

# 2 Problems on Kennedy

## Democrats May Lose Votes in 1960 By Nominating a Catholic or Not

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 31—The political implications of nominating a Roman Catholic for the Presidency are now coming increasingly to the fore in the Capital. With Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts quietly increasing his influence with Democratic politicians, what was primarily a matter of

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private speculation at the start of the year is now being openly debated from the public platform.

The American Catholic Historical Association, for example, not only discussed "the Catholic question in Presidential campaigns" here this week, but touched obliquely on one issue that has seldom been mentioned outside of private discussions of the 1960 campaign.

This is not the usual issue of the dangers of alienating some non-Catholic voters by nominating a Catholic, but the opposite: Namely, the dangers of alienating Catholic voters by passing over a popular Catholic candidate.

### Confronted by 2 Issues

The more the Democrats have studied the possibility of nominating a Catholic, the more they have become aware of the fact that Kennedy's bid for the Presidency confronts them, not with one question, but with two.

The obvious one is: Will the Democratic party lose a great many Protestant votes if it nominates a Catholic? This has been debated for thirty years ever since the defeat of Al Smith in 1928. But the other question, now entering the debate is also significant: Will the Democratic party lose a great many Catholic votes if it seems to be passing up Kennedy because he is a Catholic?

The large audience at the Joint Session of the American Catholic Historical Association and the American Historical Association debated the first question at length, but touched on the second question only vaguely and briefly.

Prof. Edmund A. Moore of the University of Connecticut, who has made a scholarly study of the 1928 Presidential campaign, touched on the second question only in relation to the nomination of Smith in 1928.

### Smith's Urban Hold Noted

"His [Smith's] prestige was

without risking the charge that it did so on religious grounds.

If there were some other Democratic candidate who was clearly ahead of the field, this would not be a major problem. But as time passes, the religious issue is likely to be debated more and more. And in the process Kennedy is likely to become, not just another candidate, but a symbol and center of political and religious controversy.

Nobody likes this in Washington, Catholic or non-Catholic, but that is the way with politics. Professional politicians usually operate on the principle that they should reject any candidate who might antagonize any large bloc of voters. Thus many of them are opposed to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson because he is a Southerner; to Adlai E. Stevenson because he has been defeated twice; to Gov. J. Menen Williams of Michigan because he is popularly identified with Walter P. Reuther and organized labor; to Senator Hubert H. Humphrey because he is said to be "too far to the left."

But Kennedy is a more complex problem. For if he is nominated, he may antagonize many Protestant votes, and if he is rejected after a couple of years of debate on the religious controversy, many Catholics may feel he was spurned on religious grounds.

For a party that needs the votes of all religious groups, particularly in the cities, this is a problem for which no prominent Democrat has yet found an answer.

very high." Professor Moore noted, "and his hold on urban voters was so great that, if his bid for the nomination failed, serious damage to the Democratic party could be expected. \* \* \*

"Smith was a hero candidate whose political liabilities were decisively counterbalanced by the danger of paying too high a price in urban votes if he were spurned."

There was nothing in the public discussion to suggest any threat that Catholics would vote Republican or stay home if Kennedy was rejected on religious grounds. Nevertheless, there was a reminder in the analogy with the Smith candidacy that the religious issue can cut both ways, and this is a point that is being increasingly talked about in private here among political leaders.

Kennedy's strength, like Smith's, lies with the urban voters. It was the defection of many voters in the normally Democratic urban areas that produced the overwhelming Democratic defeats of 1952 and 1956. The chances of a Democratic victory in 1960 lie in recreating the so-called "Roosevelt coalition" of the Democratic South and the big-city vote of the North. And a large part of the so-called big-city vote in the states with the largest number of electoral votes is composed of citizens of the Catholic faith.

#### **Catholics More Numerous**

In 1928, when Al Smith opposed Herbert Hoover for the Presidency, there were 19,994,000 Catholics in the United States. Today there are approximately 36,500,000. The total population of the nation thirty years ago was 122,800,000. Now it is over 175,000,000. Also, there has been a shift of the population into the cities in the last thirty years—from 56 per cent in 1928 to 63.5 per cent today.

Thus the city vote, which tends to be decisive in the key states of New York, Pennsylvania and California, is more important to victory now than it was then, and the proportion of Catholics in the cities now is greater than it was when Al Smith made his unsuccessful bid.

All this confronts the Democrats with a dilemma that becomes more acute with the passing of time. Kennedy has gained steadily in the race during the last year. The prospect is that he will play a prominent role in the Eighty-sixth Congress starting next month, and that he will be "the man to beat" in the Democratic primary elections of 1960.

Certainly none of the other Democratic candidates has shown much enthusiasm for risking a race with him in any primary election outside their own states. And the longer he remains in the headlines as a leading candidate, the more difficult it will become for the Democratic party to reject him