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Landslide Lyndon

Where did the moniker "Landslide Lyndon" come from, referring to Lyndon B. Johnson? Lyndon Johnson did win the 1964 presidential race in a landslide over the hapless senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater, but that's not when LBJ got his famous nickname. The bigger-than-life Texan picked up "Landslide Lyndon" in 1948, in a runoff race for the U.S. Senate, and it was meant ironically.

When the votes were counted on election day (Saturday, August 28, 1948), it seemed that Johnson had been narrowly defeated by one of the most popular governors in Texas history, Coke Stevenson. LBJ, no pushover, had served for 11 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and developed the reputation of being a "Texas wunderkind."^[1] Nevertheless, the result looked bad for Johnson. Presidential historian Robert Dallek writes:



"According to the Texas Election Bureau, an unofficial election agency run by Texas newspapers, Stevenson led at midnight by 2,119 votes out of 939,468 counted. 'Well, it looks like we've lost,' Lady Bird told Dorothy Nichols on the phone."^[2]

Or so it seemed. The votes kept coming in and the results went back and forth; victory was now declared for Stevenson, now for Johnson, now for Stevenson. After most of the tallies, the governor held a slight advantage. Then, six days after the election, a funny thing happened: 203 votes turned up in Box 13 from the pint-sized town of Alice, Texas. Even funnier: 202 of those votes were for Lyndon Johnson. The Stevenson campaign smelled a rat when it was discovered that the votes had been cast at the last minute and in alphabetical order. Charges of election fraud ensued, and the disputed contest went all the way to the Supreme Court, where Justice Hugo Black upheld Johnson's 11th-hour win. He was declared the winner by 87 votes.

It would take almost three decades for the truth to out. As Thomas Woods reports, in 1977 "the election judge in Alice admitted that he had helped rig the election."^[3] "Landslide Lyndon" always found a way to win.
(*Question from Pat O. of Gainesville, FL*)

^[1] Robert J. Dallek, "Lyndon B. Johnson," in *The American Presidency*, ed. Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2004), p. 411.

^[2] Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 327.

^[3] Thomas E. Woods Jr., *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004), p. 216.