The Debate Seen and Heard ‘Round the World:
The Transformative Legacy of the Kennedy-Nixon Debates on Presidential Elections, Image Creation, and Personal and Public Diplomacy

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This past election cycle, although too young to vote, I watched my first live presidential debates broadcast on TV. Upon hearing the annual theme, my first thought went to the Trump-Biden debate, wondering where it all started. The word “diplomacy” further piqued my interest. Although diplomacy is often thought of as two countries working to maintain peaceful relations, for this paper, I am defining diplomacy in the more direct, personal manner as it occurs in presidential elections. In this case, diplomacy exists as the management of communication between two people representing different parties of the same nation. Positive diplomacy involves a type of negotiated discourse where each parties’ views are respected and tactfully and skillfully debated. Thus, another aspect of the 2020 debates that caught my attention was the lack of diplomacy between the candidates and the level of disrespect they displayed towards each other and the moderator. It could not have always been this way. Successes, failures, and consequences had to have occurred along the way, bringing it to this point. After discovering and watching the first televised debate that occurred between Kennedy and Nixon, I immediately noticed the striking difference of the candidates respectfully debating and discussing domestic issues. My investigation ensued from there.

My research began by simply watching the Kennedy-Nixon debates, followed by several other debates between 1976 and 2020. Afterwards, online searching quickly led to the Kennedy Presidential Archives, which provided a multitude of primary sources. Next, book and article searches through my public library and online led to a discovery of an abundance of academic studies on the debate and its transformational impact. Able to access some through my public library, I also had access through my sister in college who made more databases available. In conducting this research, one thing often led to another, as bibliographies in books or articles, as
well as their notes and annotations, often led to other sources. I dove into my research, taking notes, and completing my bibliography as I analyzed sources. Deciding on a research paper format led to that almost endless cycle of outline, draft, revise, reconsider outline, revise draft, back-filling “holes” in research, and again re-drafting until a coherent whole paper emerged.

The historical argument of my paper is stated in my thesis: the Kennedy-Nixon debates, which served as a form of true debate and personal diplomacy in which two opposing candidates offered their views in a type of negotiated discourse, constituted the catalyst moment that forever changed the course of presidential elections and the spark to which new forms of media and image became increasingly vital in politics. This topic remains historically important because the effect of media on presidential elections in the United States can have serious consequences on who is elected as the leader and spokesperson of our nation, as well as how informed voters are in our country. It has altered and, for better or for worse, will continue to alter the course of our nation’s history.
Sometimes a single event like the “shot heard ‘round the world” in Concord and Lexington, triggering the American Revolution and the eventual founding of our democracy, forever changes the path of a nation. Similarly, on September 26, 1960, people nationwide were glued to their televisions on their living room couches, mesmerized by the novelty of the first of four Kennedy-Nixon televised debates, which would forever transform U.S. politics.\(^1\) The first debate captured an audience of 66.4 million,\(^2\) because in 1960, the vast majority of homes in America owned televisions.\(^3\) These debates, which served as a form of direct, personal diplomacy in which two opposing candidates offered their views in a type of negotiated discourse, constituted the catalyst moment that forever changed the course of presidential elections and the spark which created new forms of media and image-making that became increasingly vital in American politics. Although Kennedy and Nixon took the stage four times, this paper focuses in depth on the first debate, analyzing both successes and failures that have led to short- and long-term consequences that continue to define modern-day presidential elections.

With this relatively new medium of television, the visual element came to the forefront.\(^4\) The stage consisted of two chairs with podiums beside them on opposite sides. The moderator sat in the middle at a table. With the panelists in front of the stage, backs to the camera, the public could observe a candidate’s appearance, mannerisms, and interactions. Kennedy, wearing a black suit and tie, stood out against the gray background. Sitting up straight, with legs crossed and hands in his lap, he exuded poise and confidence. In contrast, Nixon wore a gray suit and tie,

\(^1\) The First Televised Presidential Debate.” U.S. Senate: The First Televised Presidential Debate, 13 Aug. 2020. www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The First Televised Presidential _Debate.htm. (The first televised debate occurred in 1956 between Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Chase Smith, surrogates for Stevenson and Eisenhower. This paper concentrates on what history considers the first televised debate, the debate between presidential candidates themselves.)


\(^4\) See Appendix A.
blending into the background. His advisors were told the background would be dark gray and advised Nixon to wear a light-gray suit to provide contrast. Upon arriving to the studio a few days prior, the background was significantly lighter. Although repainted several times, the paint continually dried light.\(^5\) Furthermore, slouching in his chair with uncrossed legs, he conveyed a slack, more informal appearance. Kennedy spoke clearly, maintaining eye contact with varying facial expressions and hand motions, creating the sense of personally speaking to the audience at home. Kennedy paid attention to Nixon’s words, taking notes on his responses. More soft-spoken, Nixon occasionally stumbled in his speech and was unable to maintain eye contact. Making no hand gestures, he gripped the podium tightly. Nixon appeared disinterested in Kennedy’s responses, fidgeting and using tissues.\(^6\) While Nixon described Kennedy as looking tanned, rested, and fit, he reported feeling mentally alert, but physically worn out. He had pledged to visit all fifty states during his campaign but paused due to a knee injury. He then fell ill from exhaustion trying to cover 15,000 miles across twenty-five states the two weeks prior. The television advisor recommended stage makeup, but Nixon refused, which he later regretted.\(^7\)

Viewers witnessed the respectful diplomacy between the candidates in their interactions. Nixon mentioned several times that they were both working for the same cause, with different means of achieving it.\(^8\) Later, Nixon described Kennedy as being on the offensive, in which he agreed with Nixon’s goals, but attacked his means to reach them.\(^9\) Nixon, however, was praised by the public for not attacking Kennedy.\(^10\)


\(^8\) “Archives” *First Kennedy-Nixon Debate*.

\(^9\) Nixon 219.

While the new visual element captured viewers’ attention, the candidates presented a significant amount of information during the debate. Focusing on domestic issues, the first debate adhered to the following format: eight-minute opening statements, two-and-a-half-minute responses to questions asked by panelists, an optional rebuttal, and three-minute closing statements.\textsuperscript{11} Newspapers, the more conventional form of media at this time, reinforced the substance of the debates by printing transcripts for the debates, which allowed word-for-word replays without interpretation. Other articles presented more analysis yet provided factual evidence from the debates to support their stance.\textsuperscript{12}

As such a historical event seized the nation, researchers immediately after and for decades to come analyzed the consequences, both successes and failures, of the televised debates. For the first time, debates allowed voters to form opinions based on a candidate’s appearance, voice, and demeanor.\textsuperscript{13} A study conducted by Richard Scammon twenty-four hours after the first debate analyzed its immediate impact, which revealed 16\% of 671 voters moved towards a more positive view of Kennedy, whereas none moved in favor of Nixon.\textsuperscript{14} The audience perceived Kennedy as a strong leader, with ability and experience due to his clear manner of speaking and direct answers.\textsuperscript{15} Viewers perceived Nixon as afraid to confront Kennedy, with indirect answers that lacked self-assurance.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, viewers focused on the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} “1960 Debates,” 12.
\textsuperscript{14} Scammon 3.
\textsuperscript{15} Scammon 6.
\textsuperscript{16} Scammon 14.
\end{flushleft}
candidates’ interactions, remarking how respectful Kennedy acted towards Nixon,\textsuperscript{17} and praising Nixon for being calm and polite.\textsuperscript{18}

For Kennedy, the most obvious success of the debate was increased popularity, with the visual element as the decisive factor. An article written by Rob Crotty states that the majority of those who listened to the debate believed that Nixon won, while those who watched the debate thought Kennedy won. While Crotty acknowledges he has no statistics to support this statement, the fact that the polls increased in Kennedy’s favor appears to point to this conclusion.\textsuperscript{19} Theodore White cites a study by Dr. Elmo Roper, a pioneer of public opinion polling, in which he estimated that 57\% of voters felt influenced by the debates, and 3,000,000 people voted for Kennedy based on the debate alone. Kennedy won the popular vote by only 112,000 votes, thus providing more concrete evidence of the importance of the televised debate.\textsuperscript{20} Kennedy himself believed that he would not have won the election without the debate.\textsuperscript{21}

The vexing challenge of public reliance on form over substance has loomed heavily over the presidential debate process ever since that first television encounter. In 2011, Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick conducted a study with college students to determine how voters initially evaluate candidates and whether they correct for appearance bias. The researchers utilized the “physical attractiveness stereotype” in which people assume that better-looking people are more intelligent, skilled, and successful. Basically, attractive people are better than unattractive people. Correction

\textsuperscript{17} Scammon 7.
\textsuperscript{18} Scammon 12.
\textsuperscript{20} White 294.
\textsuperscript{21} Newton N. Minow and Craig L. LaMay, Inside the Presidential Debates: Their Improbably Past and Promising Future, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.
occurs when people “correct” for candidates’ appearances by evaluating their political views. Hart et al. concluded that voters initially find the attractive candidate more favorable. Correction is more common in more educated people who have knowledge of the topics discussed. In attractive candidates, correction does not “correct” their appearance, but positively reinforces it, providing a further advantage. The majority of people, however, do not “correct” an unattractive appearance and instead favor the attractive candidates. This could represent a long-term consequence and failure of the debate process. With the advent of television and subsequently other visual media, will even more people base their voting decisions on the attractiveness of a candidate, rather than their political positions?

The debate format did allow more people to hear candidates’ positions, and so the question remains: could one of the successes of the debates consist in their ability to better inform voters? A study by John Ellsworth in 1965 analyzing the 1960 debates concluded that the candidates provided clearer statements and more evidence to support their positions than in previous campaigns. He also determined that the ability to immediately offer a rebuttal presented voters with a more in-depth picture of a candidate’s thinking. In contrast, in 1961, White argued that the format of the 1960 debates was too limiting, as it restricted the amount each candidate could say on certain issues. In 2012, Craig LaMay stated, “The virtue of debates above all is that they are the only place in the modern campaign where the candidates with few if

23 Hart 199.
25 Ellsworth 799.
26 White 292.
any notes, speak to each other and to the public.”27 Thus, the debates can be considered a success in providing some information on which to base voting decisions but also other perspectives on a candidate such as leadership qualities.

The issue of the bias of the visual element remained, however. A study conducted by James Druckman published in 2003 addressed the question: how does television affect political behavior? Half of the participants listened to an audio recording while the other half watched the Kennedy-Nixon debate.28 The participants chosen had no prior knowledge of the debates.29 Druckman concluded that in general, educated people learned more, regardless of whether they listened or watched the debate. People with less education, however, learned more watching the debate.30 While this could indicate a success of the televised debates to create a more educated voting public, Druckman also noted the failures of this visual system. Those who watched relied more on image and personality to evaluate a candidate, whereas those who listened relied more on response content.31 With the introduction of television, gaining support became more about appearance rather than ideas.32 In 2016, Gershon wrote an article analyzing Druckman’s study furthering these conclusions. Gershon states that although the televised debate facilitated viewers’ knowledge, it also made them increasingly likely to ignore their stances on political issues in favor of candidates’ personalities.33 While the debates allowed information to be more accessible to the public, ironically the opposite resulted, leading people to vote less based on

29 Druckman 564.
30 Druckman 569.
31 Druckman 567.
32 Druckman 560.
issues. The addition of this new form of media in presidential politics has created a need for a balance to ensure that issues remain at the forefront.

After the Kennedy-Nixon debates, a sixteen-year hiatus occurred. The law permitting networks to broadcast debates applied only to the 1960 election. Additionally, many candidates became indifferent. Kennedy had intended to debate in 1964 but was assassinated; Lyndon Johnson did not debate as he believed it would not benefit him; in 1968, Humphrey offered to debate, but Nixon declined. Candidates clearly believed that televised debates had an impact. Without compulsion, public or otherwise, avoidance emerged as a viable political strategy, an unfortunate consequence for the public. Through the work of Minow, Geller, and Wiley, debates became an expected part of the presidential election process.

To more fully address the consequences of the Kennedy-Nixon debate, the 1992 debates, thirty-two years after the Kennedy-Nixon debates, and the most recent 2020 debates, sixty years later, offer valuable insights into the long-term consequences. Comparisons continue to focus on the first debates of each. In contrast to 1960, the 1992 debates occurred with a live audience and three candidates instead of two: Perot, Clinton, and Bush. The candidates faced the audience while the panel, one moderator and three journalists, had their backs to the audience. The decorated stage utilized no special lighting effects. Without content restrictions, the debate had the following format: the panelists asked questions and the candidates answered in an order determined by drawing; candidates had one minute for a rebuttal; two minutes were allotted for

34 Stephen 39.
36 Stephan 39.
37 See Appendix C.
38 See Appendix D.
closing statements. Similar to the Kennedy-Nixon debates in terms of personal diplomacy, the candidates treated each other respectfully. These debates, however, lacked discussion. The moderator asked questions, candidates answered, and the others might or might not respond. In a post-debate focus group arranged by the Commission on Presidential Debates held the following day, participants voiced concerns that the time constraints restricted candidates from elaborating and fully answering questions. The most striking differences from 1960 to 1992 were that television was in color, creating a more realistic viewing experience, and debates were now an expected part of the election process. The media response to this debate was similar, yet different than the 1960 debates. The New York Times offered a full transcript of the debate, while the Chicago Tribune provided only excerpts. Articles focused more on analysis, allowing for more bias. Focus pivoted from the candidates’ words to the media’s interpretations.

Moving forward another thirty years, the 2020 debates between Trump and Biden provide a stark contrast to both the 1960 and 1992 debates. The candidates stood at two podiums facing the audience, while the seated moderator faced the candidates. Dimmed lights over the audience and spotlights on the moderator and candidates illuminated a highly decorated stage. The format consisted of six, fifteen-minute sections. Each section allowed for two-minute answers from the candidates with the remaining time allotted for discussion and open answers.

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40 Stephan 41.
44 See e.g. Feinsilber, Mike and Page, Susan.
45 See Appendix E.
The greatest difference occurred in diplomacy. Referring to each other on a first-name basis, the candidates continuously yelled over each other and the moderator, firing personal insults. Emotions ran high. The moderator’s role degenerated into that of frustrated referee, struggling to keep the debate on topic and reiterate the rules. Although he constantly cut off answers attempting to move to the next question, the debate focused more on making personal attacks rather than discussing issues.\textsuperscript{46} This event represents a complete failure in both debate and diplomacy. It demonstrates the consequences of utilizing televised debates and other social media platforms in an unhealthy manner that is not beneficial for public political discourse.

Another apparent contrast existed in the media’s immediate response. News stations extracted sections of the debates and discussed the social rather than the political content, such as how the candidates treated each other and the moderator and what effect it had on their campaign.\textsuperscript{47} Kevin Robillard, a senior political reporter, discussed important takeaways from the debate, including that the debate was “absurd” and not influential in changing voters’ minds.\textsuperscript{48} This debate was less about issues and policy and more a form of entertainment and theater.

Theoretically, more informed voters will create a more engaged democracy. As journalist Russell Baker stated, with the Kennedy-Nixon debates, “television replaced newspapers as the most important communication medium in American politics.”\textsuperscript{49} Sixty years later, there remains no doubt that television, along with the internet and social media, allows more people access to political candidates’ campaigns. Can this be considered a success? Politics no longer seems to be about issues, but more about image, personal attacks, and spreading misinformation. Could the


\textsuperscript{47} See e.g. Blitzer, Wolf, and Bauman, Anna.


\textsuperscript{49} Burgan 54.
Kennedy-Nixon debates then be considered a failure? The precedent set by the Kennedy-Nixon debates has long been forgotten because of the failure to keep true to its purpose and intent. The nature of today’s debate debacle could be the failure of first and foremost, the media, and second, the candidates themselves. The present challenge is to restore meaningful dialogue, debate, and personal diplomacy to its rightful place in public discourse. The idea of substantive debate and diplomacy has deteriorated from respectful conversation to personalized and party-specific insults. Consequences result in a nation exceedingly polarized. Similar to how the “shot heard round the world” constituted the catalyst for the American Revolution, the Kennedy-Nixon televised debates ignited the beginning of a revolution that changed presidential election politics. Although not a complete success in that voters more heavily judge candidates by their appearance, the Kennedy-Nixon debates can be considered a success in diplomatically presenting opposing viewpoints in depth. Perhaps, society can hearken back to the Kennedy-Nixon debates as an opportunity to get back on track, using present-day technology to once again captivate the voters’ imaginations and achieve the true meaning of political debate and diplomacy.
Appendix A

Photo from the first Kennedy vs. Nixon Televised Debate


Appendix B

Camera 2, Kennedy’s personal up-close camera during the debates.

The site security diagram, created by the U.S. Secret Service prior to the first Kennedy-Nixon debate.

Pictures taken by Julia Cerimele at the Museum of Broadcast and Communications in Chicago on February 18, 2022.
Appendix C (Data from All Three Debates Discussed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy, Richard M. Nixon</td>
<td>Bill Clinton, George Bush, Ross Perot</td>
<td>Joe Biden, Donald J. Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>September 26, 1960</td>
<td>October 11, 1992</td>
<td>September 29, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>WBBM-TV, CBS affiliate</td>
<td>Field House, Washington University</td>
<td>Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>8:00-9:30 P.M. Eastern</td>
<td>9:00-10:30 P.M. Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Networks: ABC, CBS, NBC</td>
<td>Commission on Presidential Debates (nonprofit organization that is sponsored by both the Republican and Democratic Parties)</td>
<td>Commission on Presidential Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Howard K. Smith, NBC News</td>
<td>Jim Lehrer, PBS</td>
<td>Chris Wallace, Fox News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panelists</td>
<td>Sander Vanocur, NBC News; Charles Warren, Mutual News; Stuart Novins, CBS</td>
<td>Sander Vanocu, independent journalist; Ann Compton, ABC; John Mashek, Boston Globe</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>Bob Fleming, ABC News</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewership</td>
<td>66.4 million</td>
<td>62.4 million (data provided by Nielsen Media Research)</td>
<td>73.1 million (data provided by Nielson Media Research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36.75% of population</td>
<td>24.33% of population</td>
<td>22.05% of population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Eight-minute opening statements; two and a half minute responses to questions; optional rebuttal; three-minute closing statements</td>
<td>No opening statements; each candidate questioned in turn with two minutes to respond; one-minute rebuttal by other candidates; two-minute closing statements</td>
<td>90-minute debate. Six-time segments of approximately 15 minutes, with topics selected and announced beforehand by the moderator. Each segment opened with a question, after which each candidate had two minutes to respond. The moderator used the balance of the time in the segment for discussion of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Domestic Issues</td>
<td>Questions divided between foreign and domestic policy</td>
<td>All Topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Framework</td>
<td>Equal Time Rule suspended</td>
<td>New statutes to bypass Equal Time Rule</td>
<td>New statutes to bypass Equal Time Rule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D

Photo of the First 1992 Debate

Appendix E

Photo of the First Biden-Trump Debate

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Audio Files, Videos, and Photographs


This video of the first Bush vs. Clinton debate provided contrast to the 1960 debates. It is provided by C-span, created by the American Cable Television industry, whose purpose is to serve the public by providing live and video replays of sessions of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, as well as a wealth of historical videos on all aspects of American history. 138 videos exist on American presidential debates on this site.


This audiovisual file of the first televised debate between candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960 provided the actual footage that people viewed on that evening. This was used to verify scholars’ interpretation of the event and to compare it to present-day debates. The file is from the website for the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, which has acquired and preserved primary source materials in all formats that document the life and work of Kennedy, and many parts of the archival collection have been fully or partially digitized and are accessible online.


This source is an audio file of a radio show On Point that occurred the day after the first 2020 debate. It shows the various reactions from the public and provides a contrast to the newspaper clippings following the Kennedy-Nixon debate.


The Museum of Broadcast and Communications in Chicago contains an exhibit which includes one of the cameras that was actually used for the debate. The exhibit also has a floorplan of the debate, which was created by the secret service. This provided an opportunity to observe actual equipment used in the debate.

This is a picture of the 1992 debate. It helped provide contrast with the 1960 debates, especially noting the more decorated stage and the interaction between the candidates.


This is a transcript and video of a discussion on the Kennedy-Nixon debates and how debates have changed over time. This discussion occurs between Kennedy Advisors Ted Sorenson and William Wilson and journalists Russell Baker, Marty Nolan, and Sandy Vanocur, who actually covered the debate. This source was used to gain a perspective of what people who were actually there thought of the debate looking back on it fifty years later and its legacy.

This is a photo of the chairs used for the Kennedy-Nixon debates. It is a part of the Smithsonian National Museum of History’s online collection. It helped gain a clearer physical picture of the 1960 debates.


This is a picture from the first Kennedy-Nixon debate. It helped gain a clear physical picture of the 1960 debates, especially regarding the simplicity of the stage and the formal, almost stoic, yet restrained and respectful, expressions and posture of the candidates.


This is a photo of the 2020 debate. It provides a stark contrast to the 1960 and 1992 debates, specifically noting the dramatic stage and the gesturing, scowling, and aggressive stance of the candidates.


This is a discussion group reviewing and answering questions about the first 1992 debate the day after it occurred. Its purpose was to find out what people can learn from watching debates and how debates can help people become more educated voters. This source was used to gain a better understanding about the public’s thoughts and opinions immediately after the debate.

This is a video of the first debate between candidates Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the 2020 Presidential Election. It provided contrast to the Kennedy-Nixon debate and shows how debates have changed since then.

**Newspaper Articles**


This collection from the online JFK Library archives provides various newspaper clippings following the Kennedy-Nixon debates from both the *New York Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times* dating from October 8–22, 1960. These articles provide transcripts of the second, third, and fourth debates as well as in-depth articles about some of the debate topics. These were used in my research to provide a contrast to newspaper coverage of later debates.


This newspaper article provided excerpts from the first 1992 debate provided by the *Chicago Tribune* the day after the debate. The excerpts show a contrast from the Kennedy-Nixon debates as not all newspapers provided the full transcript, as well as a contrast to the 2020 debates as newspapers provided no transcripts, and most commentary was done online.


This article summarizes the results of the first debate with statements from various people of different positions on who they thought had won and their impressions from the debate. This once again demonstrates how people interpreted the debate and how they reacted to it. It provides contrast to the public’s reaction to the Kennedy-Nixon debates and the Trump-Biden debates.

This article summarizes what occurred during the debate. It covers how the candidates portrayed themselves, how they reacted to each other, and the questions asked during the debate, as well as discussing how the debate impacted each of the candidates’ campaigns. This is an example of the analyses conducted after the 1992 debates and how the public reacted to these debates and used in comparison to the 1960 and 2020 debates.


This a transcript of first 1992 debate provided by the New York Times the day after the debate. It was used as a comparison to the post-debate media coverage of the 1960 debates, since in 1992 only some newspapers provided transcripts of the debate.

**Transcripts**


This is a transcript of a CNN news show discussing the diplomacy of the first presidential debate between Biden and Trump. It was used in this research as a representative example of how media covered the debate focusing more on the lack of diplomacy rather than issues.


The above three citations contain transcripts of the debates discussed in this paper. These transcripts were found on the website for the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1987 to ensure that debates between candidates for President and Vice President became a permanent part of the election process. CPD has sponsored all of the
presidential debates since 1988 and is also involved in research and educational activities relating to the debates.


This is a transcript of a CNN news show discussing certain topics of the first 2020 debate. Specifically, it focuses on Trump’s refusal to condemn a right-wing extremist group gathering during the first debate and the increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths. It presents a large contrast to the previously mentioned elections as voters before had not physically gotten involved in debates.


This is the transcript of the first 1960 debate. It was used to further clarify and analyze exactly what was said and covered in this debate. The transcript was also helpful to examine the issues discussed without the distraction of the visual element.

**Other**


This is Nixon’s extensive autobiography that spans the time from his earliest childhood memories through his time as president. The portion used for this research was when he discussed the debates and how he felt regarding how they affected the election.


This analysis of the Kennedy-Nixon debate was written on September 29, 1960, three days after the actual debate, by Richard M. Scammon. Scammon was the director of the Census Bureau from 1961-1965 and the founder of the Election Research Center. This analysis includes a study twenty-four hours after the debate to analyze the immediate impact of the debate and also provides a contrast to the analyses written today.

This provides data about the amount of homes that owned a television in the U.S. In 1950, 9% of houses owned a TV, but this number rose to 87.1% in 1960.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Academic Studies:

This article is a result of a study done by James Druckman, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Minnesota at the time of the study. It provided information about an experiment he did by using the Kennedy vs. Nixon televised debate. This article was used in this research to show how impactful the debates were on the general public, in particular the addition of the visual element.


This was a study by John Ellsworth five years after the Kennedy-Nixon debates that analyzes the 1960 presidential campaign debates to see if the debate format gave voters more substantial statements of position and arguments from the candidates. Ellsworth was on the faculty of the California State College at Hayward during this time. The study was utilized in this research to propose a possible success of the debates in creating more informed voters.


This is a study done by William Hart, Victor Otatti, and Nathaniel Krumdick. Hart is from the University of Alabama, Otatti and Krumdick are from Loyola University Chicago. The study was used in this research to support the claim that image now matters more than issues in politics.

Articles:
This is an article by Rob Crotty, a staff writer at the National Archives Office of Strategy and Communications reflecting on the Kennedy-Nixon debates fifty years after they occurred. The article is used to demonstrate how the debates impacted the public and what impact the visual representation of the candidates affected voters.


This article provided an analysis of the study cited above by James Druckman published in The Journal of Politics. It presented information about Druckman’s findings and conclusion, specifically that although the televised debate helped viewers learn more about political issues, it also distracted them from the candidates’ opinions on those issues and focus more on personality and appearance. It provided further support in my claim of the distraction and newfound importance on image in politics.


This is the website for the Constitution Center in Philadelphia, which is a private, non-profit organization that aims to educate about constitutional topics and debate. It provided insight on the Kennedy-Nixon debate and how it was perceived by the public.


This article discusses the details of the debate, such as the physical differences between Kennedy and Nixon, as well as the public’s reactions to the debate. It compares the 1960 debate to political events, such as the 1992 debate and election in which appearance affected the outcome. This source was used to gain further perspective on how the 1960 debates affected subsequent debates and elections.


This article talks about how social media platforms work and how they can affect political advertisements. It provided information on the negative effect social media can have on a candidate’s campaign. This information was used to consider the ongoing effects of image in presidential elections.

This article on NPR provided information on the negative impacts of such a high usage of social media due to the pandemic and how it affects politics and people’s political perspectives. NPR, National Public Radio, is a nonprofit media organization whose mission is to help create a more informed public with an approximate weekly audience of 53 million through its radio shows, podcasts, online articles, and other formats. The article supported this research in examining one of the consequences of visual media in presidential elections.


This article highlights important details from the debate. Although it does focus on political issues, it also showcases the candidates’ responses to each other and the lack of respect shown. The article provides comparison to the previous debates discussed, as the response to the 2020 debate focused much more on the social aspects rather than political issues.


This article discusses the importance of presidential debates and how the Kennedy-Nixon debates were allowed to be televised. Newton Minow, Henry Geller, Richard Wiley, all graduates of Northwestern University law school, discovered a legal way to reintroduce and continue televised presidential debates. This provided information as to why televised debates were able to continue.


This article on the official website of the United States Senate provided historical highlights of major events which included an article with information on the first ever televised debate, a debate between two women serving as surrogates for the actual presidential candidates. This provided interesting yet little known information on the subject of the first televised debate.


Besides discussing the debate, this article provided interesting information about how the seeds were planted for a televised debate in the previous elections. It provided
background information for research on how the Kennedy-Nixon debate occurred in the first place.

Books:


This book, published recently, uses a lens of sixty years to look back at the Kennedy Nixon debates in great depth. It was used in this research to look at how the candidates prepared for the debates, the debates themselves, and briefly considers the debates that occurred subsequently after the Kennedy-Nixon debates until 2016. It also provided information as to why further debates did not occur until sixteen years after the Kennedy-Nixon debates.


This book provides a more in-depth discussion about the role of television in presidential campaigns. It also offers more details about the negotiation process of scheduling the debates, in particular covering the 1960-1984 debates. This aided my research in understanding the important role television played in the 1960s.


Minow was appointed by President John F. Kennedy as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, co-chaired the presidential debates for the National League of Women voters and at the time of publication was co-vice chair of the Commission on Presidential Debates. Lamay was an associate professor at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism at the time of publication. This book details Minow and Lamay’s suggestions for future debates, and supported the stance that the debates gave Kennedy more publicity and also outlined the impact the debate had on the public.


This book, specifically the chapter on the debate, was useful in provided details otherwise unknown. The book itself covers in depth the entire election from the primaries to the actual election. Chapter Eleven was the chapter that greatly contributed to my research, as it provided in depth detail about the debates specifically.
Miscellaneous


These sources provide general details of the debates discussed in this paper. It provided specifics such as the time, date, viewership, sponsors, format, and topic.


This page in the Library of Congress website provides portraits of all the presidents of the United States in one location. It provided me with a source to compare the appearance of presidents throughout the history of the United States.


This is the official website for the United States Census Bureau, which provided information on Richard M. Scammon, a prominent political analyst who wrote an analysis of the Kennedy-Nixon debate. It was used to verify Scammon’s expertise when examining the article he wrote.


This source provides the U.S. population by year, gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau. It was used to discern what percentage of the population watched the presidential debate in different years.