



**THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT**  
**1997-2021**



Kinder Institute on  
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*Smoothing the Peaceful Transfer of Democratic Power*

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## **REPORT 2021—42**

# **PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL AT HOME AND ABROAD, 1977-SEPTEMBER 2020**

Brendan J. Doherty    *United States Naval Academy*  
*The White House Transition Project*

## 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 <http://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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## REPORT 2021—42

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since presidents always have many more demands on their time than they can possibly fulfill, the strategic choices that determine how they allocate their time are some of the most significant that a president and White House aides will make. When and where a president chooses to travel, and what he or she does while there, can reveal a great deal about presidential priorities. Presidential journeys require a substantial investment of time and energy on the part of the president and the White House staff, but can also yield great dividends as the president travels to countries around the world and different regions of the United States to meet with other leaders and key constituencies, promote a policy agenda, and shape his or her public image as president. This essay analyzes patterns of both international and domestic travel over the past seven presidential administrations in order to provide the incoming administration with information and points of reference that will assist them as they decide when, where, and for what purpose the next president should travel.

Presidential travel throughout the country and around the world has provided the American people with iconic images of presidential leadership. One need look no further than Abraham Lincoln dedicating a cemetery to fallen Union soldiers in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in November 1863; John F. Kennedy in Berlin almost a hundred years later declaring his solidarity with the people of that embattled city; or George W. Bush speaking to rescue workers through a megaphone in New York City following the attacks of September 11, 2001, to see clearly the importance of travel in shaping the public's perception of a president. Many presidents have been at their best when speaking directly to the people and drawing on the energy of the crowds they addressed in moments that would become emblematic of their leadership.

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\* The views expressed in this study are those of the author and are not those of the United States Naval Academy.

Decisions about presidential travel revolve around questions of resource allocation, and senior White House officials have testified repeatedly to the importance of the president's time. Henry Kissinger described what he called, "one of the most important challenges of modern government: to husband the President's time – his most precious commodity" (Kissinger 1999, 74). Former White House chief of staff and Vice President Dick Cheney declared that, "the president's time is the most valuable thing there is" (Bauder 2013). An aide to President Barack Obama sounded a similar theme, explaining, "the president's time ... is the most precious resource in the White House" (Donilon 2012). The strategic choices that determine when and where a president chooses to travel, as well as what he, and someday she, does while there, can reveal a great deal about presidential priorities.

A tremendous amount of effort goes into preparing for a presidential journey. An advance team lays the groundwork for each presidential trip, coordinating details that range from security to public relations. At least three helicopters—one bearing the president, and two providing security and serving as decoys—usually carry the president from the White House to Joint Base Andrews, where the president boards Air Force One. A large entourage accompanies the president, including support planes carrying personnel and military and communications equipment, and cargo planes bearing armored vehicles, the president's limousine, and at times his or her helicopter, Marine One. On occasion, in the case of travel to dangerous overseas destinations, a decoy plane painted to look like Air Force One often makes the journey as well. In short, moving the president and what has been called the mobile White House around the country and the world requires a remarkable investment of time, money, and political effort (Allen 2002; Allen 2004; Babcock 1991; Babcock 1992; Milbank 2002; Nakashima 2000; Walsh 1977). This essay analyzes patterns of both international and domestic travel over the past seven presidential administrations in order to provide the incoming president and his aides with information that will assist them as they decide when, where, and for what purpose the next president should travel.

## RESEARCHING PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL

This study covers the almost 44-year period from January 20, 1977, through September 30, 2020, encompassing seven presidencies—those of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the first three years and eight months of Donald Trump's time in office. This period includes four Republican presidents—Reagan, both Presidents Bush, and Trump—who collectively held the White House for almost 24 years as of this writing, and three Democratic presidents—Carter, Clinton, and Obama, who served as president for 20 years. The analysis is drawn from an original data set of international and domestic presidential trips that I compiled by first examining the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* at the American Presidency Project, and then the White House websites of Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump. The data set tracks the days each president spent abroad and the number of days on which he held domestic events in each state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Not every entry in the *Public Papers* was treated as an individual event. The goal was to code presidential activity in a way that reflected the actual number of events that took place, not merely to record the number of entries in the *Public Papers*. For example, brief exchanges with reporters that immediately preceded or followed an event, such as an exchange on the front steps of a school just after a speech to students inside, were not coded as separate events, even though they often received their own entry in the *Public Papers*. For other exchanges with reporters outside of the Washington, D.C. area, anything over 150 words was coded as an event. This relatively inclusive threshold was set to get a full picture of what constitutes presidential activity in the states. Exchanges with reporters under

A substantial proportion of presidential travel involves political fundraising, but many of these events are closed to the press and thus are routinely excluded from the *Public Papers*. In order to account for this, I conducted LexisNexis searches of Associated Press articles that contained each president's name within 25 words of the word *fundraiser* or one of its variants in each year of this study, and the resulting news stories were used to check the data set. Additionally, I reviewed the "Digests of Other White House Announcements" released by the White House press office, the recently available minute-by-minute daily White House schedules for Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and the first two years of George H.W. Bush, as well as Reagan's personal diary and Obama's and Trump's public schedules on the White House website, and drew upon information from the discussion of the president's schedule by the White House press secretary in his or her gaggles and briefings with the press corps. All of these efforts revealed fundraisers not found in other sources, and the result is the most comprehensive data set available of presidential travel over the past four decades.

Because many public presidential events occur in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area only a few miles from the White House as part of the president's regular activities and are not comparable to other types of presidential travel, events in Maryland and Virginia are not included in the following analysis. A presidential event held at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland or at the Pentagon in Virginia is not a representative example of a president traveling to the states.

Days spent and events held at Camp David or a presidential home that served as a second White House are not part of this data set, and days spent on vacation without official events are also not included in the data on presidential events. However, this study does present information on the number of days that presidents spent at Camp David, at a second home, and on vacation, drawing on data shared by Mark Knoller of CBS News and the Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and William J. Clinton Presidential Libraries. I owe particular thanks to Knoller, who has systematically chronicled presidential activities dating to the latter portion of the Clinton administration, and has generously shared both his expert perspective on how best to code presidential travel as well as data on presidential vacations and time at second homes and Camp David that fell outside of the scope of my study.

The data on international travel reflect the length of a presidential trip from the first to the last event abroad. As presidents do not always make remarks or hold a public event upon departing for or returning from an international trip, it is often impossible to determine from the *Public Papers* exactly when the president left and returned to the White House for a trip that took place years or decades ago. As a result, the data presented here might slightly understate the total length of some of these international journeys. This is not always the case, however, as presidents flying to and from the Western Hemisphere often hold their first public event abroad on the same day that they depart from the White House, and frequently arrive home on the same day that they hold their last public event abroad. When presidents travel to Asia, however, their departure from the White House is often two calendar days before their first event abroad, due both to the length of the journey and the crossing of the International Date Line. Because of these dynamics, the data in this study reflect time on the ground abroad, and not the total length of each trip from the departure from to the return to Washington, D.C.

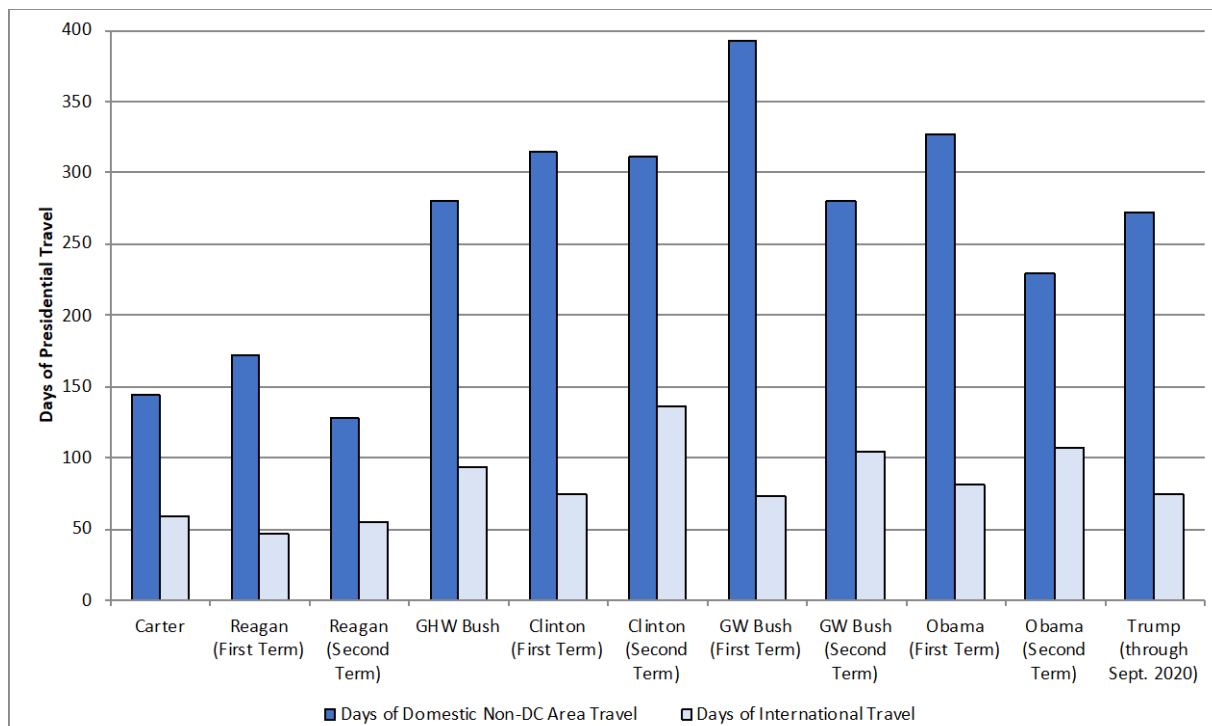
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150 words were only recorded if they served as the only record of the president's visit to a location on that day. For example, on April 4, 1994, President Clinton threw out the first pitch at an Indians game in Cleveland. He did not make a speech, and a brief exchange with reporters is the only record in the Public Papers of his trip to Cleveland, which surely was widely reported by the local news media. Such an event ought to be included in the data set of presidential travel.

## GENERAL TRENDS OF INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC TRAVEL

Figure 1 depicts the number of days that presidents held domestic non-D.C. area events (events outside of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia) and days of international presidential travel by term from January 20, 1977 to September 30, 2020. Several trends are immediately evident. More recent presidents tended to travel much more domestically than did the earlier presidents in this study. While Carter and Reagan averaged 148 days with events outside of the D.C. area per term, the per-term average for the subsequent five presidents was 302 days. George W. Bush's 392 first-term days holding domestic non-D.C. area events make him the president who traveled domestically the most, and these days on the road constitute more than a quarter of his first four years in office. Each of the three two-term presidents examined traveled more domestically in their first term than in their second term.

**Figure 1: Days of Presidential International and Domestic Travel, 1977-Sept. 2020**



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

International travel increased between 1977 and September 2020 as well, though less dramatically than did domestic travel, as the five most recent presidents each spent more days out of the country than did the first two presidents in this study. Clinton's 136 days of international travel during his second term are far more than any other president examined, and are more than double the amount of international travel by Carter or by Reagan during their respective terms. While Carter and Reagan averaged 53.3 days of international travel per term, the five most recent presidents' average per term has been 93.3 days. To better understand the dynamics of when, where, and for what purpose presidents travel, I first conducted a detailed examination of international travel before turning to an analysis of domestic travel.

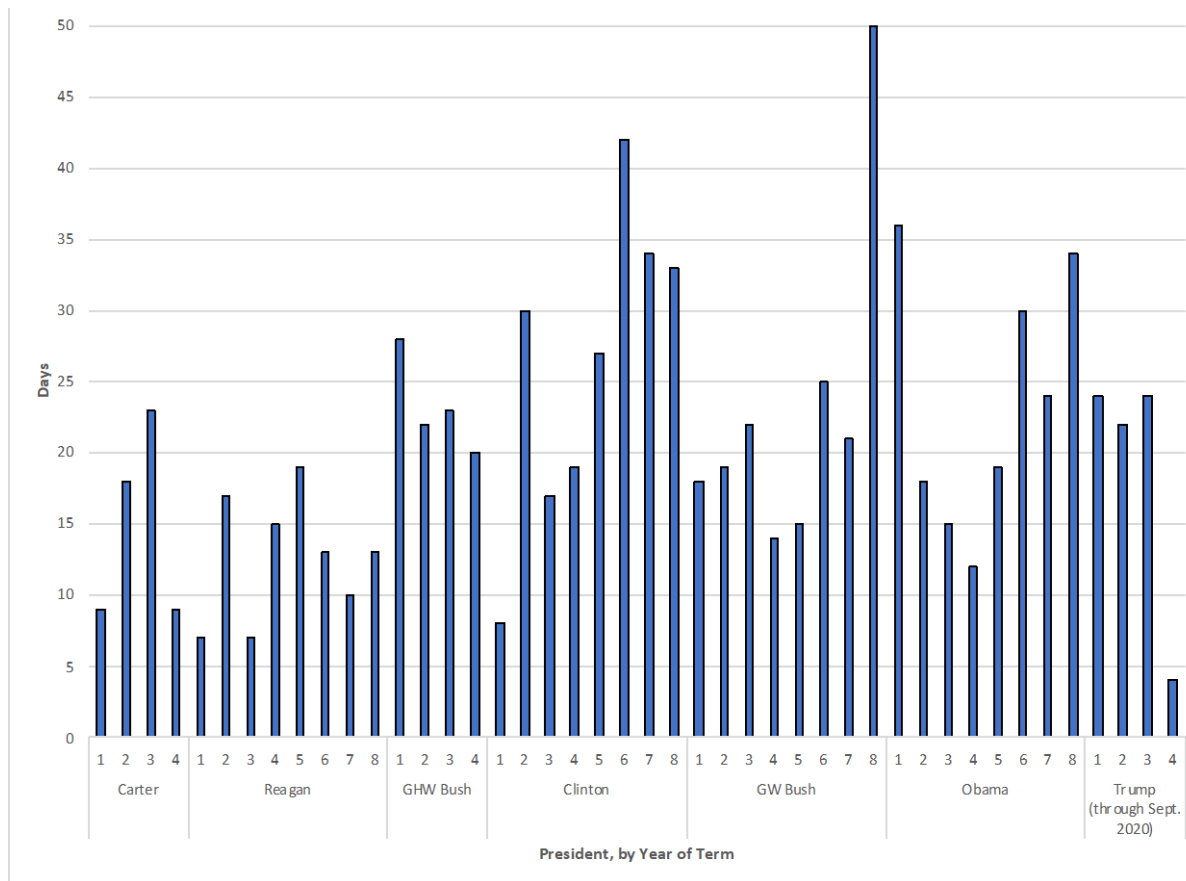


## INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL

### WHEN

While the volume of international travel has increased over the almost 44 years of this study, examination of when presidents travel within their terms reveals commonalities across these seven administrations. Figure 2 illustrates that four of the seven presidents spent the fewest days abroad in their first year in office. The first exception is George H.W. Bush, whose background as a former vice president and ambassador gave him both an international orientation and a wide range of personal contacts and friends among leaders around the world. The second exception is Obama, who campaigned in 2008 promising a multilateral approach to foreign policy and then spent substantially more days traveling abroad in his first year than any of his recent predecessors. The final exception is Trump, whose 24 days abroad in 2017 were less than half of Obama’s first year total, but still exceeded his 22 days of international travel in 2018.

**Figure 2: Days of International Travel, 1977-Sept. 2020**



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

Several other general patterns emerge from examination of this figure. The five presidents whose lowest total days of international travel came in their reelection year—Carter, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump—faced challenging bids for a second term in the White House, while Reagan and Clinton’s second-highest number of days of international travel in their first term came during the year of their reelection. It is important to note that Trump’s

international travel during his fourth year in office was curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Four of the seven presidents spent the most first-term days abroad during either their second or third years in office. First-term international travel peaked during the second year for Reagan and Clinton, during the third year for Carter and George W. Bush, and during the first year for George H.W. Bush and Obama. Trump spent an equal number of days abroad in his first and third years in office. The general increase over time revealed in Figure 1 is evident within administrations in Figure 2 as well, as the latter five presidents traveled more in most years than did the first two presidents in the study.

The second terms of the four two-term presidents in this study further highlight the escalation of international travel in recent decades. While Reagan's level of second-term international travel is roughly comparable to that of his first term, Clinton's, Bush's, and Obama's second terms all saw a substantial rise in the number of days spent abroad. In fact, Clinton's international travel during each of his last three years in office exceeds that of all but three other

**Table 1: Number and Length (in Days) of International Presidential Trips, 1977-Sept. 2020**

President	Trips	Average Length	Shortest Trip	Longest Trip
Carter	12	4.9	2	9
Reagan (First Term)	11	4.2	1	10
Reagan (Second Term)	13	4.2	1	11
GHW Bush	26	3.6	1	10
Clinton (First Term)	20	3.7	1	8
Clinton (Second Term)	35	3.9	1	11
GW Bush (First Term)	23	3.2	1	6
GW Bush (Second Term)	21	5.0	1	8
Obama (First Term)	25	3.2	1	9
Obama (Second Term)	19	4.0	1	8
Trump (through Sept. 2020)	20	3.7	1	10

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the "Digests of Other White House Announcements," White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles

years in this almost 44-year period. George W. Bush spent at least twice as many days abroad in his final year in office—50—than he had in any of his first seven years as president, and Obama's final year brought his second highest total of days of international travel. Table 1 reveals that as the total number of days of international presidential travel has increased over time, the number of international trips has grown as well, while the average length of a presidential trip abroad has decreased. Both Bushes, Clinton, and Obama all went on approximately two to three times the number of trips to other countries per term that Carter and Reagan each did, and Trump likely would have kept up a similar pace in the absence of COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2020. With the rise in frequency came a decrease in duration, as Carter and Reagan averaged more than four days per trip, while the subsequent five presidents each averaged just over three days per trip, with the exceptions of George W. Bush's and Obama's second terms. Every president except Carter made at least one journey that consisted of events abroad on just one day, often to nearby destinations like Canada or Mexico. Each president embarked on an international tour with at least a week spent abroad. Carter went on three such journeys and George H.W. Bush five in their single terms in office. Reagan took six such trips, Clinton 10, George W. Bush six, and Obama six during their eight years as president. Through September of his fourth year in office, Trump has taken three international trips in which he spent at least a week abroad.

Month-by-month patterns of international presidential travel in the first year in office are depicted in Figure 3. Carter and Trump began their international travel the latest, waiting until May. Both Bushes and Obama took their first trips abroad in February, while Reagan did so in March and Clinton in April. Carter and Clinton each took only two trips abroad during their first year in office, while Reagan embarked on three, and Trump four. George W. Bush took five trips abroad in his first year, while George H.W. Bush embarked on seven first-year journeys overseas. Obama took 11 trips abroad in his first year, an average of almost one per month, and spent 11 of 30 days out of the country in April 2009.

For four of the seven presidents in this study—Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and Obama—Canada was their first international destination, an indication of that nation's close relationship with the United States. Carter's first trip abroad was to England, while George W. Bush, a former governor of Texas, signaled his intent to forge a closer relationship with our neighbor to the south when he chose Mexico for his first international destination as president. Trump's first international destination as president was Saudi Arabia.

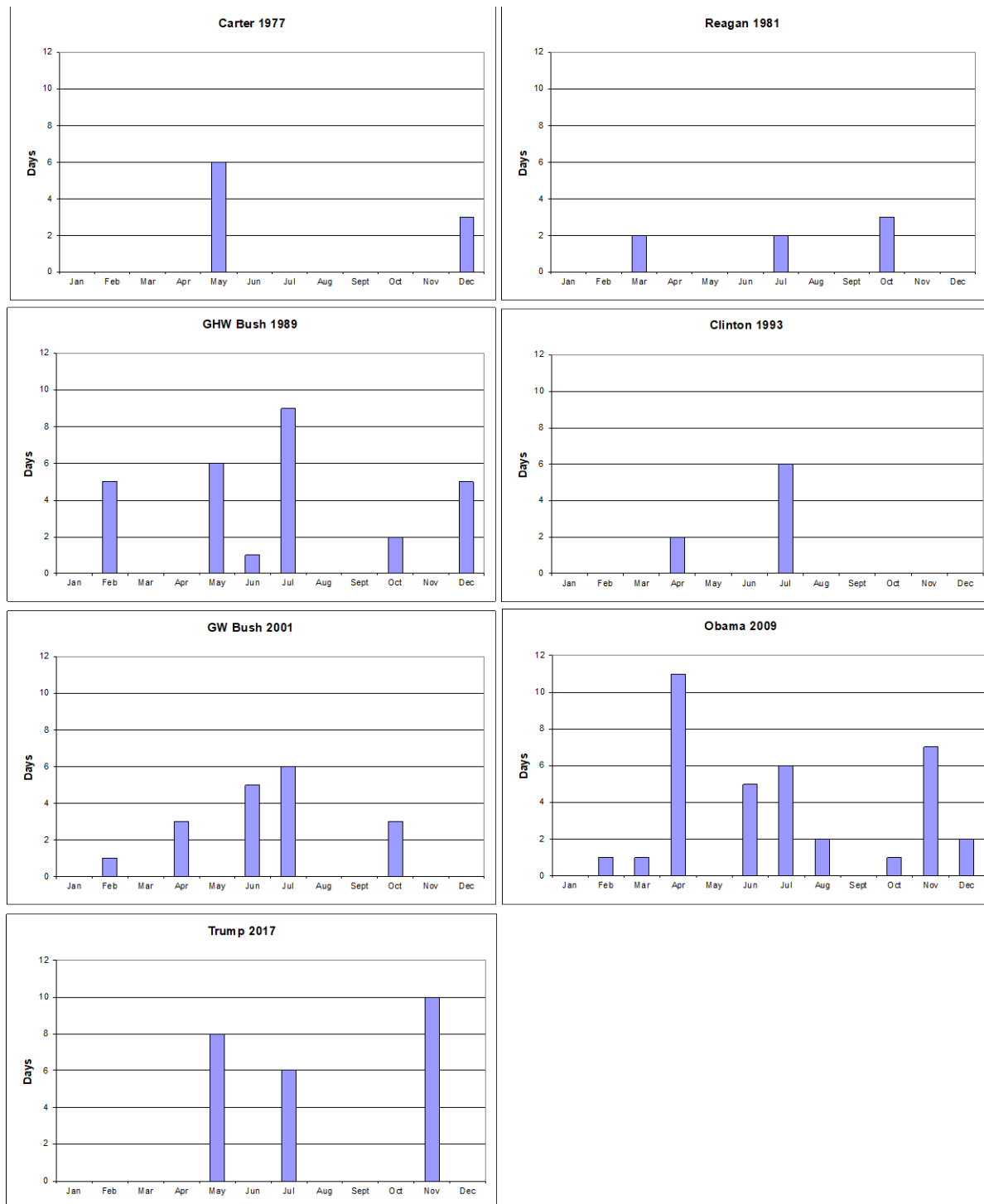
A brief review of each president's first year of international travel helps to illustrate the nature of the various journeys that presidents take abroad. While in England in May 1977, Carter attended a NATO meeting and a G-7 economic summit before moving on to Geneva, Switzerland, where he met on neutral ground with the president of Syria. He did not travel abroad again until December 29, 1977, when he began a nine-day journey in Poland, after which he visited Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Belgium.

Reagan's three journeys abroad in his first year in office took him to destinations that were closer to home. In March, he spent two days in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, meeting with that country's leaders. After spending much of the next few months recovering from being shot by a would-be assassin at the end of March, Reagan returned to Ottawa for another two days in July for a G-7 economic summit. He completed his international travel during his first year in office when he spent three days in October in Cancun, Mexico, attending the International Meeting on Cooperation and Development.

George H.W. Bush spent more days abroad in his first year than did his two immediate predecessors combined. In early February, he made a one-day visit to Ottawa before embarking at the end of the month on a trip consisting of four days of events in Japan, China, and South Korea. At the end of May and the beginning of June, he headed to Europe for seven days of events, including bilateral visits in Italy, Vatican City, Germany, and England, as well as a NATO meeting in Belgium. After just over a month back in the United States, he returned to Europe in July for a nine-day journey composed of bilateral visits in Poland, Hungary, and the Netherlands, as well as a G-7 economic summit in France. Three months later, Bush headed to Costa Rica for two days in late October for a bilateral visit, and in early December he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on the island of Malta, before attending a NATO event in Brussels. To round out a busy first year of international travel, Bush met with French President François Mitterrand in the French West Indies in mid-December.

Clinton's first-year travel was far more limited than that of the man he succeeded in the White House. In April, he spent two days in Vancouver, Canada, where he met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In July of that year, he flew to Asia for six days of events. He first attended a G-7 economic summit in Japan before continuing on to South Korea, where he met with that country's leaders and visited American troops stationed on the Korean peninsula.

Figure 3: Days of First-Year International Presidential Travel by Month, 1977-2017



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

George W. Bush made his first journey abroad in February 2001 to the ranch of Mexican President Vicente Fox for one day of meetings. In April, his second international trip took him to Quebec, Canada, for three days for the Summit of the Americas. Two months later, he flew to Europe for five days of events, including bilateral visits in Spain and Poland, a NATO meeting in

Belgium, a European Union event in Sweden, and a summit in Slovenia with President Vladimir Putin of Russia. In July, Bush returned to Europe for a bilateral visit to England, a G-8 summit in Italy,<sup>2</sup> and a visit to U.S. troops stationed in Kosovo. Bush rounded out a full first year abroad with an October journey to China for an APEC summit.

Obama's 11 first-year international trips in 2009 spanning 36 days far outpaced his predecessors. His first trip abroad in February was a one-day journey to Ottawa for a bilateral visit. At the end of March, he began an eight-day trip that included stops in London for a G-20 summit, in Strasbourg, France and nearby Baden-Baden, Germany for a NATO summit, and in Prague, Czech Republic, for a European Union summit, followed by bilateral visits to Turkey and Iraq. Later in April, he made a four-day trip first to Mexico for a bilateral visit, then to Trinidad and Tobago for a Summit of the Americas. In June, Obama flew to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Germany for bilateral visits before traveling to France for the 65th anniversary of the D-Day invasion during World War II. A July trip took him to bilateral visits in Russia, Ghana, and Vatican City, as well as to a G-8 summit in Rome. In August, Obama returned to Mexico for a summit with the leaders of Mexico and Canada, then took a one-day trip to Denmark in October where he lobbied for Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Olympics. In November, he spent a week in Asia that included bilateral visits to Japan, China, and South Korea, as well as an APEC summit in Singapore. Obama closed out a busy first year of international travel with two brief trips in December, first to Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, and then a return visit to Denmark, this time for a United Nations summit focused on climate change.

The first of Trump's four first-year international trips came in May 2017 and took him to Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Palestinian Authority,<sup>3</sup> Italy, and Vatican City for bilateral visits. He then traveled to Belgium for a NATO summit, followed by a visit to the Italian island of Sicily for a G-7 summit before returning home after eight days in the Middle East and Europe. In early July he again crossed the Atlantic for a four-day trip that included a bilateral visit to Poland and a G-20 summit in Germany. Less than a week later, Trump flew to France for a two-day bilateral visit as the guest of President Macron at Bastille Day celebrations that coincided with the centennial of the United States's involvement in World War I. Finally, in November Trump traveled to Asia for a ten-day journey that included bilateral visits to Japan, South Korea, and China, followed by an APEC summit in Vietnam and an ASEAN summit in the Philippines. Trump's 24 days abroad in his first year represents the third highest first-year total among these seven presidents.

## WHERE

Where do presidents travel abroad? Table 2 illustrates that the breadth and amount of international presidential travel have increased over the almost 44 years from Carter's inauguration through September of Trump's fourth year in office. The rise has been mostly steady, from Carter's 25 countries in four years and Reagan's 26 countries over eight years, to George H.W. Bush's 34 countries in four years, and Clinton and George W. Bush each visiting 73 countries over their eight respective years in the White House. Obama's total of 58 countries visited in his eight years represents a drop in international travel, as do Trump's visits to 25 countries through

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<sup>2</sup> The addition of Russia in 1997 transformed the G-7 into the G-8. Russia was removed from the group in 2014, so subsequent meetings again were referred to as gatherings of the G-7. For more information, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/25/world/europe/obama-russia-crimea.html>.

<sup>3</sup> While the status of territory governed by the Palestinian Authority has been contested, this study follows the practice of the State Department, which categorizes presidential visits to Palestinian Authority territory separately from visits to Israel. For more information, see: <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president>.

September of his fourth year in office, though he would have traveled more internationally in 2020 had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 2: Numbers of Countries Presidents Visited and Total International Visits, 1977-Sept. 2020**

President	Number of Countries	Total International (Includes Multiple Visits)
Carter	25	28
Reagan	26	44
GHW Bush	34	57
Clinton	73	127
GW Bush	73	133
Obama	58	108
Trump (through Sept. 2020)	25	38

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

To which regions of the world have presidents traveled most frequently? Table 3 indicates that, collectively, 242 of the 535 visits to other countries, or 45 percent, of the international visits these presidents made, were to countries in Europe. The first five of these seven presidents each made more than twice as many stops in European countries than they did in any other region, with Clinton leading the way with 64 visits. The first exception is Obama, for whom Europe was still the most visited region, but it was trailed closely by Asia (38 visits versus 32 visits), reflecting his administration’s much publicized “pivot to Asia.” The second exception is Trump, who visited countries in Europe 19 times, followed by 13 visits to countries in Asia.

These data reflect the total number of visits abroad, including multiple visits to the same country, so Reagan’s four journeys to Germany, for example, are counted four times in this table. Europe’s place atop this list is an indication of the close political, economic, and military ties between the United States and many of the countries on the continent. It is also partly a function of the great number of countries on that continent; while the United States also has close ties to its neighbors in North America, there are only two large countries, Canada and Mexico, in the immediate vicinity.<sup>4</sup>

The number of total international visits each president made, including multiple visits to the same country, displays a pattern that is quite similar, with a steady rise over time as well from Carter’s 28 visits to George W. Bush’s 133, followed by a dip to 108 for Obama, and just 38 for Trump. These two measures taken together indicate that Carter rarely visited the same country more than once, as he made 28 visits abroad to 25 different countries, while the other presidents made repeated visits to various countries much more frequently.

<sup>4</sup> Regional groupings were determined in large part according to categories established by the United Nations Statistics Division (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>). The countries of eastern Europe, including Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and more, were included as part of Europe, while the Republic of Georgia was categorized as being in Asia. While Russia spans both Europe and Asia, presidents regularly visited cities in western Russia such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.

**Table 3: Presidential Visits to Countries by Region, 1977-Sept. 2020**

Region	Carter	Reagan	GHW Bush	Clinton	GW Bush	Obama	Trump (through Sept. 2020)	Total
Europe	12	22	29	64	58	38	19	242
Asia	4	5	6	18	23	32	13	101
Middle East	3	0	2	11	18	10	4	48
North America	1	10	7	7	9	8	1	43
Africa	4	0	1	13	10	8	0	36
South America	2	2	7	5	10	4	1	31
Central America & Caribbean	2	5	4	7	3	6	0	27
Pacific	0	0	1	2	2	2	0	7
Total	28	44	57	127	133	108	38	535

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

Asia ranks as the second-most visited region, even though this count excludes the countries in southwestern Asia that are grouped separately as being in the Middle East. Over time, the number of visits presidents have made to Asia has grown, with each president through Obama spending more time there than did his immediate predecessor. The Middle East is the third-most visited region, reflecting the United States’s military and political involvement in the region, followed by North America.<sup>5</sup> While travel to other regions of the world has increased over time, visits to our North American neighbors remained relatively constant over the four presidencies from Reagan to Obama, though Trump has only been to Canada once and has not visited Mexico.

In the aggregate, the past seven presidents have made an approximately similar number of visits to Africa, South America, and Central America and the Caribbean. Clinton made the most country visits in each of these regions with the exception of South America, where George W. Bush led with ten countries visited. The Pacific, which consists of Australia and New Zealand, was the least-visited region, with only seven total presidential stops. Some presidents never visited certain regions. Reagan did not journey to Africa and George H.W. Bush made only one stop there, a 1990 visit to Egypt. Carter did not travel to the countries of the Pacific, and Reagan never visited the Middle East. As of September 2020, Trump has yet to visit Africa, or the countries of the Pacific, Central America, and the Caribbean.

Analysis of presidential destinations by country reveals both continuity and variation in the objects of presidential attention. Figure 4 depicts the number of presidential visits each country received from 1977 through September 2020, and Table 4 lists the countries that hosted five or more presidential visits and provides the data for each president. France and the United Kingdom were the most visited countries, each hosting U.S. presidents 29 times, followed closely by Germany (26), Canada (22), Japan (21), and Mexico (20).

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with United Nations categories, North America includes Canada, Mexico, and Bermuda, where George H.W. Bush met twice with British prime ministers. The countries of Central America and the Caribbean are included in a separate category.

Figure 4: Number of Presidential Visits by Country, 1977-Sept. 2020



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles. Maps made using Tableau software.



**Table 4: Countries that Hosted at Least Five Presidential Visits, 1977-Sept. 2020**

Country	Carter	Reagan	GHW Bush	Clinton	GW Bush	Obama	Trump (through Sept. 2020)	Total
France	2	3	5	5	4	6	4	29
United Kingdom	1	3	5	7	5	5	3	29
Germany	1	4	3	6	5	5	2	26
Canada	0	5	4	5	4	3	1	22
Japan	2	2	2	5	3	4	3	21
Mexico	1	5	1	2	6	5	0	20
Italy	1	2	2	5	5	2	2	19
U.S.S.R./Russia	0	1	2	5	7	2	0	17
South Korea	1	1	2	3	3	4	2	16
Poland	1	0	2	2	3	3	1	12
Vatican City	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	12
Belgium	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	11
China	0	1	1	1	4	3	1	11
Egypt	2	0	1	4	3	1	0	11
Israel	1	0	0	4	2	2	1	10
Saudi Arabia	1	0	1	1	2	4	1	10
Switzerland	1	1	1	4	0	0	2	9
Brazil	1	1	2	1	2	1	0	8
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	7
Indonesia	0	1	0	1	2	3	0	7
Ireland	0	1	0	3	1	1	1	7
Spain	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	7
Australia	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	6
Colombia	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	6
Czech Rep./ Czechoslovakia	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	6
India	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	6
Iraq	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	6
Philippines	0	0	0	2	1	2	1	6
Argentina	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
Finland	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	5
Netherlands	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	5
Portugal	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	5
Singapore	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	5
Turkey	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	5
Vietnam	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	5

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

Only eight countries were visited by all seven presidents in this study, indicating their enduring importance to the United States: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and Vatican City. An additional seven countries were visited by six of these seven presidents: Brazil, Canada, China, Mexico, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Spain. Of these 15

countries, eight are in Europe, three in Asia, two in North America, one in South America, and one in the Middle East.

The frequency of multiple visits to the same country has increased dramatically over the past 44 years. Carter visited only three countries twice—France, Japan, and Egypt; he visited the other 22 countries he traveled to as president only once. Reagan visited two countries five times each—Canada and Mexico—in eight years, and George H.W. Bush visited France and the United Kingdom five times each in just four years.<sup>6</sup> Clinton made five or more visits to seven countries during his eight years in office—the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, France, Japan, Italy, and Russia—while George W. Bush did likewise to five countries—Russia, Mexico, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Obama made five or more visits to four countries—France, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Through September 2020, Trump has made four visits to France and three apiece to the United Kingdom and Japan.

Figure 4 indicates that the countries that have been infrequently visited tend to be in the developing world. Most recent presidents have expanded both the volume and scope of presidential travel, visiting many more countries than their predecessors and going to many countries that had not previously hosted a U.S. president.

### ***FOR WHAT PURPOSE***

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Presidents travel internationally primarily to attend a wide range of bilateral and multilateral summits with other heads of state. Table 5 reveals that the majority of presidential trips abroad have been bilateral visits, which almost always involve meetings with the host country's head of state and are often official state visits. Collectively, 63 percent of the visits that presidents made over this almost 44-year period were bilateral visits; individually, these ranged from 50 percent for Trump to 72 percent for George H.W. Bush.<sup>7</sup>

In most years, presidents regularly have attended G-7 and G-8 summits, NATO summits, European Union meetings, APEC summits, and various regional summits. All of these events rotate location from year to year, and all but the European Union meetings<sup>8</sup> sometimes take place in the United States. Obama was the first president to attend regularly ASEAN summits, as well as meetings of the newly created G-20. The relative decline in the proportion of bilateral visits under Obama likely reflects the proliferation of multilateral groups and meetings, including recent United Nations events focused on climate change. Many presidential trips for a multilateral summit frequently also include a number of one-on-one meetings with individual heads of state. In addition to their meetings with foreign leaders, presidents often visit American troops stationed abroad as part of their many trips around the world.

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that these totals include two visits to Bermuda, which is part of the United Kingdom, and to the French West Indies, which is part of France.

<sup>7</sup> The total of 538 visits in Table 5 exceeds the total of 535 in previous tables and figures because Carter attended both a NATO meeting and a European Union meeting during one visit and both a NATO meeting and a G-7 Summit during another, while Obama attended both a NATO and a European Union meeting once; thus these three visits were each counted under two separate categories.

<sup>8</sup> European Union meetings include meetings of related bodies such as the European Commission and the European Parliament.

**Table 5: Categories of International Presidential Travel, 1977-Sept. 2020**

Nature of Visit	GHW		GW		Trump (through Sept. 2020)		Total	%	
	Carter	Reagan	Bush	Clinton	Bush	Obama			
Bilateral visit	19	30	41	81	95	56	19	341	63.4
G-7/G-8/G-20	4	7	3	8	7	16	6	51	9.5
Other Multilateral/ Regional Summit	1	2	3	12	7	11	3	39	7.2
NATO meeting	2	1	4	3	7	5	3	25	4.6
APEC summit	0	0	0	5	6	4	1	16	3.0
Bilateral Summit in Third Country	2	2	3	2	3	0	3	15	2.8
European Union	1	1	1	4	4	3	0	14	2.6
ASEAN Summit	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	7	1.3
Summit of the Americas	0	0	0	1	3	3	0	7	1.3
Funeral	1	0	0	4	0	2	0	7	1.3
Non-governtal Conference	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	6	1.1
Middle East Peace Conference	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	5	0.9
United Nations	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	5	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

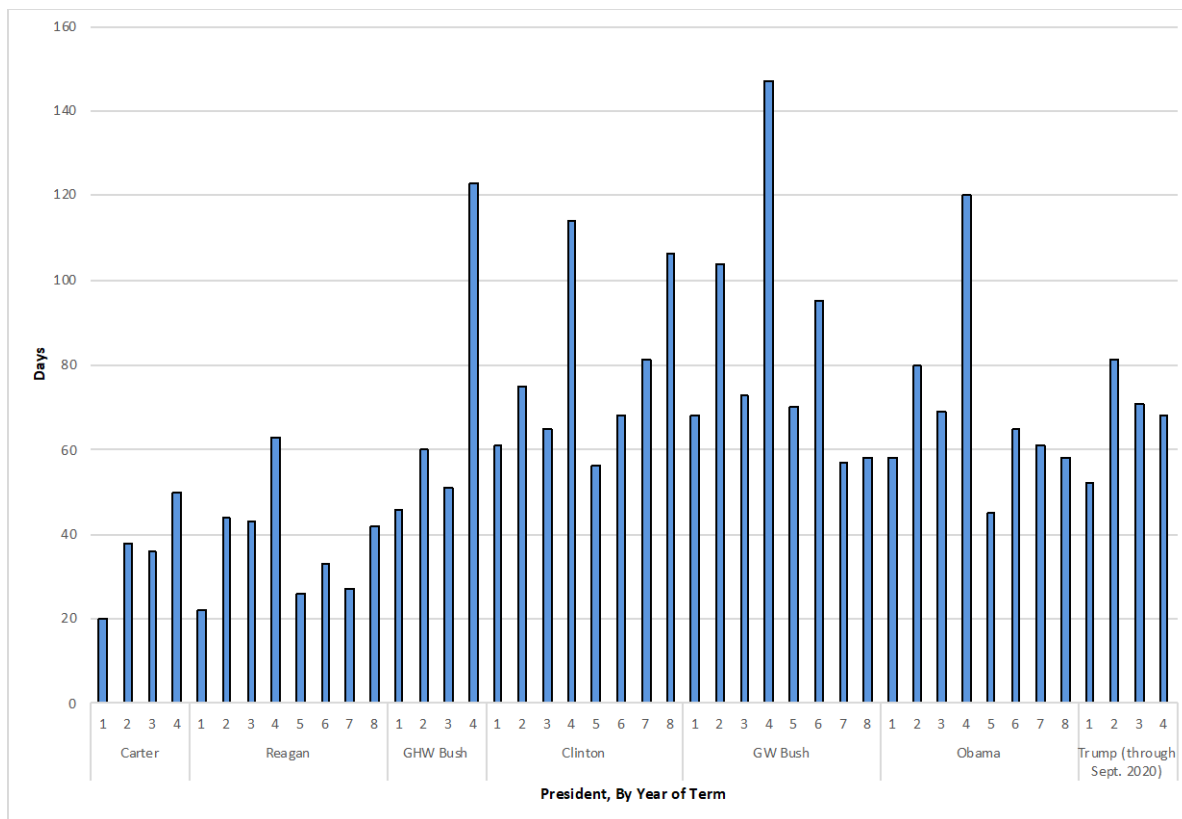
Presidents have conducted bilateral summits in a third country with relative frequency, with an average of more than one every third year. Ten of the 15 such meetings in this study were with the leader of the Soviet Union or Russia, beginning with Carter in 1979 in Vienna, Austria, followed by Reagan’s 1985 summit in Geneva, Switzerland, and his 1986 summit in Reykjavik, Iceland. George H.W. Bush met with the Soviets in Malta in 1989, and again in Helsinki, Finland, in 1990. Clinton continued this practice, meeting with the Russian president in 1993 in Vancouver, Canada, and again in Helsinki in 1997. George W. Bush held a summit with the president of Russia in 2001 in Slovenia and again in 2005 in Slovakia. Trump met with the president of Russia in 2018 in Helsinki. Additionally, Carter and George H.W. Bush each met with the president of Syria in Geneva in 1977 and 1990, respectively, and in 2006, George W. Bush met in Jordan with the prime minister of Iraq. Trump met with the leader of North Korea in 2018 in Singapore and again in 2019 in Vietnam.

About one in every 14 presidential visits abroad has been for the purpose of attending a multilateral or regional summit that is not one of the specific meetings referenced in Table 5. These events have included Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Central American summit meetings, a World Trade Organization meeting, and other gatherings of regional leaders in places such as Africa, the Caribbean, the Baltics, and Asia. Presidents have rarely traveled to funerals in other countries, often sending the vice president or other representatives in their stead to head the American delegation. Carter journeyed to Japan to pay tribute to a deceased prime minister, Clinton did so for funerals in Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and

Japan, and Obama did so for Nelson Mandela’s funeral in South Africa and for Shimon Peres’s funeral in Israel. Presidents have occasionally planned an international journey to coincide with the anniversary of a major historical event. Several recent presidents have chosen to travel to France to commemorate the D-Day invasion of Normandy during World War II and have given memorable speeches atop the cliffs that Allied troops scaled in June 1944 after landing on the beaches below.

International presidential travel increased substantially over the almost 44 years of this study, and the distribution of international travel within a president’s term has varied. Recent presidents have embarked on more international journeys of shorter duration, on average, although each of the past seven presidents has made multiple trips that consist of more than a week of events abroad. Patterns of international travel during a president’s first year have varied a great deal, illustrating both the personal priorities of each president and the nature of the events that presidents attend abroad. Recent presidents have traveled more broadly, though Europe is still the most visited region. While more than half of all presidential visits abroad have been bilateral visits, multilateral summits compose an important and growing part of a president’s international travel agenda.

**Figure 5: Days Presidents Held Domestic Non-D.C. Area Events, 1977-Sept. 2020**



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

## DOMESTIC PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL

### *WHEN*

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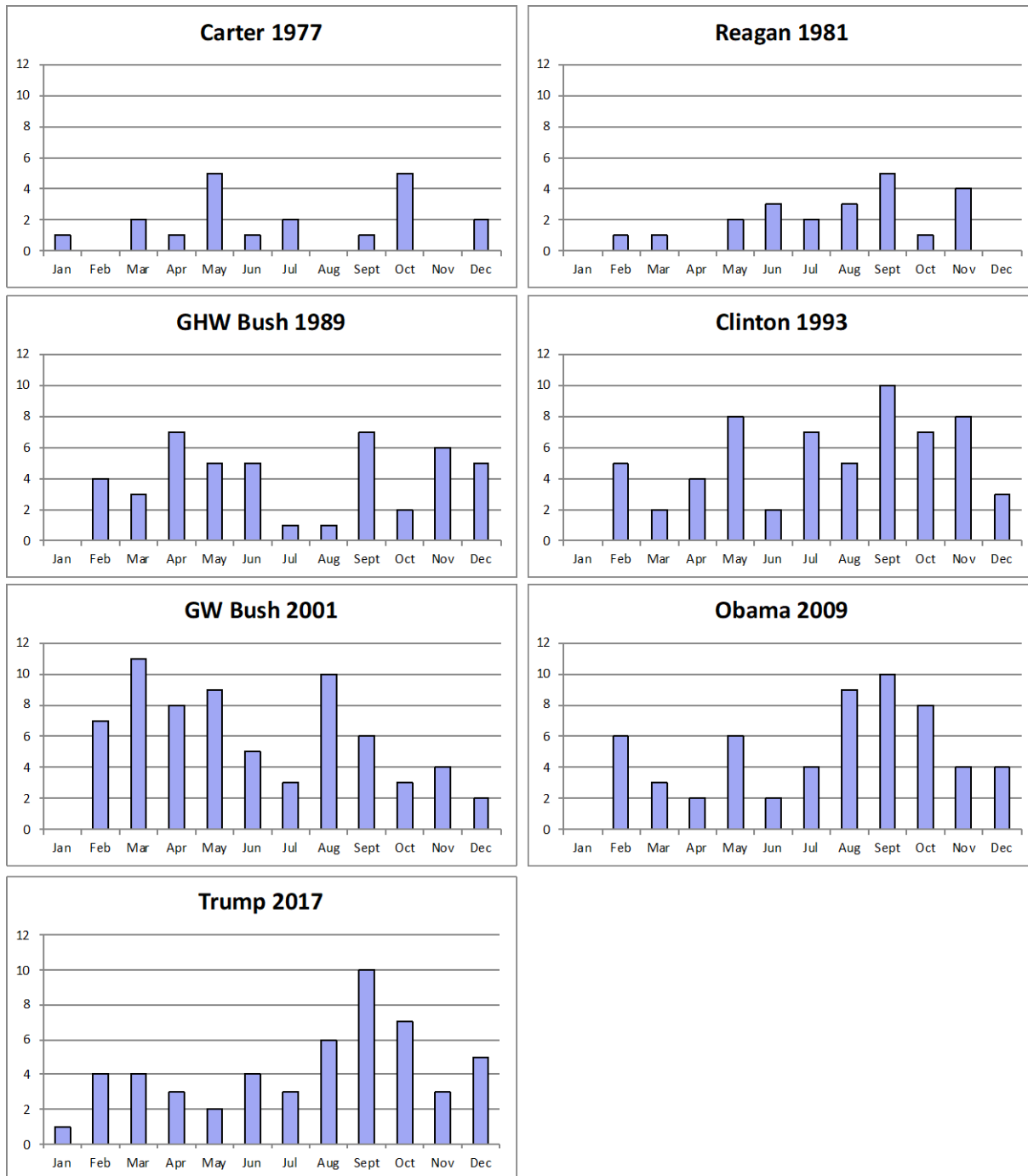
Presidents travel domestically far more frequently than they journey abroad, as they take trips around the country in order to meet and communicate with the people they represent. A president has a great deal of discretion in deciding when, where, and for what purpose to travel, and his or her allocation of the scarce resource of time can reveal a great deal about the president's strategic priorities. As a reminder, the data discussed here exclude events in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, because so many events presidents attend there occur in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., at locations such as the Pentagon, CIA headquarters, the National Institutes of Health, and Joint Base Andrews, and thus are not directly comparable to other presidential travel across the country.

Analysis of domestic travel within a president's term reveals first-term patterns that are remarkably consistent for each of the seven presidents in this study. Figure 5 illustrates that the greatest numbers of presidential events in the states consistently take place in the reelection year (as of September 2020, Trump's fourth-year domestic travel has not yet surpassed his activity in each of his first three years, but is on track to do so by the end of the year), followed by the second year of a term—in which presidents frequently campaign and raise money for their co-partisans in the midterm elections—then the third year, and finally the first year in office. The figure also illustrates the dramatic increase in domestic travel over time, as Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump each traveled about as much in their least active years as Carter did in his busiest year of travel.

There is less consistency in the second-term domestic travel patterns of the four presidents in this study who were elected to two terms in the White House. Reagan traveled less in his second term than he did in three of the corresponding years of his first term, likely due in part to his status as our nation's oldest president. Clinton, in contrast, embarked on an aggressive public travel schedule in his second term, holding events on successively greater numbers of days in each of his final four years in office. George W. Bush traveled least in his final two years in office when his approval ratings were low and he was confronting daunting economic and foreign policy challenges. Each year of Obama's second term saw fewer days of domestic travel than in the corresponding years of his first term. While his yearly second-term travel totals were still much higher than Reagan's, they were almost uniformly lower than either Clinton's or Bush's.

Examination of Figure 6, which depicts first year non-D.C. area domestic travel by month for each president, reveals much more activity than was the case for international travel. The five most recent presidents traveled more in their first year than the first two presidents in this study, and they undertook more extensive travel agendas earlier in the year. Both Carter and Reagan only had two months with five or more days of domestic travel, far fewer than their successors, though Reagan refrained from substantial travel during much of the spring and summer as he recovered from the attempt on his life in late March. Bush's 68 days holding non-D.C. area domestic events in 2001 represents the highest first year total, followed by Clinton's 61 days, Obama's 58 days, Trump's 52 days, and George H.W. Bush's 46 days of domestic events outside of the D.C. area.

Figure 6: Days of Non-DC Domestic Presidential Travel by Month, First Year, 1977-2017



Source: Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

## *WHERE*

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How has domestic presidential travel been distributed geographically? Which states have presidents visited most and least? Figure 7 depicts the total number of days that presidents held domestic events in each state between January 20, 1977, and September 30, 2020. For the sake of compact presentation of data, Alaska, which hosted presidential events on 20 days over almost 44 years, and Hawaii, which hosted events on 34 days over this period, are not depicted.

The map depicts patterns of presidential attention that are strongly correlated with state populations. The four states that hosted the most presidential visits—California, New York, Florida, and Texas—were the four most populous states according to a U.S. Census Bureau population estimate from the year 2000, the census year closest to the midpoint of this almost 44-year study. The four next most populated states—Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan—were the next four most-visited states.<sup>9</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Vermont, the second-least populated state, saw the fewest days with presidential visits—just three days over almost 44 years—and the eight least populated states hosted an average total of 14.4 days of events over almost four decades. The correlation coefficient between the states' population and the number of days of visits hosted is 0.93, suggesting a very strong relationship. Unsurprisingly, presidents travel most often to hold events in states where greater numbers of people live.

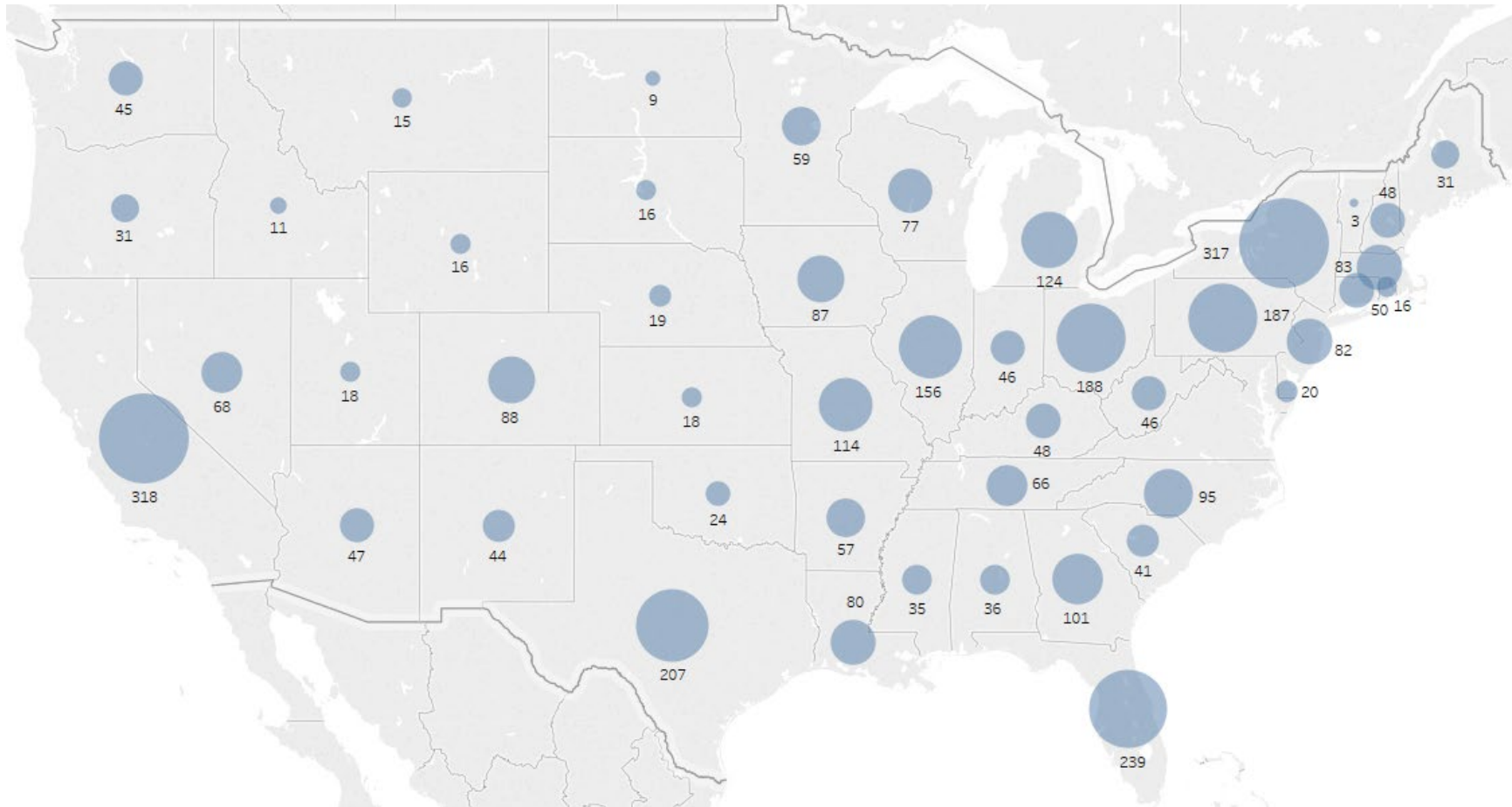
Which cities have presidents visited most? Table 6 reveals substantial consistency among the top nine cities in which the seven presidents in this study held the most events. New York was the leading city for all seven presidents, and it was the only locale that was among the top nine cities for all seven of these presidents. Chicago was among the top nine cities for six of these seven presidents, while Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia were on the lists of five of these seven presidents. There was substantial variation as well. Ten cities in Table 6 appear on the top nine list of only one president (Albuquerque, Beverly Hills, Charlotte, Cleveland, Columbia, Denver, Little Rock, New Orleans, Phoenix, and Portland). Another four cities appear on the top nine list of just two presidents during this period (Las Vegas, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and St. Louis).

It is worth noting that these data are by city and not by metropolitan area, so these totals do not capture visits to nearby cities such as Long Beach, Santa Monica, and Beverly Hills, all of which are in the Los Angeles area (Beverly Hills is among Trump's top nine destinations, while Los Angeles is not). Nevertheless, they do indicate which specific cities hosted the most presidential events. Across parties and over time, these seven presidents tended to hold many events in a similar set of cities, but their destinations also varied geographically in interesting ways.

The individual priorities of the presidents are reflected in this table as well. Atlanta ranked third for Georgia native Carter, and Los Angeles was second for Californian Reagan. George H.W. Bush held the third most events in his home-state city of Houston. New Orleans's place on George W. Bush's list is due to his many visits there in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Las Vegas makes Obama's list due both to that state's status as a battleground state in presidential elections and because of Obama's multiple trips to campaign and fundraise on behalf of Democratic Senate leader and Nevada Senator Harry Reid. While New York topped the list for each president, Trump's events there are a greater percentage of his total events in his top nine cities, as he was the only president who called that city home. Clinton and Obama both made numerous trips to New York for fundraising, in addition to the many other official events they held there.

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<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 population estimates for each state can be found at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2000-2010-state.html>.

**Figure 7: Days Presidents Held Domestic Non-D.C. Area Events in Each State, 1977-Sept. 2020**

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles. Maps made using Tableau software.



**Table 6: Non-D.C. Area Cities in which Presidents Held the Most Public Events, 1977-Sept. 2020**

Carter		Reagan		GHW Bush		Clinton		GW Bush		Obama		Trump (through Sept. 2020)	
City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.
New York	40	New York	42	New York	31	New York	153	New York	72	New York	158	New York	63
Los Angeles	13	Los Angeles	33	Los Angeles	31	Los Angeles	59	New Orleans	25	Chicago	56	Las Vegas	15
Atlanta	12	Chicago	26	Houston	30	Chicago	57	Atlanta	18	Los Angeles	39	Atlanta	8
Boston	8	Philadelphia	12	Chicago	20	Philadelphia	40	Chicago	18	Miami	34	Charlotte	8
Philadelphia	8	Atlanta	11	Dallas	20	San Francisco	35	St. Louis	17	San Francisco	33	Dallas	7
Chicago	6	Columbia	11	St. Louis	15	Houston	31	Albuquerque	16	Philadelphia	23	Phoenix	7
Cleveland	6	Columbus	11	Columbus	14	Boston	30	Philadelphia	16	Boston	21	Houston	6
Houston	6	Dallas	11	Atlanta	11	Miami	29	Little Rock	15	Las Vegas	21	Milwaukee	6
Portland	6	Houston	11	Miami	10	Denver	28	Milwaukee	15	Columbus	18	Beverly Hills	6

*Source:* Data compiled by the author from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the “Digests of Other White House Announcements,” White House schedules and press briefings, and Associated Press and other news articles.

While the analysis above explores many dynamics of when and where presidents hold events around the country, the *Public Papers of the Presidents* do not fully capture time spent at some of the most common destinations for presidents when they leave Washington, as they hold relatively few events at these places that are recorded in the *Public Papers*: the presidential retreat Camp David in northwest Maryland and, for those presidents who have one, a second home. Indeed, the data on presidential events above do not include time spent at presidential second homes due in part to the difficulty of trying to reconstruct how much time presidents spent at those locations decades ago.

Drawing on data provided by Mark Knoller of CBS News, the Carter Presidential Library, the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, and the Clinton Presidential Library, Table 7 presents the number of full and partial days that each of the presidents in this study spent at Camp David, at second homes, or on vacation at another location. For Trump, who visited properties he owned in many cities and countries—including Las Vegas, Scotland, and more—while on trips that were not vacations, the data below capture his time spent at the two properties that served as second homes and where he spent his vacations—his clubs in Bedminster, New Jersey, and Palm Beach, Florida<sup>10</sup>

**Table 7: Days at Camp David, at Second Homes, and on Vacation, 1977-Oct. 22, 2020**

Full & Partial Days at Site	Carter	Reagan	GHW Bush	Clinton	GW Bush	Obama	Trump (through 10/22/20)
Camp David	376	517	65	173	487	93	31
2 <sup>nd</sup> Home or Vacation	97	335	174	174	533	235	277

*Source:* Data provided by Mark Knoller of CBS News, the Carter Presidential Library, the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, and the Clinton Presidential Library. The numbers provided by the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library are estimates, and not exact counts, of the days that George H.W. Bush spent at his home in Kennebunkport and at Camp David.

It is important to note that a president is never truly on vacation. No matter where he or she goes, a president must always be on the job, tending to critical affairs of state, whether it be at the White House, on Air Force One, at Camp David, at a

second home, or in another location, taking a break from some but not all of the duties of the job. The press briefing room at George W. Bush’s Crawford ranch included a sign bearing the name “Western White House,” likely at least in part to contest journalists’ and comedians’ assertions that the president’s lengthy stays there were vacations. While presidents are at work no matter where they are, it is also worth noting that presidents cannot always accomplish the same goals remotely that they can while in the nation’s capital. For example, in the midst of a crisis in the Republic of Georgia in August 2008, George W. Bush delayed a trip to his ranch in Crawford so that he could communicate face to face with key advisers in Washington (Perino 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Mark Knoller of CBS News generously provided the data on Carter’s days at Camp David, Reagan’s days at Camp David and at his ranch or on vacation, Clinton’s days on vacation, George W. Bush’s days at Camp David, at his ranch, and at his parent’s home in Kennebunkport, Obama’s days at Camp David and on vacation, and Trump’s days at Camp David and at his properties in Bedminster, NJ and Palm Beach, FL. The Carter Library provided the data on Carter’s time in Plains, Georgia, and on vacation. The George H.W. Bush Library provided estimates of the number of days Bush spent at Camp David and in Kennebunkport. The Clinton Library provided the data on the number of days Clinton spent at Camp David.

George H.W. Bush frequently held events at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine, just as George W. Bush did at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. Both Bushes used their private homes as an extension of the White House, often meeting with foreign leaders there or conducting other presidential business. Reagan spent a great deal of time at Rancho del Cielo, his California home near Santa Barbara, California, but, unlike the Bushes, rarely held official events there. Trump has spent significant amounts of time at and has held many events at commercial properties he owns, most frequently at his clubs in Bedminster, New Jersey and Palm Beach, Florida. Carter, Clinton, and Obama had no equivalent second home, though Carter did visit his family home in Plains, Georgia for many holidays and Obama occasionally traveled to his home in Chicago. Additionally, Carter journeyed to various vacation locations around the country. Clinton embarked on a family trip each summer, journeying six times to the island of Martha's Vineyard and twice to Wyoming. Obama took yearly trips to Hawaii at the end of the year and to Martha's Vineyard in seven of his eight years in office, as well as shorter visits to other destinations.

Reagan is the clear leader in days at Camp David, spending all or part of 517 days there during his eight years in office, followed by George W. Bush's 487 days. Had Carter served a second term, his total numbers might have rivaled Reagan's. In contrast, Trump, Obama, and George H.W. Bush spent much less time there. While presidents do go to Camp David to relax at times, it is often very much a working retreat where presidents can take the time to think about bigger-picture or longer-term issues and meet with staff or even foreign leaders. According to CBS News's Mark Knoller, George W. Bush hosted foreign leaders there on 19 occasions, and Obama's visits there included hosting a G-8 Summit in 2012 and a Gulf Cooperation Council Meeting in 2015. Perhaps most famously, Camp David was the site of the Carter-led peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Egyptians in the late 1970s.

George W. Bush's 533 days spent either at his Crawford ranch or at his parents' house in Kennebunkport, Maine, are the most among the past seven presidents at a second home or otherwise on vacation, but Trump's first-term total of 277 days spent at his commercial properties in Bedminster, New Jersey and Palm Beach, Florida put him on a pace similar to Bush's. Reagan had the second highest total, spending 335 days at his California ranch during his eight years in office. Bush did indeed work during much of his time in Crawford. Most prominently, Knoller notes that he hosted 20 visits by foreign leaders at his ranch, demonstrating the frequency with which a modern president performs the duties of his office remotely (Knoller 2009). A president is never off the job—the demands of the office are unceasing, regardless of a president's location.

#### ***FOR WHAT PURPOSE***

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Presidents travel domestically for a myriad of reasons—to advance their own reelection interests, to raise funds, to support their fellow party members, to exert pressure on recalcitrant legislators, to promote their policy agenda or achievements in a setting outside the nation's capital, to attend ceremonial events, to respond to natural disasters or other crises, to influence public opinion, to meet with key leaders or organized interests, to see the people they represent, or simply to get out of Washington and address a crowd of cheering supporters.

While chronicling and exhaustively categorizing the many types of events a president holds around the country is beyond the scope of this study, there are recurring patterns of events throughout a president's term in office. For example, after delivering the annual State of the Union address in January or February, most presidents embark on a trip to highlight the themes and policy priorities emphasized in the speech to Congress. After giving his penultimate State of the Union address on January 19, 1999, Clinton gave speeches in Norristown, Pennsylvania, and Buffalo, New York, the following day. On January 29, 2003, George W. Bush journeyed to Grand

Rapids, Michigan, where he told a crowd of local citizens why presidents travel regularly after giving a State of the Union address: “I want to share some of my thoughts about that speech I gave last night. It’s important for me to come to parts of our country and explain why I said what I said, so that you and others around our country clearly understand some things about the country and the problems we face” (*Public Papers of the Presidents* 2003). Trump has not traveled around the country on the day after his State of the Union addresses, departing from the practice of his recent predecessors.

Each spring, presidents traditionally address at least three college commencement ceremonies, including one private college or university, one public civilian college or university, and one of the military service academies. Presidents, of course, have great discretion about which schools they address. In the spring of 1989, for example, George H.W. Bush delivered commencement addresses at five schools: Texas A&M University, Alcorn State University, Mississippi State University, Boston University, and the United States Coast Guard Academy.

Each August, presidents traditionally leave Washington for a family vacation, which, as discussed above, is most accurately viewed as a working vacation. In 1978, Carter spent a week during August in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The following year, he took a week-long cruise on the Mississippi River aboard the Delta Queen. Clinton made trips in 1993 and 1994 to Martha’s Vineyard in August, before going to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the nearby national parks in 1995 and 1996. During each year of his second term, he and his family spent time once again in Martha’s Vineyard during August. Reagan, both Bushes, and Trump spent much of the month of August during each year of their presidencies at their homes in California, Maine, Texas, and New Jersey, respectively, while Obama vacationed regularly in August on Martha’s Vineyard and at the end of each year in Hawaii.

At any time of year, but especially during the summer and fall hurricane season, presidents travel around the country to respond to disasters, both natural and human-made, including hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, volcanoes, and more. While any individual event is difficult to predict, patterns do recur, as some disasters tend to be seasonal. For example, George H.W. Bush journeyed to South Carolina in September 1989 after Hurricane Hugo struck, and then to Florida in August 1992 in response to Hurricane Andrew. In September 1999, Clinton traveled to North Carolina following Hurricane Floyd. In September 2005, George W. Bush journeyed to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In August and September 2017, Trump traveled to Texas and Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, and in October 2017 he went to Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Whether it is the eruption of Mount St. Helens, the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, or the terrorist attacks in Oklahoma City, a good deal of presidential travel involves responding when disaster strikes. Presidential journeys responding to human-caused tragedies are a regular and unpredictable component of presidential travel, as demonstrated by Obama’s trips in the wake of mass shootings in places like Newtown, Connecticut; Aurora, Colorado; Orlando, Florida, and more.

Each September or October, presidents usually travel to New York to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. Additionally, presidents often travel around the country on the patriotic national holidays of Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Veterans Day, as well as on the anniversaries of key events in American history, such as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the attacks of September 11, 2001. Presidents frequently travel to varying locations to attend the national conferences of key groups or constituencies, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the NAACP, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the National Governors Association. While many states are presidential destinations in and of themselves,

others are often merely waystations. Most presidential visits to Hawaii and Alaska have been brief, occurring during stopovers as presidents journey to and from Asia, with the exception of Obama's regular visits to his boyhood home state in the Pacific.

Presidents spend a great deal of time on the road campaigning for themselves and their co-partisans during even-numbered years when congressional and presidential elections take place. Previous research has found that the number of presidential fundraising events has increased over time, and that in recent decades, approximately one in every four presidential events outside of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia was a political fundraiser. Additionally, almost two out of every five such presidential events were either a fundraiser or another event held within 30 miles of a fundraiser on the same, previous, or next day, demonstrating the frequency with which presidents dedicate themselves to raising campaign funds while they travel (Doherty 2012, 97-99).

Presidents often visit military installations around the country to meet with the men and women in uniform and thank them for their service, while at the same time projecting an image of the president as a strong and effective leader by emphasizing their role as commander-in-chief, and thus as the principal defender of our nation. From 1977 through 2004, an average of 5.5 percent of all presidential events outside the Washington, D.C. area took place in a military setting (Doherty 2008).

Domestic presidential travel has increased substantially over time, and is largely concentrated in major cities in the most populous states. With growing levels of travel over time has also come increased breadth of travel, as recent presidents have traveled to more states per year than did their predecessors. In each year of their first terms, George W. Bush and Obama made a disproportionate number of visits to the respective states each had narrowly won or lost in their first campaign for the White House, illustrating the importance of the strategic targeting of key electoral states not just in the election year but throughout a president's first term in office (Doherty 2012). Presidents travel around the country for a wide range of purposes as they seek to move the nation closer to their particular vision of a more perfect union.

## CONCLUSION

Presidents will always have many more demands on their time than they can possibly fulfill. Presidential journeys require a substantial investment of time and energy on the part of the president and the White House staff, but can also yield great dividends as the president travels to countries around the world and different regions of the United States to meet with other leaders and key constituencies, promote a policy agenda, and much more. Doing so helps the president to achieve various concrete goals, while at the same time helping to shape his or her public image as president.

Over the past 44 years, recent presidents have traveled more than their predecessors did, both internationally and domestically, and have done so more frequently as they have journeyed to a wider range of destinations. Most often, their travel abroad has taken them to Europe and their travel at home has taken them to a relatively common set of cities in the most populated states. They travel abroad for bilateral visits and to attend a relatively regular series of multilateral conferences around the world. At home, they traverse the 50 states for a plethora of reasons and a dizzying array of events.

The precedents set by the seven most recent presidents of the United States will in part shape the choices made by the nation's next chief executive. While each president and his or her staff have a great deal of discretion when it comes to deciding how to allocate the president's time,

heads of state around the world, leaders within the United States, and the American people expect to see the president in person for events ranging from G-8 summits to meetings of the National Governors Association and personal responses in the aftermath of natural disasters and other tragedies. It is up to each president to forge his or her own path, using the experiences of previous presidents as points of reference, as he or she decides when, where, and for what purpose to travel.

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