The Election of 1960: An Analysis

The election of 1960 was one of the closest and most dramatic elections in history. There were many historical firsts in this election as well. First off, the presidential candidate pairing of Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy (JFK) was the youngest ever, ages 47 and 43 respectively. Also, this was the first time a Roman Catholic (JFK) was to seek the presidency, and this was also the first time televised debates were used (Wikipedia). All these landmarks made for quite the historic as well as dramatic election.

After serving in the military, John F. Kennedy entered politics. With his father's encouragement and grooming, Kennedy represented Massachusetts in the House of Representatives from 1947 to 1953 as a Democrat, and then served in the U.S. Senate from 1953 to 1960 (whitehouse.gov). This however, was the extent of his political experience prior to running for presidency. JFK was seen as attractive and youthful, and was well supported in the liberal community. He however lost a bit of support when he chose not to pair his vote to censure McCarthy, a family friend, while he was hospitalized. Nonetheless, he was well supported by the liberal community and Democrats alike.

Richard Nixon was a long time politician with experience in both the House and the Senate. He was also the vice president to Eisenhower in 1960 when he chose to seek the presidency. Due to the 22nd Amendment, Eisenhower was unable to run for a third term, thus leaving the nomination vacant. This then allowed for Nixon to seek the nomination. Nixon was known for being tough on communism and his strong experiences in the foreign policy realm (whitehouse.gov).

In 1960, as President Eisenhower's last term was coming to an end, the Republicans controlled the white house, while the Democrats managed to retain control of Congress. Many historians believe that were Eisenhower not barred from running for a third term by the 22nd Amendment; he would have, and could have successfully ran for a third term(Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). However, due to

the 22nd Amendment, Richard Nixon, Eisenhower's vice president ran for the presidency instead and claimed the Republican nomination practically unopposed. John F. Kennedy was a Senator from Massachusetts when he chose to run for president. He faced strong competition in fellow Democrat Adlai Stevenson, and Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon Johnson. However, due to a tactfully run campaign by his brother Robert Kennedy, JFK managed to win the nomination in the Los Angeles convention in the first ballot (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008).

During this election period, the cold war was at its peak. Therefore, the pressing issues facing the country were namely dealing with the Soviet Union and communism in general. An issue that JFK faced as he was seeking the nomination was prejudices against his faith. JFK was known as a practicing Roman Catholic, and many Democrats feared that he would be unable to win over the national vote due to this. However, after winning two key primaries in heavily Protestant states (West Virginia and Wisconsin), the Democrats fears were abated (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). Both JFK and Nixon had very similar agendas, and both spoke of progress and change. Kennedy spoke of the "New Frontier" and his desire for technological advancements and space exploration. This was in response to the Soviets launching Sputnik, the first man made object to orbit the earth. Kennedy argued that the US was falling behind in the Cold War, and steps needed to be taken in order to ensure that the US rose to the top (Wikipedia). Nixon, on the other hand, argued that he would continue to promote the peace and prosperity brought on by Eisenhower, and that the young and inexperienced Kennedy could not be trusted with the presidency while foreign tensions surged. Kennedy also wished to work towards a brighter domestic future, by combating poverty, and promoting education. Nixon too promoted the need for a brighter domestic future through the Republican themed increased importance on private industry and less government spending (wikipedia). In the field of foreign

policy, Kennedy and Nixon shared similar beliefs and goals, which is what led to attacks based less on agenda but more on experience and character.

This election was very different from the previous election, for it presented many firsts. First off, the nation witnessed the first non-Protestant to run for presidency. In a time where Catholics faced many prejudices, this was a monumental first. Also, it was also the youngest pairing ever to run for election, Nixon being 47, and JFK being 43 (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). Another notable historic event that occurred was the utilization of televised debates. This gave Kennedy a significant boost in polls and favorability. In the first televised debate, Kennedy came out looking fresh-faced and young, while Nixon looked tired and sickly. While those who listened to the debate on the radio believed Nixon to have won, the 80 million viewers that watched the televised debate believed that the young and attractive JFK had won the debate (wikipedia).

Once Kennedy had received the Democratic nomination, he asked Lyndon Johnson to be his vice presidential running mate. This surprised many, even more so when Johnson accepted. However, the addition of Johnson onto the ticket significantly increased the chances of victory in swing states. Johnson, a bold politician, proved instrumental in carrying several of the southern states.

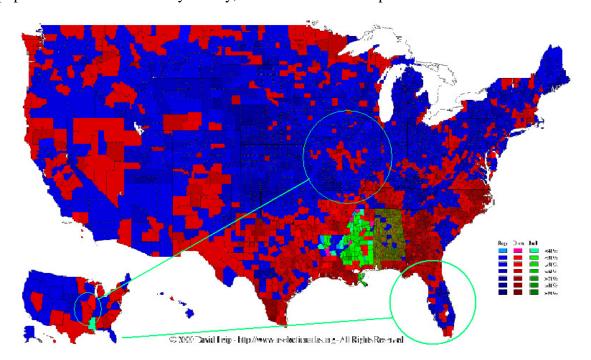
As previously mentioned, the nomination process for Kennedy, though ambitious, was not nearly as difficult as anticipated. This was due in large part due to the very organized and financially backed campaign of JFK, run by his brother, Robert Kennedy. Kennedy faced competition for nomination in Lyndon B. Johnson the Senate Majority leader from Texas, Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, and Stuart Symington of Missouri. Symington, Stevenson, and Johnson all refused to campaign in the primaries, thus failing to garner much support outside their home states (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). It was their hopes that Kennedy or the others participating

in the primaries would stumble, thus leading to one of them being chosen as the compromise candidate.

This however, did not play out as they hoped. Kennedy managed to run successfully in seven primaries, thus showing skeptical Democrats that it was in fact possible for national victory to come to a Catholic, regardless of prejudice. Humphrey, a key contender lost in the primaries of West Virginia and Wisconsin, thus taking him out of the race. Thus, at arrival of the convention, Kennedy's main opponent was Lyndon Johnson, Adlai Stevenson, and many favorite sons. By garnering support in these primaries, and choosing Johnson as his running mate, Kennedy then managed to win the Los Angeles convention nomination on the first ballot. Shortly thereafter, Nixon was nominated in the Republican convention. He had run nearly unopposed, with only slight and fleeting competition from Rockefeller of New York. Nixon then chose Henry Cabot Lodge as his vice presidential running mate, in order to further emphasize his focus on foreign policy (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). Lodge was known for his for his foreign policy experience, and highly respected and known as the ambassador to the United Nations. Kennedy tactfully chose Johnson, which allowed him to gain much southern support, which he otherwise would not have gained. Though Johnson at first had campaigned against Kennedy in the primaries, he proved to be a strong campaigner and valuable in gaining JFK support.

The polls showed Nixon with a slight lead throughout the campaign. However, JFK soon caught up when he placed calls to local authorities and Martin Luther King Jr's parents upon the arrest of MLK Jr. Nixon had chosen to stay out of the whole ordeal, but by getting involved, JFK managed to win not only the endorsement of MLK Jr.'s father, but much support from the black community as well (wikipedia). The debates also brought JFK up in the polls, for this was the first election in which the debates were not only aired on the radio, but televised as well. Many political pundits still felt that Nixon was going to win. The election night of November 8, 1960 remains one of the most famous

election nights in history. As votes poured in from the large Northwestern and Midwestern cities, Kennedy opened with a large lead. However, as later returns began to come in from the West and rural Midwest, Nixon began to close the gap. Nixon did not concede the election until the following afternoon. The final totals were Kennedy with 34,220,984 votes, 49.72% of the popular vote, and Nixon with 34,108,157 votes, 49.55% of the popular vote (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). Kennedy carried three hundred and three electoral votes to Nixon's two hundred nineteen. Kennedy won the popular vote by a mere one tenth of one percentage point, and by less than 113,000 votes. It cannot be emphasized enough just exactly how close this election was. Kennedy won eleven states by three percentage points or less, while Nixon won five states by the same margin. Below is a map detailing the popular vote broken down by county, in order to further emphasize the closeness of this election:



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At first glance, it is difficult to distinguish a definite pattern as to which regions each candidate had an advantage in. Nixon ran strongly in the farm belt region, as well as in the West, while Kennedy ran strongly in the Northwest and Midwest. It is clear from looking at this map that many states were closely contested. More notably, Illinois which is circled on the map, was a very interesting case. Kennedy won Illinois by a mere 9,000 votes out of 4.75 million. Nixon had carried 92 of the 101 counties within the state, however Kennedy's win came by winning Chicago. Cook County, home to ten percent of Illinois' population, and Kennedy's 450,000 margin of victory there was sufficient enough to give Illinois to Kennedy. There was clear evidence of voter fraud, many Republicans blamed the Chicago political machine and Mayor Daley in manipulation of votes and allowing voter fraud.

Texas and Alabama also proved to be interesting cases. Texas, Johnson's home state was won by a 51-49% margin, surprisingly close for the southerner's home state (David Leip, *Atlas of U.S Presidential Elections*). Republicans believed that Johnson's political machine has stolen votes for JFK. Upon investigation, it was discovered that more votes were actually counted than voters registered in southern counties, however, JFK had already been declared the winner by the all Democrat election board, thereby not allowing a recount. Alabama, as delineated on the map, went to neither Kennedy, nor Nixon. Electors were chosen individually in Alabama, and the slate of eleven Democratic electors, five were pledged to Kennedy, while six were unpledged. Kennedy managed to win the popular vote in Alabama, however, the six unpledged electors on the Democratic slate chose to throw their votes to Harry F. Byrd, a Virginia politician who had not even been seeking the presidential seat (wikipedia). It is believed that this occurred in response Democratic stance supporting civil rights.

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¹ Leip, David. Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections. 2008. Accessed December 16, 2008, http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1960&f=0.

Kennedy won only twenty three states to Nixon's twenty six, yet still had more electoral votes. This was because Kennedy won larger states which carried more electoral votes. California also proved to be an interesting case; initially California's electoral votes were awarded to JFK, however, as absentee ballots were counted Nixon came out on top, by a small margin (Isaac McPhee, March 4, 2008). It is important to note how easily this election could have swung in Nixon's favor. Nixon had stopped all investigations, fearing a constitutional crisis. Had these investigations been allowed to be fully executed, and evidence of voter fraud solidified, this could have led to many problems. Had a recount yielded Illinois in Nixon's favor, JFK's electoral votes would drop down to 273, just four above the requisite 269, thus encouraging attempts to uncover voter fraud in other closely contested states in order to either tie or bring the win to Nixon. Nixon feared what would happen, should the election be thrown into the House.

The margin by which Nixon could have won this election was less than one per cent. This is further expounded in the chart below:

Actual Election					Theoretical					
	NIXON		KENNEDY		Change of votes	NIXON		KENNEDY		Total Votes in State
	Pop.	Elect.	Pop.	Elect.		Pop.	Elect.	Pop.	Elect.	
Hawaii	92295	0	92410	3	58	92353	3	92352	0	184705
New Mexico	153733	0	156027	4	1148	154881	4	154879	0	311107
Nevada	52387	0	54880	3	1247	53634	3	53633	0	107267
Illinois	2368988	0	2377846	27	4430	2373418	27	2373416	0	4757409
Missouri	962221	0	972201	13	4991	967212	13	967210	0	1934422
All Other States		220		267			220		267	
TOTAL		220		317	11874		270		267	7294910
	KENNEDY WINS			NIXON WINS						
Margin: < 1%										

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² Michigan State University, How Close Were the Elections?, https://www.msu.edu/~sheppa28/elections.html#1960

As indicated in the chart, Kennedy managed to gain the electoral votes in these states by a few thousand votes in each state, if not less. A change of 11,874 votes would have shifted these five states to Nixon, thus winning him the election. These five states would have brought Nixon from his 220 electoral votes to 270, thereby winning him the election.

This election turned out to be the closest election in history. Had allegations of voter fraud been cemented, and a few states had turned over to Nixon, Nixon would have won the election. Had allegations of voter fraud even been pursued, then the possibility of an electoral deadlock would have been high as well. Nonetheless, the election went to Kennedy, him winning both the national and the electoral vote, and thereby the election.

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