1960 Presidential Election

The election for President of the United States was a close race between Senator Kennedy and Vice President Nixon. Kennedy and Nixon had several televised debates, and Kennedy became known as the stronger of the two candidates. Though he did win the election with a majority of the votes, he only received 105,000 more votes than he needed, a relatively small amount, in a Presidential election.

Senator Kennedy's overwhelming re-election as Senator in 1958 put him on everyone's short list of possible candidates for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1960. In 1957 alone, he received over 2,500 requests for speaking engagements from all parts of the US. He delivered 144 speeches, in 47 states. Opinion polls of Senator Kennedy were also very favorable; with 64% of Americans in 1958 believing Kennedy had the " background and experience to be President".

Despite his overwhelmingly favorable statistics, Kennedy's nomination for president was far from assured. Adlai Stevenson, the two-time failed candidate of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, was as popular as Kennedy among the party faithful. Kennedy tried to get Stevenson's endorsement, but failed. Kennedy then began a two-pronged effort to achieve the presidential nomination. He picked up the pace of his speaking engagements, spending days crisscrossing the US. At the same time, Kennedy recruited his brother-in-law, Stephen Smith, to conduct n effort to reach out to party leaders. With only 17 primaries, Kennedy could not hope to gain the presidential nomination with the support of the established leadership of the Democratic Party alone.

On January 2nd, 1960, John F. Kennedy officially announced he would seek the Democratic nomination for the Presidency of the United States. His announcement was timed to get the maximum news coverage and it did. Kennedy made clear in his announcement that he was not running for Vice President, despite his relative youth. Kennedy stated unequivocally that he would not accept the nomination as Vice President From the moment he entered the race,

Kennedy was clearly the candidate to beat, though at first, party regulars were skeptical of his chances. The first primary was in New Hampshire, where Kennedy won 85% of the vote (despite it being viewed as a " Protestant" state and likely to be worried about Kennedy's Catholicism.) Kennedy ran unopposed in a series of other primaries. His first deeply-contested primary was in Wisconsin. His opponent was Hubert Humphrey, the Senator from Minnesota. Humphrey was well known in Wisconsin and thus a formidable opponent. Kennedy campaigned for six weeks, in late February to early April with Kennedy's entire family taking part. Their hard work paid off on April 5, when Kennedy scored a victory, receiving 56.5% of the vote. While Wisconsin was also largely a Protestant state, Kennedy owed a significant part of his victory to his overwhelming support in Catholic districts. As a result, he still had to prove that he could win in a state without a large Catholic population.

That opportunity occurred in West Virginia, whose electorate was only 4% Catholic. Kennedy met the issue of his Catholicism head-on. On the first day of the campaign in Charleston he stated, " I am a Catholic, but the fact that I was born a Catholic does not mean that I can't be the President of the United States. I am able to serve in Congress and my brother was able to give his life, but we can't be President? " Kennedy campaigned endlessly in West Virginia. His wife campaigned successfully there as well, clearly connecting with the people. Kennedy out-campaigned and outspent Humphrey. The result was Kennedy's landslide victory receiving 60.8% to 39.2% for Humphrey.

The Democratic convention opened in Los Angeles on July 11th. Kennedy arrived with a commanding lead. His major opponent was Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon Johnson. However, a " draft Stevenson" movement seemed to be picking up steam, as the convention got under way. This movement was in a sense a " stop Kennedy" movement, for any vote for Stevenson would be a vote that Kennedy would not get, and that might deny Kennedy the nomination on the first ballot. The feeling in Los Angeles was that the support for Kennedy was soft, and thus if Kennedy did not win on the first ballot, his support might fade away. Therefore, all of the Kennedy camp's efforts were directed to a first-ballot victory and Kennedy did indeed win on the first ballot.

Kennedy now had to choose a Vice President. Kennedy recognized that he needed the support of Lyndon Johnson, who was the Senate Majority Leader to govern effectively. To heal the wounds created by the campaign, he decided to offer Johnson the option of running for Vice President. Much to Kennedy's surprise, Johnson accepted the offer. Senator Johnson was extremely helpful in the general election, campaigning effectively in the South and bringing the electoral votes of Texas into the Kennedy column. The general election was a closely-run race between Jack Kennedy, the Senator, and Richard Nixon, the sitting Vice President. Kennedy's major campaign theme was " the need to get the country going again" . Typical of his campaign speeches Kennedy stated: " I have premised my campaign for the Presidency on the single assumption that the American people are uneasy at the present drift in our national course, that they are disturbed by the relative decline in our vitality and prestige, and that they have the will and the strength to start the United States moving again. "

Other campaign themes included the "missile gap", highlighting that the United States was falling behind the Russians in missile production.

The most important milestones in the campaign were the series of debates between Nixon and Kennedy. Kennedy immediately gained points for being on the same platform as Nixon, and holding his own. In the first debate, Nixon's make-up was misapplied and the studio was too hot. As a result Nixon came across looking tired and uncomfortable, compared to the young vigorous look of Senator Kennedy. After the debates, the crowds for Kennedy grew. Wherever his motorcade went, the crowds would jam the streets. In October, Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested in Georgia. Kennedy was informed of the event. Sargent Shriver, Kennedy's brother-in-law suggested Kennedy call Mrs. King to express his support, which he did almost immediately. Robert Kennedy then intervened by calling the judge involved, and securing King's release. This brought Kennedy additional support in the African American community.

Finally, Election Day arrived. The margin of the popular vote was one of the narrowest in US history. It took until the middle of the next day to declare Kennedy the winner in Minnesota and for Nixon to concede, making Senator Kennedy, President-Elect Kennedy. He had won by just 113,238 votes though his electoral victory was a more decisive: 303-219 votes.

Was Nixon Robbed?

The legend of the stolen 1960 presidential election.

By David Greenberg

"You gotta swallow this one," says a Republican hack in Oliver Stone's Nixon, referring to the 1960 election, in which John F. Kennedy prevailed. "They stole it fair and square."

That Richard Nixon was cheated out of the presidency in 1960 has become almost an accepted fact. You've probably heard the allegations: Kennedy's operatives fixed the tallies in Texas and Illinois, giving him those states' 51 electoral votes and a majority in the Electoral College. Fearing that to question the results would harm the country, Nixon checked his pride and declined to mount a challenge.

The story is rich in irony: The much-hated Nixon, later driven from the presidency for cheating in an election, puts country before personal gain. The beloved Kennedy, waltzing through life, pulls off the political crime of the century. Nixon's defenders like the story because it diminishes Watergate. His detractors like it since it allows them to appear less than knee-jerk—magnanimously crediting Nixon with noble behavior while eluding charges of Kennedy worship.

Ironic, yes. But true?

The race was indeed close—the closest of the century. Kennedy received only 113,000 votes more than Nixon out of the 68 million ballots cast. His 303-219 electoral-vote margin obscured the fact that many states besides Texas and Illinois could have gone either way. California's 32 electoral votes, for example, originally fell into Kennedy's column, but Nixon claimed them on Nov. 17 after absentee ballots were added.

Even before Election Day, rumors circulated about fraud, especially in Chicago, where Mayor Richard Daley's machine was known for delivering whopping Democratic tallies by

fair means and foul. When it became clear how narrowly Nixon lost, outraged Republicans grew convinced that cheating had tipped the election and lobbied for an investigation.

Nixon always insisted that others, including President Eisenhower, encouraged him to dispute the outcome but that he refused. A challenge, he told others, would cause a "constitutional crisis," hurt America in the eyes of the world, and "tear the country apart." Besides, he added, pursuing the claims would mean "charges of 'sore loser' would follow me through history and remove any possibility of a further political career."

Classic Nixon: "Others" urge him to follow a less admirable course, but he spurns their advice for the high road. (William Safire once noted that he always used to tell Nixon to take the easy path so that Nixon could say in his speeches, "Others will say we should take the easy course, but …") Apart from the suspect neatness of this account, however, there are reasons to doubt its veracity.

First, Eisenhower quickly withdrew his support for a challenge, making it hard for Nixon to go forward. According to Nixon's friend Ralph De Toledano, a conservative journalist, Nixon knew Ike's position yet claimed anyway that he, not the president, was the one advocating restraint. "This was the first time I ever caught Nixon in a lie," Toledano recalled.

More to the point, while Nixon publicly pooh-poohed a challenge, his allies did dispute the results—aggressively. The New York Herald Tribune's Earl Mazo, a friend and biographer of Nixon's, recounted a dozen-odd fishy incidents alleged by Republicans in Illinois and Texas. Largely due to Mazo's reporting, the charges gained wide acceptance.

But it wasn't just Mazo who made a stink. The press went into a brief frenzy in the weeks after the election. Most important, the Republican Party made a veritable crusade of undoing the results. Even if they ultimately failed, party leaders figured, they could taint Kennedy's victory, claim he had no mandate for his agenda, galvanize the rank and file, and have a winning issue for upcoming elections.

Three days after the election, party Chairman Sen. Thruston Morton launched bids for recounts and investigations in 11 states—an action that Democratic Sen. Henry Jackson attacked as a "fishing expedition." Eight days later, close Nixon aides, including Bob Finch and Len Hall, sent agents to conduct "field checks" in eight of those states. Peter Flanigan, another aide, encouraged the creation of a Nixon Recount Committee in Chicago. All the while, everyone claimed that Nixon knew nothing of these efforts—an implausible assertion that could only have been designed to help Nixon dodge the dreaded "sore loser" label.

The Republicans pressed their case doggedly. They succeeded in obtaining recounts, empanelling grand juries, and involving U.S. attorneys and the FBI. Appeals were heard, claims evaluated, evidence weighed. The New York Times considered the charges in a Nov. 26 editorial. (Its bold verdict: "It is now imperative that the results in each state be definitively settled by the time the electoral college meets.")

The results of it all were meager.

New Jersey was typical. The GOP obtained court orders for recounts in five counties, but by Dec. 1 the state Republican committee conceded that the recounts had failed to uncover any significant discrepancies, and they halted the process. Kennedy was certified the state's official winner by 22,091 votes. Other states' recount bids and investigations similarly petered out.

Texas and Illinois, the two largest states under dispute, witnessed the nastiest fights. In Texas, where Kennedy won the 24 electoral votes by a margin of 46,000 ballots, the GOP took to the courts. But its suits were thrown out by a federal judge who claimed he had no jurisdiction. In Illinois, the appeal was pursued more vigorously, maybe because the electoral take was higher (27) and Kennedy's margin slimmer (9,000 votes). Charges focused on Cook County (specifically Chicago) where Kennedy had won by a suspiciously overwhelming 450,000 votes.

National GOP officials plunged in. Thruston Morton flew to Chicago to confer with Illinois Republican leaders on strategy, while party Treasurer Meade Alcorn announced Nixon would win the state. With Nixon distancing himself from the effort, the Cook County state's attorney, Benjamin Adamowski, stepped forward to lead the challenge. A Daley antagonist and potential rival for the mayoralty, Adamowski had lost his job to a Democrat by 25,000 votes. The closeness of his defeat entitled him to a recount, which began Nov. 29.

Completed Dec. 9, the recount of 863 precincts showed that the original tally had undercounted Nixon's (and Adamowski's) votes, but only by 943, far from the 4,500 needed to alter the results. In fact, in 40 percent of the rechecked precincts, Nixon's vote was overcounted. Displeased, the Republicans took the case to federal court, only to have a judge dismiss the suits. Still undeterred, they turned to the State Board of Elections, which was composed of four Republicans, including the governor, and one Democrat. Yet the state board, too, unanimously rejected the petition, citing the GOP's failure to provide even a single affidavit on its behalf. The national party finally backed off after Dec. 19, when the nation's Electoral College certified Kennedy as the new president—but even then local Republicans wouldn't accept the Illinois results.

A recount did wind up changing the winner in one state: Hawaii. On Dec. 28, a circuit court judge ruled that the state—originally called Kennedy's but awarded to Nixon after auditing errors emerged—belonged to Kennedy after all. Nixon's net gain: -3 electoral votes.

The GOP's failure to prove fraud doesn't mean, of course, that the election was clean. That question remains unsolved and unsolvable. But what's typically left out of the legend is that multiple election boards saw no reason to overturn the results. Neither did state or federal judges. Neither did an Illinois special prosecutor in 1961. And neither have academic inquiries into the Illinois case (both a 1961 study by three University of Chicago professors and more recent research by political scientist Edmund Kallina concluded that whatever fraud existed wasn't substantial enough to alter the election).

On the other hand, some fraud clearly occurred in Cook County. At least three people were sent to jail for election-related crimes, and 677 others were indicted before being acquitted by Judge John M. Karns, a Daley crony. Many of the allegations involved practices that wouldn't be detected by a recount, leading the conservative Chicago Tribune, among others, to conclude that "once an election has been stolen in Cook County, it stays stolen."

What's more, according to journalist Seymour Hersh, a former Justice Department prosecutor who heard tapes of FBI wiretaps from the period believed that Illinois was rightfully Nixon's. Hersh also has written that J. Edgar Hoover believed Nixon actually won the presidency but in deciding to follow normal procedures and refer the FBI's findings to the attorney general—as of Jan. 20, 1961, Robert F. Kennedy—he effectively buried the case.

Another man, too, believed Nixon was robbed: Nixon. At a 1960 Christmas party, he was heard greeting guests, "We won but they stole it from us." Nixon nursed the grudge for years, and when he was criticized for his Watergate crimes he would cite the Kennedys' misdeeds as precedent. He may have felt JFK's supposed theft entitled him to cheat in 1972. It's an interesting hypothetical: If no pall had been cast over the 1960 election, would Watergate have happened?

Mazo's articles appeared in a four-part series in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and elsewhere. He incorporated them into a 1968 version of his Nixon biography, and other historians cited them in later accounts of the alleged fraud. Nixon himself held them out as evidence that he'd been cheated. Mazo's articles are problematic. He rarely cited his sources or provided any way of gauging anecdotes' authenticity. Some of them were disputed at the time by (Democratic) election officials. Others, in Illinois, were scrutinized by a special prosecutor the next year and didn't hold up.

Nonetheless, given their sheer number, it's quite possible that some, even many, were true. If so, they add up to a disturbing (if not election-altering) amount of cheating. Here are some of his anecdotes.

In Texas, Mazo alleged that:

- Democratic leaders bought hundreds of poll-tax certificates and gave them to poor Mexican-Americans who might not otherwise vote.
- Voting machines were fixed. In one San Antonio precinct, a machine didn't record votes for Nixon.
- People voted illegally. One young girl said her father was sick and voted for him.
- In Republican districts, officials strictly enforced rules about how ballots must be marked, voiding many of them. In nearby Democratic districts, officials were more lax.
- Tabulators were guilty of what we might call "fuzzy math." In Fannin County, for example, 6,138 votes were cast when only 4,895 people were on the rolls.

In Cook County Ill., Mazo alleged that:

- "Ghosting" occurred. A man who had died, and his son who had moved away, both voted in Ward 4, Precinct 31.
- A doctor claimed that he was told his parents had voted, even though one was deceased and the other hadn't voted in 10 years.
- More fuzzy math. In Ward 27, Precinct 27, 397 votes were recorded from 376 voters.
- Interpreters who accompanied Spanish-speaking voters instructed them, "Vote straight Democratic, that's all."
- A precinct captain in Ward 4, Precinct 47 voted twice.
- After someone left a voting booth without voting, an election judge entered the booth and pulled the lever for the Democratic ticket.
- In Ward 5, Precinct 22, a voter stuffed six ballots in the ballot box.
- In later years, journalists such as Seymour Hersh and Anthony Summers would also claim that mobster Sam Giancana and his syndicate played a role. Those charges have always remained murky and unsubstantiated.

Morton telegrammed officials in Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas, urging recount efforts.

Texas Republicans staked their case on apparent precinct-to-precinct inconsistencies in how many ballots officials discounted: Officials appeared stricter about voiding improperly marked ballots in Republican-leaning areas than in heavily Democratic areas—thus shearing Nixon's totals but not Kennedy's. The GOP managed to get a federal court injunction to delay certification of the vote until the party's petition for a recount of 1.25 million ballots could be heard. But when the petition itself came before a federal district judge, he rejected it. No one's civil rights had been violated, the judge ruled, and apart from a civil-rights claim, federal courts had no jurisdiction over state vote contests.

After losing the battle at the state Board of Elections, Adamowski sued. He won another recount of the 863 precincts under contention. In that second recount, he fared considerably better than in the first—though still not well enough to win his election. Although this second recount didn't include presidential ballots, Professor Edmund Kallina of the University of Central Florida projected that if Nixon's tally had improved in the second recount as much as Adamowski's did, Nixon too would have fallen shy of victory.

Of course, many of the fraud allegations weren't the sort of thing that a recount could detect. To address other kinds of fraud, Adamowski, as a lame-duck state's attorney, convened grand juries to investigate his own re-election race. After his Democratic successor took over, the matter was turned over to a special state prosecutor, Morris J. Wexler. Wexler returned his report on April 13, 1961. He concluded that irregularities had occurred, but, again, not enough to have influenced any election outcome. He also returned the 677 indictments mentioned above.

There's one final wrinkle. Allegations of vote fraud by *Republicans* arose across Illinois too. (Outside Chicago, the GOP controlled most districts.) Such charges drew little scrutiny because of Kennedy's victory, but if the Cook County vote had been in danger of reversal, Democrats surely would have mounted challenges downstate to win back votes that may have been stolen in the other direction.

I mostly relied on long-lost newspaper accounts for this article, because of a lack of good secondary sources. The only serious study of these charges is Edmund Kallina's excellent *Courthouse Over White House: Chicago and the Presidential Election of 1960*, although despite the subtitle Kallina focuses more on local politics than on the presidential race. Nixon writes about the issue in both of his memoirs, *Six Crises* and *RN*. Earl Mazo and Stephen Hess endorse the stolen-election idea in *Richard Nixon: A Personal and Political Portrait*. Biographies that add original contributions are Herbert Parmet's *Richard Nixon and His America* and Fawn Brodie's *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character.* Other accounts, which have a conspiratorial bent and should be taken with a grain of salt, appear in Seymour Hersh's *The Dark Side of Camelot*, Patrick Mahoney's *Sons and Brothers*, and Anthony Summers's *Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon*.

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