The 1960 Presidential Election in Florida: Did the Space Race and the National Prestige Issue Play an Important Role?

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THE 1960 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN FLORIDA: DID THE SPACE RACE AND THE NATIONAL PRESTIGE ISSUE PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE?

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The landmark launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, and the subsequent perception that the United States trailed the Soviet Union, not only in space but also in missiles, plagued the Eisenhower Administration for the rest of the decade. The Democratic Party strategy for the 1960 presidential election included using the space race, the alleged missile gap, and declining American prestige abroad to illustrate the need for new leadership in the White House. Senator John F. Kennedy, the Democratic nominee, effectively raised these issues throughout the general election to support his "New Frontier" program and won by the narrowest popular vote margin in history.

Yet, using the same themes during his tour of Florida, Kennedy failed to carry the state. An influx of Republican voters from other states, the absence of crucial Democratic voting blocs, and a considerable defection of registered Democrats contributed to Vice President Richard M. Nixon's Florida victory. Analysis of major Florida newspapers revealed that Kennedy's religion, the liberal Democratic platform, referenda on proposed amendments to the state constitution, and state office races generated more interest than the space race, despite the presence of Cape Canaveral as the primary launch facility for the U.S. space program. Kennedy's religion, civil rights, and states rights emerged as the key issues for Florida voters and compelled many Democrats to vote for Nixon as the only alternative or in protest.
Chapter 1


The phenomenon known as the space race had its roots in the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957, which occurred between July 1, 1957 and December 31, 1958. In April 1955, the Soviet Union announced plans to launch a man-made satellite into orbit during the IGY. Following the advice of the National Security Council and special assistant Nelson A. Rockefeller, who argued that national prestige was at stake if the Soviets reached this milestone first, President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced a similar intent on behalf of the United States on July 29, 1955.¹ Both countries anticipated an evolution in rocket technology that would result in the development of a new type of weapon, the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The subsequent efforts by the two superpowers to achieve the goal of launching a satellite followed divergent technological strategies with unforeseen political consequences.

The Soviet Union pursued the ambitious objective of manned space flight after experimental flights with dogs in 1951 demonstrated its feasibility. Early Soviet research

included space suit design, emergency escape systems for space capsules, and powerful engines to launch heavy payloads. Soviet scientists envisioned payloads comprised of not only human passengers but also scientific instruments and telemetry weighing thousands of pounds. To attain the requisite velocity to escape the gravitational pull of the earth, Soviet scientists chose a booster technology based on combining several smaller engines into a larger unit to achieve greater thrust. These large boosters also powered the first generation of Soviet ICBMs that carried primitive nuclear warheads weighing up to ten thousand pounds.

President Eisenhower had little immediate interest in manned space missions or heavy payloads. As Walter A. McDougall noted, within the Eisenhower Administration, "First and foremost, space was about spying, not because the United States was aggressive but because the USSR was secretive." Satellites fulfilled Eisenhower's more pressing objective of reconnaissance over the Soviet Union, having potential scientific benefits while incurring significantly less expense and risk than manned space travel. In addition, the American ICBM strategy focused on refining technology to produce smaller warheads, reliable guidance systems, and stable propellants, forsaking a large short-term commitment

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4 Walter A. McDougall, ... The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 194.
to first-generation ICBMs in anticipation of more cost-effective second- and third-
genation weapons.

Eisenhower considered the IGY effort a lower priority than military missile and
satellite programs and instructed government officials to act accordingly. His approach
may have cost the United States an opportunity to launch the first man-made earth satellite a
year ahead of Sputnik. Wehrner von Braun, head of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency’s
(ABMA) rocket team, perceived the prestige implications of being the first country to
accomplish the feat and pushed for an acceleration of the schedule. A test launch of an
Army Jupiter C rocket on September 19, 1956 carried a satellite prototype in its nose cone.
Shortly before the launch, von Braun received instructions to replace the payload with a
sandbag of equivalent weight in order to prevent hard feelings on the competing Navy team.
The missile attained unprecedented distance, speed, and height and could easily have placed
a satellite into orbit. Primarily because of von Braun’s impatience after this event, the
ABMA team obtained a reputation of fostering interservice rivalry and gradually lost much
of its support outside of the Army. Thus, the Eisenhower Administration laid the
groundwork for a potential Soviet lead in the nascent space race and inadvertently sowed
the seeds for the subsequent missile-gap and space-gap controversies. These issues
frustrated the Eisenhower Administration and the Republican Party from the launch of
Sputnik until the 1960 presidential election.

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6 William B. Breuer, Race to the Moon: America’s Duel with the Soviets (Westport,
Despite a shroud of secrecy, two events in the summer of 1957 hinted that the Soviets were making progress in their satellite effort. In June, they published the frequencies on which their satellite would transmit. The frequencies deviated from those established by the IGY committee. Interestingly, they were within the range of most common short-wave receivers, proving that propaganda was a concern from the beginning of the Soviet space program. The second event was the first successful Soviet ICBM test, announced on August 27. The Soviets claimed the ability to “direct rockets to any part of the world” and alleged “the manned aircraft of the [U.S.] Strategic Air Command were vulnerable to Soviet offensive rockets and to Soviet air defenses.” Despite these developments, Project Vanguard, the Navy satellite program and the favored group after the ABMA team’s fall from grace, continued at its original pace.

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched the first man-made earth satellite, Sputnik. The event raised the stakes in the space race and broadened the focus of the Cold War. Sheldon Ungar stated, “Like the atom bomb, it [Sputnik] bisected history and created a sense of pre- and post-Sputnik worlds.” Previously, the United States appeared to be technologically superior to the Soviet Union, communism was contained in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, and the Cold War was waged primarily in

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7 Levine, 56.


military terms. After Sputnik, the Soviet Union laid a claim to scientific preeminence, the balance of power appeared to shift toward Moscow, the Cold War expanded outside of the military arena, and American confidence was shaken to the core.

The Tass press release reporting the launch was relatively subdued, primarily relating technical facts. Even so, it concluded with a statement clearly intended to evoke a new sense of Soviet superiority: "Artificial earth satellites will pave the way for interplanetary travel and, apparently, our contemporaries will witness how the freed and conscientious labor of the people of the new socialist society makes the most daring dreams of mankind a reality." Sputnik remained aloft for ninety-four days and gathered valuable scientific data concerning atmospheric conditions and its internal temperature. Each orbit, accompanied by beeps transmitted from the satellite to short-wave radios throughout the world, reinforced the concept that not only science but also civilization was irrevocably changed.

The American reaction to the Soviet satellite has been characterized by terms such as "alarm," "panic," "disbelief," "humiliation," and "exasperation." The average American citizen was wholly unprepared for such a dramatic demonstration of Soviet technological ability. Many of the fundamental beliefs concerning the relative merits of the Soviet and American ways of life were suddenly and vividly challenged. Edward Diamond and Stephen Bates summarized the typical American feelings: "Overnight the self-assured center began coming apart. Inventive, free-enterprise America, home of Edison and the

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Wright brothers, . . . was being overtaken—surpassed?—by a backward, totalitarian, Communist nation.” Arnold L. Horelick attributed some of the intensity of the reaction to latent fear stemming from the Soviet ICBM test announcement in August. Faced with tangible evidence of the Soviet space program, one could no longer discount that announcement as hollow boasting or mere propaganda.14

Media coverage of Sputnik in the U.S. certainly contributed to negative reactions from American citizens. Jack Lule concluded that members of the press used the launch of Sputnik “as a means to enact powerful dramas that evoked and extended ongoing cultural concerns over the Cold War, atomic weapons, perceived shifts of power and prestige, and deteriorating national values.” He described the three dramas presented in news reports as defeat, mortification, and dream and dread. The drama of defeat simply characterized Sputnik as a Cold War triumph for the Soviet Union and a loss for the United States. The drama of mortification involved mass introspection on the possible flaws in American society that could have allowed such a defeat, including perceived deficiencies in education and government leadership, and resulted in a strong desire to fix these problems once identified. Finally, the drama of dream and dread portrayed a more romantic aspect of the

12 Stoiko, 81.
event, whereby Americans simultaneously saw hope and danger in the enigmatic realm of outer space.\textsuperscript{15}

While Lule’s study pertained to newspaper coverage, Cheryl L. Marlin conducted a similar study of weekly news publications and reached similar conclusions. Marlin focused on the three magazines with the highest circulation figures between October and December 1957, which were \textit{Time} followed by \textit{Newsweek} and \textit{U.S. News and World Report}. \textit{Time} couched its coverage squarely in Cold War terms, essentially ignoring scientific aspects, and perpetuated what Lule characterized as the drama of defeat. Symbolizing the drama of the dream, \textit{Newsweek} displayed a fascination of the unknown and celebrated the scientific potential and pioneer spirit surrounding the space race. Marlin compared the magazine’s attitude toward the competition with that of “a kid whose father won’t pass the other cars on the road, . . . urging, ‘Let’s go!’” Finally, \textit{U.S. News and World Report} portrayed the Sputnik launch as a surprising but surmountable setback and exhorted Americans to participate in regaining the lead in space.\textsuperscript{16} This posture correlated to Lule’s mortification drama. Clearly, perceptions of the Sputnik launch in the media conflicted and added to the collective sense of public frustration.

President Eisenhower held a press conference on October 9, which Stephen Ambrose characterized as “the most hostile in [Eisenhower’s] career.”\textsuperscript{17} Fielding repeated

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questions concerning anxiety over national security and whether the United States would ever catch up to the Soviet space program, Eisenhower maintained that the United States was in no imminent danger and would not engage in a costly competition with the Soviet Union. He stated unequivocally, “Never has it been considered as a race; merely an engagement on our part to put up a vehicle of this kind during the period that I have already mentioned [the IGY].” Moreover, he dismissed any correlation between the ability to launch a satellite and the ability to target American cities accurately with an ICBM. In a reference to the August announcement of the Soviet ICBM test, Eisenhower observed that landing “in the target area” meant little because “you can make a target area the size you please.”

Eisenhower’s calmness was attributable in large part to his possession of considerable classified information unavailable to the public. Intelligence advisors informed him in November 1956 that the Soviet Union was approximately one year away from possessing the ability to launch a satellite. Furthermore, U-2 reconnaissance flights produced photographs of the SS-6 missile slated for the launch of Sputnik. Although this evidence could not pinpoint a launch date, knowledge of a pending launch existed. Thus, the element of surprise that significantly influenced public reaction did not affect the Eisenhower Administration as deeply. The data gathered by the U-2 flights contradicted the notion that a surprise attack threatened and provided the president with a certain level of

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comfort regarding the status of the Soviet ICBM program. Eisenhower also deduced that Sputnik’s weight, 184 pounds, revealed a Soviet lag in communications miniaturization technology. When he stated to the press that he harbored no apprehension concerning U.S. national security based on Sputnik, he was sincere.

Unfortunately for Eisenhower, he was unable to substantiate his assurances to the press and the public with facts. The U-2 photographs were classified and there had been no public acknowledgement of U.S. flights over the Soviet Union. Exposing the program at such a critical juncture would compromise a significant intelligence asset. Consequently, Eisenhower frustrated his audience and created doubts concerning the integrity of his statements. This frustration fueled criticism and public anxiety.

Stephen Ambrose noted that Eisenhower, who admitted that the magnitude of the American reaction surprised him, had no valid cause for astonishment by what he heard and read after the launch of Sputnik. Eisenhower often stated that ICBMs possessed a greater psychological than military value and predicted a wave of fear accompanying the realization that the Soviet Union could launch nuclear weapons from within its borders. Even so, Eisenhower expressed disappointment over the “crisis in self-confidence” caused by the

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20 Ambrose, 503-504.

21 Diamond, 92.
launch. Fundamental American beliefs held for decades and recently reinforced by the triumph in World War II seemed “swept away” overnight. 22

McGeorge Bundy offered a plausible explanation to this mutual misunderstanding between the president and his people. Bundy pointed out that while Sputnik and its underlying technology emerged without warning to America and indeed, most of the world, the Eisenhower Administration actually planned for such a contingency since 1954. The president endured countless briefings on the effect of a Soviet first strike and made the necessary decisions to establish a suitable deterrent, thus the scenario was familiar and he felt confident in U.S. preparations. Bundy concluded:

[Eisenhower] really did not understand that the reactions of his countrymen were much more than a response to partisan propaganda, or that those who he saw as merely partisan were often themselves genuinely—if wrongly—fearful. Because of his insufficient understanding of those fears, he responded in ways that made them grow. To his critics he seemed not to be taking the danger at its true value. 23

A mere month after Sputnik dominated world headlines, the launch of Sputnik II on November 3 underscored Soviet prowess and served notice that the first satellite was no mere gimmick or stroke of luck. Sputnik II carried a sophisticated 1,120-pound payload, including a dog named Laika to facilitate biological experiments. Laika lived for almost a week in orbit and confirmed the feasibility of manned space flight. 24 The space race was barely thirty days old and yet the Soviets boasted two successful launches, metaphorically lapping the Americans before they left the starting blocks.

22 Ambrose, 449.


Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev recognized this propaganda coup and quickly moved to capitalize on it. The four space-related themes adopted and used throughout Khrushchev’s tenure were Western vulnerability to Soviet ICBMs, Soviet scientific superiority, Soviet dedication to the peaceful conquest of space, and the integral role of Premier Khrushchev in the space program. Khrushchev flaunted Soviet space exploits as proof of communist superiority over capitalism. He claimed that Soviet rocket technology rendered obsolete two important elements of U.S. strategy, long-range bombers and forward bases in Western Europe. These brash claims, ostensibly corroborated by the satellite launches, resulted in a widely held but erroneous belief that the United States lagged behind the Soviets in the relative number of ICBMs in their arsenal.

The myth of the missile gap, an important issue in the 1960 election, was the most enduring legacy of Khrushchev’s “rocket rattling” practices. Khrushchev initiated a deliberate and calculated campaign to convince the West that the Sputniks signaled the beginning of a growing Soviet ICBM advantage. The Soviet claims were fraudulent, but the highly publicized satellite achievements, with no comparable U.S. feats, gave credence to the statements. Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush explained the correlation between the Soviet space program and the missile gap myth:

The space program afforded the Soviet leaders an opportunity to stage a sustained and non-provocative military demonstration, which was an integral part of the ICBM deception. The reputation acquired as a result of their space program provided Soviet leaders with a reservoir of credibility on which to draw for purposes

25 McDougall, 237.
of strategic deception. The reservoir was regularly replenished by new and more spectacular space ventures.\textsuperscript{27}

The misperception prevailed into the next decade, affecting U.S. politics and influencing world opinion despite American efforts to refute the claims.

Following the two Sputniks, Western Europeans lost confidence in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in general and the United States in particular. According to polls conducted periodically by the United States Information Agency (USIA), American prestige abroad declined after the Soviet launches. A poll taken in 1955 in Great Britain, France and West Germany showed a mere 6 percent from all countries felt that the Soviet Union was militarily superior to the NATO powers. A similar poll taken in November 1957 reflected the impact of the Soviet satellite launches. When asked whether the Western powers lagged behind the Soviet Union militarily, 21 percent in Great Britain, 20 percent in France, 12 percent in Italy, and 10 percent in West Germany responded in the affirmative. When asked whether the United States alone was mightier than the Soviets, 50 percent in Great Britain and 25 percent in France answered no.\textsuperscript{28}

Faced with a crescendo of dissatisfaction at home and abroad, but firm in the belief that no risk to national security existed, Eisenhower chose to act quickly in the civilian arena through education and science. Shortly after the launch of Sputnik, he requested that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) revise a draft education bill to emphasize science and mathematics rather than school construction in order to address "the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{28} McDougall, 240.
present mood” of the country. He also planned a series of radio and television addresses in which he would educate, inform, and reassure the American public. He only delivered two before suffering a stroke on November 26, 1957 that forced cancellation of the remaining addresses. Consequently, his responses, though initiated rapidly, lacked the publicity required to demonstrate vigorous action in the prevailing atmosphere of doubt and anxiety.

In his first address, on November 7, Eisenhower announced the creation of the President’s Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) and the position of Special Assistant for Science and Technology. PSAC resulted from a meeting on October 15 with the Science Advisory Committee of the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM-SAC), a civilian body composed of fourteen prominent scientists. During the dialogue between Eisenhower and ODM-SAC, the concept of a presidential science advisor backed by a science advisory committee evolved. Eisenhower envisioned a body that would not only facilitate comprehension of complex scientific issues within his administration and provide impartial technological advice, but also demonstrate to the American people that he valued and

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31 Ibid., 15-16.
sought sound scientific advice.\(^{32}\) James R. Killian, Jr., president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a former ODM-SAC member, received the first appointment as Special Assistant for Science and Technology.

The Eisenhower Administration suffered four setbacks following the launch of Sputnik II that exacerbated the atmosphere of criticism surrounding the White House. First, Senator Lyndon Johnson (D, Tex.), majority leader and chairman of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, initiated hearings on November 25, 1957 that he described as a "'searching inquiry' into United States defense posture."\(^{33}\) Paul K. Conkin characterized the hearings as "one of the largest and best conducted congressional investigations in American history." He also noted that the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee "almost alone had the trained staff, and in Johnson the political clout, to investigate what was soon known as the missile gap."\(^{34}\)

Determined to avoid a political witch-hunt, Johnson established parameters for the hearings to ensure that the future of American security took precedence, and witnesses were chosen based on knowledge rather than party affiliation.\(^{35}\) In less than two months the subcommittee compiled three thousand pages of testimony from thirty-four witnesses, including scientists, military officers, Eisenhower Administration officials, and

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\(^{33}\) Bottome, 51.

\(^{34}\) Paul K. Conkin, Big Daddy from the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 144.
representatives from the aerospace industry. Johnson also cited nearly two hundred interviews conducted by the subcommittee’s staff and “searching questionnaires” sent to “industrial organizations, leading scientists and engineers, and leading educators.”36

On January 7, 1958, Johnson briefed the Senate Democratic caucus on the subcommittee’s findings. Without criticizing Eisenhower directly, Johnson clearly held the administration responsible for America’s slow start in the space race. He stated, “That the Soviet achievements are tangible and visible, while ours are not, is a result of policy decisions made within the governments of the respective nations. It is not . . . the result of any great relative superiority of one nation’s science over the other’s.” The subcommittee developed fourteen proposals, including strengthening of the Air Force, acceleration of research and development programs, acceleration of intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) and ICBM development, and renewed emphasis on mathematics and science education.37

In the midst of the Johnson hearings, Project Vanguard provided a second setback. With pressure mounting daily to match the Soviet accomplishments, the next scheduled Vanguard launch, originally intended as another in a series of deliberate preliminary tests, was hastily modified to include a three-pound satellite. After some highly publicized delays, the launch date was finally set for December 6, 1957. It was a dismal failure. The

37 Ibid.
rocket did not clear the launch tower and exploded, sending its beeping payload into the swamp surrounding the complex at Cape Canaveral, Florida. 38 Foreign newspapers ran headlines calling the U.S. satellite “Flopnik,” “Stay-putnick,” “Kaputnik,” and “Sputternick.” Washington insiders circulated a joke that named the satellite “Civil Servant” because “It won’t work and you can’t fire it.” 39 Eisenhower, at home recuperating from his stroke, expressed “disappointment” over the incident. 40

Congressional members from both parties expressed varying degrees of despair and indignation. Johnson described the incident as “one of the best publicized and most humiliating failures in our history.” Richard Russell (D, Ga.), chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, called it “a grievous blow to our already waning world prestige.” The Republican response focused on the level of publicity leading up to the launch, and many believed that the press shared the blame for the negative launch results. Senate minority leader William Knowland (R, Ca.) stated, “The Soviet Union may well have had a dozen [failures] before they launched the first sputnik.” 41 Reacting sharply to the criticism, Vice President Richard M. Nixon said, “Sure we failed. We have before and we will again, but we need to keep our sense of proportion. I say we should get behind our

38 Shelton, 12.
missile people and help them. Let’s get away from our wailing walls and act like Americans. 42

Only two weeks after the Vanguard failure, leaks of a classified civil defense report fanned the flames of criticism against the Eisenhower Administration. Early in 1957, Eisenhower appointed a civilian committee, designated the Security Resources Panel (SRP), to assess American civil defense policy and review a Federal Civil Defense Administration proposal for a $40 billion national bomb and blast shelter program. H. Rowan Gaither, chairman of the RAND Corporation and the Ford Foundation, led the panel. Eisenhower gave the SRP six months to present a report of its findings. Without Eisenhower’s knowledge or consent, the committee broadened its focus to a general survey of U.S. national defense when Robert C. Sprague assumed leadership from an ailing Gaither. 43 Only special assistant Robert Cutler knew of this change and neglected to share the information with Eisenhower. 44

When the committee delivered its report orally to Eisenhower on November 4, 1957, he was surprised and slightly agitated at the change of focus but listened to the entire presentation, asking only that the group check its figures prior to delivering the written report to the National Security Council (NSC). The SRP released the report to the NSC on November 7. While Eisenhower shared some of the SRP’s views on the need to protect SAC bombers and accelerate the missile program, he believed the report magnified the

44 Bundy, 336.
extent of the Soviet threat. He also dismissed the recommendation of an $8 billion increase in defense spending over the next five to eight years.45

Although the Gaither report received a cool response at the White House, a series of press leaks brought it to the public’s attention. Johnson requested a copy for the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee body of testimony. After initial resistance, Eisenhower consented to an off-the-record subcommittee briefing by Killian.46 Publication of this information perpetuated the missile gap myth and the belief that the United States was no longer safe from Soviet attack. It also supported allegations that despite warnings from his own advisors Eisenhower did not fully comprehend the enhanced Soviet threat.

The final setback occurred on January 6, 1958, when the New York Times printed a full-page summary of a national defense study released by the Special Studies Project of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc. The Special Studies Project, chaired by former Eisenhower special assistant Nelson A. Rockefeller, sought to “assess major problems and opportunities . . . likely to confront America over the next ten years.” The panel included such prominent individuals as Chester Bowles, Gen. Lucius Clay, Henry Luce, Dean Rusk, and Edward Teller. The group established seven sub-panels to focus on various topics. The published report, titled “International Security—The Military Aspect,” embodied the work of the Security Panel.47

46 Ibid., 77-78.
Some of the Security Panel's recommendations echoed those of the SRP, such as accelerated missile development, improved SAC asset protection, and increased defense spending. The Rockefeller report also suggested an increase in defense spending of $3 billion per year until 1965, excluding any additional funds required for mutual assistance and civil defense. In addition, the Rockefeller report called for continued aircraft modernization into the next decade, additional troop transports, equipping ships and submarines with missiles, and a military pay hike. The report concluded that Americans could "achieve the necessary military power while preserving and expanding other elements of our strength, such as health, education, and economic growth." With Rockefeller joining the fray, the criticism became bipartisan. Eisenhower could no longer dismiss the negative comments as the product of vindictive Democrats or an overzealous press corps.

Concerns over national security compelled Eisenhower to devote his entire State of the Union address on January 9, 1958 to "matters bearing directly upon our security and peace." His only direct reference to the Sputniks occurred while he cautioned against ignoring the Soviet economic threat. He stated, "Admittedly, most of us did not anticipate the intensity of the psychological impact upon the world of the launching of the first earth satellite. Let us not make the same kind of mistake in another field, by failing to anticipate the much more serious impact of the Soviet economic offensive." Eisenhower remained true to his belief that the United States incurred no enhanced military threat from the Soviet Union. Of his eight proposed initiatives, only two related to the military. The rest dealt

48 Ibid.
with economic aid, world trade, international scientific cooperation, education, and domestic spending.  

Eisenhower hoped to push his education bill emphasizing science and mathematics through congress quickly but was disappointed. Representative Carroll Kearns (R, Pa.) and Senator H. Alexander Smith (R, N.J.), a prior champion of Eisenhower education bills, introduced the HEW bill on January 27, 1958. On the same day, Representative Carl Elliott (D, Ala.) and Senator Lister Hill (D, Ala.) introduced a competing bill. Hill chaired the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, through which all education legislation passed. Smith was the ranking Republican on this committee.  

Months of hearings ensued, including testimony by such distinguished scientists as Wehrner von Braun and Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover. Congress finally approved the legislation on August 23, 1958 and Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act into law on September 2, nearly a year after Sputnik entered earth orbit. While the law succeeded in establishing renewed support for scientific education, its value in demonstrating prompt response by the White House to the Soviet satellite lead was marginal due to the time lag between the two events.

In the hostile political climate created by the Sputniks, the Johnson hearings, the Vanguard failure, the leaks of the Gaither report, and the release of the Rockefeller report, Eisenhower desperately needed a high-profile satellite success. PSAC formed a Space

50 Clowse, 66, 78.
51 Ibid., 84-90.
Assessment Panel to “review all elements of the existing space program and to make a precautionary assessment of the prospects for a successful American satellite launch.”

This panel concluded that Wehrner von Braun’s ABMA team provided the best chance for a successful launch in the near term. Based on the panel’s recommendation, von Braun received a mandate to strive for a satellite launch as soon as possible. He brashly assured success within ninety days and his team delivered on his promise. With the launch of Explorer I on January 31, 1959, America finally entered the space age. The eighteen-pound satellite reached a maximum height of 1,573 miles in orbit and transmitted for 112 days, relaying data on cosmic rays, micrometeorites, and temperature in outer space. Using instrumentation developed by Dr. James A. Van Allen, Explorer I discovered the presence of a solar radiation belt surrounding the earth, knowledge of which was critical for the pursuit of manned space flight.

During March 1958, a flurry of activity gave the United States a numerical lead in the space race. On March 5, the ABMA successfully launched Explorer II but it failed to attain orbit due to a malfunction. The Navy finally placed Vanguard I into orbit on March 17, and the statistics it gathered proved that the shape of the earth resembled a pear rather than a sphere. It was also the first satellite to use solar power and continued to transmit data for more than three years. The ABMA attained the American lead by launching Explorer III on March 26. Designed to continue the experiments conducted by Explorer I, it

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52 Damms, 313.
53 Shelton, 14.
54 Ibid., 16-18.
provided further data on the Van Allen radiation belt as well as temperature readings and micrometeorite impact analysis.  

On the same day as the Explorer III launch, PSAC released “A Statement by the President and the Introduction to Outer Space,” the Eisenhower Administration’s formal announcement of the new U.S. space program. It listed national prestige among the motivations for establishing such a program. Specifically, it stated, “To be strong and bold in space technology will enhance the prestige of the United States among the peoples of the world and create added confidence in our scientific, technological, industrial, and military strength.” In a projected timeline for the new space program, PSAC conservatively predicted a manned flight to the moon and back in two decades. Showing deference to Eisenhower’s reluctance to characterize any space effort as a competition with the Soviet Union, the report concluded by stating that space science should not be promoted to the detriment of existing scientific endeavors and that the U.S. should be “cautious and modest in our predictions and pronouncements about future space activities.”

Eisenhower requested congressional authorization for a civilian space agency on April 2, 1958, a week after the release of the “Introduction to Outer Space.” He saw no justification for military control of the space program because, in his mind, the satellite and missile efforts were distinct. While the launch vehicle for both was essentially the same

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56 Launius, 150.

57 Ibid., 153.
rocket in many cases, he believed the payload should dictate the jurisdiction. The interservice squabbling experienced to date and the success of the civilian PSAC reinforced his views. PSAC illustrated that civilians harbored less bias and self-interest and exhibited a level of candor the military services lacked.\textsuperscript{58} The proposed legislation from the White House reflected this premise by establishing a civilian authority reporting directly to the president modeled on an expanded National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA).\textsuperscript{59}

Lyndon Johnson, as chairman of the new Senate Special Committee on Space and Astronautics, co-sponsored the bill with Senator Henry Styles Bridges (R, N.H.) on April 14. He considered development of a federal space agency a high national priority and sought to avoid partisanship when possible. Despite temptation to resist Eisenhower’s idea of placing the new agency in civilian hands, Johnson perceived the political expedience of the arrangement and realized that in practice the military would not be excluded from participating in the space program. Johnson also yielded to Eisenhower on the role of the new Space Council, establishing it as an advisory body for the agency administrator rather than a steering committee to set policy direction and prioritize projects.\textsuperscript{60} Johnson’s pivotal role in the bill’s success further identified him with the space program, and he later described it as one of his three proudest achievements as a senator.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Shelton, 18.
\textsuperscript{60} Dallek, 533-534.
\textsuperscript{61} Conkin, 137.
Congress approved the National Aeronautics and Space Act on July 16, 1958, and Eisenhower signed it into law on July 29. The act created the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) as an independent body to replace NACA. NASA’s first administrator, T. Keith Glennan, was appointed by Eisenhower on August 8 and confirmed by the Senate one week later. An entry from Glennan’s diary reveals that he concurred philosophically with Eisenhower on the purpose of NASA. He listed several guiding principles for NASA, including contracting most of its work to universities and the private sector, establishing an “orderly launch vehicle program” to replace the “missile mess,” and recognizing propaganda as an element of the program but subordinating its value to that of a long-range plan.62

By the time NASA officially began operating on October 1, 1958, the United States still possessed a numeric lead over the Soviets in the satellite race. After the stunning one-two punch of the first two Sputniks, the only Soviet success in 1958 was Sputnik III, launched on May 15. The payload weighed in at over three thousand pounds, three times heavier than Sputnik II.63 By contrast, Explorer IV, launched three days before Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act and the heaviest American payload to date, was still lighter than Sputnik. However, its instrumentation was sophisticated enough to successfully measure the electron densities resulting from an atmospheric atomic bomb test on September 6, 1958. The design philosophies of the two programs remained intact, and

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62 McDougall, 196.
63 Stoiko, 85.
both produced successful scientific results. The Soviets continued to push the limits of payload weight as the United States refined its miniaturization technology.

While progressing on the scientific front, politically Eisenhower and the Republicans remained on the defensive. The Democratic strategy in the 1958 congressional elections proved successful and resurfaced in 1960. The Democrats charged that Republican idleness and indifference resulted in Soviet supremacy in a host of areas, including education, missiles, satellites, economic growth, bombers, science, and national prestige. For example, Senator Stuart Symington (D, Mo.), a candidate for the presidency in 1960, used his positions on the Armed Services and Aeronautical and Space Sciences committees to sustain charges of a missile gap. This approach earned him a landslide victory in his 1958 bid for re-election. Walter McDougall asserted, “To those in the know, the limited importance of the Soviet satellite launches and the true proportions of military might were clear.” However, every Eisenhower critic seized on the Sputniks “as an opportunity to sell their programs as cures to the presumed ailments of American life that contributed to the ‘loss’ of the space race.”

The results of the 1958 election represented a large setback for the Republicans and provided momentum to the Democrats going into the 1960 campaign. Theodore H. White described the Republicans as being “at the lowest ebb since the zenith of the New Deal in 1936,” controlling “only fourteen of the forty-eight governorships of the nation and only

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64 Ambrose, 450.
65 Ibid., 473
66 McDougall, 132.
seven of the forty-eight state legislatures chosen in the previous day's elections. The Democrats also enjoyed almost a two-to-one advantage in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, making Eisenhower the first president to encounter three successive congresses controlled by the opposition party.

Despite the rapid progress of the American space program, it still lacked a “first.” After the unprecedented distance of 70,000 miles attained by Pioneer I on October 11, the ABMA planned to launch Pioneer III, a space probe with a mission to bypass the moon and attain solar orbit. Success in this venture would give the United States the distinction of creating the first man-made planet. Symbolically, the launch occurred on the anniversary of the Vanguard I explosion, December 6, 1958. However, the first stage rockets shut down four seconds too soon, depriving the probe of the necessary velocity to reach the sun. Four weeks later, the Soviets launched Luna I with the same mission. It entered orbit around the sun on January 7, 1959, and in the process discovered the phenomenon known as “solar wind.” While the Soviets again grabbed the headlines, the fact that the United States nearly accomplished the feat first illustrated the parity of the two programs.

Eisenhower’s State of the Union address on January 9, 1959, reflected the accomplishments over the past year. Instead of focusing solely on national defense, as he had the previous year, he returned to a traditional format in which all areas of government

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68 Ambrose, 474.

received attention. He also had substantive space accomplishments on which to report. He proudly stated, "We have successfully placed five satellites in orbit, which have gathered information of scientific importance never before available. Our latest satellite illustrates our steady advance in rocketry and foreshadows new developments in world-wide communications."71

Contrasting Eisenhower's upbeat appraisal of the U.S. space program, the House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration issued a stern caveat that the United States must engage in a "bold and dynamic" space effort or face "national extinction."72 In findings released on January 10, 1959, the committee firmly stated, "It cannot be overemphasized that the survival of the free world—indeed, all the world—is caught up in the stakes [of the space race].” The committee noted a general assessment by witnesses that the American program lagged anywhere between twelve and eighteen months behind its Soviet counterpart. Of greater concern was the prediction that a dedicated effort would require five years to bridge that gap. The report concluded, "our scientific race, not alone in space but in the broader realm of science, is serious and urgent and demands the utmost effort by this Nation."73

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70 Stoiko, 136.


Reacting to the successful Luna I mission, on January 17 Lyndon Johnson announced a new round of Senate hearings conducted jointly by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee and the Committee on Aeronautics and Space Sciences, both of which Johnson chaired. The Senate created the Committee on Aeronautics and Space Sciences in conjunction with the National Aeronautics and Space Act to provide oversight for NASA and other civilian space efforts. The purpose of the new hearings was to assess progress since the highly publicized Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee hearings the previous year. Johnson sought to determine if overall defense and space efforts were adequate. He observed, “The technicalities of who is ahead of whom in certain fields of research and development are only of secondary interest to the American people. They want to know what the score is when all of the factors are added together.”74 The hearings adjourned a few weeks later, on February 4, having reached no conclusions. Johnson reserved the right to reconvene later if necessary.75

Despite congressional criticism, the success and rapid progress of the U.S. satellite program allowed NASA to broaden its focus to include manned missions. NASA announced its first manned initiative, Project Mercury, on December 16, 1958, and engaged in a highly publicized participant selection process.76 NASA Administrator T. Keith Glennan introduced the seven Mercury finalists at a press conference in Washington, D.C., on April 9, 1959. Glennan stressed that no man would launch until the space capsule

75 Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 13 February 1959, 265.
76 Emme, 104.
proved "as reliable as man can devise." The boisterous press conference lasted ninety minutes as reporters asked questions ranging from why the men volunteered to which churches they attended and how often.\textsuperscript{77} The introduction of the Mercury astronauts marked the beginning of a new level of American fascination with the space race. The space program now included faces with names rather than just a series of metal spheres designated by Roman numerals. Despite Glennan’s statements that the actual flight was scheduled two years away, public anticipation and excitement swelled.

NASA continued to build momentum during the summer of 1959 with two firsts. On May 28, two monkeys named Able and Baker became the first animals to survive a sub-orbital space flight.\textsuperscript{78} The launch, conducted by the ABMA, was similar to the first one planned for Project Mercury and reinforced the project’s feasibility. Although the Soviets later countered with two sub-orbital flights in July in which animals survived, the United States finally attained a technological "scoop" of the Soviet program. The next American achievement occurred on August 7 when Explorer VI transmitted the first photographs of earth from space. This was the first satellite project controlled entirely by NASA from inception and provided a confidence boost to the new agency.\textsuperscript{79}

As the advantage in the space race appeared to swing toward the United States, the Soviets ended the year with a two-pronged scientific and propaganda coup to rival the first two Sputniks. Luna 2 struck the surface of the moon within 300 miles of its target point on

\textsuperscript{78} Emme, 109.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 111.
September 12. Before impact, the probe transmitted the most complete data on the moon's atmosphere and surface to date. The Soviets marked the second anniversary of Sputnik with the launch of Luna 3, which entered lunar orbit on October 6. Luna 3 photographed the surface on the far side of the moon. The sophisticated instruments covered a longitudinal range of 110 degrees, over half of the chosen hemisphere. Soviet scientists cleverly timed the photographic passes to coincide with lunar sunrise and sunset. This strategy allowed them to view mountains and other formations in relief as well as measure height by the length of shadows.\(^80\)

By the end of 1959, both space programs could boast of significant and rapid progress in the previous two years. Despite a slow start, the American space program quickly advanced to a level of capability that matched, and in some areas exceeded, its Soviet counterpart. In the area of earth satellites, the United States held a numeric advantage of twelve to three, with eight remaining in orbit. The only Soviet satellite remaining in earth orbit was Sputnik III. Both programs launched probes past the moon and placed them in solar orbit. The Soviet edge remained booster capacity and payload weight, but American advances in miniaturization technology mitigated that advantage. From a propaganda perspective, the Soviets boasted an astonishing string of "firsts" dating back to the first Sputnik that overshadowed significant American accomplishments.\(^81\)

Politically, Eisenhower and the Republicans remained in a defensive posture concerning the space race and national defense in general. Eisenhower responded quickly

\(^80\) Stoiko, 136-137.
to the Sputniks on the scientific front, but his efforts lacked the media impact of the Soviet achievements and thus failed to demonstrate his awareness and concern. Leaks of the Gaither report projected an image of a detached president more concerned with a balanced budget than national security who apparently could not control his own administration. The Rockefeller Fund report not only reinforced the Gaither report but also revealed bipartisan dissatisfaction.

Democrats, most notably Lyndon Johnson, sensed the political value of the space race and the public perception of a need for action. By virtue of his highly publicized hearings and prominent legislative leadership resulting in the National Aeronautics and Space Act, Johnson emerged as a champion of the American space program. Stuart Symington, another Democratic presidential hopeful, also spoke out repeatedly on the purported missile gap. In the realm of foreign policy, the space race and its associated issues, including national prestige and the missile gap, would emerge as factors in the 1960 presidential campaign.

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Chapter 2

SPACE-RACE ISSUES IN THE 1960 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Momentum appeared to favor the Democratic Party heading into the 1960 presidential campaign. The party’s resounding success in the 1958 congressional elections ensured solid control of both congressional houses and many state governments. President Dwight D. Eisenhower continued to draw criticism over his unwillingness to engage the Soviet Union in a bid to restore the perceived technological supremacy of the United States before the launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957. This criticism emanated from the media, the public and political opponents. In addition, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev fabricated the myth of an ever-widening ICBM advantage over the United States and used Soviet space achievements to enhance the myth’s plausibility.

A memo from Charles Brewton to Senator Lyndon Johnson discussing Democratic campaign strategy for 1958 and 1960 identified segregation as the Democratic “stumbling block” and suggested the Democratic Party “find another issue which is even more potent.” Walter McDougall believed that issue was the Soviet-American space race.82 Walt Rostow, one of Senator John F. Kennedy’s (D, Mass.) foreign policy advisors, recognized that Vice

82 McDougall, 149.
President Richard M. Nixon, the most probable Republican candidate, would be walking a thin line between supporting the Eisenhower record and offering his own program. The space race provided a potential pressure point for Nixon and Rostow believed the Democrats “should exploit” it. Space-race issues embraced by the Democratic candidates were the missile and space gaps and the resulting decline in national prestige.

The missile-gap issue grew out of a deliberate Soviet policy of subterfuge concerning the relative strategic might of the Soviet Union and the United States. The space gap, a projected Soviet lead in heavy-payload rockets, was indeed real and persisted until 1963. It also provided support for the mythical Soviet ICBM advantage. It is important to note that the missile and space gaps were projections of future numbers of warheads and payload size, respectively, rather than measures of actual capabilities. This distinction assists in understanding the Soviet ability to bluff the United States and much of the world for nearly four years.

The Soviet ruse succeeded for two reasons. First, the numerous achievements of the Soviet space program implied the existence of a solid engineering and technological foundation necessary for the design and construction of ICBMs. Second, the secrecy surrounding the totalitarian Soviet regime impeded U.S. efforts to verify Soviet claims. The U-2 reconnaissance flights partially penetrated the Soviet enigma, but the resulting

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83 Ibid., 219.
84 Levine, 57.
85 Horelick, Strategic Power, 109.
intelligence was insufficient to disprove the Soviet propaganda conclusively. Myriad intelligence estimates also contributed to the uncertainty in the Eisenhower Administration. With projections of Soviet missile strength published by each branch of the military, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the United States Intelligence Board, there existed no definitive, consistent source of intelligence data on this matter.  

Allegations of a decline in American prestige constantly plagued the Eisenhower Administration after the launch of Sputnik. Eisenhower personally discounted the importance of national prestige as it related to the Cold War. Members of his administration, including Vice President Nixon, did not share this view. Nixon realized that prestige, not military superiority, was “the real motive in space” and the Soviet space achievements illustrated “a backward country coming up from nowhere” to the developing nations of the world. After the launch of Sputnik the Cold War moved outside of the traditional arenas of military strength and espionage. Any cultural difference between communism and democracy fell under scrutiny. Stephen P. Depoe observed that in this climate of total Cold War, “constant comparisons made between American and Soviet societies also led to a questioning of America’s priorities and a search for a clear

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86 Roman, 199.
87 Bottome, 178.
88 Callahan, 21.
89 McDougall, 204.
90 Ibid., 227.
articulation of national purpose." In the 1960 campaign, the Democrats, particularly Kennedy, effectively tapped into this prevailing sentiment.

Despite the Republican defeat in the 1958 congressional elections, the Democrats still respected Eisenhower's popularity with the American people. Indeed, Kennedy privately postulated that Eisenhower would have beaten any Democrat in 1960 had he been eligible to run for a third term. With Eisenhower out of the picture, the race attracted many hopefuls from the Democratic Party. Four senators officially announced their candidacy: Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, Kennedy, Stuart Symington, and Lyndon Johnson. Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon never announced his candidacy but entered three primary races. After losing in all of them, including the primary of his home state, Morse dropped out of the race on May 21, 1960. Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate in 1952 and 1956, never publicly declared his candidacy but privately hoped to be drafted at the nominating convention. Several others were touted as "favorite son" candidates, including Senator George Smathers of Florida, Governor Pat Brown of California, and Governor Mennen Williams of Michigan.

Hubert Humphrey announced his candidacy on December 30, 1959, the first candidate from either party to do so. He planned a campaign focused on foreign policy and national security and exclaimed, "We can no longer tolerate a government that reacts instead of taking the initiative. We cannot afford to have an administration that spends all...

of its time repairing damage instead of building solid, long term programs."93 During a trip to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1958, he gained publicity by virtue of an eight-hour visit with Premier Khrushchev, the longest audience granted an American to date.94 In his memoirs, Humphrey mentioned Khrushchev’s complaints about the United States discussing space issues in the United Nations rather than directly with the Soviet Union. Humphrey recalled Khrushchev pointedly stating, “So now . . . the United States discusses outer space with Guatemala—but Guatemala does not seem to be too advanced in space sciences.”95

During his formal announcement on January 2, 1960, John F. Kennedy enumerated several issues that would form the foundation of his campaign. The list included: ending the arms race, “where Soviet gains already threaten our very existence”; rebuilding “the stature of American science and education”; and providing “direction to our traditional moral purpose, awakening every American to the dangers and opportunities that confront us.”96 Kennedy asserted he would, if necessary, “call for higher taxes, deficit spending, reshuffling of available appropriations or a combination of these methods to close the ‘missile gap’

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which he charged the Eisenhower Administration will leave to its successor.”

Theodore C. Sorenson, a prominent member of Kennedy’s campaign staff, summarized the theme of the campaign as exhorting voters to “get the country moving again.” He explained, “Kennedy stressed the historical negativism of the Republican Party and, never criticizing Eisenhower by name, deplored the greater Russian progress in space, the decline in U.S. prestige abroad, and the lag in America’s appeal to the developing world.”

Symington and Johnson chose to forego the primary elections and take their chances at the nominating convention in July. Both camps anticipated an enervating primary struggle between Kennedy and Humphrey that would produce no clear favorite heading into the convention. Symington inaccurately predicted a need for a compromise candidate in the wake of the primaries and planned to present himself as the unifier of his party. Two factors contributed to the failure of his candidacy: Kennedy’s success in the primaries and a lack of political support outside of his home state of Missouri. By avoiding the primary elections, Symington lost an opportunity to expand his appeal and win delegates. He possessed no contingency plan when Kennedy emerged as the strong favorite. He officially joined the race on March 24, 1960, but played a minor role in the campaign.

On the other hand, Johnson’s strategy appeared sound at the outset. He possessed true political power as Senate majority leader, and enjoyed the added advantage of House

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99 White, 38-42.
speaker Sam Rayburn's (D, Tex.) support. Johnson and Rayburn believed that they held enough political markers from years of congressional bartering to secure the nomination for Johnson after Kennedy and Humphrey took each other out of contention. Kennedy's success in the primaries nullified Johnson's strategy but, unlike Symington, Johnson waged a spirited campaign from July 5, 1960, the date of his formal announcement of candidacy, until he agreed to serve as Kennedy's running mate.\textsuperscript{100}

In contrast, the Republican field was very narrow. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York stated on December 26, 1959, that he would not be a candidate for the Republican ticket and thus virtually assured Vice President Nixon the Republican nomination. Rockefeller, a former special assistant to Eisenhower and an early proponent of U.S. participation in the IGY satellite effort, displayed no reluctance to criticize Eisenhower after leaving the administration. Indeed, publication of a national defense study conducted under the auspices of the Rockefeller Fund further weakened Eisenhower's position following the Sputnik launches. In his withdrawal announcement he stated, "For such a time as this calls for a profound and continuous act of national self-examination. I shall contribute all I can to this political act. I shall speak with full freedom and vigor on these issues that confront our nation and the world."\textsuperscript{101}

Nixon appeared to be the front-runner as the campaign year began. William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale asserted, "In 1960 Nixon was more favorably perceived in

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 43-44.

personal terms than John Kennedy; [and] his personal image rivaled Eisenhower’s.”

Although Eisenhower harbored some reservations about Nixon’s intense political ambitions and publicly voiced little support for his vice president’s nomination, he privately recognized Nixon as his most suitable successor. Nixon also acquired valuable exposure during his highly publicized trips to South America in 1958 and the Soviet Union in 1959. Like Humphrey, Nixon spent several hours with Khrushchev. Some of their dialogue was captured on tape during the opening of the American Exhibition in Moscow. During the event, known as the “kitchen debate,” Nixon conceded that the Soviets possessed an edge in rocketry but countered that the United States led in other areas, citing color television as an example. Kennedy later used this statement against Nixon during their televised debates.

The Democrats kicked off their campaign on January 23, 1960, with a fundraiser in Washington, D.C. Harry S. Truman, the last Democrat to successfully campaign for president, set the tone for the next eleven months, stating, “Under this administration we have surrendered an important advantage, including the embarrassing psychological advantage, to the Soviet Union.” He then exclaimed, “Russia continues to parade her achievements before the world—from the Sputnik, to the rocket on the moon, to a 7,762-mile missile into the Pacific, where they have no business to be at all.” Humphrey and Kennedy railed against alleged lethargy under Eisenhower. Humphrey characterized the

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104 Ibid., 523.
motto of the current regime as “No go, go slow, not now, veto—an administration which has said nay to every new idea.” Kennedy declared, “I cannot believe that the voters of this country will accept four more years of the same tired policies—and four more years of dwindling prestige abroad [and] dwindling security at home.”

Nixon also gave foreign policy a high priority from the beginning of his campaign. During an address to the California Newspaper Publishers Association in Los Angeles on February 6, he touted U.S. security and survival as the “overriding issue” of the campaign and described the United States as the “strongest nation in the world militarily.” In a direct response to Democratic criticism, Nixon asserted that military strength “has nothing to do with whether this nation is lagging behind in development of missiles or other armaments.” He frankly stated, “The United States has the retaliatory power to defeat any aggressor.”

Criticism of American standing in the space and missile race continued in the election year. During testimony before the House Committee on Science and Astronautics on February 5, Air Force Lt. Gen. Bernard A. Schriever claimed that the Soviet Union would remain ahead of the United States at least until 1961. Schriever joined the SAC commander, Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Power, in criticizing the decisions made by his commander-in-chief during the previous two years. In a February 17, 1960, press conference Eisenhower reacted sharply to a reporter who asked about congressional

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allegations that his administration misrepresented the true status of national defense. He condemned the charges as “despicable” and asserted, “Our defense is not only strong. It is awesome and it is respected elsewhere.”

During a televised speech four days later to discuss his upcoming tour of Latin America, Eisenhower incorporated a section on U.S. defense posture. He briefly itemized the major weapon systems and proclaimed, “We have forged a trustworthy shield of peace—an indestructible force of incalculable power, ample for today and constantly developing to meet the needs of tomorrow.” He also reminded detractors that the current missile program evolved to its current state from a “standing start” in merely five years. Finally, he conveyed reassurance by stating, “Today, in the presence of continuous threat, all of us can stand resolute and unafraid—confident of America’s might as an anchor of free world security.”

American citizens continued to receive mixed messages from their president, congressmen, and the media. Pollster Samuel Lubell conducted a random survey of citizens in eleven cities and four farm counties across the country to assess the general mood concerning national defense. He reported that “well over half” of those surveyed believed the Soviet Union enjoyed a lead in missiles and rockets. He heard statements such as “I don’t know what to believe” and “You get confused reading one thing one day and something else the next day.” While no one felt Eisenhower intentionally distorted the truth, a sense of skepticism over military strength emerged. Lubell encountered questions

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like, “If all those generals in Washington can’t agree, how should I know where we stand?” and “Does anyone really know what the Russians have?” He concluded that Americans had confidence in Eisenhower but harbored doubts about national defense because of conflicting views from other government officials.\textsuperscript{109}

Since Nixon ran unopposed and Johnson and Symington chose to refrain, activity in the primary elections centered on Kennedy and Humphrey. After winning the New Hampshire primary unopposed on March 8, Kennedy squared off against Humphrey in Wisconsin. Kennedy won in Wisconsin on April 5, but it proved a mixed blessing. Kennedy carried six of the ten districts, but only received 56 percent of the total votes. Although Humphrey stated before the primary that he would withdraw from the presidential race if he did not carry Wisconsin, he gained confidence after his strong showing and chose to continue with earlier plans to participate in West Virginia’s primary.\textsuperscript{110}

As the candidates arrived in West Virginia momentum appeared to favor Humphrey, despite his earlier loss. Poverty afflicted much of the population, only 5 percent of whom were Catholic. These conditions appeared tailor-made for the liberal, Protestant senator from Minnesota, who was experiencing financial problems of his own at that point. Kennedy seemed out of place as he arrived in his private jet.\textsuperscript{112} However, Kennedy related surprisingly well to the voters, treating them with respect and displaying genuine interest

\textsuperscript{111} Sorenson, Kennedy, 137-138.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 100.
and concern for their plight. The result was a decisive victory for Kennedy. Garnering 61 percent of the total votes and carrying forty-eight out of fifty-five counties, Kennedy finally had the broad endorsement for which he had hoped in Wisconsin. Humphrey dejectedly withdrew from the race on May 11. 113

Protestant West Virginia provided the first real test of the effect of Kennedy’s religion on voters. Kennedy and his staff decided that he would not raise the topic, but if given the opportunity he would confront rather than avoid it. The Episcopal Bishop of West Virginia opened the door when he publicly announced that he was against electing a Catholic president. Kennedy’s response was swift and direct. He asserted that if his religion was just cause to eliminate him from contention for the presidency, then he “shouldn’t have served in the House, I shouldn’t now be serving in the Senate, and I shouldn’t have been accepted by the United States Navy.” 114 The Kennedy team effectively presented the choice as tolerance versus bigotry rather than one of denomination and the issue subsided until the general election.

Humphrey’s withdrawal was significant for Symington, too. It effectively removed him from contention for the Democratic nomination because his strategy hinged on a deadlock at the convention. He and his staff believed the deadlock would materialize after Kennedy and Humphrey weakened each other through close primary contests. With Humphrey eliminated, Kennedy emerged as the strong favorite. Symington never officially

113 Ibid., 146.
114 Ibid., 142-144.
withdrew from the race but decreased his activity to a minimum. After the West Virginia primary, only Johnson remained as a legitimate challenger to Kennedy.

On May 1, 1960, the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 reconnaissance plane. Eisenhower, reluctant to admit the existence of spy planes to the American people, authorized an ill-advised cover-up that described the plane as a NASA aircraft engaged in high-altitude weather research. The cover-up unraveled on May 7 when Khrushchev announced that the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, remained in custody in Moscow. The ensuing embarrassment resounded throughout the Republican Party as Democrats pointed to the incident as more proof that the Eisenhower Administration lacked control over foreign affairs. Nixon appeared guilty by association. Stephen E. Ambrose stated:

The best Nixon could do was to stress how valuable the U-2 flights had been—the photographs from the spy missions had shown that the Democratic charges about a 'missile gap' were false—but he was denied even that claim, because Eisenhower and the CIA remained secretive about the flights and would not release the information.

America's image abroad also suffered. The Soviet-American summit in Paris unraveled after the first session and Eisenhower canceled subsequent visits to Japan and the Soviet Union. Theodore H. White asserted, "There was no question that America . . . requires constant and careful espionage to protect its security. [But] American spokesmen had . . .

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115 White, 126.
116 Ambrose, Eisenhower, 508-510.
117 Ambrose, Nixon, 549.
118 Sorenson, Kennedy, 216.
lied to the world and their own people, and then compounded the lies with contradiction, uncertainty and confusion.\textsuperscript{119}

Another consequence of the U-2 incident was Khrushchev’s realization that the “missile gap” ruse could no longer work because the United States possessed the technology to disprove his claims. He curtailed future statements comparing the arsenals of the superpowers.\textsuperscript{120} However, the Republicans missed an opportunity to nullify a significant element of the Democratic campaign strategy on the eve of the nominating conventions. Eisenhower’s preoccupation with maintaining secrecy and personal distance from the U-2 program prevented his administration from exposing the fallacy of the missile gap. The Democratic congressional leadership likely learned of the intelligence gathered by the U-2 program during the closed-door hearings following the incident, yet Kennedy and Symington continued to assert that the missile gap existed.\textsuperscript{121} Without Eisenhower’s consent to refute the allegations publicly with the U-2 data, Nixon’s hands remained tied on the issue.

As the national conventions approached, Johnson stood as the only obstacle between Kennedy and the Democratic nomination. He announced his candidacy on July 5, less than a week before the convention. In reference to his delay in announcing, Johnson explained, “Those who have engaged in active campaigns have missed hundreds of [Senate] votes. This I could not do—for my country or my party. Someone has to tend the store.”

\textsuperscript{119} White, 117.

\textsuperscript{120} Horelick, Strategic Power, 72.

\textsuperscript{121} McDougall, 220.
Emphasizing the need for experience in the next president, he stated, “We must have in our national leadership a man able to stand against the challenge of the Communist world. There will be little time to learn the job.” Johnson offered himself as the only candidate with sufficient experience to ensure success in the Cold War.

The Democrats held their national convention in Los Angeles between July 11 and July 15. The platform adopted at the convention revived the “gap” accusations used so effectively in the 1958 elections. The national defense plank charged that the Republicans admitted to lagging behind the Soviets in both ICBM development and the space race with “no plans to catch up . . . as a result, our military position today is measured in terms of gaps—missile gap, space gap, limited-war gap.” The science plank leveled criticism toward the Republican space program, citing a lack of urgency which “allowed communists to hit the moon first, and to launch substantially greater payloads.” Clearly, the space race remained a viable issue to the Democratic Party.

Momentum accumulated in the primaries swept Kennedy to a first ballot nomination with 806 delegates, nearly doubling the total of Johnson, his closest challenger. Despite previous statements of “refusing to trade a vote for a gavel,” Johnson surprised many observers, analysts, and commentators when he accepted the second slot on the ticket. Sorenson summarized the reasons Johnson appealed to Kennedy and his staff:

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124 Ibid., 594.
"[Johnson] had strong voter appeal in areas where Kennedy had little or none. He was a Protestant with a capital P. His assistance with a Kennedy Congress would be indispensable. Above all, Kennedy respected him and knew he could work with him. Lyndon Johnson was, in his opinion, the next best qualified man to be president."\textsuperscript{126}

Kennedy introduced a program he called the New Frontier in his acceptance speech on July 15. The program deviated from predecessors such as Woodrow Wilson’s New Freedom and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. Those programs, Kennedy noted, contained “a set of promises,” whereas the New Frontier presented “a set of challenges.” He further explained, “It sums up not what I intend to offer the American people, but what I intend to ask of them. It appeals to their pride, not their pocketbook—it holds out the promise of more sacrifices instead of more security.” The nominee prodded the delegates and television audience with questions concerning national character and fortitude, asking, “Have we the nerve and the will? Can we carry through in an age where we will witness not only new breakthroughs in weapons of destruction but also a race for the mastery of . . . the far sides of space and the inside of men’s minds? Are we up to the task—are we equal to the challenge?"\textsuperscript{127}

In a thinly veiled reference to the Eisenhower Administration, he stated, “It would be easier to shrink back from the [new] frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric—and those who prefer that course should not

\textsuperscript{125} White, 169.
\textsuperscript{126} Sorenson, Kennedy, 163.
\textsuperscript{127} Sorenson, “Let the Word Go Forth,” 100-101.
cast their votes for me, regardless of party.\textsuperscript{128} Charges of Republican lethargy emanated from Johnson’s acceptance speech, as well. He declared, “A government out of touch with the world is a government sure to be out of touch with its own people. A government continually caught by surprise abroad is a government asleep at the switch—a government napping through its responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{129}

Ten days later, in Chicago, the Republican national convention opened. The adopted party platform, based in part on a report from the private Committee on Program and Progress titled \textit{Decisions for a Better America}, contained no direct response to the Democratic criticisms of gaps and a sluggish space program. The foreign policy plank stressed the peaceful use of space and proposed that the United Nations establish laws to maintain such a peace. The science and technology plank reiterated the peace in space goal and defined the federal government’s role in scientific research, including “applied research in fields of prime national concern such as . . . exploration and use of space.”\textsuperscript{130}

Like Kennedy, Nixon also won on the first ballot, only ten votes short of a unanimous nomination. He chose Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, as his running mate. Ironically, Lodge lost to Kennedy in his 1952 bid for re-election as senator from Massachusetts. Stephen E. Ambrose noted that Lodge appealed to all factions of the Republican Party and made up for a lack of pugnacity with experience.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 101.


\textsuperscript{130} Johnson, 606.
and a consistent reputation of opposing communism. Furthermore, Nixon was no stranger to aggressive campaigning and could handle himself if the campaign turned rough.\footnote{Ambrose, \textit{Nixon}, 554.}

Although the Republican platform verbiage avoided direct reference to the Democratic platform adopted two weeks earlier, Nixon responded to Kennedy’s accusations in his acceptance speech. He denounced Kennedy’s frank statements about America suffering a tarnished prestige and emphatically stated:

\begin{quote}
I say when the Communists are running us down abroad, it is time to speak up for America at home. Let us recognize that America has its weaknesses. But let us also recognize this: while it is dangerous to see nothing wrong in America, it is just as wrong to refuse to recognize what is right about America.
\end{quote}

Nixon also subtly distanced himself from Eisenhower by admitting to a race scenario with the Soviet Union, something Eisenhower never acknowledged publicly or privately. Nixon assured, “We are ahead now, but the only way to stay ahead in a race is to move ahead; and the next president will make decisions which will determine whether we win or whether we lose this race.”\footnote{Richard M. Nixon, \textit{Six Crises} (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), 444.}

After the nominating conventions, the nominees formulated strategies for the general campaign. Hoping to benefit from Eisenhower’s popularity while also presenting himself as an individual with a record, Nixon’s basic campaign theme blended his acquired experience with the “Peace and Prosperity” created by the Eisenhower Administration.\footnote{Richard M. Nixon, \textit{Six Crises} (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), 444.} Nixon planned to focus on Kennedy’s lack of training and practical knowledge regarding foreign policy. In Nixon’s mind, continued vigilance and success in the Cold War required
a president with knowledge and the courage to confront the Soviet Union when necessary. Consequently, four of the seven subjects that comprised his basic stump speech related to candidate experience or foreign policy.  

Kennedy said that his campaign was “founded on a single assumption, the assumption that the American people are tired of drift in our national course . . . And that they are ready to move again.” Kennedy hoped to make the choice between two views of the future, “the comfortable and the concerned”, rather than two men. Anticipating attacks on his relative inexperience and knowing Nixon would capitalize on his affiliation with Eisenhower, Kennedy formulated a counter-attack. He emphasized his youth as a source of energy and motion in stark contrast to the lethargy and stodginess of the Republican regime. He also used wit to downplay Nixon’s experience. For example, referring to Nixon’s famous confrontation with Khrushchev in Moscow, Kennedy quipped, “Mr. Nixon may be very experienced in kitchen debates, but so are a great many other married men I know.”

One facet of Kennedy’s campaign strategy used the space race to illustrate the need for new leadership. Stephen P. Depoe observed, “For Kennedy, space provided an

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133 Ibid., 267.
136 Sorenson, Kennedy, 184.
137 Kelley, 65, 68.
138 Sorenson, Kennedy, 183.
opportunity to apply his ‘New Frontier’ theme to a specific issue. To Kennedy, the space issue was qualitatively different than other issues in the campaign because space was the next pivotal battleground in the Cold War.” Yet, historically, the space race seemed to draw attention only after a new launch from either superpower and then recede. Kennedy’s challenge was to bring the issue to the fore and keep it there for the duration of the campaign.¹³⁹ Thus, he sought to generate public fear and concern over the missile and space gaps and the concomitant loss of national prestige. He believed that the balance of power would permanently shift to Moscow if the United States grew complacent and therefore perpetuated the missile gap myth as both a motivational and political tool.¹⁴⁰

Shortly after the nominating conventions, Life magazine provided both candidates the chance to participate in an ongoing series of essays discussing America’s national purpose. Kennedy’s essay, published in the August 22, 1960 issue, encapsulated his theme of America’s need for new, vigorous leadership and illustrated his belief that sustained success required continuous sacrifice. He defined national purpose as encompassing “the combined purposefulness of each of us when we are at our moral best: striving, risking, choosing, making decisions, engaging in a pursuit of happiness that is strenuous, heroic, exciting and exalted” (Kennedy’s italics). He criticized the Eisenhower Administration for allowing America to grow soft in its prosperity and pointedly stated that space exploration was an endeavor the United States “ought to be doing anyway, for its own sake, whether

¹³⁹ Depoe, 220-221.

competition exists or not.” Kennedy observed, “We should congratulate ourselves not for our country’s past glories and present accumulations but for our opportunities for further toil and risk. Rather than take satisfaction in goals already reached, we should be contrite about the goals unreached.”

In Nixon’s essay, printed a week later, he noted that previous contributions to the series criticized the level of American response to communism and countered that “never has the American purpose been more clear.” He emphasized the role of the individual in a democratic society, a society where “institutions project outward from people, not downward to people” and “the individual initiates, society imitates.” Nixon proclaimed, “It is my firm belief that it is America’s national purpose to extend the goals of the Preamble of our Constitution to our relations with all men.” After listing these goals, he observed, “Four of these six goals communism purports to offer mankind. That is why their cause has wide appeal. In place of two of them, justice and liberty, they demand a social discipline enforced by tyrannical state power.”

Kennedy’s constant questioning of America’s defense posture finally elicited a response from Eisenhower. According to Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower arranged a briefing from Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles for Kennedy and Johnson after the nominating conventions in an attempt to “convince Kennedy to tone down his criticism of defense policy.” When Kennedy queried Dulles on the U.S. position in the missile race, Dulles referred him to the Department of Defense as the “competent authority on this

141 John F. Kennedy, “We must climb to the hilltop.” Life, 22 August 1960, 70B-77.

question." Ambrose concluded, "That was hardly a satisfactory answer, and Kennedy felt free to continue to speak of a 'missile gap.'"\textsuperscript{143}

Although the campaign officially started on September 1, Nixon spent August 29 through September 9 in the hospital recovering from a debilitating knee infection. He remained engaged in the campaign during this time by refining his itinerary, speaking to the press, and issuing a position paper on September 7 describing his science program. The paper discussed what Nixon characterized as a "scientific revolution" and outlined legislation he planned to introduce if elected. It also acknowledged that the United States, despite holding an overall lead in science, trailed the Soviet Union in rocket thrust technology. It declared the futility of avoiding "the fact that we are confronted with a serious challenge in some phases of science" but emphasized that the Soviets started their research immediately after World War II "while we had no [rocket] program worthy of the name until 1952."\textsuperscript{144}

While Nixon recuperated, Kennedy took his message of Republican lethargy to the voters. As Kennedy refined his basic message, Nixon's frustration grew. Nixon recalled, "During those first two weeks, Kennedy concentrated on building up what I characterized as a 'poor mouth' image of America—just barely limping along in second place behind the dynamic Soviets, with the gap widening day by day."\textsuperscript{145} Indeed, Kennedy focused heavily on this theme. At times he even discarded a prepared speech on a different topic in order to

\textsuperscript{143} Ambrose, Eisenhower, 523.


\textsuperscript{145} Nixon, \textit{Six Crises}, 336.
discuss America's decline from first to second place. For example, in Portland, Oregon, on September 7 he said, "There [is] no disputing the fact that our prestige, our stature and, thus, our influence have all declined abroad. To rebuild American prestige now will not be easy. It cannot be done overnight by a new administration."146

Eager to make up for the time he lost in the hospital, Nixon began his campaign on September 12 by flying over 2,700 miles from Baltimore to San Francisco, stopping at Indianapolis and Dallas on the way. In his speech in San Francisco he rebuked critics of Eisenhower for practicing "politics of despair" and vowed, "The United States is the strongest nation in the world economically, militarily, and morally, and we are going to stay that way."147 Five days later in St. Paul, Minnesota his frustration came to the surface as he said, "I think it is time that we be done with the practice of cutting the pride and support of America by endlessly forecasting doom and prating gloom." He concluded, "I think we should stop this continual insisting that America is poorly defended against a powerful and deadly foe. It is dangerous as well as dead wrong."148

The vice presidential candidates also addressed the prestige issue. During his campaign kickoff in Boston on September 8, Johnson described "the deterioration of this nation's position in the world" as the "real issue" in the campaign and depicted the Republican Party as "a symbol of inertia and indifference." Johnson argued, "Under no


single administration in American history has the position of our nation in the world declined so far and so fast as it has under [Eisenhower]” and urged voters to support the Democratic ticket in order to restore “vitality and decisiveness” to government. Lodge called on his UN experience to refute the Democratic charges, declaring, “American prestige in the United Nations is higher than that of Russia or any other country.” Citing as an example the support of the Afro-Asian bloc for the U.S. request of investigation into the Russian shooting of an American bomber, he exclaimed, “This backing is not the symptom of a country that lacks prestige.”

A hallmark of the 1960 campaign was the four televised debates, which ushered in the era of televised campaigns in a dramatic way. By the summer of 1960, average daily use of televisions ranged between four and five hours. Of all American families, 88 percent owned one, which translated to approximately forty million homes. Each candidate felt confident in his skills as a debater and saw an opportunity for increased exposure. In one hour, the candidates could potentially reach more voters than in all of their campaign stops combined.

The first debate took place in Chicago on September 26. Despite an agreement to focus on domestic issues, both candidates mentioned foreign policy in their opening statements. As the first to speak, Kennedy set the precedent for straying from the evening’s

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151 White, 279-280.
topic. He said, "We discuss tonight domestic issues, but I would not want... any implication to be given that this does not involve directly our struggle with Mr. Khrushchev for survival." In an obvious reference to his charges of dwindling national prestige, he stated, "I want people in Latin America and Africa and Asia to start to look to America; to see how we’re doing things; to wonder what the president of the United States is doing; and not to look at Khrushchev, or look at the Chinese Communists." He kept the foreign policy theme alive in the conclusion of his opening statement: "Can freedom be maintained under the most severe... attack it has ever known? I think it can be. And I think in the final analysis it depends upon what we do here. I think it’s time America started moving again."

Nixon recalled his reaction to Kennedy’s opening statement: "I realized that I had heard a very shrewd, carefully calculated appeal, with subtle emotional overtones, that would have great impact on a television audience." In an attempt to mitigate that impact, Nixon agreed with Kennedy on several points. He said, "The things that Senator Kennedy has said many of us can agree with. There is no question but that we cannot discuss our internal affairs in the United States without recognizing that they have a tremendous bearing on our national position." He again publicly admitted the United States was engaged in a "deadly competition" with the Soviet Union and China, reaffirming his difference with

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152 Kelley, 73.


Eisenhower on that point. He continued, “But when you’re in a race, the only way to stay ahead is to move ahead. And I subscribe completely to the spirit that Senator Kennedy has expressed tonight, the spirit that the United States should move ahead.” At this point, Nixon described the differences between the candidates and returned the focus to domestic issues.155

Max Lerner assessed the impact of the first debate on the campaign as marking a subtle shift in favor of Kennedy. He observed that Kennedy “carried himself with an assurance that left no doubts about the question of maturity and experience between the two men” and that “Overnight [Kennedy] found he had become something of a hero.” Lerner also captured the spirit of debate proponents throughout the country, stating, “It isn’t enough to say virtuous things in a party platform. You must see your man in action, bringing the figures and arguments to life under dramatic stress.”156

Encouraged by his strong showing in the first debate, Kennedy intensified his criticism of the Republican regime. In a speech in Syracuse, N.Y., on September 28, Kennedy embellished a comment from his opening statement from the debate: “I am very tired of reading every morning what Mr. Khrushchev is doing, or what Castro is doing. I want to read what the President of the United States is doing.”157 This statement drew fire from both Nixon and Lodge. Nixon proclaimed that his opponent incurred “a responsibility

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155 Clevenger, 350-351.
to the nation, as well as to his party, not to distort the image of America.” He further advised Kennedy to “start reading the newspapers about what President Eisenhower is doing before he voices criticism.” Lodge admonished, “Sen. Kennedy apparently does not understand that the important thing is to gain and hold respect, and not the largest volume of publicity.”

Interest in the space race emerged again on October 3, 1960, when Missiles and Rockets, an aerospace trade journal, published an open letter to both candidates requesting a firm statement of their respective space policies. The letter alleged, “The public has been lulled by the ambiguities of the Eisenhower Administration into believing that space really has no strategic importance. It is merely a scientific curiosity, an area to be explored for exploration’s sake.” The magazine’s editors proposed a nine-point defense and space plan that included as the first three items: formal recognition that the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a strategic space race; an expedited space program resulting in a manned space platform in 1965, a manned lunar landing in 1968, and a reusable space vehicle by 1969; and military involvement in the space program. The letter concluded, “We ask that you reply to this open letter, stating your views and making your stand quite clear.”

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Kennedy’s reply began with an affirmation that the proposed plan coincided in spirit with the Democratic Party platform and his personal beliefs. He agreed wholeheartedly with the first point, as the space race featured integrally in his campaign. He emphatically declared, “We are in a strategic space race with the Russians, and we have been losing. If the Soviets control space they can control earth, as in past centuries the nation that controlled the seas dominated the continents. To insure peace and freedom, we must be first.” For the second point, he noted that milestone dates within the space program must be “elastic.” Rather than directly opposing military involvement in the space program, Kennedy simply stated that the United Nations must be involved in maintaining the freedom of space. 161

Nixon’s reply also acknowledged the existence of a space race and recapped the score between the superpowers to date. He declared, “In short, the United States is not losing the space race or any other race with the Soviet Union. From a standing start in 1953, we have forged ahead to overcome an 8-year Russian lead. And we will continue to maintain a clear cut lead in the race for space.” As the incumbent vice president, Nixon had the advantage of responding to the proposed dates in point two with dates already published by NASA. This detailed answer contrasted sharply with Kennedy’s vague comment about “elastic” dates. Nixon again deviated somewhat from the party line established by

161 John F. Kennedy, “If the Soviets Control Space . . . They Can Control the Earth,” Missiles and Rockets, 10 October 1960, 12.
Eisenhower and conceded that the military should have a role in the space program to
“defend ‘freedom of space.’”

Washington, D.C. hosted the second debate on October 7. Unlike the first debate, the candidates agreed to field questions on any topic. Of the thirteen questions posed by the panelists, eight addressed foreign affairs and four included some mention of national prestige. In one case, Edward P. Morgan of ABC challenged Nixon on his optimistic stance concerning America’s performance in the Cold War. Morgan asked, “Can you square that position with a considerable mass of bipartisan reports and studies, including one prominently participated in by Governor Rockefeller, which almost unanimously conclude that we are not doing nearly so well as we should?” Nixon stated:

I think it’s time that we nail a few of these distortions about the United States that have been put out. First of all, we hear that our prestige is at an all-time low. Senator Kennedy has been hitting that point over and over again. I would suggest that after Premier Khrushchev’s performance in the United Nations, compared with President Eisenhower’s eloquent speech, that at the present time Communist prestige is at an all-time-low and American prestige is at an all-time-high.

Kennedy responded, “The Rockefeller Brothers report, the Gaither Report, various reports of Congressional committees all indicate that the relative strength of the United States both militarily, politically, psychologically, and scientifically and industrially has deteriorated in the last eight years and we should know it.”

Assessing the second debate, the editors of the Chicago Tribune deemed it a “vast improvement” over the first event and observed that distinctions between the candidates

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163 Clevenger, 375-376.
finally appeared. Describing the Democratic nominee’s performance, they stated, “Mr. Kennedy continued his drumfire of fault finding, his accusations of loss of national prestige, his foreboding of military decline, and his fears of a collapsing economy.” They evaluated Nixon as “confident, hopeful, and unafraid” and concluded that he “does not believe that America’s military force is fading.”  

The editors of the Los Angeles Times also felt that differences on issues emerged with greater clarity. They characterized the core difference between Nixon and Kennedy as one of philosophy, stating, “It may be unfair to charge Kennedy with loving innovation for its own sake; but sometimes he proposes a change in style not because the coat in use is wearing out or is unbecoming but because he is trying to sell a new one.” In support of Nixon, they said, “He believes that we improve on what we have; we do not discard it; national life is not a race that can be run again after a false start.” In conclusion, they asked, “After the debate did [viewers] opt for the 1960s offered by Mr. Kennedy—more taxes, more debt, more inflation and more government—or the 1960s of Mr. Nixon, a rational extension of the 1950s. We think they chose Nixon.”

The third debate occurred on October 13 and presented the candidates in a split-screen format with Kennedy in New York and Nixon in Los Angeles. Most of the questions pertained to foreign policy, many specifically regarding the candidates’ stances on the defense of the Taiwanese islands of Quemoy and Matsu. In the final question of the

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164 Ibid., 377.


evening, Roscoe Drummond of the New York Herald Tribune turned the focus to national
prestige. He asked Kennedy whether it was truly possible to measure fluctuations in
American prestige accurately. Kennedy referred to a discussion by USIA head George
Allen concerning polls taken in Europe after the Sputnik launches. Kennedy noted,
“[Allen] said that many of these countries equate space developments with scientific
productivity and scientific advancement. And therefore . . . many of these countries now
feel that the Soviet Union, which was once so backward, is now on par with the United
States.” Kennedy also cited a February 1960 Gallup Poll in which citizens of ten countries
were asked which country would lead militarily and scientifically by 1970. The results
showed that a majority of those who responded in nine of the ten countries believed the
Soviet Union would lead.167 In his rebuttal, Nixon charged, “Well, I would say first of all
that Senator Kennedy’s statement that he just made is not going to help our Gallup Polls
abroad and it isn’t going to help our prestige either.” He continued, “We’re well ahead and
we can stay ahead, provided we have confidence in America and don’t run her down in
order to build her up. I will only conclude by saying this: in this whole matter of prestige,
in the final analysis, it’s whether you stand for what’s right.”168

In his analysis of the third debate for the New York Times, James Reston perceived
a subtle shift in roles between the two candidates in which Kennedy emerged from
“underdog” status to worthy challenger. He noted, “Mr. Nixon’s presentation was general
and often emotional; Mr. Kennedy’s curt and factual. Mr. Nixon, whose campaign is based

167 Clevenger, 407-408.
168 Ibid., 409.
on his reputation for knowledge of the facts and experience, was outpointed on facts.” The candidates’ responses to Roscoe Drummond’s prestige question illustrate Reston’s point—Kennedy referred to polls while Nixon derided his opponent for contributing to the problem. Reston concluded, “In sum, Mr. Kennedy gains as these debates go on even if he does no more than stay level with the Vice President. For he started out against the charge that he was immature and inexperienced, and after three of four broadcasts he has at least held his own.”169

Journalist Walter Lippmann castigated Eisenhower and Nixon for minimizing the importance of maintaining national prestige, proclaiming relative position with the Soviet Union as the “supreme American problem in this era.” Citing the Soviet Union’s acquisition and production of nuclear weapons as the “turning point at which our descent had to begin,” he lamented, “The story of the 50s is the story of our failure to rise to this challenge, indeed to realize it, and our failure to achieve a foreign policy for what was becoming a wholly new balance of power in the world.” In conclusion, Lippmann observed, “The issue of our prestige is surely the overriding issue in this election. But it is a difficult one to explain, as Mr. Kennedy is finding, and it is an easy one to obfuscate, as Mr. Nixon and Mr. Lodge are demonstrating.”170

The space-gap and missile-gap issues surfaced again in the fourth debate, held in New York on October 21 and restricted to foreign policy topics. In his opening statement, Kennedy predicted that by 1963 the Soviets would outnumber the United States in missiles.

For added emphasis, he stated, “I look up and see the Soviet flag on the moon.” Regarding prestige, he claimed, “The fact is that the State Department polls on our prestige and influence around the world have shown such a sharp drop that up till now the State Department has been unwilling to release them.”

Panelist Walter Cronkite of CBS News asked Nixon whether the USIA polls to which Kennedy and other Democrats referred existed and, if so, would he support publishing them. Nixon acknowledged the reports, did not object to making them public and said, “America’s prestige abroad will be just as high as the spokesmen for America allow it to be.” He continued, “We have a presidential candidate stating over and over again that the United States is second in space and the fact of the matter is that the space score today is twenty-eight to eight—we’ve had twenty-eight successful shots, they’ve had eight.” He rebuked his opponent for “running [America] down” and stated, “Senator Kennedy has a responsibility to criticize those things that are wrong, but he has also a responsibility to be right in his criticism.”

Kennedy reacted strongly to Nixon’s comments, declaring, “I believe the Soviet Union is first in outer space. You yourself said to Khrushchev, ‘You may be ahead of us in rocket thrust but we’re ahead of you in color television’ in your famous discussion in the kitchen. I think that color television is not as important as rocket thrust.” He continued, “The United States no longer carries the same image of a vital society on the move with its

171 Clevenger, 416.
172 Ibid., 420.
brightest days ahead as it carried a decade or two ago. Part of that, as the Gallup Polls show, is because the Soviet Union made a breakthrough in outer space.” Finally, he stated, “We’re first in other areas of science but in space, which is the new science, we’re not first.”

Estimates of the total viewers for at least one of the debates range from 85 million to 120 million. Louis Harris, Kennedy’s pollster, concluded that Kennedy’s standing improved after the debates, particularly on the issue of national prestige where Harris scored Nixon behind 62 to 38 percent with debate viewers. The independent Gallup polls corroborated Harris’s findings. After gaining a slight edge following the first debate, Gallup measured Kennedy ahead 51 to 45 percent with 4 percent undecided. These figures represented a net gain of five points for Kennedy, a net loss of two points for Nixon, and a reduction of 3 percent in undecided voters from the results posted before the debates.

Democrats continued to press for the release of the USIA prestige polls after the final debate but made no progress as the USIA continually refused to publish them. Republicans argued that the polls took place after the Sputnik launches in 1957 and were no longer pertinent. Democrats, however, claimed that the polls happened within the last six months. Representative John E. Moss (D, Ca.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Government Information, announced a probe on October 24, 1960 to determine if the

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173 Ibid., 420-421.
174 White, 293.
175 Ibid., 319-320.
Eisenhower Administration intentionally withheld the information because it could damage Vice President Nixon’s campaign. 176

On October 26, White House press secretary James C. Hagerty admitted that a USIA report on U.S. prestige abroad existed but refused to reveal its contents. He also gave Moss and his fellow Democrats little hope of seeing the reports. Although the report carried a classification of “secret,” Hagerty maintained that it was “similar to many others that are periodically prepared within the USIA.” He stated, “Under policies approved by the President, pertaining to internal working papers of the executive branch of the government, the secretary of state and the director of the USIA have determined that this paper will not be made available outside the executive branch.” 177

Speculation over the contents of the controversial report ended when the New York Times obtained a copy and published it on October 27. Produced in June 1960, the report contained the results of surveys conducted to assess the public opinion following the collapse of the Paris summit conference between Eisenhower and Khrushchev in May 1960. The results supported Kennedy allegations of declining prestige, both militarily and scientifically. Of all respondents in Great Britain and France, 43 and 15 percent, respectively, believed the Soviet Union led the United States in military strength. When

asked which country led in space development, responses heavily favored the Soviet Union (74 percent in Great Britain and 67 percent in France).178

During a speech in Spokane, Washington on October 26, Johnson alluded to the report and said it raised three questions. First, “Did Mr. Nixon know about this report when he claimed before a nation-wide television audience that American prestige was never higher?” Second, “If he knew about it, did he deliberately mislead the American people?” And third, “If he did not know about it, what’s all this talk from the Republicans about the experience and knowledge Mr. Nixon is supposed to have gained during the last eight years?” Johnson concluded that the answers to those questions would illustrate which candidate was “better equipped to lead.”179

Despite plans to distance himself from the campaign and focus on presidential duties, Eisenhower could no longer remain silent in the face of constant reproach from the Democrats. At a dinner rally for Nixon in Philadelphia on October 28, Eisenhower defended his administration. In a jab obviously directed at Kennedy, he said, “Whatever was America’s image abroad at the beginning of this political campaign, it tends to be blurred today . . . because of unwarranted disparagement of our own military and economic power. My friends, anyone who seeks to grasp the reins of world leadership should not spend all his time wringing his hands.” He did not mention the USIA report during his speech. To show support for his vice president, Eisenhower declared that Nixon “has

shared more intimately in the great affairs of government than any Vice President in all our history” and “is the best qualified man to be the next President of the United States.”

The national prestige issue continued to receive publicity through the final days of the campaign. On October 29, the New York Times published yet another USIA report, dated October 10, 1960, titled “The World Reaction to the United States and Soviet Space Programs—A Summary Assessment.” The report reiterated that “public opinion in most parts of the free world believes that the Soviet Union is ahead of the U.S. in space achievements” and further validated Kennedy’s contention that the world linked space achievements with military strength. The conclusions drawn in the report included: “space developments appear likely to continue to offer to the public mind and imagination a convenient and compelling index or symbol of national achievement;” “space achievements will probably continue to be viewed as essentially military in their immediate implications;” “belief that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. are in a space competition seem certain to persist, and both sides are viewed as committed to rivalry in space;” and “it is probable that the U.S.S.R. will be able to sustain the public impression that it is ahead in space, barring a succession of massive and spectacular ‘firsts’ [by the United States].”

Election Day fell on November 8, less than three weeks after the last debate. Kennedy won by a margin of 303 to 219 electoral votes. The popular vote difference was only 112,000 votes and remains the narrowest margin in history. Kennedy’s victory was

182 White, 350.
tainted by allegations of vote tampering in Texas and Illinois that, according to Stephen E. Ambrose, “were too widespread, and too persistent, to be entirely without foundation.” Despite advice from friends, family, and even Eisenhower, Nixon chose not to request a recount in those states to spare the nation a disruptive and potentially debilitating ordeal.183

To what extent Kennedy’s persistence in addressing the space race and its associated issues of national prestige, Republican lethargy, and declining military superiority over the Soviet Union contributed to the victory is difficult to assess. Other issues were raised during the campaign, including Kennedy’s religion, civil rights, farm policy, and domestic economic policy. Ted Sorenson considered foreign policy issues and the televised debates as two critical elements that factored into Kennedy’s victory.184 Clearly, Kennedy repeatedly challenged Nixon on the Eisenhower Administration’s space program and its negative effect on national defense and prestige throughout the campaign, particularly during the debates.

It is reasonable to speculate that Kennedy, who had more access to intelligence than many of his Democratic colleagues by virtue of serving on the Senate Foreign Relations committee, may have known or suspected the fraudulence of the missile gap. Thus, one may dismiss his pursuit of this issue as merely a continuation of a political strategy used with great success by many other Democrats since the launch of Sputnik. However, his statements regarding waning American prestige were rational in light of information revealed during the course of the campaign. Indeed, the questions he raised continually

183 Ambrose, Nixon, 606-607.
184 Sorenson, Kennedy, 213-317.
elicited attention and response from not only Nixon but also Eisenhower. Eisenhower was so agitated by Kennedy’s statements on prestige that he developed an itinerary of personal appearances for the two weeks leading up to Election Day. Mrs. Eisenhower, concerned for her husband’s health, convinced Nixon to politely decline Eisenhower’s offer of support.\(^{185}\)

Luck played a role in Kennedy’s campaign, too. Nixon’s hospital stay in late August and early September delayed his schedule by two weeks and had a direct impact on his appearance during the first debate. Moreover, by virtue of winning a coin toss, Kennedy delivered the opening statement in the first debate and seized the initiative. Kennedy remained on the offensive, and Nixon made the mistake of expending too much energy answering for Eisenhower rather than campaigning for himself. In truth, Nixon and Eisenhower did not agree on many issues, including the role of the space program. Nixon’s accord with Rockefeller on the eve of the Republican nominating convention further illustrated these philosophical differences. Nevertheless, voters identified Nixon with the Eisenhower programs and, with the exception of admitting the existence of a space race, he failed to present himself as a Republican with new ideas.

\(^{185}\) Ambrose, *Nixon*, 600-601.
Chapter 3

THE 1960 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IN FLORIDA

Like the national race, the contest for Florida’s ten electoral votes in 1960 was close and hotly contested. Recent history appeared to favor Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Before 1952, Florida was firmly entrenched in the “Solid South,” a bloc of eleven states from the former Confederacy that turned to the Democratic Party in protest against the Republican-led Reconstruction. Despite this heritage of supporting the Democratic presidential candidate, Eisenhower carried the state in 1952 and 1956. G. Scott Thomas attributed this shift of support to two factors: a large influx of Republican voters from other regions of the country and mounting dissatisfaction with the civil rights stance of the Democratic Party. Nixon sought to continue this recent trend, while Kennedy hoped to capitalize on the large number of registered Democratic voters in the state and duplicate Harry S. Truman’s Florida victory of 1948.

All four candidates made appearances in the state, illustrating its importance to both tickets. Kennedy and Nixon toured the state on October 18. They incorporated appearances at the American Legion convention in Miami with visits to Jacksonville and the Tampa-St.

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Petersburg area. Although their itineraries prevented a face-to-face meeting in any of the cities, they addressed the American Legionnaires within an hour of each other. Nixon vowed at the Republican nominating convention to campaign in all fifty states, so his appearance was expected. Kennedy, however, visited only five southern states during the course of the campaign, of which only Florida and North Carolina received an entire day of the candidate’s time. Nixon’s running mate, Henry Cabot Lodge, also made brief stops in Bradenton and Miami on September 16 to open the campaign in Florida. Johnson spent the most time in the state, visiting six cities in two days to lay the groundwork for Kennedy’s arrival. Johnson’s visit began in Jacksonville on October 12 and concluded with a whistle stop tour through the Panhandle region on October 13.  

To identify the issues that concerned Floridians and assess their relative importance, six daily newspapers from different regions were analyzed for the period coinciding with the official campaign (September 1 – November 8). The chosen newspapers were the Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville), Miami Herald, Orlando Sentinel, Tallahassee Democrat, Tampa Tribune, and St. Petersburg Times. This group also includes the four counties that contained the highest number of registered voters in 1960: Dade (Miami), Pinellas (St. Petersburg), Duval (Jacksonville), and Hillsborough (Tampa). Editorials and reader letters were examined to calculate the distribution of campaign and non-campaign topics as well as the campaign issues with the highest frequency of appearance. Tables 1 and 2 contain the results of the analysis.

In terms of issues, the presidential candidates imparted the same foreign policy messages delivered in other states and in the televised debates. On the editorial pages of state newspapers, however, these issues shared the spotlight with Kennedy's religion and various domestic concerns such as civil rights, government spending and the economy. Reader letters also addressed the state and local office races and several referenda. In addition, newspaper polls uncovered a tendency for protest votes rather than genuine candidate support and, in some cases, a lack of interest in both candidates.

Table 1: Distribution of Editorials and Letters

Table 1 details the total number of editorials and reader letters published during the official campaign season in each newspaper and how many pertained to the campaign. The
Florida Times-Union did not publish any reader letters during this period so the totals in the corresponding rows are zero. In addition to topics relating to the presidential race, the campaign category also included state races and referenda on proposed amendments to the state constitution. The figures illustrate that, on the average, one out of five editorials addressed a campaign topic. While reader letters dealing with the campaign exceeded campaign-related editorials by nearly 50 percent overall, both groups clearly had other competing interests and the frequency varied within the sampled newspapers.
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<th>Anti-Democrat</th>
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Table 2: Top Five Campaign Topics By Newspaper
To illustrate which campaign topics received the most attention in the sampled dailies, the second table presents the top five campaign topics for each newspaper categorized by editorials and reader letters. The parenthetical number represents the total items concerning the topic. The space race does not appear anywhere in the table, suggesting it held little significance as an issue for Florida voters. The associated issue of national prestige, however, appeared in the top five lists for editorials in three newspapers and for reader letters in two publications. Foreign policy also featured prominently in both reader letters and editorials, weighing in as the most frequent letter subject in the St. Petersburg Times. Topics relating to the state office races and referenda appear repeatedly in both groups, demonstrating that the presidential race received even less consideration than the figures in the first table might indicate. In fact, the St. Petersburg Times and the Tampa Tribune published editorials on the state races and referenda more often than any national topic.

The second table also shows a disparity between the editors and their readers in terms of topic importance. Two new topics that emerge in the reader section are religion and dissatisfaction with both candidates. While Kennedy’s religion elicited letters from four of the five dailies that published reader letters, topping the list for the Tallahassee Democrat and the Tampa Tribune, only the St. Petersburg Times ran editorials on the subject with any frequency. Most of the letters and all of the St. Petersburg Times editorials spoke out against bigotry or questioned the relevance of a candidate’s faith. The lists for the Miami Herald and the Tampa Tribune included letters from readers disenchanted with both
presidential candidates. This sentiment also surfaced in some of the polls conducted by the sampled newspapers.

Only two editorials focused on the space gap and both of them spoke out against Kennedy. In a piece entitled “Where Is That Space Lag?” the editors of the Tallahassee Democrat refuted Kennedy’s claims that the United States remained behind the Soviet Union in the space race. The editorial also took a swipe at Kennedy’s message on declining prestige by noting: “Today, if we are not too preoccupied with the habit of running down our own country and its efforts, we must look at the record and see that we have caught up with the Russians in most aspects of the space race and surpassed them in many.” After recounting the achievements of both programs to date, the editorial stated, “It seems fair to say that whereas we rated ourselves five years behind [after the launch of Sputnik] we now have in three years at least caught up—and may be farther ahead than we know.”188

The editors of the Tampa Tribune drew a similar conclusion after the launch of Explorer VIII on November 3. Following a brief discussion of Explorer VIII’s mission and a scorecard between the two space programs, the editors asked, “Can the United States then be as second-rate in scientific progress as Senator Kennedy would have us believe?” The piece concluded, “This memo from the ionosphere is directed particularly to the attention of American voters, whose ears of late have been assailed by messages which seem to have come from much farther out in space. Science has yet to chart the limits of that wild blue yonder from which political speeches are drawn.”189

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189 “Memo From the Ionosphere,” Tampa Tribune, 5 November 1960, 10.
Like the editorials and reader letters, the campaign speeches delivered in Florida mostly ignored the space race. The only candidate to mention the space program directly was Lodge. He visited Florida on September 16, a few weeks after Hurricane Donna caused considerable damage to the Florida Keys and the southern region of the state. Speaking to a crowd at Bradenton, Lodge expressed hope that research would produce a hurricane tracking satellite to assist in learning more about the dreaded phenomenon. In the final days of the campaign, Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D, Wash.), chairman of the Democratic Party’s Executive Committee, spoke on behalf of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in Cocoa, the home of the U.S. space program and the Atlantic Missile Range. On November 3, Jackson stated, “This community will play a very vital role in the great age of space ahead of us and in the development of a retaliatory force.” Alluding to Kennedy’s advocacy of a re-invigorated space program, Jackson added, “I don’t see any let up at [Cape] Canaveral—I see a step-up.”

While the space gap remained largely ignored, the national prestige issue received early exposure in Florida. Publisher John S. Knight invited both candidates to be “editor for a day” and write a guest column for the Miami Herald on the topic of their choice. Kennedy’s column, titled “We Can Untarnish The Image Of America,” appeared on August 28. Explaining the reasons he felt America’s prestige started declining, Kennedy wrote, “Our failure to propose any exciting new programs since the Marshall Plan is one. Our

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191 Homer Pyle, “Demo Predicts Landslide,” Orlando Sentinel, 4 November 1960, 1A, 3A.
fumbling leadership—as dramatized at Little Rock and during the U2 uproar—is another. So was the blight of McCarthyism, when we looked scared and foolish as a nation.”

Turning to foreign policy, he argued, “We have been too concerned with military bases that the missile age is already making obsolete to notice that people cannot be bribed or threatened into choosing sides in the cold war. That is why the conduct as well as the content of our foreign policy will be all important during the next few years.” Kennedy concluded that only the Democratic Party possessed “the vision, the boldness, the sympathy and that old-fashioned American self-confidence” to face the challenges of the coming decade.192

Nixon’s column appeared on September 11 while he recuperated from a knee injury suffered in August. He also selected national prestige as the topic of his column. However, in contrast to Kennedy, he chose to focus on why America remained eminent in the eyes of the world. In addition to economic and military strength, Nixon listed the space program as evidence of high prestige. He wrote, “In overall space and missile technology, we have not only gained ground since 1958 and the first sputnik, we have moved ahead of the Soviet Union. From almost a dead start, we have shown that free people can outpace even the concentrated efforts of a slave state.” In his conclusion, Nixon cautioned against complacency and indirectly rebuked Kennedy, stating, “Even the truth needs its constant

192 John F. Kennedy, “We Can Untarnish The Image Of America,” Miami Herald, 28 August 1960, 2F.
and militant defenders. And that is our job. Selling America short is no way to accomplish it.”  

In addition to the guest editorial columns, both presidential candidates spoke out on national prestige during their swing through Florida on October 18. In Jacksonville, Nixon called his opponent a “prophet of doom and gloom” and criticized Kennedy’s ridicule of the Eisenhower Administration. He said, “Anybody who says America has been standing still hasn’t been traveling in America; he has been traveling in some other country as you here in Jacksonville know.” Speaking to a large crowd in St. Petersburg later the same day, Nixon warned, “We’re the strongest nation in the world—and Khrushchev knows it. But we won’t continue to be if we continually call ourselves second-rate.”

Reacting to Nixon’s charges that his message contained “doom and gloom,” Kennedy told Tampa voters, “I sound the alarm—not with the idea that the country is doomed, but with the idea that if this country moves forward, nothing can stop it.”

Addressing a large crowd in Jacksonville, his final stop of the day, he stated confidently, “Mr. Nixon said I should be ashamed of myself and apologize for saying the United States is not doing as well as we should economically and militarily. But it’s my function and my duty to tell the American people the truth as I see it and let you form your own honest


judgment.” He actively engaged the crowd, questioning the Eisenhower Administration’s contribution toward “building our prestige abroad” and asked, “Are you satisfied to be second in science to the Soviet Union?”

The prestige issue also received attention on the editorial pages in four of the sampled newspapers. The only editorial in support of Kennedy’s prestige stance appeared in the St. Petersburg Times. It listed three examples of duplicity on the part of the Eisenhower Administration, including the assertion that American prestige remained high. The editorial stated, “It is not comforting to acknowledge how low our prestige is, but denying it doesn’t change things one iota. And national injury is added to insult when the Administration makes it known openly that it deliberately is suppressing [USIA polls] as an ‘executive secret.”

Two newspapers spoke out against Kennedy’s position on prestige. The editors of the Orlando Sentinel decried a “campaign of fear” and accused Kennedy of being desperate to resort to such tactics. They also warned, “The shortest distance to [second-class status] is to swallow the hogwash mix of statism, socialism, welfarism, apology and appeasement urged on us by John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Democratic Party platform.” Miami Herald publisher John S. Knight dismissed national prestige as “one of the flimsiest” issues in the campaign and quoted an editorial in the London Daily Telegraph.

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196 Jerry Blinn, “Kennedy Says GOP Blundered In Latin American Relations,” St. Petersburg Times, 19 October 1960, 1A.


198 “What Are We NOT Being Told?” St. Petersburg Times, 28 October 1960, 8A.
as observing, “[Basing an election on national prestige] is tantamount to giving foreigners the right to choose the next American president.” Knight concluded, “Sen. Kennedy has raised a phony issue intended to fool the uninformed and impressionable segments of our society. This is cynical and feckless campaigning which does little credit to a man of Sen. Kennedy’s stature.”

The Tampa Tribune called both candidates to task for perpetuating the discussion surrounding prestige. Referring to Kennedy, the editors admonished, “His concern, and that of all Americans, should not be whether we are winning an international popularity contest, but whether we are acting according to right and principle.” The editors also disapproved of Nixon’s attempts to defend America’s position in the world. Rather, they claimed, “It should be his role to explain, with all the vigor at his command, upon what principles of America, a nation of principles, each particular policy is based.” The piece concluded with a caveat for both candidates “to pay less attention to these currents and tides and keep their eyes instead on the charted course the goals and principles of their nation provide.”

Published reader letters also demonstrated interest in the prestige issue, but Kennedy’s statements concerning prestige drew more critics than adherents. They submitted comments such as “Mr. Kennedy has not told me what good will be done if he is elected but only what terrible things will occur if I don’t vote for him” and “Doesn’t

199 “Kennedy’s Campaign Of Fear,” Orlando Sentinel, 18 October 1960, 6A.
200 John S. Knight, “’Prestige’ Is A Phony Issue – It’s Time To Stop Sniveling,” Miami Herald, 6 November 1960, 2F.
201 “Watch The Chart, Not The Tide,” Tampa Tribune, 29 October 1960, 12.
202 Violet Schuman letter to Editor, Orlando Sentinel, 13 October 1960, 7C.
[Kennedy] realize he is hurting the prestige of the United States in every country in the world by his outrageous lies?203 Most of the reader statements against Kennedy touched on the idea that his discussion of the issue contributed to any drop in prestige abroad. However, those speaking in favor of the Democrat lauded him for his candor and saw no need for fear. A representative letter equated the issue of declining prestige to “a question of whether the party in power is fighting the cold war of 1960, the war against political infiltration and economic attraction to the communist bloc, successfully for America.”204

All four candidates spoke on foreign policy issues. While discussing the fight against communism during a speech in Miami on September 16, Lodge enumerated three essential strengths the United States must possess to succeed in the Cold War: “We must be strong in a military sense, so that no other nation will dare attack us. We must be strong in partnership with other nations, particularly the small nations confronted with poverty. We must be strong in the example we set for the rest of the world.”205 Johnson sardonically discussed Nixon’s experience with foreign affairs, one of the basic elements of the Republican campaign strategy. He told a Jacksonville audience on October 12, “[Nixon] went to Moscow to see Mr. Khrushchev and got in a finger-waving contest in a kitchen

203 J.M.H. letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 23 October 1960, 21A.
204 John S. Ripandelli letter to Editor, Tallahassee Democrat, 1 November 1960, 8.
before television cameras. The farther in Latin America he got the worse the riots got. It finally reached the point where we had to send out the Marines to get him back safe.”

Johnson did not confine his remarks to Nixon. During an October 12 speech in Tampa, he criticized the Eisenhower Administration for its policy toward Cuba and communism in general. He said, “The front line of the cold war is now an hour’s airline ride from Tampa. If [the Republicans] took any action toward preventing Cuba from going Communist, it’s the best-kept secret of the past eight years.” In conclusion, he stated, “The problem is not to prevent a penetration of communism into the Western Hemisphere, but to try to get it out of the Western Hemisphere. Shall we entrust that responsibility to the party that permitted the Communists to penetrate in the first place?”

The American Legion convention in Miami on October 18 was the most prominent event on the Florida itineraries of both presidential candidates, and it provided an excellent venue in which to discuss foreign policy. Both candidates wrote welcoming statements to the American Legion delegates at the invitation of the Miami Herald staff. While Nixon concentrated on the traditions of the organization and discussed the personal importance of his membership, Kennedy used the letter as another opportunity to ridicule the Eisenhower Administration. He wrote, “Eight years ago the United States was incontestably the most powerful nation on earth. Today, there is doubt. This doubt has not only been expressed by

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208 Vernon Bradford, “Johnson Raps GOP On Cuba,” Tampa Tribune, 13 October 1960, 1A, 8A.
Democrats but by thoughtful Republicans like Nelson Rockefeller.” Later in the letter he accused Nixon of “blandly defending the decay of the past eight years” and referred to him as the “Great Tranquillizer [sic].”

By virtue of their respective schedules, Nixon addressed the legionnaires first. Wearing his American Legion cap, Nixon asserted, “It is time to speak up for America. I happen to know and Mr. Khrushchev knows we are the strongest nation in the world and we’re going to stay that way; whatever we think of American strength today, we can never stand pat because we are faced with a ruthless enemy.” He also proposed a “quarantine of the Castro regime” but provided no details on how he would accomplish that goal if he were president. The legionnaires rose to their feet in ovation when he proclaimed, “The U.S. must be so strong that a man like Khrushchev, who has enslaved and slaughtered millions, can never again come to the United Nations and falsely accuse the United States of being the enemy of freedom.”

Kennedy’s speech to the delegation continued the same themes set forth in his welcoming letter for the Miami Herald. He charged, “No amount of oratory, no justified charges can hide the harsh fact behind the rhetoric—behind the soothing words and the confusion of figures—that American strength relative to that of the Soviet Union has been slipping. The Iron Curtain now rests on the island of Cuba, only 90 miles from the city of Miami.” Citing Republican budget cuts as a primary cause of the decline, Kennedy jibed,

209 John F. Kennedy, “Americans Have the Courage To Meet Communist Threat,” Miami Herald, 18 October 1960, 3B.
210 “Nixon Says: We Won’t Stand Still,” Miami Herald, 19 October 1960, 1A, 19A.
“Wagging one’s finger under Mr. Khrushchev’s nose cost the taxpayers nothing, but words do not stop Mr. Khrushchev.” He also referred to the missile gap, claiming that Soviet missile production would soon double or triple that of the United States and render the American retaliatory forces vulnerable to a surprise attack.212

Foreign affairs featured prominently in other addresses from both candidates on October 18. Questioning Kennedy’s foreign policy experience and qualifications, Nixon assured a Jacksonville crowd, “Cabot Lodge and I know who our enemies are. We know what Mr. Khrushchev is and we haven’t been fooled by him in the past and we won’t be fooled by him in the future.” He described “survival of this nation and the future of the young people of the world” as the most important issue facing America and called for foreign policy based on strength rather than aggression.213

In St. Petersburg, Nixon continued to focus on foreign policy despite releasing advance copies of a speech covering domestic issues. He repeated many of the points he made in Jacksonville, but also dismissed Kennedy’s “New Frontier” as a “retread of the discredited and unworkable policies of the Truman Administration.” He suggested that voters base their choice on the answer to the question, “Which of the two teams can win the peace and win it without war or surrender?” Contrasting the administrations of Truman and Eisenhower, Nixon pointed out that “600 million human beings [were lost] to the

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212 “Kennedy: Words Are Not Enough,” Miami Herald, 19 October 1960, 1A, 18A.
Communists” under Truman while Eisenhower “got America out of one war, kept her out of others, and we do have peace today.”214

Kennedy incorporated Latin America into foreign policy speeches in Tampa and Jacksonville following his American Legion speech in Miami. He identified three failures of the Eisenhower Administration that he felt jeopardized the American Cold War advantage in the Western Hemisphere. They included a failure to identify the United States with the “rising tide of freedom” in Latin America, a failure to assist Latin American citizens in reaching their economic goals, and a failure to “demonstrate America’s continuing concern with the problems of peoples to the south.” Rather, he explained, the United States often appeared to support brutal dictators. Kennedy characterized Cuba as a “base for the attempted infiltration and subversion of all Latin America” and gave examples of anti-American protests in Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil.215 He reserved his most cutting remarks for Nixon, however. Responding to claims that the Republican ticket possessed more experience, Kennedy observed, “I’m not the vice president of the United States who presided over the communization of Cuba. Five years ago our experienced vice president said that communism was on the decline in [Latin] America.”216

A group of Republican senators and representatives formed a self-described “truth squad” whose purpose was to follow Kennedy around the country and identify purported

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214 Charles Van Devander, “Nixon Says Victory By GOP Best Hope For U.S. Survival,” St. Petersburg Times, 19 October 1960, 1A, 2A.

215 Jerry Blinn, “Kennedy Says GOP Blundered In Latin American Relations,” St. Petersburg Times, 19 October 1960, 1A.

misstatements by the Democrat. They arrived in Jacksonville on October 20, two days after Kennedy and Nixon appeared in Florida. Senator Prescott Bush (R, Conn.), who served on the Armed Services Committee, agreed with Nixon on the preeminence of U.S. military power. He charged that the responsibility for any defense budget cuts rested with the Democratic congress rather than the Republican White House. Representative Donald L. Jackson (R, Calif.) questioned the motive behind Kennedy’s recent criticisms surrounding Cuba. He observed that Kennedy’s position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee provided an opportunity to monitor the Cuban situation as it deteriorated over the past two years yet he said nothing until the campaign.217

Individuals campaigning on behalf of the candidates also included foreign policy topics in their speeches. Allen Shivers, former Democratic governor of Texas and leader of a “Texans for Nixon” movement, appeared at several Nixon rallies throughout the state on November 2. Shivers warned, “If Kennedy keeps running down this country, the Communists might be kidded into thinking we’re as weak as he says and they might be tempted to attack us. They haven’t before because they know Eisenhower has kept this country strong.”218 Senator Russell B. Long (D, La.) toured the Panhandle region of Florida on November 5 in support of Kennedy. He pointed out the connection between domestic and foreign policy during a speech in Pensacola: “To build an adequate defense against communism in this country, we must start at the bottom and work up. We must provide for

218 Ormund Powers, “Pick Man, Not Party—Shivers,” Orlando Sentinel, 3 November 1960, 1A, 3A.
the needy, the aged, the working man and the farmer, and the Democrats and Kennedy are going to do just that.”219

Although Kennedy and Nixon chose to focus on foreign policy during their tour of the state, Lodge and Johnson addressed two controversial issues that received more attention from Florida voters: civil rights and Kennedy’s religion. During his speech in Bradenton on September 16, Lodge frankly discussed civil rights. He declared, “America must set a good example for the rest of the world. Four-fifths of the world population are not in the white race. We should advance in civil rights because these people are watching us. This makes it a national problem, not one that is confined to any one region.”220

Johnson, in turn, proclaimed in an address in Jacksonville on October 12 that the Democrats “are going to protect the constitutional rights of every American regardless of his race, his creed, or the region where he lives.”221

The inflammatory subject of civil rights found its way to the editorial pages, but often cloaked in an appeal for the preservation of “Southern heritage.” The editors of the Orlando Sentinel claimed that the Democratic Party took the South for granted and urged readers to vote Republican in protest. They vowed, “We have protested and still protest and will vote against and write against the Demo ticket simply because it is the only way to be

219 “Long Urges Floridians to Back Kennedy,” Tampa Tribune, 6 November 1960, 7B.
heard. We must fight for what we think is right and not what the Democratic politician-platform writers think is right for us.”

The editors of the Tampa Tribune chastised Kennedy for hypocrisy surrounding his statement that he would consider appointing an African-American lawyer to the federal bench. They cited Kennedy’s criticism of Lodge when he predicted the appointment of an African-American cabinet member if the GOP ticket won the election. At the time, Kennedy accused Lodge of engaging in “racism in reverse.” They stated, “No man of outstanding ability should be disqualified from serving in public office because of race. But he shouldn’t be appointed because of race, either.” They also warned that Kennedy’s statement carried greater portent than Lodge’s prediction because, as president, Kennedy would possess the power to appoint judges but the vice president has no authority to appoint cabinet members.

The editors of the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville exhibited a very conservative position on integration. They praised four members of Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver’s staff for resigning in protest to his alleged connection with Democratic sympathizers of Martin Luther King, Jr. The comments were likely aimed at Kennedy, too, for his involvement while King was incarcerated in Atlanta in October 1960. Denouncing the propaganda “used diligently by certain factions in the South toward convincing the Southern people that integration of the races is inevitable,” the editors equated it to communist propaganda and the rhetoric of Axis Sally during World War II. Praising the

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222 “A Protest Vote For The South,” Orlando Sentinel, 13 October 1960, 8A.
Vandiver staffers, they said, “These four men, and thousands of others throughout Georgia and the South, realize that once we give in we really are lost.”

Another Florida Times-Union piece, appearing on Election Day, lamented the vanishing of the Old South. The editors wistfully asked, “Will the South, after the votes are tabulated, have played a hand in literally making the South ‘Gone With The Wind’?” They noted that both Kennedy and Nixon promised additional civil rights legislation after their election. And, like Rhett Butler, the candidates “exploited the South for votes in hopes of a victory, but neither man is concerned with Southern tradition or custom.” The editors concluded that since one of the men would inevitably take office, Southerners who voted would also inadvertently bring about the South’s eventual demise.

While civil rights appeared only in the Tampa Tribune’s list of top five topics, Kennedy’s religion evoked discussion in editorials and reader letters of five sampled newspapers as well as on the stump. At several stops on his Florida tour Johnson challenged this sensitive issue, utilizing the same strategy of directness that Kennedy used successfully in the West Virginia primary. Johnson devoted a portion of his speeches to defending his running mate’s patriotism and record of public service in order to illustrate the irrelevance of Kennedy’s chosen faith. He also recited the story of how Kennedy’s oldest brother, Joseph Kennedy, Jr., perished during a volunteer mission in World War II. As he concluded the story, he said, “Not a soul got up in a pulpit and asked what church

224 “South Hasn’t Lost Yet, Despite Propagandists,” Florida Times-Union, 29 October 1960, 6.

225 “Will South After Election Be Gone With The Wind?” Florida Times-Union, 8 November 1960, 4.
[Joseph] went to. I say that any man good enough to die for his country is good enough to serve his country in any capacity.  

Three newspapers addressed Kennedy’s religion and unanimously rejected its validity as an issue. All of them went on to endorse Nixon as their candidate of choice. The editors of the *Tampa Tribune* dismissed fears that the Pope or other officers of the Catholic Church would influence Kennedy in the event he won the election. They complimented Kennedy on his directness in rejecting such an idea and cited Kennedy’s congressional record of voting against federal aid for parochial schools and the appointment of a U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. In conclusion, they deemed the religious issue “as false as a Halloween face” and proclaimed, “no American should cast his vote on the basis of Senator Kennedy’s religion.”

Editors of the *Miami Herald* based their refutation of the issue on Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which deems, “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” However, they went much further than merely admonishing voters who based their choice on religion. They characterized the consideration of Kennedy’s religion as “a disgraceful manifestation of mass bigotry” and asked what right the detractors possessed that permitted them to ignore the U.S. Constitution. In conclusion, they chided, “Shame, we say, on those who prate of their...

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227 “It’s The Wrong Test,” *Tampa Tribune*, 28 October 1960, 10B.
devotion to our revered institutions but who are not above putting the Constitution and their political morals in the deep freeze until after the election.”

The editors of the Orlando Sentinel also absolved Kennedy of perpetuating the issue. They blamed overzealous Democratic supporters, specifically United Auto Workers (UAW) president Walter Reuther. The UAW distributed anti-Nixon pamphlets that, in the opinion of the editors, equated support of Nixon with bigotry. The editors stated, “The danger of stirring up the ugly issue of bigotry lies in the fact that it obscures the real issues in the campaign—issues which have nothing to do with how a candidate worships God.” They also praised Orlando residents for “ignoring the religious issue and for weighing the candidates on their merits.”

One category of letters pertaining to religion asked that further discussion cease due to its irrelevance. For example, one Tampa Tribune reader wrote, “The ‘religious issue’ was buried some time ago in infancy. It was given both Protestant and Catholic services by the only two individuals whom it should have concerned, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kennedy. Let’s all keep it buried.” Very few of the reader letters regarding religion suggested that Kennedy be supported or rejected based on his faith. Although one Tampa Tribune reader felt strongly enough about religious freedom to say, “I earnestly believe that none of us can justifiably fear that Kennedy will take orders from the Pope. I will demonstrate that belief

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228 John S. Knight, “Bigotry in Action,” Miami Herald, 18 September 1960, 2F.
229 “The Ugly Issue Of Bigotry,” Orlando Sentinel, 1 November 1960, 4A.
230 William W. Coleman letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 26 October 1960, 16.
by action as well as words when I go to the polls and vote for Kennedy.²³¹ One fellow Catholic accused Kennedy of being either a hypocrite or a bad Catholic for vowing to separate his religious beliefs from his official duties if elected. The reader charged, “I would not expect any interference from the Vatican in political matters within this country but Mr. Kennedy owes his allegiance to the church in such matters whether of a spiritual or temporal nature if he be true to the faith.”²³²

In fact, most of the letters generated by this sensitive topic lashed out against using Kennedy’s religion as voting criteria. A representative letter proclaimed, “The prejudice towards Senator Kennedy because of his religion is a complete disgrace. Anyone who votes against a man because of his faith cannot honestly call himself an American.”²³³ Some of Kennedy’s defenders made a point of revealing they were not Catholics to add emphasis to their words: “Let me say now I am not a Catholic. But I resent the attack against Sen. Kennedy’s religion. I resent an attack against any religion.”²³⁴ Another citizen took exception to the implication that voting against Kennedy equated to bigotry. He admitted that Kennedy’s religion was one of several reasons he chose Nixon but argued, “The Constitution does not say that a voter shall not take a candidate’s religion into consideration.”²³⁵

²³¹ Rufus A. Griffith letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 6 November 1960, 23A.
²³² Patrick O’Brien letter to Editor, Orlando Sentinel, 12 October 1960, 5A.
²³³ Patricia Madden letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 6 November 1960, 23A.
²³⁴ Joseph H. Drake letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 23 October 1960, 21A.
²³⁵ Arthur E. Church letter to Editor, Tampa Tribune, 26 October 1960, 16.
In addition to publishing reader letters, state newspapers also conducted numerous polls in myriad formats and varying degrees of formality in an effort to gauge the political climate of Florida. Three of the newspapers analyzed—Tallahassee Democrat, Miami Herald, and St. Petersburg Times—published poll results. While many of the issues discussed in the editorials and reader letters re-appeared, an undercurrent of voter dissatisfaction and apathy emerged. Polls would be the only way to discover this group as they typically would not bother to write letters to the local newspaper.

The Tallahassee Democrat staff conducted an informal postcard poll of two hundred subscribers in September. This simple poll merely required the recipient to mark the candidate of their choice. Nearly half of those receiving cards replied, which was a pleasant surprise to the editors. The Nixon-Lodge ticket garnered 52 percent of the straw votes, Kennedy and Johnson received 37.9 percent and 10.1 percent were undecided. Reporter Hallie Boyles noted that the survey occurred before the first televised debate between the candidates.

Among the comments found on the returned cards, "the lesser of two evils" or similar seemed to be the most prevalent. The editors also perceived that a majority of those responding voted against a ticket instead of supporting one. Nixon supporters cited increased government spending, expanded union influence in government, and experience as reasons for casting a GOP vote. Those falling in the Democratic column sought honesty, action and change rather than the status quo, as well as increased government support for labor. Both candidates received religious votes, too, accompanied by comments like, "I would not vote for a Catholic for President of the United States" and "I am a Presbyterian
but this anti-Catholic intolerance is nonsense.” Foreign policy also received attention. One Nixon advocate considered Kennedy “too brash a young man to be trusted with our foreign affairs.” Conversely, another voter stated, “The most vital issue for Americans today is a decisive foreign policy and space policy. The present administration lost the fresh spirit needed to meet and master the Communist challenge as it presents itself in 1960.”

Due to the unexpected level of response from the first poll, the Tallahassee Democrat staff conducted a follow-up poll, mailing three hundred postcards on October 22 after the debates concluded. The response to the second mailing increased to nearly 60 percent. The second batch of postcards differed from the first by the addition of an “undecided” option. The results showed an increase in votes for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket from 37.9 percent in the first poll to 45 percent, support for the Nixon-Lodge ticket dropped from 52 to 36.7 percent, and the percentage of undecided voters nearly doubled, increasing from 10.1 to 18.3. After removal of duplicate entries for readers who responded to both polls, Nixon maintained a slight lead of 43.6 to 41.8 with 14.6 percent undecided.

The second batch of postcards contained fewer written remarks, which the Tallahassee Democrat staff attributed to the addition of the “undecided” category. Comments on “undecided” entries included “Both are professional politicians surrounded by professional politicians” and “Give me a decent candidate and I’ll vote.” Voters voicing a preference repeated the trend from the first poll of voting against a particular ticket more than they supported one. Comments against both candidates ranged from vague hunches to

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specific criticisms, but examples of anti-Nixon comments were specific. One voter wrote, 
"Lodge is a good man but Nixon had several years to come up with some constructive 
policies—where has he been?" Another disagreed with "barnstorming by Ike at taxpayers’ 
expense" in support of Nixon. Examples of anti-Kennedy statements included "Kennedy is 
dangerous, not only to the South but to the entire country" and "I think it would be 
disastrous for Kennedy to win."\(^{237}\)

Stephen Trumbull of the Miami Herald conducted an informal opinion sampling 
throughout the metropolitan Miami area in early October. He chose an "average man’s" 
block in five different neighborhoods and attempted to survey each household. Of the 
thirty-four responses described, twelve each favored the candidates and ten were undecided. 
The most popular reason to back Nixon was the experience of the ticket, although the 
enthusiasm for Nixon personally varied. Other reasons included the GOP civil rights 
stance, party loyalty, and Kennedy’s religion. Kennedy supporters were more mixed in 
their reasons, but three cited the Democratic Party’s support for labor as the justification for 
their choice. Other rationale included party loyalty, the Democratic civil rights plank, 
Kennedy’s image, and vote-denial for Nixon. Two of the undecided respondents mentioned 
frustration concerning the similarity of the two programs, but the rest either did not voice a 
preference or preferred to wait until the conclusion of the debates to make a choice.\(^{238}\)

\(^{237}\) "Kennedy Leads Local Vote Poll," Tallahassee Democrat, 1 November 1960, 1, 2.

The most extensive poll encountered was the Miami Herald’s “The Mood of Florida” series. Miami Herald staff writers visited every region of the state and contrasted the prevailing trend with how the region voted in the 1956 election. Kennedy led strongly in Tampa and the Panhandle region. Nixon enjoyed large margins in Sarasota and Orlando but held smaller margins in Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. Jacksonville remained split between the candidates. Only the staunchly Democratic Panhandle region supported Adlai Stevenson in 1956. Interestingly, this area also supported Alfred E. Smith, the only other Catholic candidate for president, over Herbert Hoover in 1928.239

Stephen Trumbull attributed Kennedy’s strong showing in Tampa and Hillsborough County to a large increase in union strength since 1956, when Eisenhower carried the area by only three thousand votes. Unemployment was also up, and most of those supporting Kennedy cited labor and economic issues as their reason.240 As in Tampa, the Panhandle residents weighing in on the Democratic side did so for economic reasons. Several recalled the “Hoover depression” and sought to avoid another one. Among the Nixon supporters, the GOP record against communism and Nixon’s foreign affairs experience swayed them the most.241

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239 John L. Boyles, “Panhandle ‘Against Hoover’ Again in This Year’s Vote,” Miami Herald, 2 November 1960, 1A.
240 Stephen Trumbull, “Tampa’s Labor Voice is Loud For Kennedy,” Miami Herald, 30 October 1960, 1A.
241 John L. Boyles, “Panhandle.”
In the Republican strongholds of Sarasota and Orlando, party loyalty and satisfaction with the Eisenhower Administration emerged as the primary explanation, but evidence of anti-Kennedy sentiment existed. One Orlando resident denounced Kennedy’s discussion of a decline in national prestige: “I don’t think he has any business slamming the country like he does. Even if some of the things he says are true, let’s not shout it out to the world.” Another admitted he initially supported Kennedy but switched to Nixon “when [Kennedy] advocated so much government control.” As in other areas, Kennedy adherents in the two regions frequently pointed to economic issues.242

In Palm Beach County, Miami Herald reporter Bill Mansfield took a different approach. He tallied views specifically on the televised debates, the running mates, Kennedy’s religion, and economics. Most felt Kennedy had the edge in the debates, and some of those who were undecided swung to the Democrat after watching. In the assessment of running mates, Lodge passed Johnson handily, with a common response being disappointment that he was not the presidential nominee. His presence on the ticket also swayed some fence sitters to the GOP ticket. None of the citizens interviewed indicated they chose the Democrats because of Johnson. In other regions of the state the religious issue seemed dormant, but Mansfield elicited strong responses on both sides when he raised it first. Despite the fervor of the answers, the religious issue and economics

revealed an even split between the tickets among those interviewed. Mansfield also mentioned that no one mentioned civil rights during his survey.\(^{243}\)

In “The Pinellas Poll,” a periodic opinion poll conducted by the St. Petersburg Times in Pinellas County, residents were asked to name the “two or three big issues of the 1960 presidential election.” Civil rights appeared on 51 percent of the lists. Foreign policy appeared in 40 percent of the responses, while religion and aid for the elderly both surfaced in 22 percent of the responses.\(^{244}\) Pinellas County contained one of the bastions of Republican support in the state.

The St. Petersburg Times and the Miami Herald co-sponsored The Florida Poll, a scientific poll conducted by First Research Corporation of Miami. Both newspapers published the results on November 6. The poll predicted a close race with Kennedy winning 51 percent of the Florida votes. The pollsters concluded, “The cumulative popular vote for Kennedy in Dade-Broward [counties], plus the heavy Democratic trend in the northwest, is felt to be too heavy to be overcome by the Nixon edge in the rest of the state.”

Over half of the voters listed the debates as a factor in their decision. Choice of running mate influenced 55 percent of the Nixon supporters but only 41 percent of those backing Kennedy. Candidate religion affected 25 percent of the voters. Interestingly, Nixon only garnered 56 percent of the Protestant straw votes, while 77 percent of Catholic voters and

\(^{243}\) Bill Mansfield, “Palm Beach Still in GOP Camp—But How Deep?” Miami Herald, 5 November 1960, 6B.

\(^{244}\) “Civil Rights Called No. 1 Political Issue,” St. Petersburg Times, 30 October 1960, 8B.
73 percent of Jewish voters chose Kennedy. The pollsters explained that the “heavy Protestant vote is counterbalanced by Democratic heritage.”

In the final weeks of the campaign, newspapers across the country published candidate endorsements. Kennedy press secretary Pierre E. Salinger calculated that 16 percent of the national newspapers endorsed the Democratic ticket. Endorsements by the Florida newspapers followed the national figure very closely. Of the thirty-one daily newspapers in Florida, only four (13 percent) endorsed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Among the six Florida newspapers examined, the Florida Times-Union endorsed neither candidate, the St. Petersburg Times endorsed Kennedy, and the rest endorsed Nixon. Interestingly, Kennedy carried Duval County (represented by the Florida Times-Union) and all of the counties represented by the papers endorsing Nixon except Orange County (Orlando) yet failed to carry Pinellas County, home of the St. Petersburg Times.

The editors of the St. Petersburg Times listed four factors that compelled them to support the Democratic ticket. First, they felt the current stalemate between a Republican White House and a Democratic congress must cease. They said, “There is so much unfinished business to face—both at home and abroad—that many voters feel, as we do, that the nation cannot afford another era of divided government.” Second, America needed

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245 “Kennedy Has Chance To Carry Florida,” St. Petersburg Times, 6 November 1960, 1A, 2A.
247 “Only Safe Florida Bet: Vote Will Be A Record,” St. Petersburg Times, 8 November 1960, 1A.
a "reborn foreign policy" to reverse the "terrifying deterioration of our foreign relations," including a decline in our prestige abroad. Third, a rejuvenated economy was essential to maintain strength in other areas. The editors characterized the economy under Eisenhower as "mushy, lackluster, and sluggish." Finally, Kennedy's realistic approach to the campaign and its issues impressed the editors. They admired him for possessing the courage to tell Americans that they must participate in the country's revitalization through effort and sacrifice. In contrast, they accused Nixon of following "the huckster trail of tranquilizers and soothing syrup—'You've never had it so good' . . . 'Don't rock the boat."249

Support for Nixon ranged from enthusiastic to lukewarm. Like many citizens who responded to the various polls and surveys, the editors of the Tallahassee Democrat chose Nixon simply because he was the only alternative to Kennedy. In fact, they withheld their endorsement until the Sunday before the election. They experienced a dilemma, noting that although the newspaper historically supported the Democratic candidate, they found the 1960 Democratic platform "politically abhorrent." The editors rejected the platform's "excessive and suppressive federal encroachment on local responsibilities and private affairs" and characterized its foreign policy as "too soft and too conciliatory." Regarding the candidates, the editors admitted, "We find in their characters nothing much to support fear that either would make a particularly bad President. Nor do we find qualities which

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249 "I don't believe there is any burden . . . that any American would not assume to protect his country," St. Petersburg Times, 26 October 1960, 8A.
indicate true greatness.” Their final decision rested on the fact that the Republican platform contained fewer objectionable elements than its Democratic counterpart.\textsuperscript{250}

John S. Knight of the \textit{Miami Herald} presented his endorsement for Nixon in economic terms. Knight criticized Kennedy for choosing government over business to hold power over the economy. He observed, “It seems to me that Sen. Kennedy has too little faith in the kind of capitalistic society which has brought this country so many blessings, and that he would, as President, look to enlarge the pattern of government.” Knight conceded that the polls forecasted a Kennedy victory but maintained Nixon possessed “a broader comprehension of our [economic] system” and therefore represented a better choice for voters. He concluded, “In short, [Nixon] stands for the kind of America which jeopardizes neither our solvency nor our freedom.”\textsuperscript{251}

The most biased publication encountered during this research was the \textit{Orlando Sentinel}. The editors essentially conducted a three-month endorsement of Nixon on the editorial pages and expressed no regrets for doing so when some readers complained. Consequently, they did not devote an entire column to an “official” statement of support for Nixon. They summarized the favorable aspects of Nixon as: “his conservative approach to the future; his desire to further the free enterprise system in the U.S.; he has proved he can stand up to Khrushchev; [and] his careful training at the hands of one of the great leaders of the U.S., Dwight David Eisenhower.” On the other hand, they felt Kennedy would “spend

\textsuperscript{250} “Less To Fear From Nixon,” Tallahassee Democrat, 6 November 1960, 4.

\textsuperscript{251} “We’re for Nixon—And A Solvent, Free U.S.A.,” \textit{Miami Herald}, 30 October 1960, 2F.
us, our children and great-grandchildren into the poorhouse” and feared “his welfare state philosophy and his uncomfortable relationship with organized labor.”

Foreign policy and economic philosophy caused the editors of the Tampa Tribune to back Nixon and Lodge. They asserted, “In our judgment, the campaign comes down to this simple question: Which man, or team of men, can best assure the security of this nation in the struggle with Communism?” In answering that question, they perceived two areas of importance—strength abroad through foreign policy and domestic economic strength. Nixon and Lodge received the foreign policy nod based on their experiences as vice president and UN ambassador, respectively. They criticized Kennedy’s “devotion to Big Government and Big Spending” and cautioned, “If we outgun Russia but our economy totters and our liberties waste away, how can we win the struggle?” They concluded that Nixon and Lodge offered “the best hope of keeping the nation strong and free” (italics in original).

Nixon successfully continued the trend of Republican victory established by Eisenhower and carried Florida by a narrow margin of 46,776 votes. He received 795,476 votes, 51.5 percent of the 1,544,176-vote total. Kennedy garnered 748,700 votes and posted the strongest Democratic finish since 1948, when Truman carried the state. Three factors contributed to Nixon’s ability to withstand a late surge prompted by Johnson’s influence on state Democratic officials and Kennedy’s performance in the televised debates. First, the migration of Republican voters into southern Florida resulted in the largest number of

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252 “Candidates’ Cases Go To The Jury,” Orlando Sentinel, 8 November 1960, 6A.
253 “Two For Security,” Tampa Tribune, 23 October 1960, 20A.
registered Republicans to date in state history. Second, the voting blocs of organized labor and African-Americans, although considered integral to Kennedy’s national victory, were not sufficiently present in Florida to have an impact. Finally, dissatisfaction with the liberal Democratic platform and aversion to Kennedy’s religion contributed to a large defection of registered Democrats.

Between 1950 and 1960 Florida’s rate of population growth exceeded all other states at 79 percent. An integral part of this boom was migration from other states to central and southern Florida, an area beginning in Orange County (Orlando) and proceeding south along both coasts to Dade County (Miami) and Collier County (Naples). Manning J. Dauer characterized this region of rapid growth as an “urban horseshoe” based on its shape and demographics. This region also contained the counties that consistently supported Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, and Nixon drew his support from these counties, as well. A post-election analysis published in the Florida Times-Union identified five counties in this region that provided one-third of Nixon’s votes in the state: Pinellas, Sarasota, Orange, Broward, and Palm Beach. The significant Republican margin in these


256 Dauer, 126.
areas offset Kennedy carrying 45 out of 67 Florida counties, including the three largest (Dade, Hillsborough, and Duval).²⁵⁷

Dauer attributed this voting pattern to consequences of the migration from other states. Those who came from traditionally Republican states in the Northeast typically maintained their party affiliation. The number of registered Republicans in Florida rose from 60,665 in 1950 to 338,390 in 1960, which represented 20 percent of all registered voters.²⁵⁸ Also, due to Florida’s relative lack of large urban centers, the population growth produced “urban sprawl” as subdivisions were built to accommodate the new inhabitants, resulting in what Dauer described as a “giant suburbia” across south Florida. Consequently, there existed little or no connection between the new residents and Southern traditions. Dauer explained, “As citizens seek identification with smaller communities, a loose conglomeration of cities and towns grows up, constituting a metropolitan area. Often there is little identification with the total urban area or with the state.”²⁵⁹ Thus, south Florida’s ties to the “Solid South” heritage diminished throughout the decade.

Compounding the developments in south Florida was a decline in voting strength in the northern half of the state, which remained staunchly Democratic between 1950 and 1960. Of the 41 counties north of the horseshoe, only one experienced the level of growth seen in the 17 counties of the horseshoe. In fact, 12 of the northern counties suffered a decrease in population during this time, whereas the lowest growth rate in the southern

²⁵⁷ “GOP Tightening Five-County Hold,” Florida Times-Union, 10 November 1960, 22.
²⁵⁸ Dauer, 111.
²⁵⁹ Ibid., 94-95.
counties was 20 percent. Annie Mary Hartsfield calculated the voting strength of these 41 northern counties in 1960 as a mere 22.5 percent of the total votes cast in Florida.\textsuperscript{260}

Nationally, Kennedy received considerable support from organized labor and African-Americans. The Democratic ticket drew 60 percent of the votes from skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers and 70 percent of African-American votes across the country.\textsuperscript{261} The relatively slight presence of these groups in Florida precluded a similar impact. In 1960, only Miami, Tampa, and, to a lesser extent, Jacksonville contained significant numbers of organized workers. Union rolls in these three cities grew due to the presence of the railroad, shipping, and construction industries. Miami also hosted several major airlines and large hotels. Outside of these cities, however, most employees worked in non-union trades such as tourism, service, insurance, and the military. Although hotels were present throughout the state, they were small and not conducive to unionization.\textsuperscript{262} Kennedy carried all three of the union-rich counties (Dade, Hillsborough, and Duval) with margins of 7.6, 1.3, and 4 percent, respectively.

African-Americans comprised 15.4 percent of Florida’s voting-age population in 1960, a decline from 20.1 percent in 1950, and the number of registered African-Americans represented only 11.4 percent of the total registered voters in the state.\textsuperscript{263} Of all registered African-Americans, 9 percent were Republicans, which further diluted the potential

\textsuperscript{260} Hartsfield, 2-3.


\textsuperscript{262} Dauer, 97-100.
Democratic bloc. Only fourteen counties reported African-American registration at 60 percent or higher. Kennedy carried all of them except Citrus and DeSoto, and Nixon’s margin of victory in those cases was 2.8 and 0.2 percent, respectively. In addition to the low registration rate, the African-American voters were concentrated in the less-populated northern counties that traditionally voted Democratic anyway. Thus, the bloc’s influence was greatly diminished and somewhat superfluous in these areas.

Despite the record number of registered Republicans and relatively small labor and African-American voting blocs, the number of registered Democrats in Florida exceeded the Republicans by over 1.3 million in 1960. Obviously, Nixon’s victory required a substantial number of votes from registered Democrats. There were two primary motivations for Democrats to cast a vote for the Republican ticket: the Democratic Party platform and Kennedy’s religion. Assessing Nixon’s performance in the South, Dewey W. Grantham observed, “[Nixon’s] showing was in part the result of the party’s strong campaign throughout the region. But it also reflected the accumulating distrust of the national Democratic Party felt by many white southerners, a distrust that was exacerbated by the civil rights movement and by Kennedy’s Catholicism.”

263 Ibid., 104-107.
265 Hartsfield, 13, 33.
266 Bass, 120.
The national Democratic campaign faced stiff resistance in the South. New York Times reporter Claude Sitton published findings from a two-week tour of Florida, Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas on September 7, 1960 and the outlook was bleak. He reported a “negative reaction of unexpected proportions” to the “liberal” Democratic platform that resulted in a refusal of state officeholders to actively support the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Kennedy’s own Southern campaign chairman, Senator George A. Smathers (D, Fla.), admitted he found portions of the platform “objectionable and unrepresentative.” Opposition to the platform generally focused on four items: repeal of “right-to-work” laws, elimination of poll taxes and literacy tests for voter registration, creation of a Fair Employment Practices Commission, and expansion of government programs.268

In Sitton’s article, Florida Governor LeRoy Collins and state Democratic Party chairman James Milligan predicted, “Florida will be lost unless the state’s Democratic officeholders join in a unified campaign.” To illustrate the point, Sitton quoted Florida gubernatorial candidate C. Farris Bryant as stating “my principal concern is my own campaign.”269 All but two candidates running for state office refused to associate themselves with the national ticket in their own campaigns.270 Bryant deemed the platform “obnoxious” and refused to mention Kennedy’s name when introducing Johnson at a

269 Ibid.
speech in Orlando on October 12. Indeed, one of Johnson’s goals in visiting Florida was to get the state officials behind Kennedy. According to national columnist Drew Pearson, Johnson met with several of the “old guard” Democrats in Miami and delivered the following ultimatum: “If [Kennedy] wins without the South, I’m warning you. You’ll get nothing out of the next Congress and the Kennedy administration. I can tell you. I know.” The state candidates must have reflected the feelings of many constituents. As a rule, politicians are reluctant to take an unpopular position, especially during a campaign. Although research uncovered no specific figures on the number of Democrats who voted for Nixon in protest of the national platform, it is clear that the sentiment widely existed in Florida and other southern states.

While dissatisfaction over the national platform emerged primarily from the South, Kennedy’s religion came into play across the nation. The Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan calculated that, in 1960, 81 percent of voting Catholics supported the Democratic ticket nationwide. Dr. George Gallup’s American Institute of Public Opinion published similar figures showing 78 percent of Catholics voted Democratic. Furthermore, Gallup measured Catholic support for the Democratic ticket in 1956 at only 51 percent. These figures illustrate a considerable swing back to the Democratic Party by

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272 Drew Pearson, “Florida’s Demos Got Word—And LBJ Wasn’t Too Polite,” Miami Herald, 5 November 1960, 7A.
273 Key, 153.
274 Ibid., 158.
Eisenhower defectors. Thus, Catholics represented a more cohesive voting bloc in 1960 than African-Americans or labor.

Yet again, the Florida demographics precluded state support for Kennedy from a national voting bloc. A meager 5 percent of Florida residents in 1960 were Catholic. Only nine states had an equal or smaller Catholic population at the time.275 One of those states was West Virginia, which matched Florida’s Protestant majority of 95 percent. The Kennedy team engineered a convincing primary victory in West Virginia over Senator Hubert Humphrey that apparently laid the religious issue to rest until the general election. Kennedy was unable to duplicate this success in Florida for two reasons. First, he spent more time in the state of West Virginia than in Florida, allowing him the opportunity to reach more people personally. Obviously, the time constraints and nationwide scope of a general election precluded lengthy trips to Florida. Kennedy earmarked a full day for touring the state and effectively scheduled appearances by Johnson to supplement his tour. However, the impact was unavoidably smaller than that of his West Virginia campaign.

More importantly, the tactic Kennedy employed to mitigate the religious issue in West Virginia could not work as successfully in Florida. Essentially, the Kennedy team sold the idea that a vote for Humphrey equated to a vote for bigotry. The voters in West Virginia were quite sensitive to such a label and sought to avoid the potential stigma. Florida voters were not as homogeneous in their attitudes toward prejudice. The Kennedy team acknowledged this fact by using Johnson as the instrument for confronting the issue in Florida and other southern states rather than Kennedy, who personally challenged the

275 Ibid., 156.
Episcopal Bishop of West Virginia. Aversion to Kennedy’s religion may have been suppressed in Florida but it was present. Most of the editors and readers who published their views on this subject decried religious bigotry and chastised those who would change their vote based on a candidate’s chosen faith. Yet, newspaper polls uncovered voters willing, under the cloak of anonymity, to express their aversion to the idea of a Catholic president. As discussed earlier, Miami Herald reporter Bill Mansfield discovered an even split between voters in Palm Beach County when asked if Kennedy’s religion would influence their vote (Nixon carried Palm Beach County by 60 percent\(^{276}\)). The Tallahassee Democrat poll also revealed anti-Kennedy comments surrounding his religion, which is more significant given the unwaveringly Democratic voting history of the region surveyed.

\(^{276}\) Hartsfield, 33.
Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

The launch of Sputnik and the subsequent space race between the Soviet Union and the United States created a vexing and enduring political problem for the Republican Party until the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. Immediately following the October 1957 launch, President Dwight D. Eisenhower received criticism from the media, the public, and the Democrats. Despite urgent calls for more spending to “recapture the lead,” Eisenhower relied on intelligence reports that indicated Sputnik did not jeopardize national security. He quickly chose to act in the civilian arena by creating the President’s Scientific Advisory Committee and the position of Special Assistant for Science and Technology. He also directed the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to propose education legislation enhancing instruction in science and mathematics. Before either of these initiatives was publicized, Sputnik II joined its predecessor in orbit and criticism intensified. The Soviets launched two satellites within thirty days and the United States had yet to answer.

In the weeks following the November 3 launch of Sputnik II, a series of events underscored the belief that Eisenhower and his administration either did not perceive the alleged Soviet threat or stubbornly refused to counteract it. Eisenhower suffered a stroke in
late November that prevented him from completing several planned radio and television addresses concerning the Soviet satellites and his planned response to them. Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson and his Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee conducted hearings in November and December to assess America's national security and the state of the satellite program. The findings implied dereliction by the Eisenhower Administration and recommended immediate defense and research spending as remedies. During the Johnson hearings, a hurried attempt to launch Vanguard I on December 6 resulted in a highly publicized launch-pad explosion that magnified the apparent Soviet space lead. Finally, a press leak of the classified Gaither Committee report and the publication of a national defense study by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, both of which reiterated several of the points from the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee findings, crystallized the image of an apathetic or uninformed administration.

So pervasive was this image that the triumphant launch of Explorer I, on January 31, 1958, did little to assuage the critics. By the end of March 1958 the United States possessed a numerical lead in successful launches, and Eisenhower chose this time to propose creation of a civilian space agency. Johnson co-sponsored the bill in the Senate and used his considerable influence to shepherd it through the complex legislative process. Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act on July 29, 1958. The new law established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and formalized control of the space program under one civilian organization. Johnson emerged as the hero from this endeavor rather than Eisenhower and he was considered a champion of the U.S. space program.
Despite the rapid progress of the space program, the Democrats enjoyed tremendous success in the 1958 congressional elections by continuing the charges that the Republican space and missile programs were inadequate to guarantee a lead over the Soviet Union. The space race was fully integrated into the Cold War. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev touted the existence of a growing “missile gap” between the superpowers. He cited the spectacular and well-publicized Soviet space achievements as evidence of Soviet technological superiority and implied that this superiority carried over into intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Congressional Democrats embraced the fictitious issue and turned it against Republican opponents. Eisenhower could not disprove the missile gap allegations without compromising the successful U-2 reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union. In addition, with Johnson receiving the lion’s share of the credit for the National Aeronautics and Space Act, the Republicans were deprived of a claim to that milestone contribution to the space program. Flush from their success, the Democrats saw potential for the same space and missile issues in the 1960 presidential race.

After the relatively quiet year of 1958, in which the Soviets launched only one new satellite, they opened 1959 by placing Luna in orbit around the sun on January 7 and thus created the first man-made planet. The United States hoped to accomplish the same feat first, but a minor technical problem prevented Pioneer III from even reaching the sun. The astonishing success of Luna prompted hearings by the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee and the House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration, which in turn generated more negative publicity for Eisenhower.
NASA tried to reverse the tide of criticism by announcing its seven finalists for Project Mercury, the first U.S. manned space mission, on April 9, 1959. Four months later, the U.S. space program scored its first true “scoop” of the Soviets when Explorer VI transmitted photographs of earth on August 7. The mission had additional significance as the first satellite project conceived, designed, and implemented solely by NASA. The American triumph was short-lived, however, as the Soviet Union responded with a one-two punch similar in impact to the first Sputniks. On September 12, Luna 2 struck the moon within 300 miles of its target point. Less than a month later, the Soviets marked the second anniversary of the Sputnik launch with Luna 3, which entered orbit around the moon on October 6 and transmitted photographs of its far side. Once again, it appeared that the U.S. program stood on the sidelines as the Soviets moved forward in space.

As the election year of 1960 began, the Republicans had gained little, if any, ground since the 1958 congressional elections. Khrushchev continued to boast of a missile gap, and the United States owned only one significant space “first.” Although the two space programs were close, and in several areas dominated by the United States, Eisenhower was losing the propaganda battle. Hence, the political climate was rife for the Democrats to employ a similar strategy to the one used so successfully in 1958.

After an uneventful primary season during which Republican Vice President Richard M. Nixon ran unopposed and Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts eliminated all serious opposition by May, the two received their respective party nominations at the national conventions. Both candidates displayed a preference for foreign affairs during the primaries, and their acceptance speeches foreshadowed the themes
of the general campaign. Kennedy sought to “get the country moving again” and used America’s performance in the space race, the associated decline in national prestige, and, to a lesser extent, the missile gap to illustrate alleged lethargy on the part of the Republicans over the previous eight years. Nixon disputed Kennedy’s comments concerning America’s declining world status contended that America remained strong in the eyes of the world.

In speeches across the country and, more effectively, during the landmark televised debates, Kennedy painted a picture of a proud but haggard America which had unnecessarily fallen behind the Soviet Union. He proclaimed that electing Nixon would simply perpetuate the current problems, and what America really needed “to get moving again” was new leadership in the White House. Classified United States Information Agency (USIA) reports on prestige polls conducted in Europe were withheld from the media, but the New York Times obtained and published two such reports in the closing weeks of the campaign. These reports supported Kennedy’s charges that America’s image abroad suffered after the Sputnik launch and remained tarnished.

The Republican strategy centered on depicting Kennedy as inexperienced in foreign affairs and thus unqualified to assume leadership of America during the Cold War. However, Nixon seemed unable to mount an offensive. Kennedy’s aggressive, attacking style compelled Nixon to expend too much energy defending the Eisenhower regime or merely criticizing Kennedy for denigrating the status quo. Thus, he did not effectively communicate his own ideas. In addition, by virtue of Kennedy’s strong showing in the debates, Nixon’s statements concerning his opponent’s poise and maturity seemed baseless. While Kennedy and Nixon held similar views on the importance of the space program, and
Nixon publicly acknowledged on multiple occasions that a space race existed, Kennedy and his running mate, Senator Lyndon Johnson, projected the Democratic Party as more informed on space issues. Kennedy won a close race by a popular-vote margin that remains the smallest of any president.

Kennedy did not duplicate his national success in Florida, where Nixon won by less than 50,000 votes. The Republicans extended their control of Florida that began in 1952 when Eisenhower first carried the state. Nixon capitalized on a record number of registered Republican voters and a developing trend of Democratic voter defection spurred by dissatisfaction with the Democratic platform and distaste for Kennedy's religion. Despite a large majority of registered Democrats, Florida lacked strong labor, African-American, and Catholic voting blocs to offset the defection. Furthermore, state Democrats remained aloof from the national ticket until Kennedy showed well in the televised debates and Johnson toured the state to rally support.

Based on an analysis of editorials and reader letters from six Florida daily newspapers, the space race was not an important issue to Florida voters in 1960. This result may seem surprising given that Cape Canaveral was the cradle of the U.S. space program and remains the primary launch facility for American spacecraft and satellites. Two possible explanations are the immaturity of the space program at the time of the election and the inconsistent nature of the space race as a campaign issue. The space program was in its infancy in 1960 and identification with it would have been localized to Brevard County, where Cape Canaveral is located. Project Mercury, beginning with Alan Shepherd's milestone sub-orbital flight on May 5, 1961, triggered a national media frenzy
encompassing “The Cape” and the space program, but it occurred almost six months after the election. Each Mercury flight embodied the drama of dream and dread identified by Jack Lule in the wake of Sputnik’s launch. As public interest soared, Florida entered the spotlight and remained there until the end of the Apollo program in the early 1970s.

While many found the space race romantic, public interest subsided between launches. The challenge for Kennedy throughout the campaign was to maintain interest to the greatest extent possible. Consequently, he focused on associated issues, such as national prestige and the missile gap, which generated more attention because of the element of danger connected with them. Emulating British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, whom he considered one of his political role models, Kennedy embraced and perpetuated the element of fear introduced into the space race by Khrushchev as a tool to kick start America out of the perceived doldrums of the Republican regime. By the end of the campaign, the national prestige question overshadowed the space race as an issue. The final televised debate and the New York Times publication of two USIA reports confirming a decline in American prestige among Western European countries kept the issue prominent until Election Day.

The issue of national prestige struck a chord with Florida voters. This concern can be attributed to the Cold War climate in which the 1960 election took place. Prior to Sputnik, Americans believed in the pre-eminence of their country and enjoyed that lofty status. One reason for this preoccupation with leading the Soviet Union was the perception that world leadership equated to national security. This belief was tested by the launch of Sputnik and subsequent Soviet space achievements. With communist Cuba merely 90
miles from Miami, citizens of the state were sensitive to any perceived Soviet threat. Theodore H. White offered another rationale for maintaining high national prestige. He wrote, "If other nations falter in greatness, their people retain still what they were. But if America falters in greatness and purpose, then Americans are nothing but the offscourings and hungry of other lands."277

The space race issue was too far removed from daily concerns to galvanize support for the Democratic ticket in Florida. Florida voters displayed a preference for issues that affected them directly or challenged their fundamental beliefs. The high number of editorials and reader letters pertaining to Kennedy’s religion, the liberal posture of the Democratic platform, state office races, and proposed amendments to the state constitution confirm this. Both parties addressed civil rights concerns in their respective platforms, and some Florida voters saw no distinction between them. However, the Democratic platform also advocated increased federal spending and an expansion of government services, both of which were anathema to many states rights advocates. Conservative Democrats in Florida likely voted for the Republican ticket as the only alternative or to express dissatisfaction with their party.

The 1960 election may be remembered more as the first victory of a Catholic presidential candidate in the nation’s history. It made the election unique, regardless of the debate surrounding the relevance of a presidential candidate’s faith. The heavy Protestant majority in Florida ensured that religion would factor into the voting. Kennedy sought to minimize the issue after a resounding victory in the West Virginia primary and a candid

277 White, 377.
address to the Houston Ministerial Association in September. While he succeeded in suppressing its visibility, an undercurrent remained. In anonymous newspaper polls and the privacy of the voting booth, personal convictions prevailed.
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DISSEPTIONS


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