retrofitting coal-fired power stations to utilise solar energy. The party would also provide free solar panels to informal settlements to enable residents to access free electricity for cooking, lighting, and other basic needs.

Education

COPE's education policies focus on enhancing the quality of educators and improving the overall education system. A COPE government would reintroduce education colleges for new educators and continuous professional development programmes to existing educators to provide practical training alongside theoretical work, ensuring they are well-equipped and confident in teaching their subjects and keep pace with the rapid changes in education. The party would also enforce continuous performance monitoring to ensure sustainable quality in

the South African education system. COPE would scrap the minimum pass rate of 30 per cent and introduce aptitude tests in Grade 9 to guide learners in selecting suitable subjects in Grade 10 for a more successful career path. Additionally, COPE would open state-run Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in townships and rural areas.

Mineral resources

COPE acknowledges the historical role the mining industry played in the development of South Africa and wants the future potential and growth of the industry to be shared more equitably. Accordingly, a COPE-led government would ring-fence tax revenue earned from the mining sector to fund youth development programmes. The party would also enforce the use of solar energy in all existing and new mining operations to reduce the environmental impact of the sector.

Youth development

COPE intends strengthening existing youth service programmes and introducing new initiatives for marginalised young people. A COPE-led government would provide life skills training and entrepreneurship training in secondary school to enable meaningful participation in the economy. The party would also encourage and incentivise companies to employ young first-time workers to gain experience and enhance their employment potential.

Housing

COPE would rapidly expand accessibility to housing, with particular attention to the poor, youth, disabled, and those in rural and informal settlement communities. The party would repurpose unutilised state-owned land for housing development. A COPE-led government would provide a mix of complete housing units and serviced plots. All new developments would be founded close to jobs and economic services.

The environment and climate change

COPE's environmental and climate change policies are characterised by a commitment to stimulate the green economy and active community involvement in addressing climate change. The party advocates for sound environmental practices, emphasising recycling and sustainability. COPE supports organic farming to replenish depleted soils and safeguard consumers and the environment. To address climate change, the party proposes the progressive reduction of carbon emissions through interventions like tax incentives and aligning with international commitments. Furthermore, COPE promotes radical community-wide programmes to raise awareness on climate change and empower individuals to initiate efforts that contribute to mitigating its effects.

Tourism

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COPE would invest in tourism infrastructure in rural areas to grow the potential of tourism to provide jobs and growth in undeveloped areas. The party would prioritise women and youth in the sector for support through mentoring, micro-loans, and other state assistance.

Immigration and xenophobia

COPE rejects xenophobia as un-African and blames uncontrolled migration for its spread through South Africa. Accordingly, a COPE-led government would protect and control borders and ports of entry to enforce orderly, controlled, lawful, and documented movement of people and goods and protect the economy. The party also advocates for the social integration of refugees and migrants to combat intolerance.

LGBTIQA+ rights

COPE acknowledges and upholds the constitutional rights of the LGBTIQA+ communities. The party advocates for the regular monitoring and protection of vulnerable groups in both rural and urban areas. A COPE-led government would also work with churches and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to establish community centres to provide ongoing education and address issues affecting the LGBTIQA+ community and other vulnerable groups.

South Africa's twelve official languages

COPE rejects the marginalisation of any language for political reasons. The party would introduce state-wide programmes to promote the development of all languages, encouraging their extensive use in education, commerce, law, culture, and society with the primary goal of ensuring learners are taught in their mother tongue during the first three years of primary school.

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Artificial intelligence

COPE acknowledges that Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents significant opportunities for the advancement of South Africa's people—especially the youth. The party would focus on preparing learners by ensuring that subjects, such as mathematics, science, and robotics are adequately taught in state schools with appropriate equipment and laboratories. A COPE-led government would introduce the local manufacturing of computers to achieve economic transformation in the digital sector. To lead this initiative, the party would recruit 10 000 qualified information technology graduates.

Sources:

- (30) Congress of the People constitution - <https://congressofthepeople.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/cope-constitution.pdf>
 - (31) Independent Electoral Council 2019 National & Provincial elections - <https://results.elections.org.za/dashboards/npe/app/dashboard.html>
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