Lessons for Cord and Jubilee from the Malindi, Kericho by-elections

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The by-elections in Kericho and Malindi held on March 7 were of great national public interest, both counties received unusual attention in the hope of luring voters to become followers of certain leaders.

The by-elections were occasioned by the appointment of ODM MP from Malindi, Dr. Karamagi, and UDP Kericho Senator, Charles Keiter to the Cabinet.

The two by-elections, although held on the same day with equal political stakes, did not have the same political weight. Both were turned into a contest between Jubilee and Cord, presumably in preparation for 2017.

In each case, victory meant different things for the parties. The sense of victory in Malindi was relative to the expected performance. The party had a realistic assessment of the likely outcome — that Cord would wrest the seat. This probably explains why Jubilee's participation appeared as an afterthought rather than a serious show of intent. The party had virtually conceded the seat to ODM until it presumably was provoked to wake up and at least show the Jubilee flag by giving Cord some political hard time.

In the Kericho by-election, its operatives went to town, emphasizing that the objective was to register a respectable vote rather than to capture the seat.

Jubilee's candidate, Philip Chiong, captured more than 9,000 votes, at least one-third of those cast. Since this was a respectable showing, the party achieved its objective.

Political factions within Kericho, however, was an outright victory. The campaign was an instrumental dogfight for supremacy in Kilifi — the Deputy President William Ruto against Deputy Governor Isaac Ruto and Baringo Senator Gideon Moi.

In terms of social classes and political 'dynamics', Deputy President is a new man with new money who has been investing the Kalen- gin establishment. To their chagrin, he was quick to fill the leadership vacuum left by the exit of former President Daniel arap Moi.

Among those mentioned by that quickness was Isaac Ruto, who is older than the DP in age and politics. Ruto was in university student politics in 1982 and became a guest of the State after the attempted coup.

Elected to Parliament in 1997, he served as assistant minister and minister in Moi's government.

Ruto was also elected to Parliament in 1997, forcingText to be added by the user. in 1993 as a Youth for Kenya operative. He served as an assistant minister.

When Moi left office, it was William rather than Isaac who captured national attention, ruffling political feathers within Kenya by declaring his presidential ambition in 2006. That way, William

The political stakes in the Ker- icho senatorial contest, therefore, were nationally higher than those in the Malindi parliamentary seat. As expected, ODM retained the Mal- indi seat but Jubilee achieved its objective of showing the political field.

The by-polls in Kericho was different and it had multiple angles. First, it was a fight for the political soul of the Kalenjin people on whether to dump William Ruto and his 'hun- ter image' and embrace the alternative represented by establishment 'elder', Moi and Isaac. Second, it was a fight to create Jubilee's national prominence and encourage defections from within the party.

Karan's main Paul Tangi was essentially a Cord proxy given Isaac Rut- to's political closeness to Ralia.

Third, the contest also appeared to be a generational one between the old guard — represented by Tangi — and a youthful recent university graduate with hardly any reelection of the Moi's days. The youth factor won.

After the Malindi and Kericho experience, all sides in the political field will need to go back to the drawing board.

In Malindi, the results show that Uhuru's Jubilee team has increased their presence at the Coast and even capture more seats than they did in 2013.

In Kericho, the Jubilee win emphasized the party's dominance and sent a warning to Ralia that it would not be easy to make political inroads outside the lakeside. The implied warning was also for other- ers, like Murua, challenging Jubilee's hegemony.

How well each side reassesses its fortunes remains to be seen and manifested before 2017.