



THE WHITE HOUSE
TRANSITION PROJECT
1997–2017

RICE UNIVERSITY'S
BAKER INSTITUTE
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

SMOOTHING THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF DEMOCRATIC POWER

Report 2017–43

PRESIDENTIAL WORK DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

*What They Do, Whom They See, and the Choices They Make**

Terry Sullivan, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*
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WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report relies on the confidential logs of eight postwar presidents, detailing their activities minute-by-minute during their first 100 days in office. These data and the analytical techniques employed dissect the presidents' routine: the whole of what presidents do, whom they see, and how the choices they make affect these two.

The Patterns to What Presidents Do

On average, few circumstances influence what presidents do. Instead, presidents do what they must rather than what they want. The demands of their constitutional duties drive their daily activities and squeeze out most potential alterations in routine. Despite their best intentions, presidents resemble their predecessors more than they differ from them. Second, beyond these demanding duties, presidential daily routines engage in a broad range of activities rather than concentrate on a single one: they do many things every day and nothing in particular.

This pattern holds for the core constitutional duties as well. Hence, presidential engagement concentrates on those duties explicitly defined in Article II of the constitution. And when presidents make an alteration, routine normally dissipates the effect of that change making adjustments through a flurry of small reductions in commitments across the

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board. With two exceptions, both of constitutional consequence: hostilities and unified government. Both these circumstances generate presidential responses consistent with their duty for national security and their opportunity for political leadership. In responding to these two circumstances, the presidential changes in routine generate genuine tradeoffs, pulling significant resources of time away from their personal lives and away from their role in managing the White House decision-making process. The former drains presidential health and endurance and probably portends ill effects in the long run. The latter suggests the necessity of the “control” functions of the White House staff, lodged properly in the chief of staff and staff secretary functions in particular.

The Patterns to Whom Presidents See

The councils that surround a president reflect a conundrum: the group that see a president regularly has very few members. Yet the councils that presidents rely on have a broader membership than these few individuals or the core White House staff.

Every day, presidents interact with scores of people but no one in particular. On average, the most time presidents spend interacting with any specific individual amounts to less than 10% of the day. The institutional responsibilities so important in dictating the president’s engagement seem less important in dictating the makeup of the councils that presidents draw on. Indeed, the few councils that have fixed memberships, with statutes dictating in some small ways who should participate, increasingly have become the target of presidential inattention over the decades. Instead, presidents try to manage their councils more to improve the possibilities that those councils will inform their presidential deliberations.

The evidence suggests that these presidential councils have more breadth than expected and involve more external (and presumably contrary) advice than most imagine. That result derives from the fact that presidents see many more everyday than those in their “inner circles” and that the phrase itself “inner circle” suggests considerably more attention than the nature of real presidential routine allows. Presidents get advice from a wide array of actors. And just when circumstances call on presidents to deal with extraordinary issues, their councils expand (rather than contract) in just the ways most would imagine they ought to.

The Patterns to the Choices Presidents Make

Given the lack of theoretical study, presidents have only two useful mechanisms at their disposal for reshaping their routines: to affect the overall size of their staff and to decide the degree of “open” staff relationships. These two represent large-scale adaptations of the White House decision-making system rather than more precise adjustments. Both the expansion of staffing (and, presumably its specialization), and adopting a strong hierarchy seem to have measurable effects on what presidents do and with whom they consult.

In orchestrating the president’s routine, staff must become more aware of the dimensions of that routine to find adjustments that match the president’s work to the president’s ambitions. In the end, controlling routine provides the only choices presidents have to avoid the institution’s strong influence on routine.



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HOW IT BEGINS FOR THEM

There's nothing that can completely prepare you for the job of being President of the United States. You know, that first day after you get sworn in, and they walk you into the office, then everybody leaves, and you're looking around, thinking, "*Man, now what?!*"

—President Barack Obama, 2016

With an ever-increasing apprehension, newly inaugurated presidents realize they now stand on thin ice. Even surrounded by committed and attentive subordinates, presidents clearly feel this seclusion.

Those staff can't help much. They have their own new experience to absorb and, as it turns out, the president's seclusion has both an actual, physical as well as a mental dimension. Physical seclusion separates these staff from their president in ways they did not experience in the campaign. No one sees what their president sees. So, trying to help can easily make things worse.

Scholars can't help, either. Analysis of presidential decision-making too often relies on data that do not address directly the way presidents work: what they spend their day doing, whom they see, how their operations differ from one another, or how (even whether) they can adjust their styles. Instead, the information scholars develop often addresses just the few things they can see — speeches or vetoes or executive orders, etc. Rarely do the outputs of decision-making have a clear-cut relationship to that decision-making. And in considering those individual outputs, scholars also rarely consider an output as part of a whole of

presidential activity or its overall routine, thereby ignoring its complexity.¹ Like elsewhere in science, failing to fix these empirical and theoretical shortcomings — shortcomings of perspective — leaves a void into which rushes popular misconception and just bad information.

In the end, staff and scholars have little to tell their presidents what to do when they experience that first reaction out there on the ice, “*Man, now what?!*”

The research reported here brings two important resources to bear on filling this void in experience and in analytics. One provides the needed data — using confidential and minute-by-minute logs of presidential activities compiled into a composite log called “the President’s Daily Diary.”² The data amassed here reconstitute the 40-year period covering Presidents Eisenhower through George H.W. Bush and represent the most up-to-date information available.³ The other resource offers an analytical approach that considers each element of the president’s day as simultaneously a positive and negative choice, e.g., to participate in a press conference also means to forego using that time for a security briefing instead. This new approach considers all that presidents do into a whole.

Analyzing these data reveals that presidents respond to much the same demands, that they rarely change their routines to better reflect their own ambitions, that presidential staffs make their presidents work too much, and that standard dictums about the choices they might make in routine—e.g., more open staff relationships inform the president—get it wrong.

TWO FLAWS DRIVEN BY MYTH

Chris Matthews provides an example of how problems can manifest themselves. Matthews wrote in his book, *Hardball*,⁴ that at the national level, a politician’s detailed knowledge of others plays an important role in shaping success. To prove his point, Matthews recount a story about Lyndon Johnson. It seems that as soon as LBJ learned his attorney general and political rival, Robert Kennedy, regularly led late-night discussions with his entourage, Johnson immediately made a point of always calling on or meeting with Kennedy early in the morning.

As just noted, several organizations (including the US Secret Service, the White House Appointments Office, and the White House residential staff) log the president’s whereabouts, those attending the president, and their activities together. These logs

¹ Appendix 2 discusses the flaws of understanding institutions as only the sum of their constituent parts—as “easily decomposable” systems. For an additional discussion of this topic, see Herbert Simon, “The Architecture of Complexity,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106, no. 6 (December 1962): 467–82.

² See Appendix 1 for a detailed description of the diary.

³ The Presidential Records Act of 1978, its amendments, and associated presidential executive orders prevent the release of Daily Diary information (and other archival materials) until 12 years from the close of an administration. Following this statutory delay in releasing materials, archival decisions rarely place processing diaries on a high priority.

⁴ Chris Matthews, *Hardball: How Politics is Played — Told by One Who Knows the Game* (New York: Touchstone, 1988).

together tell the story of the president's contacts both in private, in person, and on the phone and through other forms of communications often minute-by-minute.

In this case, President Johnson's Daily Diary shows that LBJ interacted with his attorney general some 96 times between the assassination that elevated President Johnson and Robert Kennedy's resignation as AG to run for the Senate from New York. These interactions included face-to-face meetings, group meetings the AG attended, and phone conversations, many of which the president secretly recorded. Of those 96 encounters, only one of them occurred before 10:00 a.m.⁵ Although appealing as an anecdote, then, Matthews' story about President Johnson's routine turns out not to have a basis in fact.

Such appealing but flawed information generates at least two faulty "lessons learned": what we see of the public record does not establish useful guidance and understanding the public record often leaves false expectations.

Incorrect Guidance

Often in preparation for winning, modern presidential candidates have had their staffs prepare studies of what previous presidents have done. Using the public record of previous administrations, for example, both the 1980 Ronald Reagan and the 2000 George W. Bush presidential campaigns undertook such an effort trying to learn what to expect and what would work.⁶

These studies report on whom presidents see and how much time they devote to meetings. As a common finding, these studies report that President Carter spent little time working with congressional leaders. Such a finding would fit the "received wisdom" about President Carter's disdain for the legislative branch. These studies produce other summaries as well: about the amount of time presidents invest in press conferences, management, budget development, travel, etc. Yet compared to the minute-by-minute details of the daily diary, both the Reagan and Bush studies wildly underestimated (by hundreds of percentage points⁷) the amount of contact previous presidents had invested overall, and, for President Carter, then especially the contacts they had had with their congressional leaders.

Taking the common view that President Carter's failures had resulted from his lack of contact with congressional leaders, the evidence seemed to reinforce that idea. Using that information and its validation of their own perceptions, the Reagan planners then decided their president could draw an appealing and dramatic distinction with President Carter by immediately and dramatically reaching out to the congressional leadership. Knowing instead that President Carter met very often with congressional leaders (second-highest amount of contact among postwar presidents) and, in fact, started each day with a congressional briefing, might require rethinking an explanation for President Carter's congressional ineffectiveness and, by implication, might undermine the idea that the Reagan planners had really identified a useful strategy for their own new president. In the end, their

⁵ Data derived from the presidential daily diary log, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

⁶ These studies are internal to the Reagan for President Campaign and the Bush for President Campaign and were provided to the author by staff responsible for their development.

⁷ For a detailed assessment, see Terry Sullivan, *Nerve Center: Lessons in Governing from the White House Chiefs of Staff* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

dramatic strategy had little discernible effect ameliorating President Reagan's otherwise mediocre legislative record.

Unexpected Demands for Time

Relying on their flawed prior expectations (even though sometimes based in serious attempts at study), new administrations come to office having underestimated the likely number of demands they will regularly receive for their president's time.⁸ At the end of *their* first 100 days, Karl Rove—President George W. Bush's chief political counselor—described the early Bush experience with this underestimation in much the way others would reflect on their own low expectations, as the uncomfortable sensation of feeling like “a fire hydrant in a world of dogs.”⁹

Compounding their low expectations, the unexpected demands they then face come not just from congressional leaders, which they will have undercounted, but also from regular members of their party, which they will have also underestimated, from their own administration leaders, their allies in the public, and from those allies who will try to use the president's success as an endorsement for their own schemes. Faced with these unexpected demands and lack of useful guidance, what can a president's staff do but either enter into the unenviable task of deciding whom to downgrade in the president's attention or how to make room by extending the president's workday? Regardless of how they resolve their conundrum, just having to face it means that the president's staff has already failed.

A Lack of Useful Solutions

Without knowing the standard tradeoffs between responsibilities, it becomes difficult to modify the president's routine. Since no one sees what a president sees or hears what a president hears, it becomes exceedingly difficult to understand how to adjust the president's routine in any rational way. Staff, then, necessarily react with options that only sound good and solve only the most obvious problem without considering or providing a comprehensive solution or one that accounts for the inevitable tradeoffs in the president's routine.

The next two sections provide a different picture of previous administrations by concentrating on what those presidents did each day, whom they interacted with each day, and how what they did and the people they saw created a routine with clear tradeoffs. These data and analyses reveal that presidents respond to much the same demands, that they rarely change their routines to better reflect their own ambitions, that presidential staffs make their presidents work too much, and that standard dictums about the available choices in routine get it wrong.

⁸ When asked on *Sixty Minutes* at the end of his first 100 days (4/22/2009) what lessons he had learned, President Obama replied, “[I]f you had said to us a year ago that the least of my problems would be Iraq, . . . I don't think anybody would have believed it.”

⁹ Karl Rove, interview with the author, Washington, DC, December 2001.

WHAT PRESIDENTS DO

This section focuses on the first of two broad choices that define presidential routines: what do they do? A president cannot care about diplomacy, for example, without committing a fair amount of time to that responsibility. The single decision to commit more time to diplomacy, however, carries with it all the important characteristics of presidential routine. First, choices imply opportunities, and for presidents opportunities involve, first and foremost, the amount of time with which they have to work, both in a general sense and with respect to the specific demands of their health and then just the “hours in the day.” Second, what presidents do, as well as whom presidents see, reflects the unusual scale and scope of the American presidency. Recall that a common experience in transitions juxtaposes what candidates and their staffs expect with the recurring tsunamis they come to experience. Third, every decision about what to do involves a choice about whether to react to circumstances or not. What forces affect routine and which do not?

Fourth, committing to diplomacy in one moment makes a statement about priorities, obviously, but it also precludes engaging in other duties, like holding a press conference or meeting with legislative leaders to discuss strategy, during that same time and possibly at all during the day. So, understanding routines involves describing both presidential choices and their tradeoffs.

For every change in commitment made, something has to give somewhere else or the president has to work longer to accommodate that change. Such a new focus necessarily draws from other areas to make a new focus and that draw also constitutes a presidential choice, about another notion of “focus,” this one in the negative. So, what presidents do reveals the nature of “tradeoffs” among responsibilities: do presidents make a one-to-one tradeoff (a real tradeoff) or do they take from a range of other commitments, thereby “dissipating” the effects of their first choice? And since dissipation reflects a willingness to make only “small” adjustments, changes that themselves become hard to see also become easy to miss. Eventually, some responsibilities might become the target of dissipation, always the duty that gets set back, and some duties stand in stark contrast with one another, the elements of a serious tradeoff. What responsibilities fall into which categories of response? And lastly, does dissipation lead to pressures simply to make the president work longer?

THE LIMITS AND USES OF PRESIDENTIAL WORKDAYS

What presidents do, and hence the answers to these questions, first reflects the time in which presidents have to do it. Time becomes the president’s most valuable asset. And the postwar presidency has created a common ground for understanding this asset. The broad limit defined and fixed by the 22nd Amendment has coincided with the rising special place of the modern presidency in the American constitutional order.¹⁰ These modern presidencies utilize the new and immense powers the institution garnered in the Great Depression and the subsequent global wars.

¹⁰ For the context of the 22nd (and 20th) Amendment, see Terry Sullivan and Scott DeMarchi, “Congressional Bargaining in Presidential Time—Give and Take, Anticipation, and the Constitutional Rationalization of Dead Ducks,” *Journal of Politics* 73, no. 3 (July 2011): 748–63.

Table 1. Descriptors of the President's Day during the First 100 Days

President	Observations ^a		Workday Averages ^b			Learning (Trend) over 100 Days				
	days	cases	Begins	Ends	Length	Starting Point	Slope	Cumulative Effect	Difference ^c	
Dwight Eisenhower	89	4,655	8:37:33	18:20:04	9:42:21 (3:15:06)	9:09:22	.05	10:21:22	1:12:00	8.1%
John Kennedy	98	5,848	9:34:57	19:40:07	10:00:17 (3:11:07)	9:26:12	.05	10:38:12	1:12:00	8.2%
Lyndon Johnson	95	7,554	9:24:34	22:27:46	13:03:12 (2:34:21)	12:34:08	.01	12:48:06	0:14:00	2.1%
Richard Nixon	100	7,796	8:28:28	22:40:19	14:11:51 (2:28:57)	15:20:27	-.09	13:10:51	-2:09:36	-24.9%
Gerald Ford	98	24,638	7:42:40	21:37:14	13:54:34 (2:38:48)	13:40:05	.04	14:37:41	0:57:36	9.3%
Jimmy Carter	100	12,848	6:37:15	23:37:11	17:04:40 (1:41:12)	16:40:13	.03	17:23:25	0:43:12	9.8%
Ronald Reagan	87	8,384	8:44:12	22:10:44	13:26:32 (2:34:46)	13:26:33	.00	13:26:36	0:00:03	0.0%
George H.W. Bush	76	10,429	6:54:54	21:34:48	14:39:54 (2:16:39)	14:28:54	.02	14:57:42	0:28:48	5.0%

Source: Compiled by author.

^a Observations exclude some days not recorded and cases include individual encounters. These cases aggregate into specific events.

^b Data in parentheses represent sample standard deviations as a measure of precision.

^c Percentages in this column represent Kruskal- λ calculations, based on a truncated endpoint at 24 hours.

Table 1 reports the basic details of presidential days for those elected and elevated presidents governed by the realities of the 22nd Amendment.

Long Average Workdays

The overall picture suggests one experience common to all presidents—a very long workday. In the mid-1960s, what seems like an early generation of these modern presidents worked around 10 hours a day on average. Beginning with Lyndon Johnson, this typical workday gave way to a second generation of presidents whose workday averaged around 14 hours, a more than 33% increase. Designate these new presidencies as “post-modern.”

The typical presidential workday changed dramatically after John Kennedy’s administration with an average workday lasting 14 hours.

And this step increase to post-modern presidencies seems robust. For example, at 17 hours, President Carter’s first 100 days differed substantially from his immediate predecessors. That increase in length over the others’ constituted another 30% step increase. Yet, Carter’s successors returned to the previous average, suggesting that 14 hours represents something of a theoretical limit to “normal” operating hours.¹¹

Distinctive but Inconsequential Differences

A second element reflected in Table 1 has to do with the differences between presidents. In a statistical sense, all of these presidents had precise (or distinctive) average workdays, yet the data do not support differences between specific days. What makes those average distinctions derives, ultimately, from very small deviations.

Weekends Don’t Matter

Beginning, again, with President Johnson, the presidential workday began to infringe on the weekends. While the earlier presidents experienced a nearly 30% decline in the length of their weekend workdays, post-modern presidents’ weekends declined by only 10% on average.

In the post-modern presidency, the weekend pace during the first 100 days does not differ from the weekday pace.

Staying Awake Matters More

How have these differences developed? One answer involves the simple differences between the beginning and ending of a president’s day, suggesting a balance between personal choice and institutional responsibilities. Presidents typically choose when they come to the office and that decision probably reflects more their own personal styles. When they quit, however, reflects more the undeniable demands that they face that day.

In reviewing the data on beginnings and endings, more of the variations in workday lengths depends on when the day ends than when it begins. The variation between the

¹¹ While many thought President Reagan had a reduced workday, his day (at 13.44 hours), in fact, came in under the average by less than 15 minutes.

presidents on when their day ended represents a little less than twice the variation between them on starting their days.

The challenges of responsibility stretch out the workday.

In a way, then, the variation in end times for the president’s day represents one measure of the tradeoffs presidential staffs make to adjust their presidents’ schedules. Making the president work longer represents the easiest way to react to new demands.

THE SCALE OF PRESIDENTIAL ROUTINE

When former White House staff describe their on-the-job training, they refer to it as “drinking from a fire hose.” When staff, like Karl Rove, relate their experience with the unexpected demands they discover once in harness, again, they refer to a fire-related analogy. When those from business talk about their work at the White House, they recall the unrelenting pace of operations that, for a Fortune 10 business, would happen once a year for six weeks (“when rolling out a new product we had invested a billion dollars in and could sink our stock prices”¹⁴), but “in the White House, it’s ‘24/7/365,’ even Christmas day!”

Table 2 reports on this one aspect of presidential activities, its scale of operations. It presents average daily activities, along with statistics on the changes made between the modern and post-modern presidencies.

The table presents three types of presidential interactions: (1) those involving only one individual (either working alone or interacting with another person), (2) those involving meetings having different compositions (some more formal than others), and (3) public events involving a range of “outsiders” (these would include the general public but also

Table 2. President’s Activities during First 100 Days

Commitment	Average Daily Activity		
	Modern	Post-Modern	% Change
Personal time	1.8	3.4	83.9
Seclusion	3.8	15.4	307.5
Single individuals ¹²	4.5	12.5	175.7
<i>Meetings</i>			
Small groups (<5)	2.2	3.0	36.3
Large groups	2.8	2.9	5.0
Legislative	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
Public events	2.1	4.0	90.1
Daily interactions	56.7	130.4	130.0
Day length	09:51:45	14:24:54	32.2 ¹³
Average days	93.5	92.7	

Source: Compiled by author.

¹² This category includes phone calls as well as face-to-face meetings.

¹³ Since time in the day has a fixed upper bound, this percentage derives from a Kruskal-lambda (λ) statistic, which measures as its base the time remaining in the day.

¹⁴ Rove interview with the author.

encounters with the press). The table also reports the total numbers of people (including officials and staff) presidents interact with during an average day.¹⁵

Growing Seclusion

In addition to the average lengths of workdays, the “fire hose analogy” appears in this table in just the sheer numbers of daily interactions presidents have. Post-modern presidents, for example, average encounters with around 130 people during their 14 hours through scores of separate interactions.

Against this backdrop of interactions, note that presidents have spent a growing proportion of their time in seclusion, working alone to prepare for their “next thing” on the schedule or reading to make decisions. The table reports an almost tripling of both seclusion and one-on-one encounters during the post-modern president’s day.

Presidents at work have become increasingly secluded.

Of course, some proportion (as yet unmeasured) of presidential seclusion involves engaging in the president’s record-keeping responsibilities—signing documents and certifying plans and reports. These make up the presidency’s “clerkship” as part of a growing federal infrastructure.¹⁶

Minimizing Formal Meetings

This seclusion of presidents over time has come at the expense of formal meetings. Three types of formal meetings have all experienced a decline in presidential engagement. Beginning with President Johnson, post-modern presidents have regularly complained about the lack of useful work carried out in meetings with the congressional leadership and the cabinet. Like President Nixon, most post-modern presidents have given only lip service to the practice of “cabinet government,” preferring instead that the cabinet simply administer their specific purviews without more comprehensive coordination.

Lastly, presidents have had a long-standing ambivalence towards their National Security Council. Since its inception as part of a comprehensive assault on the prerogatives of the presidency after World War II designed to slow the growth of presidential power and leadership, presidents have struggled to find a use for the Council (as opposed to its National Security Advisor). Among post-modern presidencies, this ambivalence has resulted in a 25% decline in meetings of the Council.

Post-modern presidents have reduced the numbers of formalized meetings with the NSC and congressional leadership even more than they have with the Cabinet.

¹⁵ Interactions on cyber devices, e.g., through an Internet conference call, count as meetings while no clear evidence yet exists on measuring e-mail encounters, although in general e-mail would resemble reading documents, which we have data on.

¹⁶ As Sullivan and De Marchi, “Congressional Bargaining,” have made clear, as part of a long-term strategy to “rein in” the presidency, the Congress has delegated more and more of these requirements for certification and reporting to the presidency. These delegations have become part of a complex of strategies beginning in the late 1920s to respond to the presidency’s (some would argue “inevitably”) growing influence on policy-making, including at least two constitutional amendments: the 20th and 22nd.

Now, more than ever, especially when it comes to the routines of presidents, no one sees what the president sees and no one hears what the president hears. And as a consequence, no one knows what the president knows.

THE SCOPE OF PRESIDENTIAL ENGAGEMENT

In addition to its grand scale, presidential engagement can define a scope through its distribution across those responsibilities that define the presidency. Since the late 1940s, political science and public administration have developed a taxonomy of mutually exclusive duties which describe what the president does — what the discipline has come to call the president’s “hats.” These hats cover all the president’s key duties, e.g., commander in chief, and other typically executive duties, e.g., ceremonial head of state, or statutory delegations, e.g., setting a budget. These hats also include some responsibilities with a more popular frame, like communicating with the public or leading a political party.

Table 3 reports on how presidents distribute their time among these 10 standard responsibilities during an average day.¹⁷ The distribution of these choices becomes the scope of any president’s routine. Presidents spent around 75% of their days engaged in these 10 responsibilities, with the remainder committed to personal time or official travel.¹⁸

While the shift from modern to post-modern presidencies has an effect on the scale of presidential routine, in some cases doubling the commitment to an activity, this seemingly important change of presidential routine had virtually no effect on the scope of those activities. From one set of presidents to another, the pattern across responsibilities remains virtually the same—the commitment of presidents to these duties remains mostly within one to three percentage points of each other. Post-modern presidents have increased significantly their attention to only managing the White House decision-making processes. There the presidents have almost doubled their committing to 15% of their days.

Engagement Reacts

Many with White House experience bemoan that too much of an administration’s time involves reacting to events and situations rather than projecting the president’s agenda onto those circumstances.¹⁹ For example, one of President Obama’s key advisors, David Axelrod, recalls sensing this effect after a transition meeting about their agenda:

I remember a meeting about mid-December when all the economic advisers . . . reported to the president-elect on the state of the economy. And it was a stunning presentation, and it

¹⁷ For those events, meetings, or conversations in which the president seems to engage in overlapping responsibilities, however, the data initially record multiple purposes. Later standard, analytical techniques for assessing priorities and routine adjust these data to meet a requirement that the sum of these choices reflect the requirement that proportions sum to 1.0.

¹⁸ Travel involves time spent in actual conveyance. Where meetings take place during travel, e.g., on *Air Force One*, the data distribute the meeting time to its appropriate function. Naps and other time with family count as personal time, even during conveyance.

¹⁹ In an interview, former White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card noted that, eventually, in a working White House reaction takes over so much that staff begin to imagine that “‘planning’ means ‘what will we do next week?’” Andrew Card, White House Transition Project interview conducted by Martha Joynt Kumar, Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA, May 23, 1999.

was clear that we were going to be consumed by dealing with this economic crisis for the first weeks, months, perhaps years of the administration.²⁰

The summary evidence presented here do not reflect such reactions, but the underlying, individual presidential data do to a limited extent, and the more complicated multivariate models suggest some limited reactions as well.

Table 3. Presidential Commitments during the First 100 Days

<i>General Origins Type</i>	Commitment (% of Day)			Commitment by Origins
	Engagement as Modern	Post- Modern	% Change	
Personal	20.4	15.5	-4.8	
Travel	4.3	3.9	-0.4	
<i>Explicit, Constitutional Warrants</i>				34.9
1. Commander in Chief	11.0	9.9	-1.2	
2. Chief Diplomat	16.3	13.6	-2.7	
3. Executive Management	10.3	10.7	0.5	
4. Chief Law Enforcement	1.3	0.5	-0.8	
<i>Implicitly Executive Duties</i>				16.4
5. Legislative Leader	10.4	8.8	-1.6	
6. Ceremonial Head of State	6.7	8.8	2.2	
<i>Congressional Delegations</i>				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	
<i>Historical Developments</i>				8.6
9. Chief Communicator	5.1	8.3	3.5	
10. Party Leader	3.8	2.2	-1.6	
Day length	09:51:45	14:24:54	32.2 ²¹	
Average observations	93.5	92.7		

Source: Compiled by author.

Presidential engagement reacts to circumstances more than projecting the president’s agenda onto those circumstances.

Among those specific reactions in the multivariate models, two highlights seem most important because they highlight this complex problem of reactions. First, the “war presidents” (like Presidents Eisenhower or Nixon) spent a good deal of their time on the role of commander-in-chief, averaging around 12% of their day. Though it does not seem

²⁰ “Past Advisers Outline Challenges of Presidential Transitions,” hosted by Ari Shapiro, *National Public Radio*, December 3, 2016.

²¹ See footnote 13, above.

like a large amount of the president's day, this commitment represents a substantial amount, relative to the average commitment to other responsibilities. And by contrast, the "peace" presidents (like Presidents Carter or Reagan) committed around 7% of their day to this responsibility. Hence, for presidents, this 40% reduction in time spent on commander-in-chief responsibilities amounts to a "peace dividend."

In addition to this difference between presidents, a similar difference occurs *within* a presidency. For example, when presented with a disastrous military circumstances at the Bay of Pigs, beginning April 17, 1961, President Kennedy suddenly increased his attention to the commander-in-chief responsibility by almost 200%. So, where confronted with hostilities, presidents react to that circumstance.

Second, neither the war presidents nor the president who suddenly (if only briefly) engaged in war spent a majority of their days as commander-in-chief. The pressures of the presidency's other responsibilities simply make impossible a much more focused response.

Presidents Don't Pursue Any Special Focus

The founding fathers, especially James Wilson and James Madison, argued that the presidency's strength would derive from the direct association between the institution and its single occupant, guiding engagement in pursuit of the president's personal ambitions. In his *Federalist Paper No. 72*, Alexander Hamilton, the leading advocate for an energetic presidency, described this personal pursuit of "fame" as the executive's chief motivating force, calling it "the ruling passion of the noblest minds, which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public . . ." ²² In pursuit of such ambitions, Hamilton argued, presidents would make a clear effort to distinguish themselves through "good" works, often emphasizing a dramatic break from their predecessors:

To reverse and undo what has been done by a predecessor, is very often considered by a successor as the best proof he can give of his own capacity and desert; and in addition to this propensity, where the alteration has been the result of public choice, the person substituted is warranted in supposing that the dismissal of his predecessor has proceeded from a dislike to his measures; and that the less he resembles him, the more he will recommend himself to the favor of his constituents.

Writing two years before taking office as president, Woodrow Wilson argued that the potency of duty's call would override this ambition for fame and reduce presidents to focusing not on what makes them different from their predecessors but focusing instead on those circumstances common to the times and the duties reflected in those common challenges. The simplest reflection of duty's call, Wilson argued, derived from how each duty's place in the constitutional order lent it weight, beginning with the heaviest call from those responsibilities actually enumerated in the Constitution's Article II and ending with

²² In a statement to his constituency in 1832, Abraham Lincoln described his motivation for seeking office in similar terms: "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem." In a private letter to his brother Thomas, then junior Congressman Sam Rayburn explained his reluctance to abandon his political career and return home to the family farm by invoking much the same ambition: I would rather have my name indelibly linked to the history of my country than anything else."

those responsibilities only having historical precedents.²³ That this Wilsonian duty trumps Hamilton's distinctiveness.

To discern between these two reasonable prospects, between Hamilton and Wilson, define a special presidential focus on a specific duty as one in which a president commits more than twice the average commitment by the bottom four presidents on that responsibility. Of all the possible comparisons surveyed between presidents, their peers, and involving each of the 10 presidential duties listed in Table 3, only two presidential commitments evidenced such a special focus, and both involve President Carter. President Carter spent almost 10% of his time on communications while the bottom four presidents in the data invested an average of only 4.4%. President Carter also invested almost 18% of his day to managing the executive agencies, when the baseline for most presidents stands at a little under 8%. Part of Carter's intense focus derived from having unified party control in both the Congress and presidency. More on that effect later.

These two surprising results for President Carter also suggest an interesting possibility with respect to focus, as President Carter came very close to having a third special focus on legislative leadership. Where presidents might have a specialized focus, of course, that focus may in fact not rest with their ambitions alone. For example, along with President Carter, President Eisenhower's legislative commitment comes very close to matching the standard for an extraordinary focus.²⁴ Yet, this level of commitment to legislative responsibilities might have reflected more a reaction to special circumstances rather than adopting a special focus. Both presidents began his presidency along with a brand new congressional leadership, e.g., newly elected Speaker Joseph Martin and newly elected Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft for Eisenhower. As with Carter, congressional leaders had not held their respective jobs before nor had most of them even served as their party's floor leader in the previous Congress. So, these numbers likely reflect that, in spite of their own interests, these two presidents *needed* to create and then cement a working relationship with his new congressional majorities. Additionally, this pattern of commitment could reflect requests from congressional partisans to lend the president's imprimatur to these new congressional leaders and probably even to repair retroactively mistakes the new congressional leaders had generated as they handled the president's agenda.

*Presidents don't differ enough from one another to look like they have a special "focus."
And where they do seem to have a special focus, other circumstances might play a role
in shaping that extraordinary commitment.*

Finally, consider an oft-noted special focus—that President George H.W. Bush possessed a special commitment to diplomacy. This popular notion has no roots in the detailed data assembled here. President Bush stood third among the six elected presidents in committing to diplomacy, surpassed by contemporary Presidents Nixon and Kennedy.²⁵

²³ Wilson Woodrow, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911).

²⁴ Even President Johnson during his first 100 days spent one hour and 8 minutes a day on legislative affairs, having 577 individual encounters with members, often through phone calls.

²⁵ With more complex measures of "distinctiveness" and employing more complex methodologies than simple comparisons based on statistical precision, these conclusions about engagement remain: breadth of engagement without focus and duty over ambition. See Terry Sullivan, "Decision-making in the Singular

President Bush's focus *did* surpass that of his two immediate predecessors: President Carter's equaled the average while President Reagan's came in far lower. The contemporary comparisons would have made President Bush's slightly higher commitment seem a more significant than it actually merited.

In general, then, little of the record equates with Hamilton's view of distinctive presidents shaping their commitments simply by the force of their distinctive ambitions.

Engagement Reflects Constitutional Origins

Instead, the evidence seems to support Woodrow Wilson's notion that constitutional weight matters and of duty's call. Table 3 also reports the average presidential commitment across responsibilities arrayed by their constitutional origins, those proportions reported in the far right column. The patterns there closely reflect Woodrow Wilson's assumptions.

For example, presidents committed an average of one-third of their time to constitutionally explicit duties, the primary Wilsonian category.

Presidents engage in mandated constitutional duties. Of the four areas to which presidents commit more than 10% of their day on average, three derive from the constitutional duties enumerated explicitly in Article II.

Among the four duties in the table that receive at least 10% of the average attention, three of the four duties originate with the text of Article II: Commander in Chief, Chief Diplomat, and Executive Management. The one remaining, managing the White House decision-making process, falls under the second major Wilsonian category: implicit executive powers. The section on the dynamics of commitments will comment specifically on this duty to manage the White House process and its relationship to unified party government.

Moreover, the constitutional origins suggest a highly structured engagement: At 35%, the first set of constitutionally explicit duties receives twice the commitment as the second set of duties and four times the commitment as the fourth grouping of duties.

Presidents Do Many Things, but None in Particular

The table also makes clear that presidents generally invest a little of their time in all responsibilities. Even among the constitutional preeminent responsibilities, presidents generally invested no more than 10% of their time in any one duty. Outside these primary constitutional warrants for national security and diplomacy and executive management the mean presidential engagement amounted to a single digit.

The drag of so many responsibilities, then, seems to reduce the attraction of focusing on any one in particular, including even the call of duty from the primary constitutional charges. Even the war presidents, for example, commanding troops on the battlefield and having campaigned on resolving these conflicts, found it difficult to commit more than a third of their time to the twin responsibilities of commander-in-chief and diplomacy.

Every day, presidents take on a variety of duties, but none in particular.

Consider the most public thing a president does: speeches and other forms of communications. As noted already, this responsibility occupies the lowest tier of presidential attention, having no constitutional or statutory origins. As a consequence, presidential commitment to this responsibility averages around 6%. Yet, as the most visible thing observers see, the patterns to this engagement often become the basis for “lessons” that pervade discussions of how presidents should approach governing, on setting priorities, or on developing strategies. For example, an oft-quoted anecdote about President George H.W. Bush purportedly illustrates a general lesson learned about focus. The anecdote revolves around Marlin Fitzwater’s reportedly constant struggle with his President Bush over the lack of disciplined messaging. Fitzwater championed the notion that the White House staff had to maintain a daily focus on one “message of the day,” providing an organizing theme to interpret, for the press, the president’s daily activities. Fitzwater complained he could never get President Bush to adhere to this strategy, the president always complaining that his “day was more complicated than anything that could be recounted in a single theme.”²⁶

Clearly this dispute between the president and his chief spokesman revolved around their different vantage points. The president’s press secretary understood the presidency only in terms of this narrow portion of the president’s responsibilities whereas the president saw communications as only a reflection of his other duties. Without a conscious evaluation of what their president does, *no one else can see that perspective*, not even the president’s closest assistants.

The Stability of Communications

Another finding in this area involves the dynamics reflected in presidential communications. Despite the apparent importance of presidential communications and the daunting pace of advances in technologies to make communications easier,²⁷ the presidential commitment to communications has remained reasonably stable. This apparent lack of committed time, of course, does not imply that communications does not occupy an important place in the presidency or in White House operations. A huge percentage of the White House staff (estimates place the number at 50%) engage in communications, suggesting both its importance and that presidents leave this task to those subordinates. The seemingly suppressed commitment to communications, or party management, or White House process, or economic management reflects their *relative* importance, not their *absolute* importance.

A Difference between Campaigning and Governing

The evidence provided in Table 3 also highlights what might distinguish governing from campaigning. Clearly, campaigns emphasize communications while, as indicated in the table, governing does not. Assuming that candidates engage in a ceaseless torrent of speeches and interchanges with reporters, presidents do not. President Bush’s response above reflects this disjuncture of perspectives where governing supersedes communicating.

²⁶ Marlin Fitzwater, White House Transition Project interview, conducted by Martha Joynt Kumar, 2001.

²⁷ See Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President’s Message: The White House Communications Operation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

Campaigning emphasizes communications; governing does not.

Obviously, the transfer of presidential time moving from campaigning to governing involves those duties for which a candidate has no parallel, e.g., commander-in-chief, chief diplomat, etc.—*those duties entirely and exclusively presidential.*²⁸

The current data focus on how new presidents and their staffs adjust to the contrast between these two environments. Previous studies of presidential communications suggest that administrations take advantage of new technologies,²⁹ and the data here suggest that this process employs the White House staff but not the president. Most of the newest technologies, however, have involved improvements to “broadcasting,” e.g., satellite communications leading to niche markets. The newest trends in media democratize communications instead, allowing individuals (including candidates and presidents) virtually unregulated, and therefore immediate, access to broadcasting. While presidents could continue to staff out this new media access, thereby making few alterations in how they engage their other duties, the prospect still exists that a new president could shift commitments to more communications activities, thereby reducing time spent on their primary responsibilities. This possibility suggests a potentially significant challenge to White House operations, one that a director of communications, a staff secretary, and a chief of staff will necessarily have to wrestle with, often with the scantest of operational information to see the whole of the president’s routine and how this communications shift would (inevitably) downgrade commitment to other, more central responsibilities.

MODELING WHAT PRESIDENTS DO AND THEIR TRADEOFFS

The introduction to this section highlighted the fact that presidential choices about engagement inevitably presented two forms of tradeoffs. Instead of presenting the complex statistical treatment of commitment necessary to establish the nature of these tradeoffs, the following sections will simply report what we know based on these models and analyses.³⁰ These models employ two analytical elements: a range of standard circumstances (e.g., hostilities, changing trade, the state of the domestic economy, the degree of partisan unification or discord) and, because routine involves making mutually exclusive choices, a series of equations, each describing one of the 10 kinds of commitments (along with travel time) as affected by these circumstantial variables and the interactions with the other commitments. The statistical analysis, then, solves these 11 equations simultaneously, producing both an indication of how circumstance affects routine and how each choice affects the other commitments.

²⁸ As yet, the available data do not provide results for *reelection years* of a governing president. Those data would describe the clearest differences between these two states of a politician’s life.

²⁹ See Kumar, *Managing the President’s Message*.

³⁰ For more detailed description of these models and their results, see Terry Sullivan, “Decision-making in the Singular Presidency: Expertise, Control, and Appreciating Ignorance,” 2016, manuscript, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; or Sullivan, *Decision-making in the Singular Presidency—Fame, Fidelity, and Learning to Pivot*,” or Terry Sullivan, “A Process Rationalized Assessment of Presidential Routines: The Impact of Circumstances and Organization on Isolation,” 2016, manuscript, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Recall that “tradeoff” involves a direct transfer of commitment from one duty to another, set off with a positive and relatively large response in one direction while the almost identical but negative, large response in another. Dissipation involves what appears as an increased commitment in one area but without a similar mirror reaction elsewhere. Instead, the initial change initiates a tightening up of commitments across the board through a series of minor alterations. Dissipation reactions will evidence a series of small reactions with positive and negative signs. Some reactions, because of their roles in dissipation, will likely have a mix of positive and negative responses. These mixed duties tend to involve small initial average commitments in general.

Table 4 summarizes these statistical models of duties describing both the size of the reactions and the typical direction of the responses. Tradeoffs, recall, presume that the size of the reactions themselves make it likely that the positive and negative reactions, in turn, will mirror each other.

Table 4. Types of Reactions across Responsibilities

		Size of Reaction	
		Small (dissipation)	Large (tradeoff)
Direction of Reaction	All Positive	Legislative Leader Ceremonial Head of State Party Leader Travel	Commander in Chief Chief Diplomat
	Mixed	Executive Manager Chief Law Enforcement	
	All Negative	Economic/Budget Manager Chief Communicator	Manager of WH Decision-making Personal Time

Sources: Compiled by author from data analyses referenced in footnote 30 above.

Continuity in Routine—Mostly Dissipation

While presidents react to circumstances, as modeled already by the reaction of war presidents, the breadth of and demands for engagement elsewhere limits these reactions generally to a range between 3 and 8 points. These small reactions to circumstances produce a “continuity” of presidential engagement. In effect, then, presidential routine tends to dissipate reactions, spreading their effects across a number of duties simultaneously.

Few circumstances lead to outright tradeoffs in responsibilities. Instead, most reactions generated by changing circumstances lead to small reductions across a wide range of duties.

This ability to maintain continuity and absorb reactions suggests the importance of subordinate expertise in crisis management, a topic taken up in a separate research report.³¹ In effect, though, when presented with an alteration in circumstances, presidents rely on their staffs, with staff members’ considerable policy expertise to *buffer* that circumstance.

³¹ See Heather Ba, Tyler Steelman, and Terry Sullivan, forthcoming, *Presidential Response to Crisis*, White House Transition Project Report 2017-44, Washington: the White House Transition Project.

This buffering allows the president's routine to react in a measured way. As Table 4 makes clear, most of the presidential responsibilities act as these buffering dissipations.

Constitutional Tradeoff with Internal Management

Four areas, only three of which involve duties, make up a complex of significant tradeoffs cast against this central pattern of continuity. These tradeoffs engage the president's primary responsibilities as commander-in-chief and as chief diplomat, on the one hand, and manager of the White House decision-making process and personal time, on the other. Both commander-in-chief duties and those as chief diplomat, of course, occupy the center of Wilson's system of constitutional duties. Hence, the tradeoffs involve drawing time into the president's core responsibilities and drawing from the president's peripheral responsibilities.

Note also that earlier Table 3 documented that post-modern presidencies trade the principle constitutional duties for managing their decision-making processes. This pattern could constitute a second "peace dividend." When the numbers of external challenges have declined, presidents have returned not to focusing on some other responsibilities but instead have turned to the challenges inherent in structuring their own decision-making. This tradeoff reflects the fact that only presidents have had the vantage of fully seeing that process at work.

Diplomacy Tradeoff with Personal Time

When the country faces hostilities, by contrast, the president's duties shift from what Woodrow Wilson characterized as the peripheral responsibilities to the core—those duties around the primary, written charge to the presidency.

Hostilities shift presidential commitments from the peripheral responsibilities to the core—those duties defined by the Constitution's written charge.

In particular, when facing hostilities, presidents generally increase attention to the responsibility as chief diplomat (and to a far lesser extent to commander-in-chief).

This concentration on diplomacy, in turn, generates two genuine tradeoffs: in attention to the White House decision-making processes as already noted and in less personal time. A substantial tradeoff moves about 15 percentage points of the president's time from personal time to diplomacy and about twice that reaction flows from managing the White House process.

Hostilities trade off personal time for more commitment to diplomacy.

This sequence probably suggests a "path" for tradeoffs to follow, unlike the path in dissipation. First, staff members do not buffer presidential time, but instead they draw their presidents away from family and personal time, the least burdensome and the least complicated tradeoff to make. Staff follow that reaction with one that relieves presidents of engaging in the constant demands of their decision-making processes internal to their White Houses. In doing so, staff can buffer their president. The use of personal time to react to a changing commitment to core responsibilities, however, means these tradeoffs just make presidents work longer. Prolonged alterations involving presidential responsibilities as chief

diplomat, obviously, means presidents draw from their own human capital, which has a fixed limit and can lead to debilitating effects.

The Special Case of Unified Partisan Control

The only remaining principal tradeoff involves the special circumstances of a unified party control of Congress and the presidency. When presidents have a reliable partisan margin in the House and the Senate, they tend to spend far less time engaged in managing their own White House decision-making processes and, in turn, they split this steep reduction in engagement between focusing on managing affairs in the executive branch and acting as a legislative leader.

Unified partisan control shifts time from focusing on the White House to spending more attention on coordinating executive and legislative strategies.

In effect, majority presidents become the founders' much discussed instrument for leading. James Wilson, the leading advocate for the presidency, encouraged his colleagues at the constitutional convention to reject both the Virginia and the New Jersey plans for forming their new executive branch as one governed by a committee. Though a clear descendant of American revolutionary theory, this divided presidential authority, Wilson argued, would cripple the executive as an effective counterbalance to the power of the legislative. Wilson completed his proposal by instead calling for what he called the "singular" presidency.

A singular presidency could not only capture the energy behind Hamilton's ambitious pursuit of fame, but it would also provide the single focal point for policy direction. In the relatively unlikely circumstances of unified government,³² the power derived from that unity over policy would rest on the president's ability to act as an effective focal point. Two centuries later, presidents still react to those relatively rare circumstances of unified party control by shifting to managing the executive *and* legislative branches into a focused policy-making entity.

THE PATTERN TO PRESIDENTIAL ENGAGEMENT

In sum, then, little influences what presidents do on average. The demands of constitutional responsibility drive daily activities, as Woodrow Wilson had predicted. And in what they do, routine absorbs most choices, dissipating the effect of those choices among a flurry of small reductions in commitments across the board. With the two exceptions of constitutional consequence: hostilities and unified government. Both these circumstances generate presidential responses consistent with their duty for national security and their opportunity for political leadership. In responding to these two circumstances, the presidential choices generate genuine tradeoffs, pulling significant resources of time away from their personal lives and away from their role in managing the White House decision-

³² The common experience of the Founders and that of the next century of the American polity saw almost no unified governments. Outside the few in the Founders' generation, almost no presidents succeeded in obtaining a renomination by their own party, let alone a majority in both houses. And when parties swept an election year, the new president would come to office and work with a "lame duck" minority for almost a year before the "long session" of the "newly" elected Congress would join their president. For a review of this history and its influence on the 20th amendment, see Sullivan and De Marchi, "Congressional Bargaining."

making process. The former drains their endurance and probably portends ill effects in the long run. The latter suggests the necessity of the “control” functions of the White House staff, in the chief of staff and staff secretary functions in particular.

WHOM PRESIDENTS SEE

This section focuses on the second of two choices that define presidential routine—with whom the president interacts. When they care about diplomacy, presidents seek out the counsel of those subordinates and private actors with experience or vision in this area. So, whom do presidents see? Whom do presidents admit to their councils? And who occupies their inner circles?

Counsel differs from engagement in some important ways. First and probably most importantly, counsel does not exhibit the rational process restrictions of engagement. Presidents can place as many voices “in the room” as they wish without hitting some logical restrictions, including any sort of reciprocating tradeoffs. Of course, presidents can also restrict the room to specific voices in most situations. So the numbers involved in counsel represent the first characteristic of whom the president sees.

Second, statutes dictate little of the president’s engagement, while in some situations, counsel has statutory mandates—for example, the role of the director of the Office of Management and Budget in budget making and the role of the various actors making up the National Security Council.³³ Presumably these counselors have certain roles (and jurisdictions) that put them in the room.

While committing to a responsibility involves engaging the talents of others and from them obtaining useful information, often outside observers equate consultation with considered opinion. Whom the president sees becomes a metaphor for the president’s decision-making and then, decision itself. When Clinton became president, his second chief of staff, Leon Panetta, made it clear that the president took far too long to make decisions, listening far too long to consternating voices, thereby putting in abeyance a host of other decisions floating up to the president’s level³⁴ and rendering his administration rudderless. President Nixon preferred to have advice screened heavily and digested fully to eliminate policy disagreements and debates, thereby keeping counsel at arm’s length.³⁵ These patterns to counsel soon became explanations for failed policies, though the two have little in common logically.

Critics regularly decry those presidential policies they oppose as the product of a “closed” process, presuming that the choices they don’t like would change had the president

³³ See John Burke’s assessment of early attempts by congressional opposition to require President Eisenhower to employ the NSC and how he worked to overcome its obvious and intended deficits before it became an instrument supporting (rather than limiting) presidential decision-making. John Burke, *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision-Making* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009).

³⁴ See Leon Panetta in Sullivan, *Nerve Center*.

³⁵ H. R. Haldeman, with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: New York Times Books, 1978). Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1988). Kenneth W. Thompson, *The Nixon Presidency: Twenty-two Intimate Perspectives of Richard M. Nixon* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988).

received “better” counsel gained from engaging different sources.³⁶ For example, many have quoted the claims of Donald Regan that, while he served as treasury secretary, President Reagan cared so little about economic management that the two of them never had a single one-on-one discussion, this despite the centrality of Reagan’s budget reordering and supply-side tax cut as the centerpieces of his initial policy agenda. Secretary Regan made two specific claims to support this description; both received enormous coverage 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 the first week and that conversation focused on the similarities of 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.³⁷

Others in organizational theory and public administration, for example, Richard Daft and Robert Lengel, suggest a different way of viewing advice: that the structure of underlying decision uncertainties greatly affect the president’s advice taking. In their model, resolving uncertainty lends itself more to face-to-face contact and less to structured interactions. President Clinton tossed about for advice to chart his more uncertain circumstances and mandate. Certainties, they suppose, would lead presidents to work alone.³⁸ So, President Reagan’s and President Nixon’s lack of interest in face-to-face encounters, for example, reflect less a decision-making style, i.e., preferring less counsel, and simply a reflection of the fact that, Draft and Lengel suggest, had specific policy mandates that insulated them from needing these interactions.

THE BASIC ANATOMY OF PRESIDENTIAL COUNSEL

From whom presidents seek counsel depends in part in how they take counsel. In his memoir *Kennedy*, Theodore Sorensen recounts that the Kennedy team thought President Eisenhower’s commitment to large, inclusive, and often formal meetings minimized his opportunities to get confidential counsel.³⁹ In shaping his own decision-making process, then, President-elect Kennedy set out to minimize dependence on large meetings and to shift the operational focus to smaller, often face-to-face encounters with a single advisor. President Nixon took in information in written form, relying on reading and preferring to work alone. He even set aside an hour of his afternoon to draft memoranda to his

³⁶ 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, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989).

³⁷ Donald Regan, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), referred to in Fred Greenstein, “Reckoning with Reagan: The Written Record—How the 40th U.S. President Was Portrayed in Books,” CNN.com, June 8, 2004.

³⁸ Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel, “Organizational Information Requirements, Media Richness, and Structural Design,” *Management Science* 32, no. 5 (May 1986): 554-71.

³⁹ Theodore Sorensen, *Decision-making in the White House: The Olive Branch or the Arrows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). See also Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

subordinates.⁴⁰ Richard Neustadt, the most widely cited analyst of presidential politics, argued that all presidents needed to act as their own primary counselor.⁴¹ Presumably that counsel takes place in private. Enthralled by administrative details and more than any of his peers, President Carter reportedly spent more time alone, studying briefing materials. Each of these decisions on how to take in information affected presidential choices about their counsel.

Until now, scholars have had no systematic information with which to test the kinds of presumptions implicit in the thinking of those like the Kennedy team or whether those predilections actually generated alterations once in office, or even whether some presidents isolate themselves more than others, or whether the institutional requirements of the office trump all these intentions. Until now, scholars could not tell that Secretary Regan saw President Reagan at least three times a week and participated in meetings with the president 58 times just during the first 100 days; and while Secretary Regan actually had no one-on-one encounters 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 the secretary qualified for the president's inner circle (see Table 6). That in those 58 interactions, President Reagan never discussed policy with his Secretary Regan seems highly unlikely.

A Shift Into Seclusion

As Table 2 documented, the shift from the older presidencies to post-modern White Houses has resulted in presidents taking more of their time in securing their own counsel, working in seclusion more. Currently, presidents spend around 20% of their day alone, a doubling for this category over predecessors. Presidents have made this shift into seclusion by drawing time from all other categories of counsel. And as Table 5 further clarifies, while the incidences of seclusion have tripled, the proportion of time has only doubled, suggesting that this change in presidential routine has resulted in more brief periods of seclusion scattered throughout the day.

Presidents have spent increasingly more time in seclusion, assessing issues for themselves, than they have relied on any other form of counsel.

Increasing Reliance on Individual Counsel

Equally important, post-modern presidents have increased their interactions with single individuals by 175%, emphasizing a growing importance for private interactions between presidents and individual counselors. Both these changes have made more important the presidents' "inner circles," the very narrow and exclusive band of people who encounter the president regularly (cf. Table 6).

The shift to working in seclusion and relying on more one-on-one consultations has increased the importance of the small band of subordinates who regularly encounter the president (say, once a day).

⁴⁰ Bruce Oudes, ed., *From the President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

⁴¹ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960).

A later section considers who sees the president regularly enough to constitute membership in these inner circles, using the two most widely recognized metrics: those who encounter the president as often as three times a week or as often as once a day. Both these groups have exceptionally small memberships, often excluding prominent government officials.

THE SCOPE OF PRESIDENTIAL COUNSEL

Table 5 summarizes the details of whom presidents see. As with what presidents do, and in a statistical sense, presidents see a variety of counselors but none too often. The table reports average contact with the president as a function of how much of the president's day that counsel takes up. It begins with setting the president alone in work and then it arrays potential counselors by their relationship to the president, the core White House actors first, down to foreign heads of state. As before, this table also reports differences between the two sets of presidencies. And using distance from the president as parallel to constitutional origins, it reports on the isolation of presidential counsel.

At the constitutional convention, James Wilson argued that the new presidency's advantages would rest on focusing all executive authority in a single actor. One might imagine that institutional proximity approximates a stronger share in that singular authority: those institutionally proximate to the president bear more of what James Wilson called the president's "derivative authority" than those in the executive more "distant" from the president.

Counsel Involves Many Advisors but None in Particular

On average, the core White House staff encounter the president on average only around 6% of the day. And no other group, in or out of government, interacts with the president more often! In some ways, the presidency can constitute an exquisite seclusion. No one, then, can see what presidents see; no one hears what presidents hear; so no one knows what presidents know. The numbers on seclusion also reinforce this point. As a direct consequence, presidents have a very small "inner circle," no matter its definition. So, the importance of *these* encounters becomes very high.

In general, presidents see scores of people every day and no one in particular.

Besides the president's consultations with the immediate White House team, especially the three principal advisors (VP, COS, and NSA), the president has more contact with outsiders,⁴² especially other heads of state, than with others in the government.⁴³ Contact with the executive branch leadership averages less than 2% of the day, and counsel from members of Congress and their leaders average around 3%.

⁴² As a measure, contact with outsiders excludes phone calls and meetings with individuals considered friends of the president—extended family, childhood friends, schoolmates, brothers in arms. These are coded as personal in the data.

⁴³ And other senior White House staffers, e.g., the press secretary, see the president even less, averaging around 1% of the president's day.

Table 5. Individuals Involved in the President's Councils

Counsel	Counsel for... (% of Day)		% Difference	Average Counsel All Presidents by Origins
	Modern	Post- Modern		
<i>Seclusion</i>	11.2	26.0	131.5	21.3
<i>White House Core Subordinates</i>				5.8
Vice President	6.3	3.4	-46.3	
Chief of Staff	13.3	5.9	-55.8	
National Security Advisor	6.8	5.2	-23.7	
<i>Other WH Subordinates</i>	2.1	1.8	-13.8	1.9
<i>Executive Branch Subordinates</i>				1.5
Core Cabinet Secretaries*	5.1	1.7	-67.6	
Other Cabinet Secretaries	1.2	0.2	-79.3	
Subcabinet Staff	2.9	0.3	-90.4	
<i>Legislative Branch</i>				2.6
Leaders of Congress	2.4	1.0	-56.5	
Member of Congress	5.6	2.7	-51.7	
<i>Outsiders</i>				4.7
Private Actors	14.4	2.2	-84.5	
Heads of State	2.6	3.6	38.4	
<i>Public Event</i>	9.2	8.3	-10.1	8.6

Source: Compiled by author.

* These include State, Defense, and Justice.

Contact with outsiders has declined by about 50%. Conversations with private actors (e.g., religious leaders, lobbyists, business and labor leaders) have declined almost 100%, down from 14% to around 2%. On the other hand, formal diplomatic consultations with other heads of state have increased slightly to a rate of 3.6%, i.e., slightly higher than that for all members of Congress.

Shifting Counsel

Table 5 reports two significant patterns beyond the shift to seclusion and single individual consultations. First, presidents have relied less on subcabinet officers. Though presidential appointees, these subordinates represent a substantial source of policy details. The recent popularity of outsider presidencies seems to have precipitated a substantial decline (-90%) in counsel with these subcabinet personnel, insider presidents likely have more experience with such subcabinet experts.

Second, presidents have decreased the amount of counsel from members of Congress. This pattern coincides with the decentralization of Congress after the reforms of the early 1970s.⁴⁴ While some might argue that reform has led to more power points that presidents

⁴⁴ See Terry Sullivan, *Procedural Structure: Success and Influence in Congress* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

have to attend to, decentralization might also mean that congressional “power points” have declined so as to make presidential attention no longer worth the effort.

Counsel Reflects Constitutional Origins

If one considers the progression down Table 5 from top to bottom as a reflection of presidential proximity, then those closest to the president should occupy more of the president’s counsel. And since the constitutional origins of private actors, and even the congressional leadership, do not have a straightforward relationship to *executive* authority, counsel among these groups should drop off dramatically.

Figure 1. Decline in Counsel by Distance from the Presidency

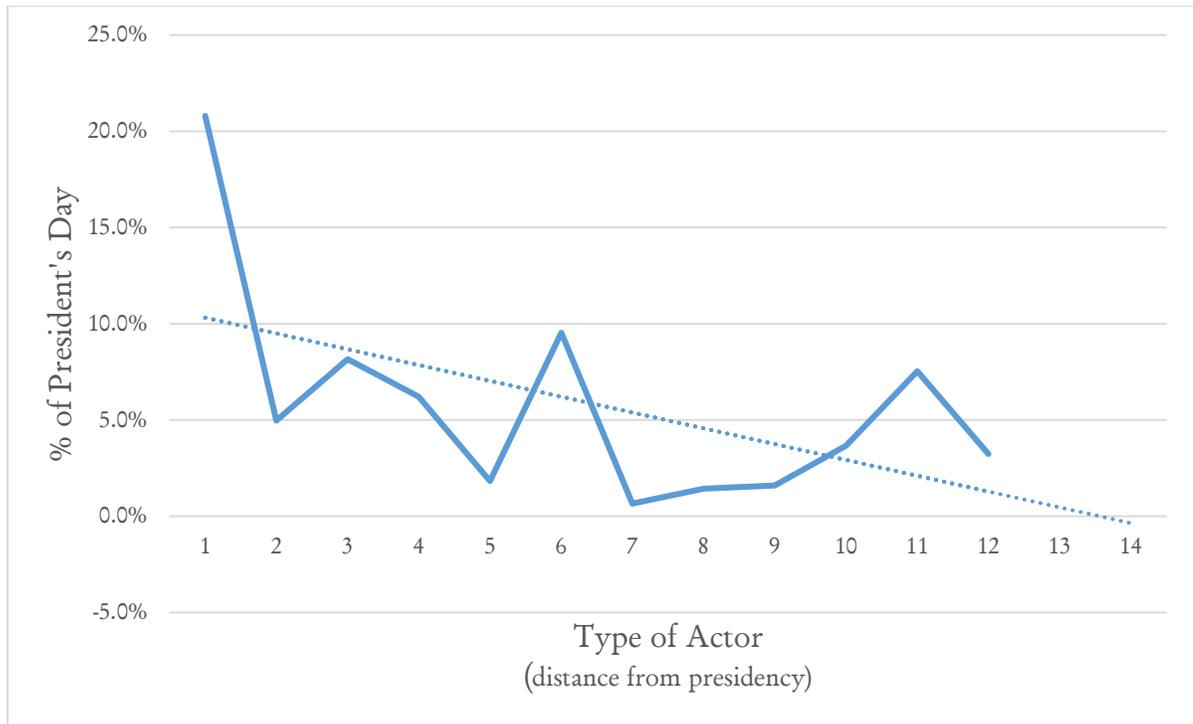


Figure 1 approximates that divergence using a log-function representation of the president’s counsel across the groups reported on in Table 5. The figure also illustrates the degree of dramatic decline of counsel once outside the president’s institutional purview. The figure illustrates the relationships between two general types of administrations, those whose organizational structures revolve around having or not having a White House chief of staff. The use of a log-function facilitates treating the expected curvilinear relationships with standard and more powerful linear statistical forms. The model has a very high “coefficient of determination” ($R^2 \approx .50$), which measures how well the relationship in the data reflects the theoretical expectation. In effect, then, the patterns to counsel tend to reflect generally the proximity of the prospective type of counselor to the president, with the exception of counsel under a chief of staff.

Generally, presidents rely more on those counselors closest to them.

Distinguishing Campaigns from Governing

Table 5 suggests one further contrast between campaigns and governing: an alteration that mirrors the breadth of presidential activities. While campaigns rely on a close-knit group of advisors who have virtually constant access to the candidate, governing involves a wider variety of expertise on a wider variety of topics. So counsel in governing would easily invoke the talents of a much wider variety of individuals, and for the same reason no one counsels the president as often as those in campaigns.

In combination, then, Table 5 and Figure 1 present an unclear picture about the question of a difference between governing and campaigning. The relationship between counsel and closeness to the president clearly suggest the kind of cohesiveness and exclusivity found in campaigns, while the totals for counsel suggests that presidents naturally find a variety of sources for advice and receive counsel from no one in particular.

These ambiguous findings make the study of counsel in crises much more critical as an undertaking. Crises increase the requirements for expertise and perspective. And advice afforded by a narrow group likely undermines the presidency's natural advantages in perspective and intelligence resources.

THE PRESIDENT'S INNER CIRCLES

In a 2001 conference of the White House chiefs of staff, former Chief of Staff and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wondered aloud about the size of the president's "inner circle." Other chiefs reinforced Secretary Rumsfeld's query, admitting that they too did not know the range of those who regularly saw their president. Rumsfeld went on to define such an inner circle in terms of regularity of access, but then he set the bar for admission at only as often as seeing the president three times a week. At the time, this seemingly low bar for admission to the president's exclusive set of counselors seemed puzzling. Yet, because of the nature of presidential counsel, this seemingly low bar turns out to be fairly exclusive in its effects.

The presidential inner circle, however defined, rarely includes more than a handful.

Table 6 describes just how exclusive a group this standard creates. It lists three sets of subordinates, ranked in terms of how often they had contact with the president during the first 100 days. The first group (upper left, above the dotted line) has what turns out to equal a relatively "wide-ranging" contact with the president: encountering the president on average at least once a day. Typically, only five people might have this much contact with their president. The second group (lower left, below the dotted line) involves those who could not satisfy the first criterion but who fit Secretary Rumsfeld's original definition of the inner circle, with three contacts a week. This group adds an additional five or six to the president's inner circle.

Table 6. Inner Circles by Administration during the First 100 Days

President and the Inner Circles	
... include	... and notably exclude
Dwight Eisenhower	

President and the Inner Circles	
... include	... and notably exclude

Sherman Adams, Chief of Staff	
John Foster Dulles, Sec. of State	
Richard Nixon, Vice President	Joseph Dodge, Director, BoB
Wilton Persons, Congressional Relations	Gabriel Hauge, Domestic Advisor
Charles Wilson, Sec. of Defense	C. D. Jackson, Special Projects
Robert Cutler, Nat'l Security Advisor	James Lay, Nat'l Security Council
Herbert Brownell, Attorney General	James Hagerty, Press Secretary
Harold Stassen, Dir. Emergency Preparedness	Allen Dulles, Director, CIA
George Humphrey, Sec. of Treasury	

John Kennedy	
Lyndon Johnson, Vice President	
Kenneth O'Donnell, Staff Director	
McGeorge Bundy, Nat'l Security Advisor	
Dean Rusk, Sec. of State	
Ted Sorensen, Domestic Advisor	
Pierre Salinger, Press Secretary	Douglas Dillon, Sec. of Treasury
Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House	David Bell, Director, BoB
Chester Clifton, Air Force Aide	Robert Kennedy, Attorney General
Robert McNamara, Sec. of Defense	

Richard Nixon	
Bob Haldeman, Chief of Staff	
Henry Kissinger, Nat'l Security Advisor	
John Ehrlichman, Domestic Advisor	
Bryce Harlow, Domestic Advisor	
William Rogers, Sec. of State	
Ron Ziegler, Press Secretary	
Spiro Agnew, Vice President	Robert Mayo, Director, OMB
Melvin Laird, Sec. of Defense	David Kennedy, Sec. of Treasury
Arthur Burns, Domestic Advisor	
John Mitchell, Attorney General	
Patrick Moynihan, Domestic Advisor	

Jimmy Carter	
Walter Mondale, Vice President	
Zbigniew Brzezinski, Nat'l Security Advisor	
Hamilton Jordan, Staff Director	
Jody Powell, Press Secretary	

President and the Inner Circles

... include

... and notably exclude

Frank Moore, Congressional Relations
Cyrus Vance, Sec. of State

Stuart Eisenstat, Domestic Advisor
Jack Watson, Cabinet Secretary
Harold Brown, Sec. of Defense
Bert Lance, Director OMB

James Schlesinger, Domestic Advisor
Michael Blumenthal, Sec. of Treasury
Griffin Bell, Attorney General

Ronald Reagan

George H. W. Bush, Vice President
James Baker, Chief of Staff
Richard Allen, Nat'l Security Advisor
Michael Deaver, Communications Director
Edwin Meese, Domestic Advisor
Max Friedersdorf, Congressional Relations

James Brady, Press Secretary
Alexander Haig, Sec. of State
David Stockman, Director, OMB
Martin Anderson, Domestic Advisor
Donald Regan, Sec. of Treasury

David Gergen, Staff Secretary
Caspar Weinberger, Sec. of Defense
William F. Smith, Attorney General

George H.W. Bush

Dan Quayle, Vice President
John Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Nat'l Security Advisor
Marlin Fitzwater, Press Secretary
Robert Gates, Deputy Director, CIA
James Baker, Sec. of State

Andrew Card, Deputy Chief of Staff
Nicholas Brady, Sec. of Treasury
Richard Darman, Director, OMB
Boyden Gray, White House Counsel
Fred McClure, Congressional Relations
Richard Cheney, Sec. of Defense

Source: Compiled by author.

The table also lists those prominently associated with an administration who had fewer than three contacts a week with their president (lower right).

As many have suggested, and as borne out by the table, the White House chief of staff appears on most lists of the inner circle. For example, Sherman Adams' operational relationship with President Eisenhower reflects the common experience for chiefs of staff:

It involved . . . being present at a large number of Eisenhower's meetings, including regularly scheduled ones, . . . as well as ad hoc presidential conferences. By spending so much time in Eisenhower's presence . . . Adams was able to keep abreast of Eisenhower's views.⁴⁵

Almost without exception, this inner, inner circle includes the chief of staff or staff director, chief domestic advisor, the secretary of state, the national security advisor, the vice president, and then typically either the director of congressional relations or the president's press secretary. While the secretaries of defense and treasury and the budget director typically see their presidents four times a week, they rarely rise into the closer circle.

The table includes four prominent variances highlighted by these standards. All of these have to do with earlier presidencies. First, James Hagerty, President Eisenhower's storied press secretary, had very limited contact with the president. He did not make it into President Eisenhower's inner circles, nor did Allen Dulles, the Director of the CIA.

Second, only during the Kennedy Administration did the president have regular enough interactions with the Speaker of the House to include the Speaker into the president's inner circle. Third, despite the popular notion that he suffered as Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon Johnson appears on Kennedy's list of inner, inner circle, having daily contact with the president. Indeed, among vice presidents, only Richard Nixon did not enjoy this kind of closest association with their president. Fourth, Robert Kennedy, President Kennedy's brother, campaign manager, and attorney general did not break into either of Kennedy's inner circles.

MODELING WHOM PRESIDENTS SEE AND THEIR TRADEOFFS

The introduction to this section highlighted the fact that presidential choices about counsel need not generate tradeoffs in the same way that alterations in engagement would require alternations elsewhere. Instead of presenting the complex statistical treatment of counsel necessary to establish the complex of tradeoffs in the changing scope of presidential counsel, the following sections will simply report what we have learned from these models and analyses.⁴⁶ While changing circumstances do not necessarily generate tradeoffs in counsel, presidents might react to those situations by shrinking their councils down to their reliable and most understood advisors. As with what presidents do, however, most circumstances do not draw a reaction with respect to counsel. And this reticence to react remains robust with respect to changes in most of the variables tested.

⁴⁵ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 142–43.

⁴⁶ For a more detailed description of these models and their results, see Sullivan, "Process Rationalized Assessment," *op cit.*

While post-modern presidents have reduced contact with experienced agency staff, hostilities draw presidents out of seclusion and into more contact with outsiders—private actors and those in the executive agencies who are considered experts.

And as with engagement, a few circumstances do interrupt a president's daily routine of counsel. For example, hostilities draw the president out of seclusion and away from reliance on the core White House staff. Presidents shift to beyond the White House itself, and particularly draw in the expertise of the executive—cabinet secretaries and their subcabinet subordinates. Unified government also reduces the role of the inner circle and White House staff in the president's councils in favor of drawing in more cabinet and legislative leaders. As in engagement, unified government seems to suggest the pursuit of coordination and leadership.

So the general pattern reverses in response to unified government; presidents have more contact with the executive branch and their congressional leadership.

THE PATTERNS TO PRESIDENTIAL COUNSEL

In sum, then, the councils that surround a president reflect a conundrum: the group that see a president regularly has very few members. Yet the councils that presidents rely on have a broader membership than these few individuals or the core White House staff.

Every day, presidents interact with scores of people but no one in particular.

On average, the most time presidents spend interacting with any specific individual amounts to less than 10% of the day. The institutional responsibilities so important in dictating the president's engagement seem less important in dictating the makeup of the councils that presidents draw on. Indeed, the few councils that have fixed memberships, with statutes dictating in some small ways who should participate, increasingly have become the target of presidential inattention over the decades. Instead, presidents try to manage their councils more to improve the possibilities that those councils will inform their presidential deliberations.

The evidence suggests that these presidential councils have more breadth than expected and involve more external (and presumably contrary) advice than most imagine. That result derives from the fact that presidents see many more everyday than those in their "inner circles" and that the phrase itself "inner circle" suggests considerably more attention than the nature of real presidential routine allows. Presidents get advice from a wide array of actors. And just when circumstances call on presidents to deal with extraordinary issues, their councils expand (rather than contract) in just the ways most would imagine they ought to.

THE CHOICES PRESIDENTS MAKE

To this point, the analysis has described a stable routine rarely affected by changing circumstances, i.e., a presidency that, as an institution, dominates presidential engagement and that defines counsel. A presidency that seemingly offers few opportunities for the distinctiveness driven by personal ambitions the founders envisioned for their new singular

executive. And a routine that, when it does react, alters engagement by concentrating more on core constitutional duties.

Presidents, however, do not want to merely react to events and circumstances or to occupy an office just to act as its caretaker. In addition to a steadfast focus, can presidents adjust their routines to maximize the impact of their own ambitions over the institutional demands of duty? Can the choices presidents make reshape their engagement or expand their counsel?

TWO MECHANISMS FOR ADJUSTMENT

When dealing with their decision-making, especially with what they do and whom they see, presidents have few identifiable mechanisms for adjustment and refocus. In the absence of better options, staff have simply pressed the president to work longer in response to changing circumstances. Table 1 suggests that this pressure extends the president's workday by an astonishingly 10% over the first 100 days.

In the absence of options, the presidential workday lengthens by 10% in just the first 100 days.

To date, the most obvious mechanisms for adjustment derive from studies in organization theory—to choose among the limited organizational options available to presidents and to adjust the size of the president's staff. Most of the available analyses have focused on the differences between two staffing systems, primarily assessed in terms of how well each promotes “competitive” advocacy or how well each limits the potential for isolating decision-makers from a variety of counsel.⁴⁷ But a second option draws the attention of some researchers as well. These analysts have identified the size of the president's staff, which has grown since the Great Depression, as a detriment to the president's own focus. Some have argued that such growth makes the president a prisoner of those hired help.⁴⁸

The Choice of Organization

The first of these two choices would emphasize easy access to the president among subordinates. Sometimes, the analysts call this option the “Spokes of the Wheel” organization (hereafter SOWO). This model places the president at the hub of relationships in which many subordinates enjoy not only equal footing in advising the president but also they receive assignments without regard to their nominal responsibilities. Sometimes called the “collegial” staffing system, SOWO in its extreme would assign no specific responsibilities to any subordinates, leveling their standing and making their counsel entirely contingent on their relationship with the president. In this system, presidents have complete responsibility for determining their own schedules and must, therefore, adjudicate directly requests for access and participation in the councils that discuss decisions. Presidents in this structure also dole out assignments (often duplicating assignments) to subordinates. Advocates for SOWO suggest that allowing a wider range of advisors

⁴⁷ The two most significant work in the area remains George, *Presidential Decision-making*.

⁴⁸ National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), *A Presidency for the 1980s* (Washington, DC: NAPA, 1980).

immediate access to the president's councils creates a better opportunity to provide competing advice, thereby maximizing presidential information and discretion on a wider range of decisions. This presumption reflects the idea that counsel determines decisions.

A second basic organization choice, often referred to as a "hierarchical" system (HS), relies on a White House chief of staff to structure the access of and assignments for subordinates. This organizational system differs from SOWO primarily in that fewer staff occupy positions as "counselors without portfolios" but instead holds staff to specifically defined responsibilities. Not surprisingly, when utilizing HS, White House chiefs eventually orchestrate the kinds of information and decisions that reach the president.⁴⁹ Purportedly, this structural choice makes the president's operation suppler and more easily refocused by the president. Most analysts, however, suppose that hierarchy also limits information flows to the president. Lewis Paper makes the standard argument, applying it to President Kennedy's organizational style:

Kennedy believed that Eisenhower's staff operation impeded his effectiveness in making sound decisions. . . . too much organization stifled debate; it denied him access to a broad scope of information and ideas; and, perhaps most importantly, it undercut his ability to understand the real merits of available options.⁵⁰

Managing the Size of the White House Staff

Some see this growth as trapping the president. Instead of shifting the president's time to managerial duties and areas of uncertainty, as organizational theorists might imagine, some researchers and pundits suggest the specialization and expertise incumbent with staff growth invokes a "switching" effect: the staff captures the president's attention, making it more reactive, less proactive, and generally driven by the staff's interests.⁵¹ In an influential early version of this argument, Hugh Heclo focused on the purported tendency to distract the president's attention, asking simply, can the president stay "abreast of it all"?⁵² "A trimmer staffing arrangement," Heclo argued, "would help a president as well as substantially simplify [the] president's job of managing."⁵³ Hence, staff growth would yield a major shift in engagement toward management of White House decision-making,

⁴⁹ Sullivan, *Nerve Center*.

⁵⁰ Lewis J. Paper, *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Crown, 1975). James Pfiffner has summarized the standard view on differing White House organizational designs, as offering an insight into how to proceed:

If the intention is to ensure that directives are carried out and that staff work is thorough and coordinated, the hierarchical model is preferable. If the intention is to ensure that creative ideas are brought to the fore and that many sides of issues are argued by their advocates, the collegial model is preferable. If you want information and alternatives presented in a logical, coherent manner, hierarchy is better. If you want to ensure that presidents are not trapped by their channels of information, collegiality is better.

See James Pfiffner, "Can the President Manage the Government?" in James Pfiffner and Roger Davidson, eds., *Understanding the Presidency*, 6th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2011), 206–23.

⁵¹ Michael H. Riordan and Oliver E. Williamson, "Asset Specificity and Economic Organization," *International Journal of Industrial Organization* 3, no. 11 (November 1985): 365–78.

⁵² Hugh Heclo, *Studying the Presidency* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1977).

⁵³ Hugh Heclo, "The Changing Presidential Office," in James Pfiffner and Roger Davidson, eds., *Understanding the Presidency*, 6th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2011), 223–34.

presumably engaging the president in “court politics” as a substitute for more productive engagement.

In a variation of this argument for counsel, some argue growth isolates the president behind a jealous staff, unwilling to pass on information (assumed contrary information) from outsider experts.⁵⁴ Following this scholarly presumption, political candidates, especially for congressional office, have called on commitments to cut deeply into the presidential support staffing. Once in office, a few presidential candidates have actually reduced the White House staff.

Yet, the presidential authority the founders created makes the president the center of the presidency. How can that sense of authority square with the development of staff, unless staff *serve* as long as their service facilitates the president’s decision-making rather than impedes it? Answering that question in the spirit of the founders’ choice would suggest a different function for staff: to buffer the president’s decision-making, instead of dictating it, to move the president’s attention away from managing the White House decision-making process toward other responsibilities, to minimize the president’s involvement in structuring decision-making and maximize focus on duty.

How do organizational choices affect what presidents do and the range of advice they receive?

THE IMPACT OF CHOOSING HIERARCHY

This section considers the first of two possible effects associated with the president’s choice of a staffing organization. Does a more hierarchical staffing system (an HS system) as juxtaposed with a more collegial system (an SOWO) improve efficiency in what the president does? The second section will then consider whether the more “open” staffing structure allows for the broadest scope of information. Since administrations have made organizational choices like the two proposed, then, statistically speaking, the data here create a kind of controlled experiment, measuring the effects on routine of organizational choices.

Hierarchy Improves Efficiency

Choosing a strict hierarchy, with its chief of staff, its access control, and (more importantly) with its clear responsibilities among subordinates, assists in bringing into the president’s councils those considered subcabinet experts and outsiders with expertise. Subordinates simply spend less time maneuvering to get into the room under a strict hierarchy, and with that “calmer” process outsiders can more easily find access into the decision-making process.⁵⁵ So, with less in-fighting, decision-making achieves a kind of improved efficiency.

Table 7 makes a more direct assessment of efficiency, comparing the average number and lengths of different kinds of meetings arranged by organizational choices. For each form

⁵⁴ Thomas E. Cronin, “The Swelling of the Presidency,” *Saturday Review*, February 1, 1973, 30–36; Matthew Dickinson, *Bitter Harvest: FDR, Presidential Power, and the Growth of the Executive Branch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵⁵ See Sullivan, “Decision-making . . . Fame, Fidelity, and Learning to Pivot.”

of meeting, from one-on-one to large group meetings, the president’s choice of a hierarchy did not affect the average length of these meetings. Instead, choosing a chief of staff who controls access reduces the total numbers of each type of presidential meeting. In sum, this organizational choice reduces the amount of time the president spends in meetings, and it shaves roughly 60 hours off the schedule over the first 100 days.

Selecting a strict hierarchy with clear staff purviews results in fewer meetings for the president—the equivalent of saving 60 hours of the president’s time.

That result suggests that the internal workings of the meetings that occur do not improve with the control inherent in using a chief of staff. Instead, a chief of staff brings to

Table 7. Efficiency and Organizational Choice during the First 100 Days

White House Organization	Numbers during 100 days average length per event		
	One Person	Small Group	Large Group
Spokes of the wheel Avg. length	477 0:17:28	373 0:24:41	166 0:50:35
Hierarchical Avg. length	326 0:17:42	300 0:26:28	156 0:54:40
<i>Time Saved</i> (hours:minutes)*	42:40	21:19	-2:24

Source: Compiled by author.
* Negative numbers indicate time added to the president’s workload.

presidential counsel speaks to the principal reasons presidents opt for a hierarchical operation. While the data indicate that presidents take counsel from those most in proximity, those in the White House and core cabinet positions, the more complex and causal data models indicate that the choice of a hierarchical system clearly increases use of those beyond the White House. Subcabinet experts and advisors outside of government altogether represent the two largest benefactors from the president choosing a hierarchical staffing system, holding constant all other considerations and effects. It seems reasonable to speculate that this pattern in presidential counsel results from the reduced conflict inside a hierarchical system, particularly those squabbles that erupt over jurisdictions. Presidents spend less time adjudicating these disputes between staff over responsibilities. The strictly hierarchical system preempts such disputes and allows the president the opportunity to take the time spent resolving these differences and apply it to receiving counsel from other sources.

Subcabinet experts and advisors outside of government altogether represent the two largest benefactors from the president choosing a hierarchical staffing system.

the organization the opportunity to control those meetings “not ready for prime time.” Much of the work of chiefs and staff secretaries goes into making sure that meetings with the president do not happen prematurely.

Hierarchy Improves Counsel

In addition to effectively reducing demands on presidential time, a chief of staff operation also reallocates presidential time among executive subordinates.⁵⁶ This pattern in complex modeling underscores the results illustrated in Figure 1. This pattern in

⁵⁶ For that analysis see Sullivan, “A Process Rationalized Assessment.”

In addition and somewhat counterintuitively, the hierarchical system allows the president to more systematically manipulate control over which staff get “into the room” for decision-making. This ability reinforces presidential authority over counsel without unduly trading against the president’s other responsibilities.

In sum, then, the SOWO system has little to recommend it as a presidential choice. The more the president’s operation resembles a somewhat modified SOWO, the more these deficiencies affect decision-making.

STAFF GROWTH OPENS DECISION-MAKING

In the past, political science has had no direct evidence of the impact on routine of a growing or shrinking White House Office staff. The current data now permit direct observation. Several of the models used to analyze presidential engagement and counsel have incorporated variables associated with the size of the White House Office and the Executive Office of the President as independent organizational forces.

Reducing White House staffing levels isolates the president, complicates decision-making, and reduces executive expertise.

Instead of presenting the complex statistical treatment of operational choice and its impact on engagement and counsel, the following sections will simply report what we know based on these models and analyses.⁵⁷

Staff Growth Focuses Presidents on Constitutional Duties

The results have made a clear case that the presumption against staff growth has no supporting evidence. Staff growth and the specialization that comes with that growth has allowed the president to use those staff to enhance presidential work. Why else would a president allow for such expansion? For example, staff growth does not draw presidents into more attention to White House decision-making. It does the opposite, freeing presidents from managing that process. The time saved from focusing on decision-making and structure has gone into improving presidential engagement in core responsibilities, primarily in diplomacy. So, the best evidence suggests that increasing White House staff supports the president’s responsibilities; it does not derail it.

Staff Growth Reduces Presidential Seclusion

The increasing support that the president receives from staff leads to less seclusion in the decision-making process: less time alone and fewer one-on-one interactions. Growth improves the likelihood that presidents engage with subordinates rather than making decisions alone. And staff growth in the White House actually leads to more coordination with the executive branch; in particular, it leads to more interactions that include the counsel of executive experts from the cabinet agencies—a significant increase in councils that include assistant secretaries with policy expertise, for example. While it benefits executive expertise, though, and unlike the use of HS, staff growth does not improve the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

president's use of experts from outside the executive, either from the Congress or from private organizations.

MODELING THE CHOICES PRESIDENTS MAKE

In sum, then, presidents have two useful mechanisms at their disposal for reshaping their routines. Unfortunately, these two represent large-scale adaptations of the White House decision-making system rather than finer adjustments. The expansion of staffing and, presumably, its specialization, as well as clearly specifying subordinate responsibilities and orchestrating the president's decision-making through a strong hierarchy have measurable effects on both what the president does and with whom the president consults. In orchestrating the president's routine, staff must become more aware of the dimensions of that routine to find adjustments that match the president's work to the president's ambitions. In the end, controlling routine provides the only choices presidents have to avoid the unavoidable dictates of the institution.

HOW THE BEGINNING ENDS

Getting right the perceptions of predecessors and of your own administration's work, of course, has more value to it than just getting the historical record right. Administrations use those perceptions to structure their own work, and when they make their organizational choices, they ought to know what options they actually have. The lack of effective information about the impact of choosing one organizational structure over another, for example, has produced the tradition among chiefs of staff of passing on to their successors a mangled bicycle wheel as a symbol of their universal attraction to and eventual universal disappointment with the SOWO as a choice. We can now understand that dissatisfaction: allowing for widespread access to the president's councils does not present the tradeoffs that presidents and their staffs have come to think it presents them: improved counsel at the expense of organizational efficiency.

Learning these lessons, whenever they have learned them, has served chiefs of staff well.

A ROBUST START TO ROUTINE

Traditions and learning aside, though, sometimes that knowledge can come too late. In the highly charged atmosphere of the presidency and given its unprecedented scale and scope, the patterns established in a president's early days often have a significant (irreversible) effect on the president's historical performance. As White House staff turn over, they often replicate the patterns they have learned or think that they have learned from their predecessors, just as new White Houses think that they have learned from their perceptions of their predecessor's routines. Routines employed in the beginning end up setting the tone for the rest of the administration.

Though only a snapshot of presidential routine, the one taken at the beginning and presented here, represents a singularly important picture, then. Since Washington town has only a single rationale for existence, its inhabitants have an inordinate focus on a new president's activity, trying to assess that person's competence and reliability as a leader and

a potential political partner. Early successes and missteps, then, play an excessively important role in shaping the president's professional reputation—arguably one of the most important assets a president has, after time itself.⁵⁸ Seasoned practitioners, like James A. Baker III, believe that these first 100 days present the best opportunity for a president to establish a “personal mark,” making the early period the best test-bed for assessing routine and distinctiveness.⁵⁹ Once established, the reputation of the president, established within the community and early on, presidents have a hard time reversing.

Second, the first 100 days present the White House with the largest operational challenges— learning about, while indelibly shaping, the job. How they do the job early on, in those early circumstances, shapes for a very long time how they do the job later. Third, the first 100 days represent the single instance in an administration's history when it has a confluence of public support and opposition disarray. Its opportunities in the high-stakes game of historical accomplishment often stand at their zenith in this period. Thus, mistakes and successes made then have the greatest effect on the administration's legacy.

Fourth, the analysis of routine during other periods of an administration, a snapshot often taken in the calm before a historic crisis besets the president's team, the patterns of presidential routine, of engagement and counsel, in those periods often resemble closely the patterns established in their earliest days. These early patterns have a resilience then. For example, having received an early and wide-ranging analysis of and recommendations for modifying his initial routines, *a report he commissioned after the first 100 days*, President Carter still maintained those early routines another two years, implementing the recommendations only at the end of his third year in office. Hence, this early period and these systematic data present a significant opportunity for asking whether presidents can ever differentiate themselves from their common, initial experiences.

THE PROBLEM WITH COUNSELORS AS A METAPHOR

In addition to understanding the importance of those early experiences, it now seems reasonable to worry about new attempts to modify the basic hierarchical system model of organization. Presidential organizations in the last three administrations have allowed for more designations of presidential advisors as “counselor.” These designations derive from wanting to lend some advisors a special status with respect to the chief of staff and highlighting that these subordinates do not have the kind of purviews as, by comparison, those possessed of the traditional line responsibilities in the standard hierarchical White House. Based on the research here, we can tell now that this purposeful adaptation to the

⁵⁸ See William Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); John Frensdreis, Raymond Tatalovich, and Jon Schaff, “Predicting Legislative Output in the First One-Hundred Days, 1897–1995,” *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2001): 853–70.

⁵⁹ “[In these early days, there] is a minimization of the . . . adversarial approach. [Y]ou don't have people on the other side attacking you. You're pretty free to name your people, make your choices, set your priorities and your objectives.” James A. Baker III, quoted in Martha Joynt Kumar, George C. Edwards III, James Pfiffner, and Terry Sullivan, “Meeting the Freight Train Head On—Planning for the Presidential Transition,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (December 2000): 754–69.

HS model likely dissipates the president's time and focus, isolates the president from useful counsel, and lengthens the president's workday. In the end, and most ironically, this misperception about uniqueness and its misapplication to staffing doom the president to work at the pace of the presidency.

As of yet, we just don't know the way out of these serious challenges. Clearly, we need to strengthen the forces of public administration because the current lack of knowledge still leaves a new president at peril out there on that ice.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: DESCRIBING THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY DIARY

As one of the advantages of the American presidency, a number of organizations log the president's activities. Chief among these, the U.S. Secret Service, the staff of the White House Appointments Secretary, and the White House residential staff keep their own logs of the president's whereabouts and activities. The Secret Service log primarily covers movement outside the Oval Office and into the Residence and transit outside the presidential compounds (White House, Camp David, and other "summer" White Houses). The White House residential staff cover the president primarily within the Mansion and Residence of the President's House. And the appointments staff cover the president's activities within the West Wing, in transit, and over the phone. These logs overlap and contribute to a more comprehensive composite log built by the National Archives and Records Administration's Diarist staff, part of its White House Records Unit. This log, called the President's Daily Diary, compiles these into a single comprehensive log and includes notations as to activity, its content, references made in contemporaneous staff and presidential notes found in a separate file called the "daily diary backup," and appendices to various logs provided by the president's staff (especially from the advance staff). The diary typically identifies the president's location, activity, and others involved. Most citations in the diary record beginning and ending times.

This final log, the Daily Diary, differs substantially from the "public schedule," often posted by the White House and prominently placed at many of the National Archives Presidential Libraries prior to releasing the actual Daily Diary. The Daily Diary often takes considerable time to release, having to clear national security, Secret Service, and various other concerns. At this writing, the last available Daily Diary covers the presidency of George H.W. Bush, the Bill Clinton Library having only recently released the public schedule.

Some redaction takes place, but most of those restrictions (except for the CIA briefers and the Secret Service protection detail) lapse before release of the diaries. In addition to the diary, our recording of these diary data also includes several verification steps, including matching the data against the NARA *Public Papers* series, and additional validation against logs of presidential recordings (for Eisenhower through Nixon).

Travel activities occur only outside the White House and typically involve motorcades or airlift of one form or another. Personal time involves time with family or personal friends, though it becomes a working engagement if the event includes a predominance of staff. In some instances the original logs reported only the president as at work (e.g., in the Oval Office) or engaged in an amorphous activity (e.g., "night reading"). The data reallocate those less specific times in proportion to each responsibility's portion among the specific times.

Seeing the President Reliably

Table 1 presents the basic data for the first 100 days of these presidents. As demonstrated earlier, reliance on objective data resources—those not intentionally gathered or designed to prove a particular point—provides a strong counterbalance (and check) especially in understanding politics to the natural proclivity toward and seeming appeal of stories and "received wisdom." So, Table 1 also provides a first check on the question of reliability.

Scientific Precision and Confidence

The observations cover between 76 and 100 of each president's first days. That variation results from record-keeping differences, mostly poorly documented weekends at Camp David, but the data still include 88% of the historical time and do not suggest any selection bias for the remainder. One potential exception occurs in the period following the attempted assassination of President Reagan. For eight days, the Secret Service and the Appointments Office did not record their logs. This range of observation allows for statistically precise estimates for each president and, in turn, statistically reliable comparisons between presidents. In addition to reliability *between* presidencies, the large number of observations *within* each presidency also make it possible to draw conclusions with an exceptionally high degree of confidence. The dataset ranges from a low of 4,653 individual observations (for President Eisenhower) to a high of around 26,000 (for

President Ford), yielding 77,339 individual observations. These aggregate into some 30,000 unique events ranging from the president working alone to grandiose state events.⁶⁰

APPENDIX 2: THE IMPACT OF “SINGULARITY” ON ROUTINE

Presidents develop operational wholes, their routines, in two recognizable components: in engagement and in counsel. Each of these components has several alternative states—e.g., differing groups from whom the president draws counsel—and the president’s routine rationalizes each of these alternatives with respect to the many others possible. This rationalization results from a simple fact of what James Wilson, the founder most closely associated with the basic constitutional theory of the executive, called its “singularity”: authority invested in a single, elected official from whom all others draw “derivative” executive authority. Not simply a theory about accountability, though, Wilson’s recommendation (and eventually the founders’ constitutional choice) of this executive singularity had consequences for routine as well. First, every commitment would necessarily reflect both a positive commitment by the president and an opportunity foregone. For example, by making time for the press, presidents exclude contact with others who would provide counsel and presumably have similar claims.

And second, the institution itself, its routines and choices, would not reflect just the sum of each thing that occurred because those occurrences did not stand in isolation of the other occurrences they had supplanted. Such an institution Herbert Simon has characterized as a “not easily decomposable system.” Such an institution requires that analysts understand the whole or the “rationalized” system inherent in the institution’s operation.

Sometimes concentrating on the rationalization inherent in the system will also concentrate on identifying one-to-one tradeoffs, or “dynamics,” within the system—how changes in one commitment necessarily generate an identical change (but in the opposite direction) elsewhere, and how choices at other times dissipate by spreading out across several much smaller tradeoffs at the same time, producing a “resilience effect” with respect to the initial change. Regardless of its specific effect, rationalization implies that neither theory nor its empirical analysis can treat governance as a set of isolated actions or outputs. To do so produces a statistical bias commensurate with those remaining, known and excluded, processes that make up the whole. The application of this insight into routine as a complex of behaviors results in gathering data on the whole of engagement and counsel and transforming these into assessments that depend upon proportions as a primary metric. Proportions in particular lend themselves to the simple reality that a change in one requires the opposite reaction elsewhere, the tradeoffs discussed above. The uses of this insight in statistical analytics have a robust but fairly new literature.⁶¹

APPENDIX 3: PRESIDENTIAL LEARNING DURING THE 100 DAYS

This appendix considers whether the 100 days provides a test-bed for presidential learning. If, as Richard Neustadt has suggested, different forms of ignorance characterize presidential transitions, then administrations presumably adjust to their circumstances. In the past decade, political scientists have played an increasingly important role in presidential transitions.⁶² The developing secondary analysis resulting from this practical contact has underscored the difficulties of reacting. Whether with a scramble to put in place routines to protect the president’s time or to structure more closely the materials destined for the president’s attention or to focus more narrowly the president’s agenda, White Houses try to improve the use of its operations and the president’s time. So, do these White Houses get better, more efficient at

⁶⁰ The log of public events, like attending a performance at the Kennedy Center, obviously does not record all in attendance, though the logs for many events, e.g., bill signings and state dinners, often do record all in attendance.

⁶¹ The literature on this effect includes John Aitchison, *A Concise Guide to Compositional Data Analysis* (University of Glasgow, 2005); John Brehm and Scott Gates, *Working, Shirking, and Sabotage: Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Silvio Ferrari and Francisco Cribari-Neto, “Beta Regression for Modeling Rates and Proportions,” *Journal of Applied Statistics* 31, no. 7 (August 2004): 799–815; Jane Fry, Tim Fry, and Keith McLaren, “The Stochastic Specification of Demand Share Equations: Restricting Budget Shares to the Unit Simplex,” *Journal of Econometrics* 73, no. 2 (March 1996): 377–85; Jane Fry, Tim Fry, Keith McLaren, and Tanya Smith, “Modeling Zeroes in Microdata,” *Applied Economics* 33, no. 3 (February 2001): 383–92; Andrew Gelman, John B. Carlin, Hal S. Stern, and Donald B. Rubin, *Bayesian Data Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, FL: Chapman and Hall/CRC, 2004).

⁶² See Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, *The White House World: Transitions, Organization, and Office Operations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

supporting what the president does, thereby affording presidential work a growing efficiency over time? Or do White House operations adopt an alternative pattern responding to circumstances not with innovation but instead with just doing more of what they do? These two responses would suggest alternative patterns to dealing with the president’s day: one making activities more efficient and the other extending the length of the president’s day.

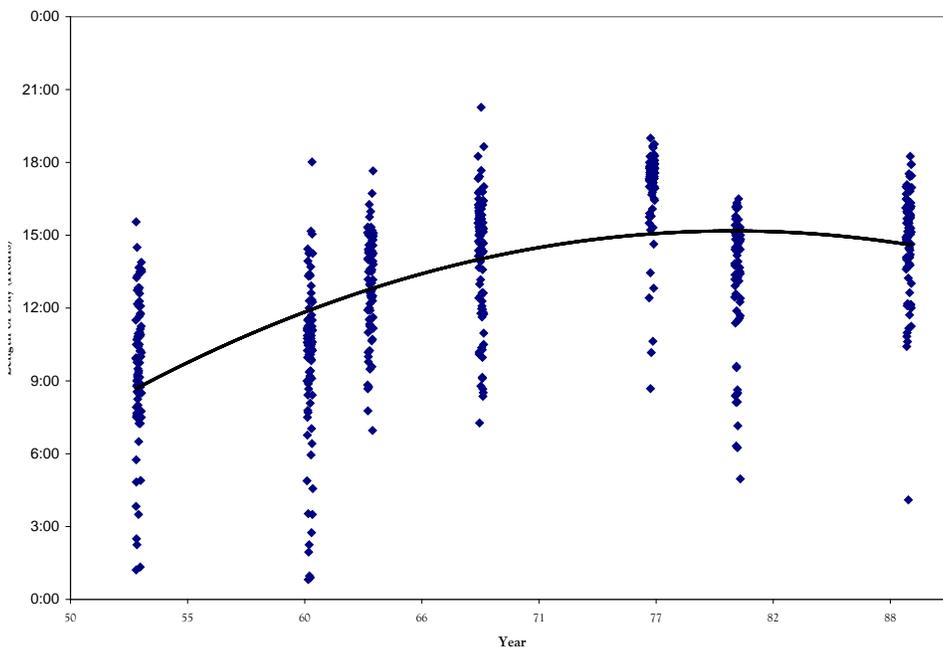
To this point, the analysis has presented each president’s 100 days’ experience as a static and aggregated thing. Obviously, the president’s operation has an opportunity to learn from its experiences and modify its operations. Indeed, as noted earlier, because planning operations often underestimate what to expect, administrations must learn, at least in dealing with those demands that surprise them in their earliest experiences. This section considers whether these organizations develop an observable response over time. Do White Houses learn?

The data presented in Table 1 also describe how the president’s work progresses as the first 100 days unfold. Almost without exception, the 100 days drive up the president’s workday. As the last column in the table indicates, all but Presidents Nixon and Reagan experienced an increase in their workday. Even President Carter, whose day already had pushed to what seemed like the limit, increased slightly as his administration matured. The table also suggests that later administrations may have handled the president’s pressures better than the first few administrations. Presidents Bush and Reagan increased their days less than 5%, while the earlier administrations experience upwards of 8% increases and President Carter’s day actually increased by nearly 10%.

Understanding this growth and its variation illustrates the impact of a White House operation on the president’s time. The growth in the president’s workday has three components. The first component involves the specific starting points most appropriately associated with the individual choices of presidents. As noted earlier, while we can have confidence in the presumption that presidents set their own pace, only slight differences in work schedules separate them. These differences, however, have a small impact by affecting how much room they have to adapt. The earlier the day begins, the more room remains for adjusting the president’s workday.

A second component involves the historical trend in presidential responsibilities, also noted earlier, that has continued through the end of the twentieth century. A growing list of responsibilities has pressured each successive White

Figure 2. Historical Trend in Length of Workday



House, and these growing responsibilities have had a discernible impact on the president’s schedule regardless of the administration’s structure or agenda. The impact of these forces takes effect over a long period and has a real effect. Figure 2 illustrates the historical trend over the era, including data on President Johnson’s transition. The trend line indicates a steady upward force ameliorated by a second-order slowing effect. This second effect probably results from the more common use of a chief of staff organizational choice near the end of the dataset and a second effect associated with the ceiling placed on variation by the practical limit to a president’s

day. The section on organizational choices will consider what effect choosing a chief has on the president’s workday.

A third component involves a “within period” trend specific to each presidency and its own early organizational challenges. Compared to the historical effect, this within-tenure effect appears less potent and more difficult to isolate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A member of the faculty in political science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Terry Sullivan teaches courses on leadership and on the role of the presidency and the Congress as institutions in the American policy-making process. In 2014 Professor Sullivan was designated as Teacher of the Year by the UNC Student Congress, and in 2015 he was selected by the UNC System Board of Governors for its award for Teaching Excellence.

He has authored four books, 40 scholarly articles published in journals ranging from the *American Political Science Review* to the *Brookings Review*, and five reports to Congress. In 2008-09, he served as an invited (external) observer to the President's Transition Coordinating Council. From 2010 through 2012, he served as Senior Research Scholar to and Commissioner on the National Commission to Reform the Federal Appointments Process. In 2013 President Obama asked Professor Sullivan to advise his Presidential Working Group on Streamlining the Appointments Process.

He has served as an American Political Science Congressional Fellow, twice a Lilly Endowment National Teaching Fellow, the first Carl Albert Policy Fellow, a Glenn Campbell Fellow in National Affairs at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University, a Spencer and Teagle Foundations National Teaching Fellow, and the Edwards Chair in Democracy at Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy.

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