

“Kennedy-Nixon Debate”: The Turning Point for Presidential Elections

Weston Schaefer

Preston Kreman

Loural McCoy

Baxter Reece

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People have been communicating ever since prehistoric times. First people communicated using spoken language, sign language, hand gestures, and even drawings. The ancient greek politicians were known for debating politics in the agora. People would pick their new leaders by who had the best speech. Hundreds of people could hear a speech in the agora. Nowadays billions of people can hear speeches live on television. Before television people had newspapers to read and radios to listen to while the debates were going on. They could listen to live broadcasts or recordings on the radio or read about them. Because of television, a mass of people can now hear and see a message from a candidate delivered by their words, body language, and their physical appearance.

Our inspiration to pursue this project is that we are all very interested in politics and we like to watch presidential debates and hear what candidates have to say. What are they going to do for our country, and how they might make it better? When thinking about the theme of communication, we wondered what communications impacted politics the most. We wanted to learn how the television impacted how we elect our presidents. This led us to the Kennedy-Nixon Debate of 1960.

We started out by asking what influenced voters before the television became an influence. We found that influences changed over time with technology. We also wanted to find out what messages the candidates wanted to give to the public. We found out that Kennedy was so loved because he was young and a family man. People thought he had values that matched a growing nation. We finally wanted to know what impact television had after the election. We found out that the television continued to show Kennedy as a family man and a strong leader. In reading about the impact afterwards,

we found that the country, and the world would shift to using television as a main source of information and influence.

The Kennedy-Nixon debate shows that people are influenced by the way candidates dress, their health, what they say, and their body language. They are communicating an image to their voters in all these ways. The complete live image of a candidate is accessible to the masses.

In thinking about our project, we decided to do an exhibit because we wanted to use images and text to tell the whole story about how the televised debate shifted the outcome of the election, as well as display a timeline, and show some of the impact afterwards. We split the work up amongst ourselves. We put one person before the television, two of us during the debates, and one of us on the impact of television on Kennedy's presidency. A research paper had already been written so most of the work was done. We found images that fit the research, developed a timeline, and formatted our exhibit board. We chose patriotic red, white, and blue because they are used by campaigns in American elections.

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Watching this actual ad for candidate Nixon shows he used television to promote his campaign.

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This blog contains information and details about the debate and its impact after.

Photo credits:

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Full Exhibit

Before Televised Debates

People vote for candidates based on what influences them. Influence reached from the debates in newspapers and political cartoons, in radio.

1884

People started to use cartoons as propaganda machines. Nothing could be off-limits in newspapers, including illegitimate child.



Political cartoon mocking Grover Cleveland and his illegitimate child.



This picture shows James Shaw in a political cartoon.

1922

Warren G. Harding was the first president to use the radio to deliver speeches and campaign messages. After him, many other presidents would do the same.



1949

In 1949 only 112,000 television sets were sold in the United States. By 1960 90% of all Americans had a set in their household.

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Kennedy-Nixon Debate

The Turning Point for Presidential Elections



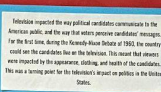
Nixon running his campaign.



Kennedy running his campaign.



Nixon running his campaign.



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Nixon running his campaign.



Nixon running his campaign.

Impact After Televised Debates



Nixon running his campaign.

"Just see what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." The words of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address are remembered in the hearts of the American people. After that inauguration, television covered every big event in his presidency.



Nixon running his campaign.

The TV made JFK famous by showing him working in the White House.



Nixon running his campaign.

Video footage of Kennedy and his children at the White House communicated his family values.



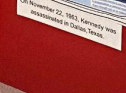
Nixon running his campaign.

Television communicated Kennedy's strength and leadership.



Nixon running his campaign.

Because of television, even a child's factor and a single word could make a difference. It was the first time a girl in America, Rosalynn, was heard when she heard the news.



Nixon running his campaign.

On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

Left Top Panel Photo

Before Televised Debates

People vote for candidates based on what influences them. Influences evolved from live debates to newspapers and political cartoons, to radio.

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People started to use cartoons as propaganda machines. Nothing used to be off-limits in newspapers, including illegitimate child.



Political cartoon mocking Grover Cleveland and his illegitimate child.



This picture shows James Blaine in a political cartoon.

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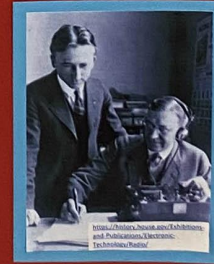
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Left Bottom Panel Photo

1922

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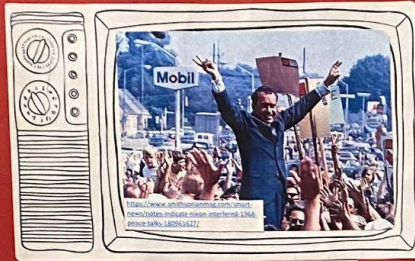
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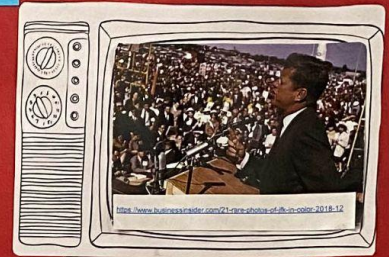
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Center Top Panel

Kennedy-Nixon Debate



Nixon running his campaign.



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The Turning Point for Presidential Elections



Television impacted the way political candidates communicate to the American public, and the way that voters perceive candidates' messages. For the first time, during the Kennedy-Nixon Debate of 1960, the country could see the candidates live on the television. This meant that viewers were impacted by the appearance, clothing, and health of the candidates. This was a turning point for the television's impact on politics in the United States.



Center Top Panel Text

Kennedy-Nixon Debate

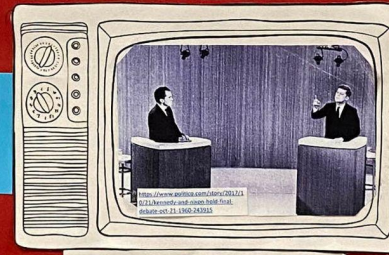
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Kennedy spoke with more confidence than Nixon in the debates.

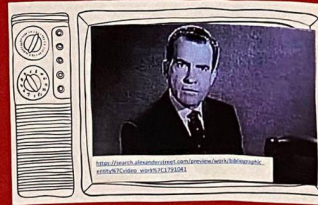
Kennedy giving his argument during the debate.

"They understand what peace demands," was the slogan for the Nixon & Lodge television campaign. Nixon highlighted his view on his economic views.

At the beginning of the presidential race, Nixon was the favorite to win, since he had been vice president for eight years. But after the debate, Kennedy started to pull ahead.

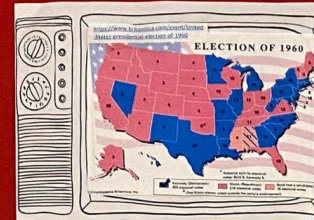


Kennedy's wife connected with immigrants by speaking in Spanish on a television ad.



Kennedy used the TV to his advantage while Nixon didn't use it to boost his appearance or personality.

According to polls leading up to the election, Nixon showed a 5 to 3 Republican disadvantage. Just two weeks before the election, Nixon started using the television more, which helped him close the gap. Although it was not enough to win the election, it ended up being the closest election in history.



Kennedy won the Electoral College votes 303 to 219. He also won the popular votes by .17%.



News stories of Kennedy with his family helped him gain popularity. The stories influenced voters to vote for the man that was with his family rather than the man that just came out of the hospital.

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Right Top Panel Photo

Impact After Televised Debates



Kennedy during the inauguration.

"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" The whole world watched Kennedy's inaugural address on television, when his famous words were etched into the hearts of the American people. After that inauguration, television covered every big event in his presidency.

On October 22, 1962 Kennedy communicated a message to the American people over TV about the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy explained the US wouldn't let any ships travel to Cuba.



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