



**THE WHITE HOUSE  
TRANSITION PROJECT**  
1997—2017

RICE UNIVERSITY'S  
**BAKER INSTITUTE**  
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

***SMOOTHING THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF DEMOCRATIC POWER***

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**Report 2017—40**

**PRESIDENTIAL INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS:  
SIX OBSERVATIONS**

Martha Joynt Kumar, *Director, White House Transition Project*  
*Professor Emeritus, Tomson University*

*Funded by the*  
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## WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

**The White House Transition Project.** Established in 1999 to provide information to incoming White House staff members so that they can hit the ground running, The White House Transition Project includes a group of presidency scholars from across the country who participate in writing essays about past transitions and the inner workings of key White House offices. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2009 and now the 2017 presidential transitions with the primary goal of streamlining the process and enhancing the understanding of White House operations. WHTP maintains an important, international dimension by consulting with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions. <http://whitehousetransitionproject.org>

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# **PRESIDENTIAL INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS: SIX OBSERVATIONS**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Their relationship may not be a genial one, but throughout our history presidents and the news organizations who cover them have worked together to meet their individual publicity needs. For a little over a century now, presidents have answered reporters queries in the formal setting of presidential press conferences and, in recent years, in the less formal settings of short question-and-answer sessions as well as interviews with one or more reporters. These three types of interchanges between presidents and the reporters who cover them lie at the heart of the relationship between the two.

Below are six observations about the interchanges that recent presidents have had with news organizations and what they tell us about the nature of the relationship between the two. First, below is a summary of the numbers for the three types of interchanges Presidents Obama, George W. Bush, Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Reagan had with reporters. Attached to these observations are tables for patterns of presidential press conferences from President Wilson through President Obama as well as a more detailed summary of the three types interchanges for the five presidents.





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**PRESIDENTIAL INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS:  
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**1. CONTINUITY AND COOPERATION CHARACTERIZE THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND NEWS  
ORGANIZATIONS**

From George Washington forward, all our presidents have had a relationship with the news organizations of their time. The same truth has remained for chief executives no matter their party or ideology: presidents need the press. The press is critical for a president because it is his link to the public. For the press, the relationship is crucial because the president is central to their readers' and viewers' concept of news. Because of their mutual need, presidents have allowed reporters space in the White House and, in 1902, in the West Wing. Their relationship is often contentious for both sides, but that contention does not stop them from cooperating with one another.

*PRESS AT THE WHITE HOUSE*

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Daily, there are over 100 print, radio, and television reporters, television camera crew members, and photographers stationed at the White House to carry what the president and his surrogates say about him and his plans, reactions, and his words. Their presence is an important resource for the president and his team to connect with those he wants to reach. They represent an asset that no other person or institution has in the American political

system. Presidents and their staffs have taken advantage of that resource by having them as a regular White House presence since 1895 when reporters were first stationed at the White House as a beat. At that time, William Price and a handful of other reporters sat at a table outside of the presidential secretary's office on the second floor of the White House down the hall from the President's office.

### *CONTINUITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND NEWS ORGANIZATIONS*

Once the president's staff budget increased in 1929 to provide sufficient funds to dedicate an aide to press relations, there was no going back. From that time forward, there has been someone on the White House staff with the press portfolio. Other than the executive clerk, the press position is the longest-serving continuing staff position in the White House Office.

**Table 1. Presidential Interchanges with Reporters: 1981-2016\***

President	Press Conferences			Short Q&A	Interviews	Total Interchanges
	Total	Solo	Joint			
Obama	156	65	91	107	1,070	1,333
G.W. Bush	209	51	158	463	452	1,124
Clinton	193	62	131	1,011	302	1,506
G.H.W. Bush	143	85	58	335	383	861
Reagan	45	45	0	269	438†	752

\*At the 7.7-year mark for four presidents and G.H.W. Bush at the four-year mark. See definition of the three categories in "Summary of Presidential Interchanges with Reporters."

†Through 10/9/87.

## **2. VENUES WHERE PRESIDENTS MEET THE PRESS: PRESS CONFERENCES, SHORT QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSIONS, INTERVIEWS**

With a press staff and a pattern of press conferences, presidential interchanges with reporters were well established early in the 20th century. In the latter half of the century, presidents developed other venues to meet with the press, particularly short question-and-answer sessions and interviews. While a president needs to respond to reporters' demands for the opportunity to question him, he has a great deal of flexibility in how and where he does so. He can make changes in the rules and in the meeting arrangements as several presidents have done.

### PRESS CONFERENCES BECOME A HIGH-RISK FORUM

Presidential press conferences were off the record sessions from 1913 until 1953 when President Eisenhower made them on the record sessions beginning December 16, 1953. He made them more public still by having them televised beginning on January 19, 1955. Even though the televised sessions were not broadcast live and could be edited, press conferences became a high-risk forum. Subsequently, presidents developed additional venues for meeting with reporters where presidential misstatements were less likely and not as much preparation was needed.

Because President Reagan had fewer press conferences than his predecessors, he found responding to reporters' shouted questions to be a useful way of providing personal responses to their queries and dampen the pressure for a news conference. While he had only 45 press conference at the 7.7-year mark in his presidency, he did respond to reporters' brief queries 269 times. Prior to President Reagan, a chief executive's most numerous contacts with reporters were in a press conference setting.

As presidents chose to do fewer press conferences, in addition to the short question-and-answer sessions, they increased their one-on-one and group interviews with reporters. President Obama has set the presidential record with the most interviews of any chief executive.

## **3. PRESS CONFERENCES SERVE AS A CONSTANT AND FLEXIBLE FORUM FOR PRESIDENTS**

Every president from Woodrow Wilson through Barack Obama has conducted press conferences as a central communications strategy. At the same time, however, presidents have adapted the forum to meet their personal interests and strengths as well as the political and news environment of their time in office.

### ON THE RECORD BRINGS DWINDLING PRESS CONFERENCE NUMBERS

When the sessions were held on an off-the-record basis from Woodrow Wilson through Harry Truman, presidents regularly met with reporters. During those forty years, President Coolidge held the most press conferences for his time in office with an average of 93.3 a year. Franklin Roosevelt was next with 84.1. Once the sessions become on-the-record events in the Eisenhower administration, the annual press conference numbers drop precipitously. Presidents and their staffs worry about presidential misstatements, bad timing, and consider the benefits of holding them. Eisenhower held an average of 24 a year with none of his successors holding more solo press conferences than he held.

### NIGHTTIME EAST ROOM PRESS CONFERENCES

While President Nixon held nighttime news conferences in the East Room, it was President Reagan who set the standard. With only three networks at the time and with all of them having a strong interest in news coverage, they covered his conferences as important news events. Of President Reagan's 46 news conferences during his eight years, 30 were nighttime East Room ones. Since that time, networks have not been interested in carrying

the sessions at a time when their high-revenue generating entertainment programs are on the air. Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama all had four such nighttime sessions in their eight years in office.

#### JOINT PRESS CONFERENCES WITH FOREIGN LEADERS

President Franklin Roosevelt held rare press conferences with foreign leaders, such as those he did with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Occasionally, he and his budget director answered questions about the annual budget the president was sending to Congress, but joint press conferences were unusual events comprising only 3.2 percent of his sessions. Forty-four years after the Roosevelt presidency, President George H. W. Bush revived and expanded the forum. Fully 41 percent of his press conferences were joint ones held almost exclusively with foreign leaders. As a president interested in foreign policy, Bush found the joint sessions a useful opportunity for him and the foreign leaders he met with to describe and explain their sessions.

#### SUCCESSORS FOLLOW PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH'S EXAMPLE

Since President George H.W. Bush established the importance of the joint press conference, his three successors have held more joint than solo sessions. While useful for presidential diplomatic purposes, they have proved less popular with reporters because of the limited number of reporters called on. Usually it is only two or three reporters from each side who get to pose questions. That is substantially fewer reporters than in a solo news conference.

## **4. PRESIDENT OBAMA ESTABLISHED INTERVIEWS AS THE DOMINANT FORUM FOR INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS**

President Obama conducted more interviews than Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton combined. At the 7.7-year mark, Obama had held 1,070 interviews compared with 452 for Bush and 302 for Clinton during the same period. Obama's preference for interviews reflects both his personal style and developments in the media. President Obama preferred long-form sessions with a reporter or reporters where he could discuss a topic in depth, such as those he held on foreign policy topics with Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic* and the off-the-record sessions he had with columnists. Unless there is a crisis or a burning issue, the randomness of the questions in a press conference mean there will not be a discussion on any one topic.

#### PRESIDENTS REACH TARGET AUDIENCES THROUGH INTERVIEWS

President Obama's preference for interviews also reflects the current atomized media environment where people get their news from many different sources rather than, as long was the case, with a few elite national newspapers and magazines and with regional and local newspapers, many of which no longer exist. President Reagan, for example, regularly answered questions posed by reporters representing *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *U.S.*

*News and World Report*, all publications that no longer have print editions. At different points in their tenure, presidents favor certain types of interviews. During election years, presidents do many more local interviews than they would normally do. President George H.W. Bush did 92 percent of his local interviews in the year prior to the 1992 election.

**Table 2. Presidential Interviews, Targeted Audiences, 1981-2016\***

President	Greatest Percent of Total	Second	Third	Total Number of Interviews
Obama	National / 43%	Local / 25%	Specialty / 22%	1,070
G. W. Bush	National / 47%	Foreign / 31%	Local / 9%	452
Clinton	National / 37%	Local / 33%	Specialty / 15%	302
G.H.W. Bush	Local / 51%	National / 31%	Foreign / 7%	382
Reagan†	National / 62%	Local / 16%	Foreign / 15%	437

\*At the 7.7-year mark for four presidents and G.H.W. Bush at the four-year mark. See definition of Audience in “Summary of Presidential Interchanges with Reporters.” The categories for Audience are: National, Regional and Local, Foreign, Specialty (Ethnic News Organizations), Sports, Mixed. A *60 Minutes* interview, for example, is categorized as National while an interview with a Dallas television anchor would be Local. A radio interview with an African-American station would be in the Specialty category.

†Through 10/9/87.

The audiences that presidents target depend on their initiatives and the available resources to reach them. When President Obama wanted to encourage young people to sign up for the Affordable Care Act, for example, he scheduled interviews with online organizations where young people got their news.

When he was pressing Congress for passage of Trade Promotion Authority legislation, he did interviews with local television anchors in markets where there were undecided members of Congress. In an earlier time, those presidential interviews would have been with local newspapers.

Which type of media presidents favor depends on their objectives and what people watch, read, and listen to. Television remains dominant in the last two dozen years. New television opportunities arose with the advent of cable television coming to the White House. CNN came in the early 1980s with Fox and MSNBC joining in in 1996. Ironically the master of television, President Reagan did more print than television interviews. On the other hand, his televised press conferences were an important aspect of his overall communications with little need to do many televised interviews. The significant elements of his media environment included national news magazines as well as large and small newspapers.

Radio was a personal favorite medium for President Clinton because he often used radio when he was governor of Arkansas. It has the benefit of taking little presidential time and most often answering questions from hosts who appreciate having a president to talk to. When President Obama was running for reelection and working on behalf of members of Congress who were running in off years, he spent more time doing radio with African-American and Latino radio hosts than he did during non-election years. President Clinton so

loved radio that when he was in Chappaqua, New York, for election day 2000, in two days he did 46 radio interviews.

**Table 3. Presidential Interviews, Types of Media, 1981-2016\***

President	Greatest Percent of Total	Second	Third	Total Number of Interviews
Obama	Television / 56%	Radio / 20%	Print / 17%	1,070
G. W. Bush	Television / 53%	Print / 41%	Mixed / 3%	452
Clinton	Radio / 43%	Television / 37%	Print / 18%	302
G.H.W. Bush	Television / 58%	Print / 28%	Radio / 11%	382
Reagan†	Print / 71%	Television / 22%	Mixed / 4%	437

\*At the 7.7-year mark for four presidents and G.H.W. Bush at the four-year mark. See definition of Media in “Summary of Presidential Interchanges with Reporters.” The categories for Media are: Television, Print, Radio, Mixed, Online Media.

†Through 10/9/87.

## **5. HISTORICALLY, 20-30 PERCENT OF A PRESIDENT’S PUBLIC APPEARANCES ARE ONES RESPONDING TO REPORTERS’ QUERIES**

When counting all a president’s public appearances, sessions where he answers reporters’ queries compose a significant portion of the total occurrences. Media opportunities may have changed, but what has not changed is the general proportion that they make up of all presidential appearances.

When President Eisenhower was in office, approximately 20 percent of his public appearances were interchanges with the reporters. Specifically, his press conferences because they were the only interchanges he had with reporters. For President Obama, his press conferences, short question-and-answer sessions, and his interviews come to approximately 30 percent of his public remarks. Presidents and their staffs use whatever venues and media they believe will get to the people they want to reach on the terms they want to do so. For Eisenhower, who served at the beginning of the rising presence of television in homes, televised press conferences gave him the opportunity to be seen in a way other presidents had not. At that time, Oval Office speeches were covered by television, but others were not.

### RECENT DWINDLING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

Presidents Obama and George W. Bush gave fewer speeches than President Clinton, who established a high-water mark of over 4,241 speeches and remarks at the 7.7-year mark of his presidency. President Obama was down by 1,000 to 3,290, almost a 25 percent drop. While cable television is often willing to carry speeches, presidents and their staffs have found fewer people follow presidential remarks with the result that staff seek alternative

ways of communicating a president's messages. Whether it is through social media or through radio, television, or print, presidents use the media that will get them to their publics.

## **6. GETTING DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE: PRESIDENTS FOLLOW THE MEDIA CHOICES THAT BROUGHT THEM TO THE WHITE HOUSE**

For President Eisenhower, television was important to his 1952 win. He then brought it into the presidency as an important element for his communications strategy. Press Secretary James Hagerty worked with Kodak in 1953 to develop lighting that would not disturb the president in a press conference setting. In a 1954 diary entry, Hagerty wrote about releasing a statement to television, radio, and newsreels. He wrote: "To hell with slanted reporters, we'll go directly to the people who can hear exactly what Pres [Eisenhower] said without reading warped and slated stories."<sup>1</sup> Hagerty expressed a sentiment and interest felt at one point or another by his predecessors and successors in the press secretary post.

### *CHOOSING MEDIA TO SEND PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGES*

James Hagerty was doing what all presidents and their press staffs have done, which is to rely on media that helped in the president's election. For Eisenhower that was television as it was for Kennedy and most of the other presidents who followed. In recent years, it was social media that propelled Barack Obama through the primaries and the general election. Social media were a favorite vehicle for him to reach his followers. That was true for both the activists who organized and came out to work for him and his supporters who followed him on Facebook and other social media where people were getting news.

For the future, presidential communications teams see the public as reading less, watching less news, and when they do, they read online. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 62 percent of adults in the United States get their news through social media and 18 percent "do so often."<sup>2</sup> That is up from 49 percent in 2012. Of those, 64 percent get their news from one site only. President-elect Trump's favored social media site—Twitter—has fewer users than Facebook, but 59 percent of them say that is where they get their news. Twitter helped Trump get to the White House, and like his predecessors, he is likely to use it going forward even if he and his communications team find they need to use other sources as well.

### *WHITE HOUSE FRUSTRATION WITH NEW ORGANIZATIONS*

What irked Hagerty to exclaim, "to hell with slanted reporters" was the frustration he felt at reporters who he believed were not telling the straight story. Hagerty knew that how an administration is portrayed in the press is important to the perception the public has of

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, James C. Hagerty Papers, James Hagerty Diary, March 4, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, "News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016," Pew Research Center, May 26, 2016.

the success or failure of an administration's actions. In his first transcribed press conference (March 22, 1913), President Wilson explained in his opening statement why "newspapermen" were so important to how an administration is perceived by the public and what led him to take them so seriously as to create presidential press conferences. He remarked: "I feel that a large part of the success of public affairs depends on the newspapermen—not so much on the editorial writers, because we can live down what they say, as upon the news writers, because the news is the atmosphere of public affairs. Unless you get the right setting to affairs—disperse the right impress—things go wrong."<sup>3</sup> The quest for the "right impression" of a president, his actions and goals leads all presidents to respond to reporters' queries. Though they all recognize the importance of reporters, they have discovered ways to blend the needs of reporters with their own style and interests.

## SUMMARY OF PRESIDENTIAL INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS

The figures in this section are based on counts of official public events as found in White House press releases and cross-checked with, first, the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents (earlier from the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents), published by the National Archives and Records Administration; second, the entries of public presidential utterances included in the Public Papers of the President as found on The American Presidency website, <http://www.americanpresidency.org>; and, third, the presidential schedule and press releases for each day that I receive from the Press Office. My headings are based on ones used by the National Archives, though I aggregate them into my own categories.

**Press Conferences.** Press conferences are divided into Solo and Joint sessions. The latter are usually held together with a foreign leader where each answers questions from an equal number of reporters evenly divided between the foreign and White House press corps members present. Both leaders first make statements, usually about what was discussed in their meeting, and then take questions. Solo sessions tend to be longer ones. I have noted how many Solo sessions a president has held in the White House compound. I have also noted how many of the Solo sessions were prime time East Room press conferences. President George H.W. Bush is the first president to use Joint press conferences on a regular basis and his successors have continued the trend he began. His predecessors did so only occasionally.

**Short Question-and-Answer Sessions.** "Short Question-and-Answer Sessions" are events where only a small number of reporters representing the White House press corps—a pool—are allowed in to question the president. This category is composed of the National Archives designation of "Exchanges with Reporters" where the president may or may not make remarks at the same time. If he has a speech that is designated by the National Archives as "Remarks and Exchange with Reporters," it is counted twice in my tabulations. His remarks are counted separately in the "Addresses and Remarks" category while the interchange with reporters is counted in the "Short Question-and-Answer Sessions" category.

**Interviews.** Unlike all of the other categories, interviews are only occasionally publicly released. They are regarded as the property of the news organization and, with some

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<sup>3</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *The Complete Press Conferences, 1913-1919*, edited by Robert C. Hildebrand, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol. 50 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 3.

exceptions, the individual organizations control whether and when transcripts are release. For the Obama, George W. Bush, and William Clinton administrations, my figures represent internal counts maintained by White House staff as well as additional interviews I find that may not have been listed on the White House file.

For the interview numbers for Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, I have used the White House Daily Diary, which is compiled from official internal records by the Diarist, an employee of the National Archives and Records Administration. The Daily Diary for President Reagan can be found online at <https://reaganlibrary.gov/digital-library/daily-diary>. The Daily Diary for President George H.W. Bush is available through the Miller Center at the University of Virginia (<http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/documents/ghb/diary>), but the diary information only goes through 1990. The full White House Daily Diary for President George H.W. Bush is available at the George H.W. Bush Library in College Station, Texas. That is the diary I used. For Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, the President's Daily Diary offers a more complete picture of the president's interactions with those associated with news organizations because the diaries capture the phone calls they place and those they receive. Even when they are brief, I include these phone contacts in my counts because the information exchanged between the president and the journalist will be used in some way by them and/or their news organizations in their articles or planning of their news coverage. The White House Daily Diary for Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton have not yet been made public so that excellent source is not yet available. When the diaries are available, I will go back through my lists and update with phone calls with reporters and other interviews that were not included in their internal lists.

**Speeches.** Speeches to Joint Sessions of Congress, State of the Union, Inaugural Addresses, and Addresses to the Nation form my category Addresses to the Nation. The Weekly Addresses category includes formal Radio Addresses in the Reagan, George W. Bush, and Clinton administrations as well as the radio addresses in the Obama administration that are titled "Weekly Address" presented on several platforms, including YouTube and television as well as radio. Other radio addresses are included in Radio Addresses as well, such as those given by George H.W. Bush, who did not regularly do weekly radio addresses as did the others. President Reagan was the first president to adopt and then maintain a practice of delivering weekly radio addresses. Except for President George H.W. Bush, all of his successors have followed his practice from the early days of their administrations. Any radio addresses by any of the five presidents was put into the Radio Addresses category. All other remarks and speeches publicly given by the president form my "addresses and remarks" subcategory.

### *PRESS CONFERENCES*

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#### President Barack Obama

- January 20, 2009–September 30, 2016: 156 (65 Solo, 91 Joint)
- White House Solo: 35
- Nighttime East Room press conferences: 4 in 2009 (February 9; March 24; April 29; July 22)

President George W. Bush

- January 20, 2001–September 30, 2008: 209 (51 Solo, 158 Joint); Total 2001-2009: 211 (52 Solo, 159 Joint)
- White House Solo: 45
- Nighttime East Room press conferences: 4 (October 11, 2001; March 6, 2003; April 13, 2004; April 28, 2005)

President Bill Clinton

- January 20, 1993–September 30, 2000: 193 (62 Solo, 131 Joint); Total 1993-2001: 193 (62 Solo, 131 Joint)
- White House Solo: 45
- Nighttime East Room press conferences: 4 (June 17, 1993; March 24, 1994; August 3, 1994; April 18, 1995)

President George H.W. Bush

- January 20, 1989–January 20, 1993 (no second term): 143 (85 Solo, 58 Joint); Total 1989-1993: 143 (85 Solo, 58 Joint)
- White House Solo: 60
- Nighttime East Room press conferences: 2 (June 8, 1989; June 4, 1992)

President Ronald Reagan

- January 20, 1981–September 30, 1988: 45 (45 Solo, 0 Joint); Total 1981-1989: 46 (46 Solo; 0 Joint)
- White House Solo: 39
- Nighttime East Room press conferences: 30 (Total: 31)

#### SHORT QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSIONS

President Barack Obama

- January 20, 2009–September 30, 2016: 187

President George W. Bush

- January 20, 2001–September 30, 2008: 463

President Bill Clinton

- January 20, 1993–September 30, 2000: 1,011

President George H.W. Bush

- January 20 1989–January 20 1993 (no second term): 335

President Ronald Reagan

- January 20, 1981–September 30, 1988: 269

## *INTERVIEWS*

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President Barack Obama

- January 20, 2009–September 30, 2016: 1,070

President George W. Bush

- January 20, 2001–September 30, 2007: 452

President Bill Clinton

- January 20, 1993–September 30, 1999: 302

President George H.W. Bush

- January 20, 1989–January 20, 1993 (no second term): 383

President Ronald Reagan

- January 20, 1981–October 9, 1987: 438 (Reagan Foundation took Reagan's Diary and the President's Daily Diary off its website)

## *ADDRESSES AND REMARKS*

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President Barack Obama

- January 20, 2009–September 30, 2016: 3,290 (24 Addresses to Nation; 392 weekly and radio addresses; 2,874 addresses and remarks)

President George W. Bush

- January 20, 2001–September 30, 2008: 3,776 (34 Addresses to Nation; 399 radio addresses; 3,343 addresses and remarks)

President Bill Clinton

- January 20, 1993–September 30, 2000: 4,241 (27 Addresses to Nation; 438 radio addresses; 3,776 addresses and remarks)

President George H.W. Bush

- January 20, 1989–January 20, 1993 (no second term): 1,678 (25 Addresses to Nation; 21 radio addresses; 1,632 addresses and remarks)

President Ronald Reagan

- January 20, 1981–September 30, 1988: 2,503 (51 Addresses to Nation; 319 radio addresses; 2,133 addresses and remarks)

## PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCES, 1913–2016

Table 4. Frequency of Press Conferences, 1913–2016

President	Total	Months in Office	Press Conferences per month	Press Conferences per year
Wilson 3-4-13 to 3-4-21	159	96	1.7	19.9
Harding 3-4-21 to 8-2-23	No transcripts	29	—	—
Coolidge 8-3-23 to 3-4-29	521	67	7.8	93.3
Hoover 3-4-29 to 3-4-33	268	48	5.6	67.0
Roosevelt 3-4-33 to 4-12-45	1,020	145.5	7.0	84.1
Truman 4-12-45 to 1-20-53	324	94.5	3.4	41.1
Eisenhower 1-20-53 to 1-20-61	193	96	2.0	24.1
Kennedy†† 1-20-61 to 11-22-63	65	34	1.9	22.9
Johnson 11-22-63 to 1-20-69	135	62	2.2	26.1
Nixon 1-20-69 to 8-9-74	39	66	0.6	7.1
Ford 8-9-74 to 1-20-77	40	30	1.3	16.0
Carter 1-20-77 to 1-20-81	59	48	1.2	14.8
Reagan 1-20-81 to 1-20-89	46	96	0.5	5.8
George H.W. Bush 1-20-89 to 1-20-93	143	48	3.0	35.8
Clinton 1-20-93 to 1-20-01	193	96	2.0	24.1

<b>President</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Months in Office</b>	<b>Press Conferences per month</b>	<b>Press Conferences per year</b>
George W. Bush 1-20-01 to 1-20-09	211	96	2.2	26.4
Obama 1-20-09 to 11-20-16	161	94	1.7	20.6

*Sources:* Unless otherwise noted below, the presidential press conference information comes from *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office). There are a series of volumes for Presidents Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton. Information for President George W. Bush comes from *The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, published by the National Archives and Records Administration. The press conference transcripts of President Calvin Coolidge are found at the Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts. For the figures for President Wilson, see the separate note for Wilson in table 5.

Table 5. Press Conferences by Term: Joint and Solo Sessions, 1913-2016

President	Total	Solo	Joint	Joint as % Total	% Months Press Conferences Held—Solo or Joint	% Months Solo Press Conferences Held
Wilson 3-4-13 to 3-4-17	157	157	0	0	62.5	62.5
Wilson* 3-4-17 to 3-4-21	2	2	0	0	4.2	4.2
Harding 3-4-21 to 8-2-23	No transcript record					
Coolidge 8-3-23-3-4-25	130	130	0	0	100.0	100.0
Coolidge 3-4-25 3-4-29	391	391	0	0	100.0	100.0
Hoover 3-4-29 to 3-4-33	268	267	1	0.4	95.8	95.8
Roosevelt† 3-4-33 to 1-20-37	344	332	11	3.2	97.8	97.8
Roosevelt 1-20-37 to 1-20-41	389	377	10	2.6	100.0	100.0
Roosevelt 1-20-41 to 1-20-45	279	267	12	4.3	100.0	100.0
Roosevelt 1-20-45 to 4-12-45	8	8	0	0	100.0	100.0
Truman‡ 4-12-45 to 1-20-49	165	157	8	4.8	97.8	97.8
Truman 1-20-49 to 1-20-53	159	154	5	3.1	97.9	97.9
Eisenhower 1-20-53 to 1-20-57	99	98	1	1.0	83.3	83.3
Eisenhower** 1-20-57 to 1-20-61	94	94	0	0	87.5	87.5
Kennedy†† 1-20-61 to 11-22-63	65	65	0	0	97.1	97.1

President	Total	Solo	Joint	Joint as % Total	% Months Press Conferences Held—Solo or Joint	% Months Solo Press Conferences Held
Johnson 11-22-63 to 1-20-65	36	35	1	2.8	100.0	100.0
Johnson <sup>#</sup> 1-20-65 to 1-20-69	99	83	15	15.3	89.6	85.4
Nixon <sup>***</sup> 1-20-69 to 1-20-73	30	30	0	0	56.3	56.3
Nixon 1-20-73 to 8-9-74	9	9	0	0	36.8	36.8
Ford <sup>†††</sup> 8-9-74 to 1-20-77	40	39	1	2.5	72.4	72.4
Carter 1-20-77 to 1-20-81	59	59	0	0	75.0	75.0
Reagan 1-20-81 to 1-20-85	27	27	0	0	54.2	54.2
Reagan 1-20-85 to 1-20-89	19	19	0	0	39.6	39.6
George H.W. Bush <sup>‡‡</sup> 1-20-89 to 1-20-93	143	85	58	40.6	89.6	85.4
Clinton 1-20-93 to 1-20-97	133	44	89	66.9	93.8	66.7
Clinton 1-20-97 to 1-20-01	60	18	42	70.0	75.0	37.5
George W. Bush 1-20-01 to 1-20-05	90	17	73	81.1	79.2	33.3
George W. Bush 1-20-05 to 1-20-09	121	35	86	71.1	91.7	62.5
Obama 1-20-09 to 1-20-13	79	36	43	54.4	72.9	54.2
Obama 1-20-13 to 11-20-16	82	31	51	62.2	89.1	56.5

*Sources:* Unless otherwise noted below, the presidential press conference information comes from *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office). There are a series of volumes for Presidents Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton. Information for President George W. Bush comes from *The Weekly*

*Compilation of Presidential Documents*, published by the National Archives and Records Administration. The press conference transcripts of President Calvin Coolidge are found at the Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts. For the figures for President Wilson, see the separate note for Wilson below.

\*Woodrow Wilson held only two press conferences in his second term, thus his percentages may lead to a misimpression of how frequent they were for his first term: 3.3 per month and 39.0 per year. The press conference numbers differ in some respects from earlier lists. The Wilson figures include the press conferences found in *The Complete Press Conferences, 1913-1919*, edited by Robert C. Hildebrand, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 50 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), as well as two other press conferences found in volume 39 and one each in volumes 40 and 61 in the series, the particular volume edited by Arthur Link as well as one short one found in the Princeton University Library files of Charles Swem, White House stenographer during the Wilson years. The press conferences on January 26, June 22, and July 13, 1914, and January 8, 1917, and June 27, 1919, were not in the Hildebrand volume, and the short session on November 13, 1913, was found in the Charles Swem files.

†There are three Roosevelt press conferences for which there are no transcripts: one in his first term, no. 41, held August 7, 1933, and two in his second, nos. 473 and 474, held July August 1938. Therefore, the total number is slightly higher than the combined total of listed Solo and Joint sessions. The Roosevelt numbers vary from the standard number of 998. That figure, which comes from the numbering done by the stenographers at the time. The last conference was numbered 998. That figure includes two press conferences from 1934 – numbers 138 and 139 – that did not take place. The stenographer left room for three conferences when he went on vacation, but only one was held. The error was not discovered until some time later and a decision was made to retain the numbering as it was. I have added 22 press conferences that were listed as A or B by the transcribers. By year, the ones I have added include the following. 1933, I include 14 A and 14 Band 49 A. The first two are sessions held in the President's office at the behest of the President with Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald (Great Britain). While the two sessions do not both involve regular questions and answers as later develops, these are the first two sessions where the president brings reporters to talk to a foreign leader. They establish an enduring pattern calling for joint press conferences with foreign leaders to have a different format from his regular solo sessions with reporters. They are shorter in length and usually involve statements from one or both foreign leaders. Included in the 1933 count is a short session on September 6 [49 A], which probably took place shortly after the conclusion of an earlier one. In 1934, in addition to numbers 138 and 139, which did not take place, we can add in 129 A and 161 A, which are not really different from a regular press conference. Others falling into the general press conference categories include 193 B, 530 A, and 703 A. Additionally, I have added in sessions with business editors as they were counted into the 998 total in the latter years. From 1941 on, sessions 744, 858, 903, and 956 with business editors were counted as regular sessions as were ones with the American Society of Newspaper Editors (879) and the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association (933). I have included such sessions in the early years of Roosevelt's presidency when they were noted with an A or B. The session with such groups include the following ones counted in these numbers: 98 A, 193 A, 275 A, 360 A, 448 A, 449 A, 452 A, 452 B, 540 A, 557 A, 614 A, 636 A, and 652 A. . There are others include in the totals, including 485 A, where Press Secretary Steve Early was instructed by an ailing President Roosevelt to conduct the press conference in his place. It turned out to be an experiment not repeated. Also in the totals are 356 A with a Canadian official and 399 A, held in Canada responding to reporters from that country. Introduction by Jonathan Daniels, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York, NY: DeCapo Press, 1972).

‡The Truman press conferences include in their numbering a series of sessions much like those with President Roosevelt. While the text of several of sessions were not included in the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the numbers remain. Thus, cumulative totals for President Truman include all of the sessions designated as press conferences. Those include nos. 11, 39, 61, 103 (American Society of Newspaper Editors), 13 (Association of Radio News Analysts), 36 (Editors and Publishers of Gannett Newspapers), 42, 81 (National Conference of Business Paper Editors), 51 (Negro Newspaper Publishers Association), 52 (editors of monthly magazines of Standard Railroad Labor Organizations), 73 (editors and executives of McGraw Hill Publishing Company). Later in his presidency, sessions with these groups were included in the *Public Papers* as press conferences, including nos. 121 and 177 with the National Conference of Business Paper Editors, 179 with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 124 with the National Conference of Editorial Writers, and 202 with the Association of Radio Analysts. Also included in our totals, though the text was not, are 109, which was a joint press conference held in Canada with Prime Minister Mackenzie King, and 82, where he corrected a previously made statement but did not take questions. That session was similar in its lack of questions to 114, where he simply thanked reporters for the courtesies they extended to him when

his mother died. He did not take questions. In the *Public Papers* 114 is included with text as well as its number.

\*\* The press conference on December 16, 1953, was the first to allow direct quotation of the whole press conference. The press conference held on January 19, 1955, was the first to be televised, although it was not broadcast live.

†† On August 30, 1963, President Kennedy had a “special news conference” in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. I have added it to the 64 press conferences designated with numbers.

‡‡ The transcript is missing for no. 48, which was held on August 19, 1965.

\*\*\* President Nixon had two sessions titled “Unscheduled News Conference”—on March 21 and July 20, 1970. I have added them to the 37 numbered press conferences.

††† On October 21, 1974, President Ford had a “News Conference of the President and President Echeverria of Mexico” in Tubac, Arizona. I have added it to the 39 press conferences designated with numbers.

‡‡‡ President George H.W. Bush had a press conference not contained in the *Public Papers*, which was held at Kennebunkport, Maine, on August 16, 1991. The transcript is in files in the Bush Library.

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