THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT
1997-2021

Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy
University of Missouri

Smoothing the Peaceful Transfer of Democratic Power

Report 2021—243

THE PRESIDENT'S WORK IN 100 DAYS

WHAT THEY DO ALL DAY, WHO THEY SEE, AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE AFFECTING BOTH

Terry Sullivan, *Executive Director, White House Transition Project*
Emeritus Faculty, Political Science, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT. Begun in 1998, the White House Transition Project provides information about individual offices for staff coming into the White House to help streamline the process of transition from one administration to the next. A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, the WHTP brings together political science scholars who study the presidency and White House operations to write analytical pieces on relevant topics about presidential transitions, presidential appointments, and crisis management. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, and now the 2021. WHTP coordinates with government agencies and other non-profit groups, e.g., the US National Archives or the Partnership for Public Service. It also consults with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions, worldwide. See the project at https://whitehousetransitionproject.org

The White House Transition Project produces a number of materials, including:

- **White House Office Essays:** Based on interviews with key personnel who have borne these unique responsibilities, including former White House Chiefs of Staff; Staff Secretaries; Counsels; Press Secretaries, etc. , WHTP produces briefing books for each of the critical White House offices. These briefs compile the best practices suggested by those who have carried out the duties of these office. With the permission of the interviewees, interviews are available on the National Archives website page dedicated to this project:
- **White House Organization Charts.** The charts cover administrations from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama and help new White House staff understand what to expect when they arrive and how their offices changed over time or stayed the same.
- **Transition Essays.** These reports cover a number of topics suggested by White House staff, including analyses of the patterns of presidential appointments and the Senate confirmation process, White House and presidential working routine, and the patterns of presidential travel and crisis management. It also maintains ongoing reports on the patterns of interactions with reporters and the press in general as well as White House staffing.
- **International Component**. The WHTP consults with international governments and groups interested in transitions in their governments. In 2017 in conjunction with the Baker Institute, the WHTP hosted a conference with emerging Latin American leaders and in 2018 cosponsored a government transitions conference with the National Democratic Institute held in November 2018 in Montreal, Canada .

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> There's nothing that can completely prepare you for the job of being President…. You know, that first day after …they walk you into the Oval Office, then everybody leaves, and you're thinking, "*Oh man*, *now what?!*"
>
> — President Barack Obama, 2016

HOW IT BEGINS FOR PRESIDENTS

With an ever-increasing anticipation that first day, new presidents realize they stand alone on the thin ice of history. Even when surrounded by committed and attentive subordinates, presidents sense this new status, and inevitably, their own growing seclusion: *"Oh man, now what?"* No one can help much with this presidential seclusion, itself a part of the constitution's DNA, dating from when the founders accepted James Wilson's idea of a "singular" presidency. Friends and former colleagues will reinforce that seclusion every time they slip easily into repeating the obligatory phrase, "*Mr. President.*"

The Impact of Seclusion

The President's staff won't help much, in ameliorating this feeling of seclusion. They will have their own new challenges, their own new duties that will seem daunting. Many of them will have never experienced the demands of a White House operation, let alone what a president's routine looks like. A national campaign, a governor's staff, a senior US Senator, all pale by comparison to the demands, scale, and scrutiny of the American nerve center. The White House isn't just a grander version of their former jobs, the major league to their farm team. Some of them *will* have worked in a White House, under different circumstances and only as part of one operation. Despite that slim experience, these staff will become the "old hands."

Even when campaigns make an effort to figure out what to expect — how much time had others spent on speeches or on national security — those efforts to get a better picture have fallen very short. In the summer before they won their election, for example, Karl Rove managed a team of Bush for President campaign interns that gathered information on what presidents back to Carter had done in their first 100 days, using that information to prepare what to them seemed like a granular plan of their president's daily schedule when they won. Comparing their numbers against the actual experience of these earlier presidents, Rove's expectations were hundreds of percentage points off, leaving their plan vastly underestimating what the new president would

have to do out there on the ice. Though wildly off in their expectations, Rove's exercise, stands out as the most accurate of previous endeavors.

And lastly, for all of them, they will never again share the kind of interactions with their president that they did with their candidate, their colleague, or their friend. They simply won't get "in the room" as much. And in their place, others will become part of their president's day, those others with necessary experiences (other old hands) or, more commonly, others dictated by the state's requirements, now defining their president's new duties. These new people will manage the access of those who previously found their way easily into the candidate's councils. Of course, given the range of presidential duties, even the new people will not share much time with the president either. No one will ever see all that the president sees, nor hear all the president hears. So, eventually, the president's seclusion becomes both a physical and a mental actuality. No one in the president's circles, inner or otherwise, will ever know what their president knows. So, if they tried to help (and regularly when they *do* try to help), even those attentive and most trusted subordinates could, just as easily, make things worse.

Two Ways to Help

To manage the president's routine and accustom it to the state's demands, two resources can provide some help. First, a president-elect joins a most exclusive club: those few who have stood in the same seclusion and worked with an operation intended to magnify their intentions, amplify their voices, and smooth their way to good decisions and effective influence. Though limited by their own singular experiences, the advice a new president can get from their predecessors can inform their "attitude" — about how to cope — and how to decide on priorities, two critical skills needed in the rarified atmosphere of the global nerve center.

Second, the deep state maintains detailed records of the president's work, logs compiled in real time by a number of government actors (like the Secret Service and the Oval Office staff, the White House operators, the residential staff, and so on) and regularly collated by the US National Archives into a composite called "the President's Daily Diary." The diary details what the president did, with whom that president met, what their discussions covered; on the telephone, in person, in small meetings, in large gatherings, in formal and informal settings, in public events, through memoranda, and so on.

The National Archives stores these composite logs in each of its presidential libraries, and for two decades, the White House Transition Project has amassed these composite logs of presidential daily routine, now covering Presidents Eisenhower through to George W. Bush,[1] correlated with documents and recordings, creating the evidence of what presidents do all day and with whom they find counsel, typically minute-by-minute. These data provides some of the information a new White House needs: how presidents spend their days ("engagement"), whom they see ("counsel"), and how (or whether) the changes they make altered their own operations.

About Presidential Time

Understanding these logs begins with appreciating the most significant constraint on daily routine — that presidents sleep. They face a fixed workday, expanded only irregularly and only at its margins and with adverse consequences. This fixed limit to the workday has an important implication for decisions about routine: a choice about one commitment normally precludes choosing others. A president can't hold a press conference and receive a security briefing at the same time and to avoid choosing between them by doing both excludes something else or exhausts the day. The proportion of time given to one responsibility has a necessary connection to time committed to others. So, every decision to concentrate engagement in one area

[1] The Presidential Records Act limits the availability of these logs until 12 years after an administration leaves office.

automatically raises one of two decisions: where does the additional time come from (what gets sacrificed in a trade-off) or how much longer can we extend the president's day, postponing the inevitable to later?

With some specialized analytics we can use these detailed data on routine to figure out which changes in engagement result in a direct trade-off with other forms of engagement and which changes in engagement merely result in small changes across other commitments dissipating the effect of the original changed commitment through several, smaller alterations. The analytics accomplish these comparisons by solving simultaneously statistical models describing each form of engagement as the product of several independent influences, like increasing GDP or open hostilities, as well as including estimates of the other forms of engagement and vice versa.

About Duty, Counsel, Choice, and Crisis

Hats. Broadly speaking, presidential engagement falls under one of 10 responsibilities, sometimes called the president's "hats:"[2] Commander-in-Chief, Chief Diplomat, Executive Management, Chief Law Enforcement, Legislative Leader, Ceremonial Head of State, managing White House decision-making, Economic/Budget Manager, Chief Communicator, Party Leader. These fall into four groups: those duties written into Article II, those that flow from functions recognized as "inherently" executive, responsibilities derived from congressional delegations, and duties created by historical norms.

Relationships. Broadly speaking, presidential counsel involves interacting with a range of advisors, typically understood by their proximity to the president: the "inner circle" (defined below), the White House staff, the Cabinet, executive branch personnel (including regulatory agencies), Congress, the Judiciary, private advisors, heads of state, general public.

Organizations. Historically, presidential routine has offered up few organizational variations. The most obvious ways of classifying operations focus on how much to structure the staff and how large a White House staff does the president need. Broadly speaking, staff structure revolves around two models: a "circle of equals" and a general hierarchy.[3]

Priorities and Crises. The data assessed here do not directly measure how presidents and their staff make decisions about setting priorities among responsibilities. They do however, reveal the general nature of those priorities and in particular they do reveal how choices to increase one form of engagement or contact one source of counsel redounds to engagement and counsel in others. In a way, these trade-offs reveal the nature of priorities as they work out.

These data report engagement and counsel in "normal" presidential circumstances. By their nature, crisis alter normal. They present the potential for significantly dire consequences and, *to a degree,* they occur unexpectedly. Natural disasters, e.g., earthquakes, can pose a crisis (a challenge with potentially dire consequences for an administration). But, nature has no design on undermining the administration. On the other hand, security crises, by design, pose an unexpected challenge with potentially dire consequences and derive an expressed intent to undermine an administration. Because too few instances of crises have occurred in the 100 days we can't make a worthwhile statistical treatment of them. A separate WHTP study will focus on crises and their effect on presidential engagement and counsel.

The next two sections summarize what we know about "normal" presidential routine.

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[2] Edward S. Corwin, 1957, *The President: Office and Powers*, 4th ed. New York: New York University Press. Elaborate statistical procedures separates out each form of engagement or counsel where (in some limited circumstances) they overlap.

[3] Presidential organizations vary between these poles (Alexander L. George, 1980, *Presidential Decision-making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice*, Boulder: Westview Press).

THREE DOZEN THINGS ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL ROUTINE

General Patterns and Processes[4]

1. Starting with Lyndon Johnson, presidential workdays average 14½ hours, beginning around 8AM and ending around 9:30PM (see Table 1). That's an average for seven days a week. This 32% increase over earlier presidents' workdays delineates "post-modern" presidencies.[5]

2. For post-modern presidents, the average weekend differs from average weekday by less than 10%.

3. Presidents react to challenges by extending their workday followed by an adverse reaction of diminished performance.

4. Many organize the president's workday like training for a marathon, long endurance runs (long regular workdays) leading to an extraordinary exertion (a drastic uptick). But presidential work is more like a decathlon, a demanding suite of events often leading to a single climatic event. Decathlon training involves continuous training at typically lower levels to avoid a catastrophic injury just prior to the event and constant adjustments in effort across events.[6]

5. Between presidents, patterns of engagement do not vary enough to suggest any president differs from the others. Even presidents who publicly committed to a contrast with their predecessors (e.g., Kennedy/Eisenhower or Carter/Nixon) didn't.[7]

6. Among presidents, patterns of engagement do not vary enough to support the notion that a president might have a special "focus" or commitment. Those few presidents that do show an extraordinary commitment, e.g., Carter on legislative affairs, make those commitments in response to challenging circumstances – a new legislative leadership in both houses.

What Presidents Do All Day — The Basics

7. Among "post-modern" presidents, the number of times a president works alone or with another individual have risen 300% and 176%, respectively (see Table 2). "*They walk you into the Oval Office, then everybody leaves….*"

8. Every day, presidents engage in a variety of responsibilities, but none in particular (Table 3).[8]

9. All presidents commit their time in direct proportion to their formal duties (Table 3, far right column). On average, they commit twice as much time to duties specified in the constitution (e.g., Commander-in-Chief and Chief Diplomat) as they commit to duties inherent in the "executive function" (e.g., as the ceremonial Head of State). And twice again to duties (like party leader) that have devolved to the president over time.

10. As a constant pattern, presidents spend more time engaged as the Chief Diplomat than as Commander-in-Chief, even during hostilities.

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[4] These patterns stand out both in simple comparisons (of means, for example) and in more complex statistical treatments.

[5] "Modern" presidents averaged around 10-hour workdays and their weekend days averaged -30% of their weekdays.

[6] Responding to 911, for example, the Bush43 White House created more personal time in the President's daily routine for exercising by rearranging the access of some senior advisors, replacing some of their individual time with more group meetings [interviews with the author].

[7] The evidence suggests that successors who commit to contrasting with their predecessor didn't know enough about their predecessor's routines. As Woodrow Wilson noted, presidential duties dictate presidential work (Wilson Woodrow, 1911, *Constitutional Government in the United States,* New York: Columbia University Press).

[8] As a consequence, presidents often seem at odds with their communications teams and the oft-quoted strategy that "each day should have a single message," which describes a communications strategy but not a presidential routine.

11. As a constant pattern, presidents spend more time focusing on management issues in the Executive than they spend on legislative leadership.

12. As a constant pattern, presidents spend almost no time on interacting with the federal law enforcement community, including the Attorney General.

13. The number of public events on the president's daily schedule have doubled. But the time these events take has not changed.

14. The proportion of time presidents commit to their communications function has not varied since the Eisenhower administration, regardless of the advancements in communication technologies and the size of the "audience."

15. On average, presidents spend 15% of their waking hours with their family and friends. And that engagement typically declines (see next section).

What Presidents Do All Day — The Trade-offs

16. The significance of ongoing presidential duties "buffers" presidential reaction to events. Even crises (unexpected, external threats) generate this buffering by otherwise "normal" routine.[9]

17. Changes in circumstances (e.g., short-term decline in GDP, hostilities, or a longer term increase in congressional supporters) typically invokes a muted reaction, a dissipation across the president's routine rather than a direct trade-off.

18. Much of the time presidents have used to increase seclusion has come from the time their predecessors have spent with formalized groups: meetings with legislative leadership groups and with the NSC have each declined by 23%. These reductions have even outpaced the decline in Cabinet meetings. The declining attention to the congressional leadership has not resulted from split party control.

19. Typically, staff don't change the president's schedule; instead, they extend the president's workday.

20. As a trade-off, increasing engagement as Commander-in-Chief or in Chief Diplomat come at the expense of personal time and managing the internal White House decision-making process.

21. And vice-versa, increasing personal time or engagement in White House internal decision-making (e.g., refereeing "turf wars" among senior advisors) involves a trade-off with national security duties.

22. As dissipation, increasing engagement as legislative or party leader or as ceremonial head of state comes from smaller changes among executive management, law enforcement, economic/budget management, and communications.

23. As dissipation, increasing engagement in communications efforts comes at the expense of smaller changes in legislative and party leadership and ceremonial events.

24. Hostilities generate a specific trade-off between personal time transferred almost exclusively to duties as Chief Diplomat rather than as Commander-in-Chief.

25. To avoid trade-offs, hostilities often result in an expansion to the president's workday.

26. A temporary extension in a president's workday inevitably generates twice as much down time over the following three days.

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[9] Typically, crisis routine boosts immediate presidential engagement in constitutional duties and then almost as immediately returns to normal patterns. As an example, President Kennedy insisted on his normal routine during the Cuban Missile Crisis (often interpreted as a ruse to avoid public panic) could easily reflect this buffering effect imposed by the president's ongoing duties.

27. Unified party control highlights the control functions of the Chief of Staff and Staff Secretary, trading time spent on White House decision-making to expand executive and legislative coordination.

Who Presidents See — The Basics

28. Every day, presidents interact with scores of individuals and no one in particular (Table 4).

29. Presidential counsel doesn't reflect proximity.

30. Presidents take less and less counsel in formalized group meetings, e.g., the NSC, Cabinet, congressional leadership breakfasts.

31. Presidents take more counsel through formalized memoranda, considered in seclusion, emphasizing the Staff Secretary functions, though presidents rarely interact with the Staff Secretary.

32. Presidential "seclusion" describes a routine. It differs from presidential "isolation," a judgment about the breadth of a president's counsel.

33. The president's inner circle, however defined,[10] consistently includes no more than a handful of subordinates. Consistently, a president's inner circle includes: the Vice-President, the White House Chief of Staff, the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, the Domestic Policy Advisor, and either the Press Secretary or the Congressional Liaison, (but not both).

Who Presidents See — The Trade-offs

34. Changes in circumstances (e.g., a decline in GDP, hostilities, or an increasing number of congressional supporters) disrupt the president's normal patterns, drawing presidents out of seclusion and generally away from their inner circle and towards more interaction with Executive Agency expertise.[11]

35. All these changes shift presidents away from personal time, as well, towards more interaction with Executive Agency expertise.

36. None of these developments draw in more interactions with congressional leaders.

A HALF-DOZEN EFFECTS FROM ORGANIZATIONAL CHOICES

1. Increases in the White House staff does not lengthen the president's workday.

2. Increasing the White House staff reduces the time presidents spend with personal time.

3. Scheduling represents the greatest determinant of how long the President works every day, not stamina, nor organizational choices.

4. Adopting a "circle of equals" staffing arrangement increases presidential direct engagement with managing the White House decision-making process at the direct expense of time spent on primary constitutional duties (Commander-in-Chief, Chief Diplomat).[12]

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[10] Former White House Chiefs of Staff define the president's "inner" as those few executive subordinates that see the president, on average, three times a week. See the discussion among the Chiefs about this issue in Sullivan, Terry, 2004, *Nerve Center: Lessons on Governing from the White House Chiefs of Staff,* College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

[11] Recall that typically, these changes do not alter the president's basic patterns of engagement.

[12] This trade-off suggests that more "open" and "modified open" staffing arrangements draw the president into refereeing more internal demands and conflicts among advisors.

5. Increasing the size of the White House staff generally eases the burden on presidents for engagement related to "management" (e.g., coordinating White House management or coordinating the executive agencies) and shifts engagement to central constitutional duties (e.g., as Chief Diplomat).
6. Adopting a "circle of equals" staffing arrangement increases seclusion and consultation among the inner circle while reducing consultation with senior executive experts. A circle of equals staffing increases isolation and results in more instances of internal memoranda from the Staff Secretary calling for broader inclusions in decision-memoranda.
7. Increasing the size of the White House staff reduces seclusion and reliance on the inner circle while increasing consultation with senior executive experts, with other White House staff, and the Cabinet.

SUMMARY TABLES

Table 1. The President's Day, the First 100 Days

Classification	President	Workday Averages Begins	Ends	Length
Modern	Dwight Eisenhower	8:35:47	18:38:31	10:02:44
	John Kennedy	9:34:57	19:40:07	10:00:17
Post Modern	Lyndon Johnson	9:20:41	22:31:06	13:10:02
	Richard Nixon	8:28:28	22:40:19	14:11:51
	Gerald Ford	7:30:05	23:56:53	14:11:30
	Jimmy Carter	6:37:15	23:37:11	17:04:40
	Ronald Reagan	8:43:18	22:09:39	13:26:21
	George H.W. Bush	6:54:54	21:34:48	14:39:46
	William J. Clinton	7:13:40	00:32:23	17:18:43
	George W. Bush	7:38:44	19:41:42	12:02:58

Source: Compiled by author for US National Archives, *Presidential Daily Diary*, various presidents.

Table 2. The President's Pace during the First 100 Days

Engagement[13]	Avg. Numbers of Activities per Day: Modern	Post-Modern	% Change[14]
0. Personal time	1.8	3.4	83.9
1. Seclusion	3.8	15.4	307.5
Single individuals	4.5	12.5	175.7
2. Meetings			
Small groups (<5)	2.2	3.0	36.3
Large groups	2.8	2.9	5.0
Legislators	0.2	0.1	-23.2
Cabinet	0.1	0.1	-4.9
NSC	0.1	0.1	-23.8
Others	2.4	2.6	8.4
3. Public events	2.1	4.0	90.1
Total Workday Length	10:01:38	14:30:44	

Source: Compiled by author.

[13] Time in each category includes phone calls as well as "face-to-face" encounters.

[14] Since time in the day typically has a fixed upper bound, this percentage derives from a Kruskal-lambda (λ) statistic, which measures change against a base taking into account the fixed time remaining in the day.

Table 3. Presidential Engagement during the First 100 Days

General Origins Engagement as	Engagement (% of Day) Modern	Post-Modern	% Change[a]	By Origins
Explicit, Constitutional Warrants				*34.9*
1. Commander in Chief	11.0	9.9	-1.2	
2. Chief Diplomat	16.3	13.6	-2.7	
3. Manager of Executive Branch	10.3	10.7	0.5	
4. Chief Law Enforcer	1.3	0.5	-0.8	
Implicitly Executive Duties				*16.4*
5. Legislative Leader	10.4	8.8	-1.6	
6. Ceremonial Head of State	6.7	8.8	2.2	
Statutory Delegations				*14.9*
7. Manager of WH D-M Process	8.1	14.9	7.4	
8. Economic/Budget Manager	2.3	2.8	0.5	
Historical Developments				*8.6*
9. Chief Communicator	5.1	8.3	3.5	
10. Party Leader	3.8	2.2	-1.6	
Personal & Family	20.4	15.5	-4.8	
Travel	4.3	3.9	-0.4	
Total Workday's Length	10:01:45	14:30:54	32.2	

Source: Compiled by author.
Notes: [a]See footnote 14, above.

Table 4. Counsel by Proximity to the President

Contact with…	% of Contact[a]	% Change[b]
in Seclusion	25.0	117
Core WH Subordinate	11.6	17
Other WH Subordinate	14.3	53
Executive Branch Subordinate	8.9	-55
Legislative Branch Actor	24.9	-31
Judicial Branch Actor	0.4	100
Outside, Private Advisors	1.4	-62
Heads of State	1.8	0
Public and Press	12.0	-10

Source: Compiled by author.

Notes: [a]Denominator excludes personal and travel time.
[b]Calculated over baseline of modern presidencies. See Table 1 and footnote 14, above.

APPENDIX: ABOUT "COMMON KNOWLEDGE"

Often the lore of presidents held as common knowledge rests on stories about "tradecraft," how a president conducted the business of leading or made decisions. Often these stories reflect insights as to how presidents conduct their business, often as vignettes into a particular president's motives. Often these stories substantiate criticism of presidential advice taking, about the lack of "appropriate" counsel on critical decisions. That general criticism often asserts that a particular president would have decided differently had their White House operation provided the president a broader range of advice. These data and analytics can provide help with what many consider "common knowledge."

About Tradecraft

In his book, *Hardball,* Chris Matthews asserted that national politicians use what they know of their peers to fuel their own successes.[15] To prove his point, Matthews recounted a story about President Lyndon Johnson. As soon as LBJ learned his attorney general and political rival, Robert Kennedy, regularly led late-night discussions with his entourage, Johnson made a point of always calling on or meeting with Attorney General Kennedy *early* in the morning. In this case, President Johnson's Daily Diary shows that LBJ interacted with his attorney general some 96 times between the assassination that elevated Vice-President Johnson and Robert Kennedy's resignation to run for the US Senate. These interactions included face-to-face meetings, group meetings, and phone conversations. Of those 96 encounters, only one of them occurred before 10:00 a.m. That this story, however appealing, turns out apocryphal doesn't mean that presidents can't use information about others to aide in their cause, it just makes clear that the instinct to lean into something that *sounds good* often runs afoul of facts. And without facts, we can't *know* if Mathews has a good idea.

About Presidential Decision-making

Critics often decry presidential policies they oppose as the product of isolation, suggesting that the president's choices would change had the president *received* the right counsel.[16] For example, many have quoted the claims of Donald Regan that, while he served as Treasury Secretary, President Ronald Reagan cared so little about economic management that the two of them never had a single one-on-one discussion, this complaint despite the centrality to the Reagan agenda of a reordered budget and a supply-side tax cut. Secretary Regan made two specific claims to support this depiction of President Reagan's decision-making; both received enormous coverage at the time and have since constituted a mainstay of describing President Reagan's work habits: First, Secretary Regan claimed that the only conversation the two had ever had occurred at the cabinet swearing-in ceremony during their first week and that this conversation revolved around the similarity in their last names. Second, and more importantly, Secretary Regan claimed that he learned about President Reagan's economic views only by reading about them in the newspapers.[17]

Using the Reagan Daily Diary, it appears that Secretary Regan saw President Reagan and participated in meetings with the president 58 times just during the first 100 days while the President settled on his two signature agenda items, both with consequences for the national government's budget. Though Secretary Regan had no one-on-one meetings with the President during those 100 days, many of these 58 encounters involved meetings of fewer than five people. Indeed, Secretary Regan saw President Reagan so much that he qualified as a member of the president's inner circle during those early days. That in those 58 interactions, often with only a few others in the room, that President Reagan never discussed his signature policies on the budget with his Secretary of Treasury seems highly unlikely.

Patterns of counsel often get blamed for presidential decisions which require that the president make choices among options each with significant support among advisors, reflecting considerable uncertainty as to how choices produce outcomes. Many presidential policy choices produce no immediate outcomes but instead only influence the direction of other forces which eventually interact to produce favorable or unfavorable outcomes.

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[15] Chris Matthews, 1988, *Hardball: How Politics is Played — Told by One Who Knows the Game*, New York: Touchstone.

[16] For example, see the range of academic analysis regarding "competitive advocacy," which presumes that wide-ranging engagement yields better decisions. See Alexander George, *Presidential Decision-making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980); or John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein with the collaboration of Larry Berman and Richard Immerman, 1989, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965,* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

[17] Donald Regan, 1999, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington,* New York: Harcourt, 1999.

About Focus

As noted in #5 above, the patterns of actual engagement and counsel do not statistically distinguish one president from another. Consider, for example, an oft-noted "special" focus — that President George H.W. Bush has a special commitment to diplomacy. This popular notion has no roots in the detailed data assembled here about his and other presidents' engagement. President Bush stood third among the eight elected presidents in engagement on diplomacy, surpassed by his contemporaries, Presidents Nixon and Kennedy. President Bush's focus *did* surpass that of his two immediate predecessors: President Carter's engagement equaled the average for all elected presidents while President Reagan's came in far below the average. As a potentially common mistake, the patterns of contemporary comparisons, relying on immediate predecessors, might have made President Bush's slightly higher engagement seem more significant.