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"Can you believe they put a man on the moon?" The Apollo Program. (3)

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# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION DURING THE SPACE RACE

**Abstract**

While the story of the race to land humans on the moon is often told from the perspective of US ingenuity, there was much more international cooperation in the lead up to this important milestone than is often recognized. From a political science perspective, such cooperation is highly unexpected. Mainstream theories of international relations, such as neo-realism, tend to assume that the Space Race fits squarely into explanations based on the great power rivalry and competition that characterized the Cold War. And given that the Soviet Union and the US had many tense stand-offs, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, political scientists would assume that little to no scientific sharing occurred, especially scientific advancements that could add to military advantage. Indeed, this narrative of a world bent on power competition, and devoid of trust or shared norms, has permeated into the popular discourse about the Space Race, becoming common wisdom. Drawing upon new and extensive archival research at the JFK Presidential Library, NASA Headquarters, National Archives Records Administration, and European Space Agency, among others, this paper shows that there was much more to the Space Race than super-power competition. While competition helped to spur on key innovations in spaceflight, the historical record also shows that the success of the moon landing depended heavily on prior international cooperation. Focusing on the period from the International Geophysical Year (1957) to Apollo 11 (1969), this paper advances a new theory about international cooperation that emphasizes the importance of non-state actors, key individuals, widespread public support, and international and transnational collaboration. Beyond the Space Race, this theoretical approach, which rests on the human evolutionary predisposition to be social, can be applied to other instances of unanticipated and unexpected international cooperation. With respect to the case of space, this paper concludes that these early years of human spaceflight set the tone for future forays into space and that the cooperative underpinnings of it continues to this day, from the operation of the international space station to the current flourishing of new actors in space. As Stephen Hawking said in 2016, "We are entering a new space age and I hope this will create a new unity. Space exploration has already been a great unifier, we seem able to cooperate between nations in space in a way we can only envy on Earth."