



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

*SMOOTHING THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF DEMOCRATIC POWER*

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**Periodic Report Series 2021—47**

**SIX PRESIDENTS AND THEIR INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS  
AT 30 MONTHS: 892 DAYS INTO AN ADMINISTRATION**

Martha Joynt Kumar, Director

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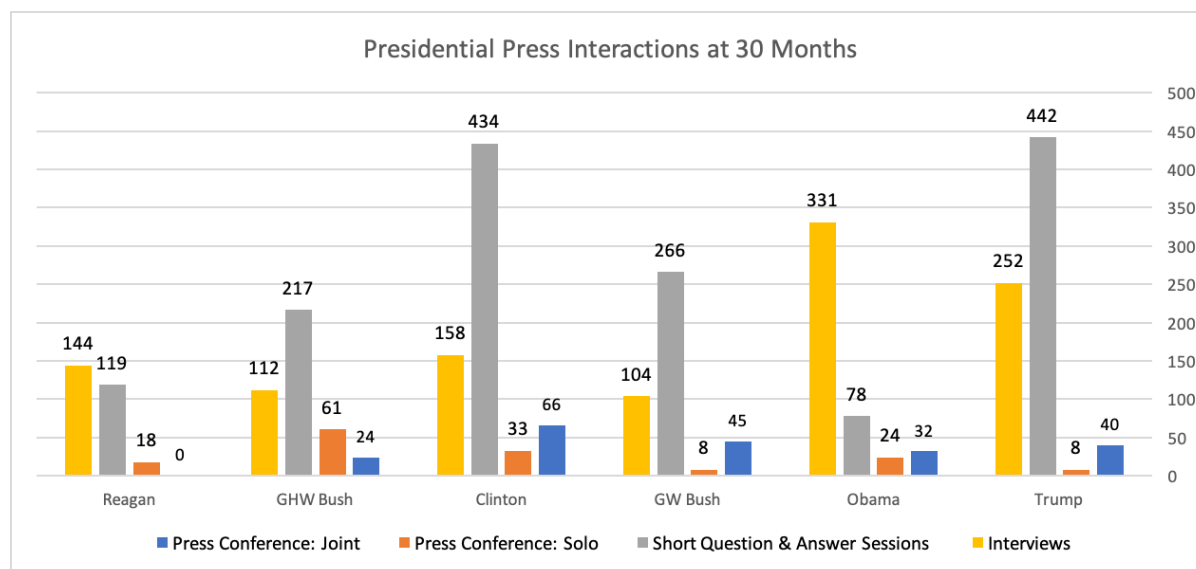
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## SIX PRESIDENTS AND THEIR INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS AT 30 MONTHS: 892 DAYS INTO AN ADMINISTRATION

Martha Joynt Kumar, *Director, White House Transition Project and  
Emeritus Professor, Towson University, Department of Political Science*

### *Summary of Presidential Interchanges with Reporters 1981-2019*

- For over 100 years, presidents have formally answered reporters' questions. In the last almost 40 years, Presidents Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama answered reporters' questions in approximately a third of their public speaking events. For President Trump the number is over 50%.
- In the period since Ronald Reagan was in office, there has been a substantial loss of national moments where people stop to listen to a President speak in solo press conferences and in Oval Office addresses to the nation. Once the crown jewel of presidential interchanges with reporters, solo press conferences held at the White House have become the exception, not the regular event they once were. The White House sessions were valued by news organizations and the public as presidents spend up to an hour taking questions and follow-up queries from members of the full White House press corps. Night time Oval Office addresses have also become a rarity.
- Rather than having the solo press conference as the center piece of their interchanges with reporters, the most recent six presidents expanded their forums with the creation of joint press conferences with foreign and domestic government leaders, regular short question and answer sessions, and interviews.
- There is continuity among the six presidents as most of them favor meeting with reporters in settings they believe got them to the presidency. For President Trump that means short question-and-answer sessions aligned with his tweets while President Obama used more interviews than all of his predecessors. President Reagan focused on prime time television settings, and President Clinton used all three press interchange forums.
- Unlike his predecessors, President Trump has cut back on traditional formal presidential policy speeches as a means of connecting with the general public. Instead, Trump aims his words and events to the supporters who brought him to the presidency in order to let them know his thinking and preferences. As he did in his campaign, he uses tweets to announce his appointments, resignations, and policy positions in addition to airing his grievances. He follows up on his tweets with short question and answer sessions with reporters, and, then, holds a regular set of political rallies to keep his constituents energized and informed.



Since President Woodrow Wilson held the first presidential press conference days after he came into office in March, 1913, presidents have had regular contacts with reporters in a series of evolving forums. To a greater or lesser degree, presidents have followed the belief expressed by President Calvin Coolidge that people need to know a President's plans and thinking. "I regard it as rather necessary to the carrying on of our republican institution that the people should have a fairly accurate report of what the president is trying to do, and it is for that purpose of course that those intimate conferences are held," Coolidge told reporters in a vacation session he held in September 1926.<sup>1</sup> While the types of media have broadened, reporting on the President and the presidency as an institution remains equally important to the public.

All recent presidents have met with reporters though they vary in the types of forums they used and the frequency with which they answered questions. As was true early in the twentieth century and now in the twenty-first, the communications choices presidents make tell us a great deal about them personally, their style, and goals as well as about their publicity opportunities and the media and governing environments they work in during their tenure. While newspaper reporters were the only ones covering the President's off-the-record press conferences in Wilson's time, today there are three types of forums and the sessions are almost all on-the-record ones catering to television, radio, online publications as well as newspapers and magazines.

For most of the past forty years, the three categories of press interchanges are: press conferences [joint and solo]; short question and answer sessions; interviews. Press conferences include the traditional solo sessions Wilson and his successors had. Since President Eisenhower put them on-the-record, exchanges with the President have been expanded to include joint sessions, ones the President has with foreign leaders and government officials. Interviews with reporters are a second popular venue for presidents wanting to answer questions, particularly on a specific topic or policy. Third, short question-and-answer sessions are ones where a President takes one or more questions usually at the beginning or end of a meeting held at the White House or before the President leaves from the South Lawn aboard the Marine One helicopter. For a

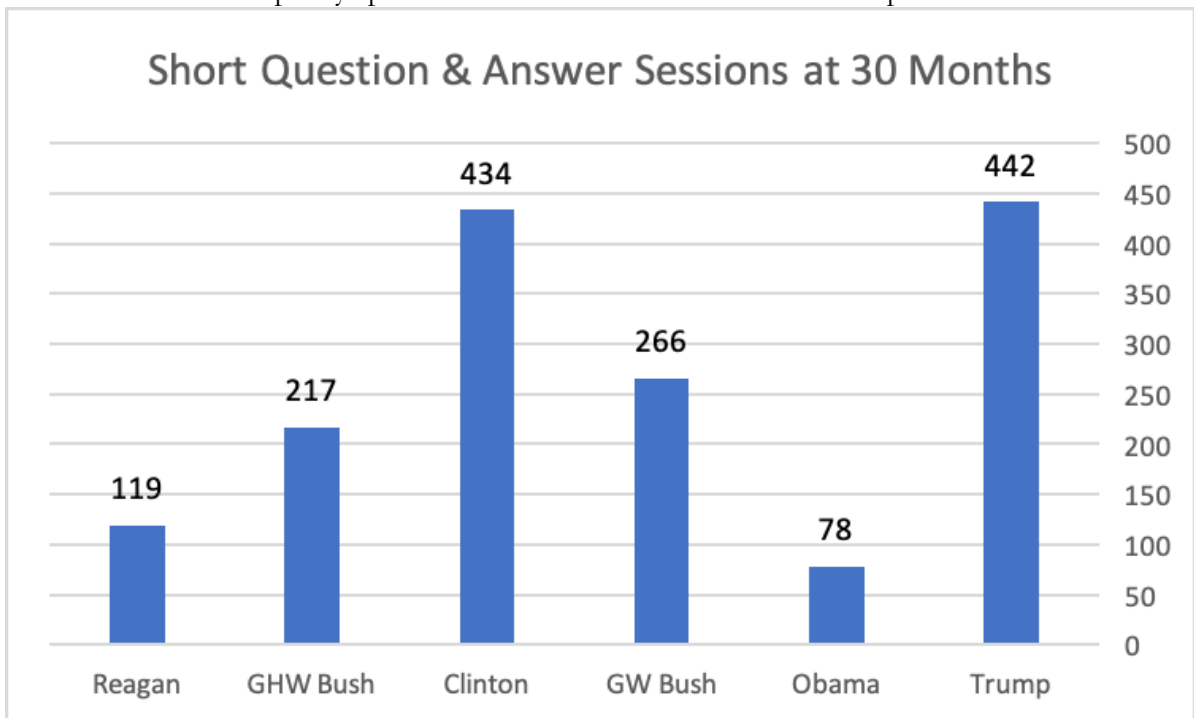
<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the development of presidential press conferences, see Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President's Message: The White House Communications Operation* (Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 253-282. Calvin Coolidge is cited on page xiii. September 14, 1926. Volume VII, <http://coolidgefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Copy-of-V07.compressed.pdf>

detailed description of each category, see pages 15-16. The data featured here [pages 13-15] includes the three types of interchanges Presidents Trump, Obama, George W. Bush, Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Reagan held with reporters at the beginning of 30 months. Those presidents represent both Republicans and Democrats and presidents who held office before cable networks came to the White House as well as ones using social media.

What follows are six findings from the data captured in the exchanges those six presidents had with reporters.<sup>2</sup>

1. ***Except for President Trump, Most Presidents Answer Reporters' Queries in Approximately a Third of Their Public Events.*** Even if they do not enjoy doing so, presidents accept the need and opportunity to respond to questions posed by journalists. Counting up all of a President's public utterances – speeches, weekly radio/ television addresses, press conferences, interviews, exchanges with reporters – at least one third of the occasions where he speaks are ones where he answers questions from one or more journalists. Presidents Obama [29%], George W. Bush [30%], George H. W. Bush [33%], and Ronald Reagan [28%] were remarkably similar in the percentage of the total occasions where they took questions. With 40%, President Clinton was more inclined than the other presidents to answer questions.

President Trump has significantly higher numbers taking reporters' queries than the other five presidents. One of the reasons President Trump's percentage numbers are as high as they are is because he gave comparatively fewer speeches. Ordinarily, the question-and-answer sessions with reporters serve as a complement to the speeches a President makes where he outlines his goals, immediate plans, and explains his policies. But in Trump's case, the Q&A sessions are more of a substitute for set policy speeches than was the case with his recent predecessors.

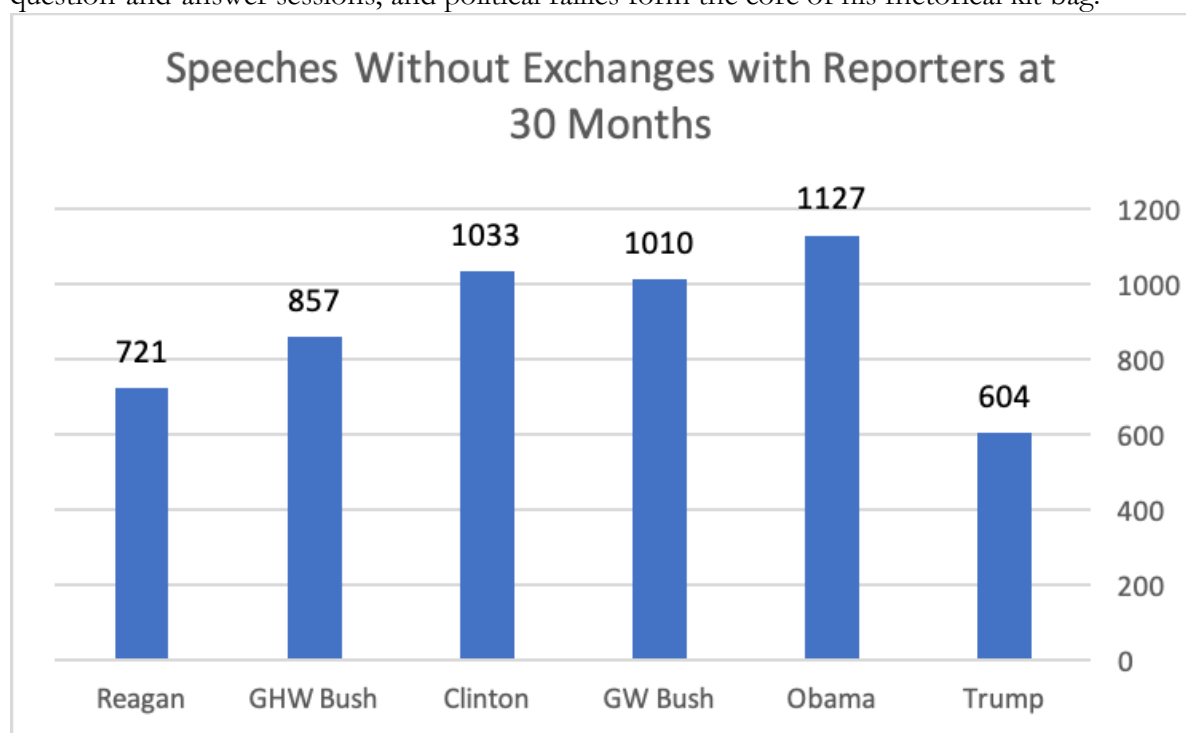


<sup>2</sup> Christian Cmehil-Warn, University of Missouri at Columbia, Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy summer fellow, provided valuable assistance managing data and developing charts for presidential interchanges with reporters.

President Trump uses question-and-answer sessions to respond to a variety of questions in a fairly undisciplined forum where the President decides who he will call on and what subjects he will discuss. These sessions represent a contrast with solo press conferences, which are structured, where reporters have follow-up questions, and can build on the questions asked by others. From a practical standpoint, the question-and-answer sessions represent something of a free-for-all where President Trump is the ringmaster. While other presidents have held these sessions, they have done so more as a way of responding to reporters between the more formal press conferences than as a substitute for them.

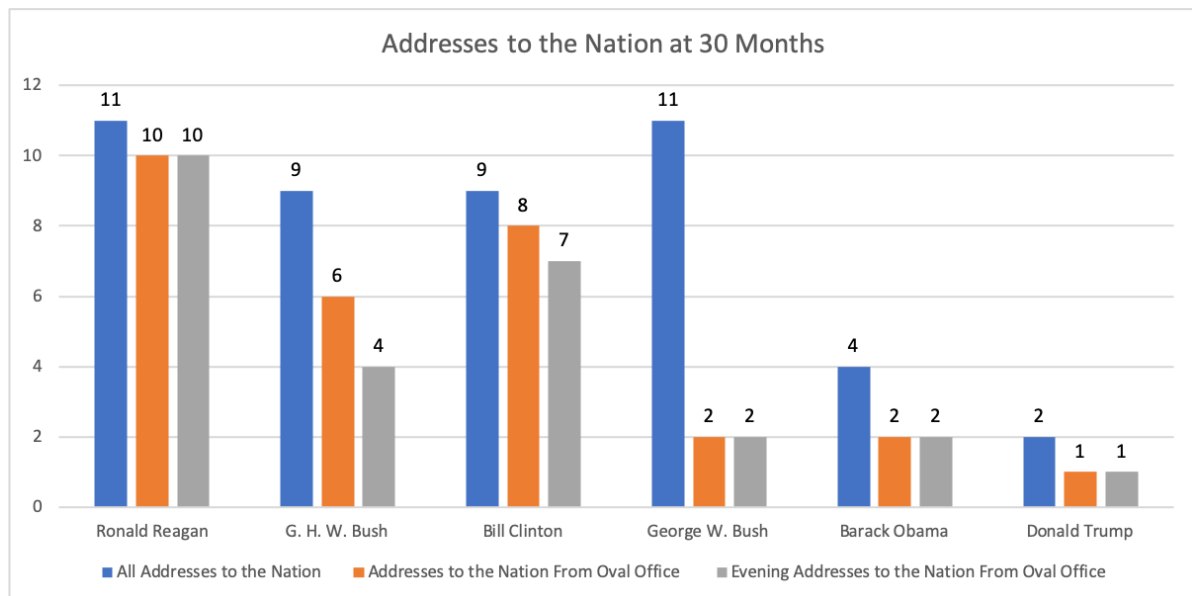
An early choice presidents and their staffs make is how often they will make public appearances and how frequently they will deliver remarks and more formal speeches. Recent presidents have taken advantage of the opportunities cable television provides to reach the public on a regular basis. The numbers for the most recent four presidents at 30 months show a similar pattern for Obama, Bush, and Clinton but significantly fewer for Trump. The figures, without remarks where the presidents answered reporters' questions, are: Trump 604, Obama 1,127; George W. Bush 1,010; Clinton 1,033. In the pre-multi cable period, Presidents George H. W. Bush and Reagan had 857 and 721 speeches and remarks. With the largest number of speeches, President Obama favored settings where he announced and expanded on his policy initiatives and presidential actions.

For President Trump, his 65 political rallies since his inauguration form his most extensive and consistent speech category beginning less than a month after his inauguration.<sup>3</sup> He has held at least one political rally in all but seven of the 30 months he has been in office. In his political rallies whether campaigning for others or for himself, President Trump amplifies the messages he tweets and the points he emphasizes in his question-and-answer sessions with reporters. Tweets, question-and-answer sessions, and political rallies form the core of his rhetorical kit bag.



<sup>3</sup> See list of President Trump's political rallies with citations. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_post-election\\_Donald\\_Trump\\_rallies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_post-election_Donald_Trump_rallies)

High profile presidential speeches have gradually fallen from the occasional evening Oval Office address that President Reagan gave to the rarity it has now become. In his first 30 months, President Reagan gave eleven speeches designated by the National Archives in the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* as Addresses to the Nation. President George W. Bush matched his total Addresses to the Nation, yet he only delivered two of them in the Oval Office. With technical developments making it possible for presidents to speak from alternate and more comfortable White House venues, Bush gave Addresses to the Nation in the Treaty Room in the White House Residence, Cross Hall, Cabinet Room), in cities around the country including his Texas ranch, Cincinnati, Atlanta, New York (Ellis Island), and on the moving aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln traveling off the California coast. President Obama too eschewed Oval Office addresses. Of his four addresses one was from the East Room and another a two miles from the White House at the National Defense University at Fort McNair. With two Addresses to the Nation and neither from the Oval Office, President Trump has accelerated the downward trend for presidential addresses.

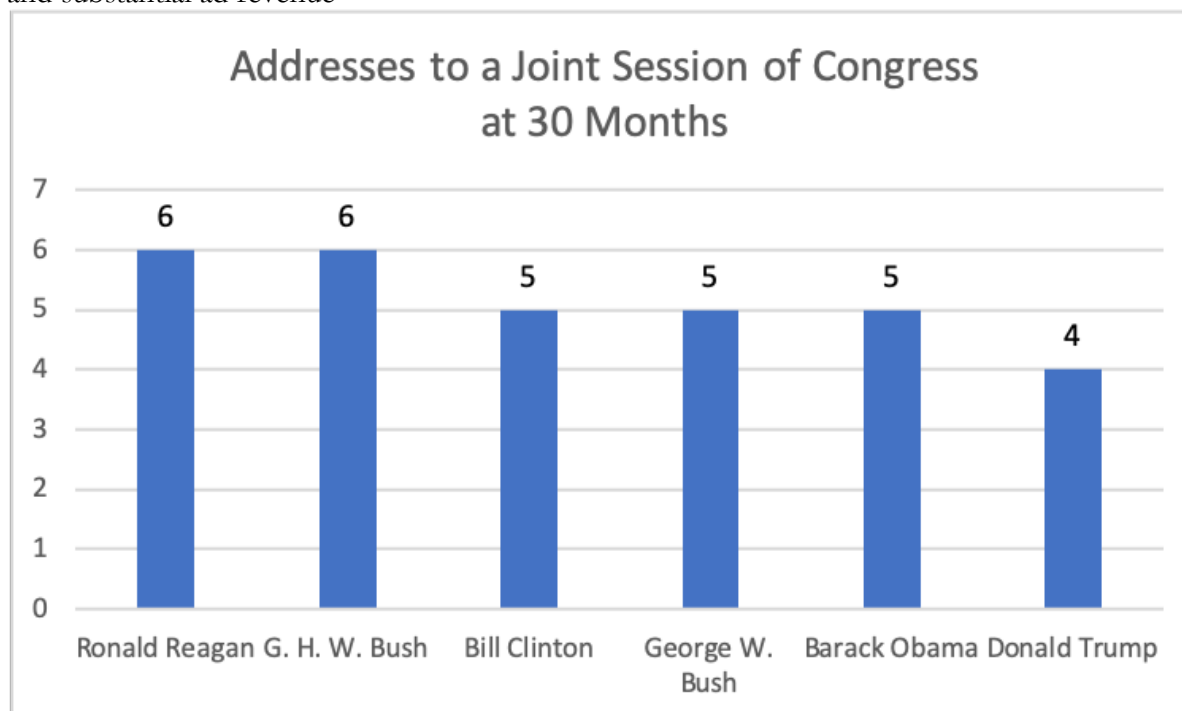


Though not as sharply lower, addresses to a Joint Session of Congress are also slipping though the Inaugural Address and the State of the Union message hold fairly firm. Those addresses have a fair stable and strong audience watching the President on television. President Trump, for example, had an audience estimated by the Nielsen Company at 46.8 million in 2019, 45.6 in 2018, and 47.7 in 2017 for these congressional addresses.<sup>4</sup> Just as important in the Trump presidency, though, is the resonance of the address on social media. The Nielsen Company estimated in 2019 there were an additional 15.2 million State of the Union interactions combined on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with 84% on Twitter.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Nielsen Wire, “Nearly 47 Million Viewers Watch President Trump’s State of the Union Address, February 6, 2019. For earlier years from 1993-2018, see “The Statistics Portal,” Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/252425/state-of-the-union-address-viewer-numbers/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Nielsen Wire, February 6, 2019.

President Obama had an audience high of 52.3 million in 2009 and President Clinton had his strongest audience too in his first presidential year with 66.9 people tuning in for it.<sup>6</sup> Particularly in their early years, presidents can expect to have an audience of at least 40 million even if it dips to the 30 million level at later points in their presidencies.<sup>7</sup> Evening presidential press conferences and Addresses to the Nation have a much greater audience variation and, thus, news organizations are less interested in carrying them at times when entertainment programs draw a large audience and substantial ad revenue



2. ***Presidents Favor Forums and Technologies that Brought Them to the Presidency.*** President Trump reaches his electoral base through short question and answer sessions as well as Twitter postings. As was true in the campaign, he finds he can reach his base of supporters through Twitter. In a July 2019 social media conference Trump said if he puts out a press release, “people don’t pick it up. It’s me – same. If I put it out on social media, it’s like an explosion. Fox, CNN, crazy MSNBC...”<sup>8</sup> Without a media filter as an intermediary, he trusts his ability to get to the 62.8 million who follow him. The public response is immediate and strong.

Once he became President, he continued to focus his message attention to those he considers his electoral base. Unlike his predecessors who searched for ways to build a national base of

<sup>6</sup> Nielsen Wire, “40 Million Watch President Obama’s Press Conference,” March 25, 2009. By his second term, though, Obama’s State of the Union audience fell to 33.5 million, which is the trend for presidents as their newness to the public wears off. Nielsen Wire, “33.5 Million Tune In to Watch President Obama’s State of the Union Address,” February 14, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Nielsen Wire, “Lisa de Moraes, “Five Weeks in, And Obama Still Draws a Crowd,” the *Washington Post*, February 26, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> President Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the Presidential Social Media Summit,” July 11, 2019. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-presidential-social-media-summit/>

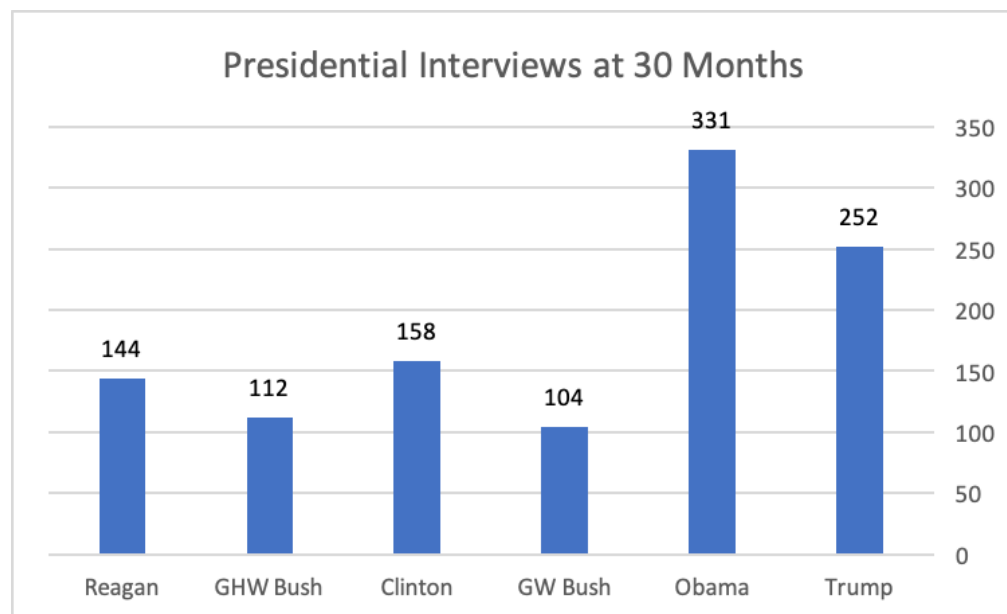


support, Trump has focused his communications strategies on retaining and solidifying his electoral supporters. That has called for him to continue to use those forums he found worked for him during the campaign.

Twitter and question and answer sessions are his favored combination followed by his political rallies. He establishes his narrative for the day through his early morning tweets. In 892 days, he sent out 8,660 of them.<sup>9</sup> That is almost ten a day, seven days a week for the whole of his presidency with his recent numbers higher still. Since the beginning of 2019, he has had an average of 15 a day. He uses them to say what is on his mind at the time as well as highlight his successes and express his grievances with critics and allies. Increasingly in his second and third years, he uses Twitter to announce policies, appointments, and resignations, all actions traditionally reported through presidential speeches and statements.

With his tweets as advance notice of what is on his mind, he can follow up with his thoughts by answering reporters' questions at the top or bottom of a meeting he might be hosting with corporation executives, members of Congress, his Cabinet or others who come through to meet with the President. He holds these often impromptu short question-and-answer sessions with reporters at the beginning or end of a meeting he has with members of his administration and others outside of government in the Roosevelt Room, Cabinet Room, and in the Oval Office. His most frequent location is speaking with reporters on the South Lawn when he is about to board Marine One and, less frequently, on his return home. By early August, he had 72 such sessions with reporters. When you add in ones on Air Force One and at other airports, the numbers rise to 128.

3. ***Presidential Interviews: A Flexible and Popular Forum.*** Presidential interviews with journalists are an important addition to the available publicity arsenal a President has. With solo press conferences fading, recent presidents have increased the interviews they conduct with reporters. Of the six presidents, President Obama had substantially more interviews with reporters than any of his predecessors. He had 331 of them at the 30 month mark of his presidency with Trump (252) liberally using them as well.



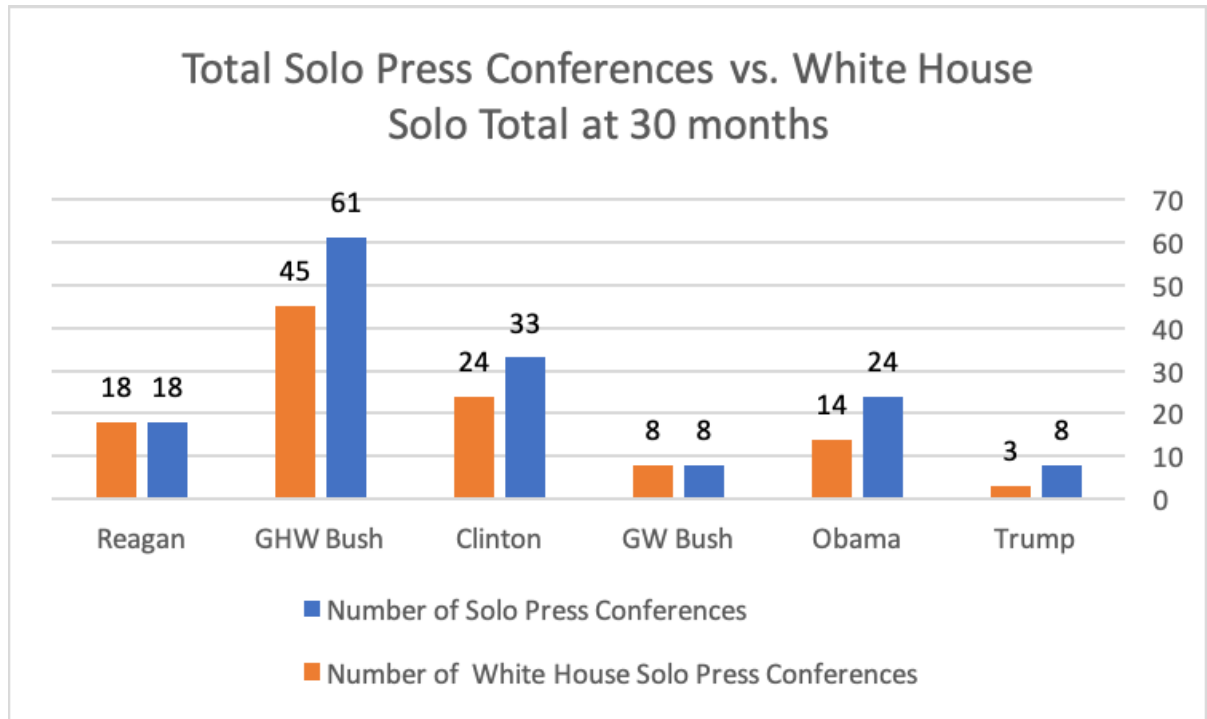
<sup>9</sup> The Trump Twitter Archives has President Trump's tweets as a candidate and as President. <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive>

Interviews allow presidents to target the people they want to talk to and the news organizations they want to satisfy. Obama, for example, used them to advance his policy initiatives requiring congressional approval, such as Trade Promotion Authority. For President George W. Bush, interviews meant he could speak to foreign audiences in countries he was scheduled to visit. President Trump has used them to focus political attention on his conservative base through his many interviews conducted during the 2016 election period and during his presidency by favoring interviews with Fox and other conservative television organizations. An avid cable news watcher, President Trump sometimes calls into “Fox and Friends,” or in the evening appears or phones in to his friend and supporter, Sean Hannity. By 30 months, he had 71 interviews with Fox News and its business and sports divisions and a few local affiliates, which constitutes 28% of his total interviews.

4. ***Presidential Press Conferences: Presidents Adapt Press Forums Depending on Personal Preference and Available Resources.*** For forty years, presidential press conferences were the only forum where presidents took questions from reporters. Once the conferences went on the record in the Eisenhower administration, however, the risks of making mistakes led presidents and their staffs to find alternate places and ways to speak with journalists. President George H. W. Bush adapted the shape of the press conferences to suit his diplomatic needs and personal preference. He, and now his successors, extensively used joint news conferences with foreign leaders and, less occasionally, with government officials. Presidents continue to hold press conferences, but they have cut the number of solo sessions they hold and adopted the joint session, which limits their exposure to reporters’ questions from perhaps an hour down in a solo session to maybe 15 minutes of questions in a joint one. Additionally, the sessions have the advantage of putting a foreign leader on the record on issues important to the President.

For reporters and many of those following presidential interchanges, solo press conferences held at the White House constitute the crown jewel. Solo sessions leave a President more vulnerable than joint sessions and short question and answer meetings. In the Q&A sessions, the President has control over timing, who asks questions, whether he takes follow up queries, and how he responds to reporters questioning the truth of what he says. Additionally, all White House accredited reporters can attend the solo press conferences and theoretically ask a question, which is not the case with most of the short question-and-answer forums. Sessions held in small areas where a large group of reporters can’t fit in the space, tend to have a pool of reporters and ones from the local area rather than the full White House press corps. Historically, solo press conferences run between half an hour to an hour and a President covers a wide range of substantive topics, particularly on the economy, foreign and national security policy as well as his domestic initiatives. Solo press conferences held at the White House receive more media and public attention than do any other interchanges between presidents and reporters.

President Reagan used solo press conferences held in prime time as his major conduit to the public. In his years before the development of cable networks, President Reagan’s news conferences represented a national moment when people watched his East Room sessions. They were popular with the public, but networks lost ad revenue during the hour they were on, which became increasingly important for the networks’ front office as entertainment programs brought in large profits and news did not. After joint news conferences became a feature of presidential communications, only Presidents Clinton and Obama consistently held solo ones.



5. *The First Two Years: A Time of Presidential Learning and Adjustment.* While there are clear differences among the six presidents, there are some similarities. In their first year, presidents and their staffs test what communications strategies work for them and in what forums the President is comfortable responding to reporters. During this early period, for example, President Reagan developed two communications practices that served him well for the following seven years. First, during his second year, he established his night time East Room presidential press conferences as a basic part of his outreach to the public and, second, he created a weekly radio address that he delivered live on Saturdays from Camp David where he and Nancy Reagan spent most weekends. Early in their terms, other presidents developed additional ways of communicating with the public, including George H. W. Bush making use of joint press conferences, Barack Obama doing extended interviews on multiple platforms, and Donald Trump bringing Twitter to the presidency. Each of the presidents increased the use of their new platform as their term went on.

Once a President develops a successful communications precedent, his successors are likely to follow his path. Ronald Reagan provides an example with his use of his weekly radio addresses. While President George H. W. Bush did not use them until later in his presidency, Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, all gave weekly addresses from the early days of their presidencies. President Trump, however, tried weekly addresses in his first year, but abandoned it by the middle of his second one. President George H.W. Bush brought in regular use of the joint news conference with foreign leaders and government officials. While earlier presidents sometimes used joint news conferences, especially for laying out the annual budget along with the budget director and for an occasional session with a foreign leader, Bush made joint sessions a regular feature of presidential interchanges with reporters.

During his first two and a half years, President Trump narrowed the forums he used and the occasions when he spoke. Overall, he did fewer speeches where he took no questions from

reporters than did all five of his recent predecessors, fewer weekly addresses than did all recent presidents except George H.W. Bush, and fewer press conferences, than all five of his predecessors, except President Reagan who did no joint sessions during his presidency. Reagan, though, did have more White House solo sessions (18) than did Trump (3) with ten of them being night time East Room ones covered by the television networks. Unlike his predecessors at this point, President Trump has not had a night time news conference.

At the same time, President Trump increased his use of two forums: short question and answer sessions and Twitter. In comparing his speeches and his short question and answer sessions during his first calendar year and his second one, he cut down on his remarks where he did not take reporter questions [335 down to 187] but increased the remarks and exchanges with reporters numbers during those two year periods from 120 to 208. He increased his Tweets from 2,459 in the first calendar year to 3,568 in the second. In his first six months of 2019, he had 2,633.

6. ***A Successful White House Publicity Operation Requires a Well-Coordinated Organization.***<sup>10</sup> While responses to reporters' queries form the core of presidential communications, he needs a well-coordinated publicity operation to successfully create, explain, and distribute the content of his messages. The high staff turnover of communications directors in most recent administrations has caused message problems, but in the Trump White House there is an additional problem as there is no organizational definition of the communications role. All of the senior communications people have served at the highest staff level titled Assistant to the President, but their titles and roles sharply vary. The communications post has been a free standing office with a director heading it (Jason Miller named but later declined the position, Mike Dubke, Anthony Scaramucci), part of a dual role with the press secretary position (Sean Spicer), as a deputy in the chief of staff's office (Bill Shine), as a director of strategic communications (Hope Hicks), as a senior advisor for strategic communications (Mercedes Schlapp), a separate press secretary position (Sarah Sanders, Sean Spice), and currently Stephanie Grisham heads both the communications and press offices as well as retains responsibility for Melania Trump's communications. An ever-changing communications setup makes message coordination particularly difficult in this administration.

Having a settled communications operation is crucial for a President as the varied responsibilities of a publicity operation include gathering information from around the government, setting up presidential meetings with reporters, developing a President's addresses and remarks, weekly radio / television addresses, and providing news organizations with administration information. Central parts of presidential communications include regular briefings by White House and administration officials concerning presidential events and policies, statements explaining administration actions, and documents distributed to the public. With a communications operation in flux and a lack of current White House Press Room briefing sessions with the press secretary and other administration officials to inform reporters and the public, the result is an additional focus and importance placed on President Trump's words. Having fewer people explaining his views and coordinating with one another than was true in earlier administrations, President Trump serves as his own communications director and

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the Office of Communications and the Office of the Press Secretary, see [whitehousetransitionproject.org](http://whitehousetransitionproject.org). Look in Office Briefs for analytical pieces on both offices and organization charts for each.

coordinator. Thus, all of his interchanges with reporters become particularly significant for understanding the Trump presidency.

Martha Joynt Kumar, Director, White House Transition Project and Emeritus Professor  
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**Six Presidents and Their Interchanges with Reporters through  
June 30, 2019  
892 Days into the Administration<sup>1</sup>**

Martha Joynt Kumar

***President Trump: Interchanges with Reporters***

- **Press conferences, January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 48 [8 Solo and 40 Joint]**
- **Short question-and-answer sessions, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 442**
- **Interviews, January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 252**
- **Addresses and remarks, January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 923**
- **Tweets, January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 8,660**

***PRESS CONFERENCES***

**President Donald Trump: Press Conferences**

January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 48 [8 Solo; 40 Joint]

White House Solo: 3

Nighttime East Room: 0

Press Conferences make up 6% of President Trump's interchanges with reporters

**President Barack Obama: Press Conferences**

January 20, 2009 – January 20, 2011 56 [24 Solo, 32 Joint]

White House Solo: 14

Nighttime East Room: 4 [February 9, 2009; March 24; April 29; July 22]

Press Conferences make up 12% of President Obama's interchanges with reporters

**President George W. Bush: Press Conferences**

January 20, 2001 – June 30, 2003: 53 [8 Solo; 45 Joint]

White House Solo: 8

Nighttime East Room: 2 [October 11, 2001, March 6 2003]

Press Conferences make up 12% of President George W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

**President Bill Clinton: Press Conferences**

January 20, 1993 – June 30, 1995: 99 [33 Solo; 66 Joint]

White House Solo: 24

Nighttime East Room: 4 [June 17, 1993; March 24 and August 3, 1994; April 18, 1995]

Press Conferences make up 14% of President Clinton's interchanges with reporters

**President George H. W. Bush: Press Conferences**

January 20, 1989 – June 30, 1991: 85 [61 Solo; 24 Joint]

White House Solo: 45

Nighttime East Room: 1 [June 8, 1989]

Press Conferences make up 21% of President George H. W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

**President Ronald Reagan: Press Conferences [President Reagan is hard to compare for the early months as he was shot March 30 1981 and had several weeks of recovery without public appearances]**

January 20, 1981 – June 30, 1983: 18 [18 Solo; 0 Joint]

White House Solo: 18

Nighttime East Room: 10 [April 30, 1982, May 13, June 30, July 28, September 28, November 11, 1982; January 5, February 16, May 17, June 28 1983]

Press Conferences make up 6% of President Reagan's interchanges with reporters

### **SHORT QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS**

#### **President Donald Trump: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 442

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 60% of President Trump's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Barack Obama: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 2009 – June 30, 2011: 78

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 17% of President Obama's interchanges with reporters

#### **President George W. Bush: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 2001 – June 30, 2003: 266

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 63% of President George W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Bill Clinton: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 1993 – June 30, 1995: 434

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 63% of President Clinton's interchanges with reporters

#### **President George H. W. Bush: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 1989 – June 30, 1991: 217

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 52% of President George H. W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Ronald Reagan: Short question-and-answer sessions**

January 20, 1981 – June 30, 1983: 119

Short Question and Answer Sessions make up 43% of President Reagan's interchanges with reporters

### **INTERVIEWS**

#### **President Donald Trump: Interviews**

January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 252

Interviews make up 34% of President Trump's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Barack Obama: Interviews**

January 20, 2009 – June 30, 2011: 331

Interviews make up 71% of President Obama's interchanges with reporters

#### **President George W. Bush: Interviews**

January 20, 2001 – June 30, 2003: 104

Interviews make up 25% of President George W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Bill Clinton: Interviews**

January 20, 1993 – June 30, 1995: 158

Interviews make up 23% of President Clinton's interchanges with reporters

#### **President George H. W. Bush: Interviews**

January 20, 1989 – June 30, 1991: 112

Interviews make up 27% of President George H. W. Bush's interchanges with reporters

#### **President Ronald Reagan: Interviews**

January 20, 1981 – June 30, 1983: 144

Interviews make up 51% of President Reagan's interchanges with reporters

**PERCENTAGE OF ALL PUBLIC UTTERANCES OCCURING IN SESSIONS WITH REPORTERS****President Donald Trump: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 55%

**President Barack Obama: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 2009 – June 30, 2011: 29%

**President George W. Bush: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 2001 – June 30, 2003: 30%

**President Bill Clinton: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 1993 – June 30, 1995: 40%

**President George H. W. Bush: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 1989 – June 30, 1991: 33%

**President Ronald Reagan: Percent of Public Utterances in Sessions with Reporters**

January 20, 1981 – June 30, 1983: 28%

**ADDRESSES AND REMARKS****President Donald Trump: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 2017 – June 30, 2019: 923 [6 Address Nation / Joint Session; 49 Weekly Address; 868 Remarks];  
Tweets: 8,660

**President Barack Obama: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 2009 – June 30, 2011: 1,198 [9 Address Nation / Joint Session; 125 Weekly Address; 1,064 Remarks]

**President George W. Bush: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 2001 – June 30, 2003: 1,219 [16 Address Nation / Joint Session; 128 Weekly Address; 1,075 Remarks]

**President Bill Clinton: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 1993 – June 30, 1995: 1,253 [14 Address Nation / Joint Session; 127 Weekly Address; 1,112 Remarks]

**President George H. W. Bush: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 1989 – June 30, 1991: 972 [15 Address Nation / Joint Session; 6 Weekly Address; 951 Remarks]

**President Ronald Reagan: Addresses and Remarks**

January 20, 1981 – June 30, 1983: 771 [17 Address Nation / Joint Session; 58 Weekly Address; 696 Remarks]

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<sup>1</sup> The May and June 2019 figures for President Trump for Remarks and Short Question and Answer sessions are tentative until the National Archives publishes the official ones. The figures here are based on counts of official public events as found in White House press releases and pool reports as well as cross-checked with, first, the *Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents* [earlier from the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*] published by the National Archives and Records Administration and, second, the entries of public presidential utterances included in the *Public Papers of the President* as found on The American Presidency website, [www.americanpresidency.org](http://www.americanpresidency.org), and third, the presidential schedule and transcripts for each day that I receive them from the Press Office. My headings are based on ones used by the National Archives though I



aggregate them [Remarks and Exchanges and Exchanges without accompanying remarks] into my own categories and divide press conferences into Solo and Joint ones.

**PRESIDENT TRUMP'S TWEETS.** I do counts for particular time periods from the Tweets archived in the Trump Twitter archive at [trumptwitterarchive.com](http://trumptwitterarchive.com). Click on "See All" to scroll through his Tweets. The database is easily searchable.

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

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

**INTERVIEWS.** Unlike the other categories, "interviews" are only occasionally publicly released. They are regarded as the property of the news organization and, with some exceptions, the individual organizations control whether and when transcripts are released. For the Obama, George W. Bush, and William Clinton administrations, my figures represent internal counts maintained by White House staff as well as additional interviews I find that may not have been listed on the White House file. For recent presidents, I comb online sources for interviews, use information from Pool Reports issued by reporters covering the President, references in reporters' stories to their discussions with the President, and information I have obtained from reporters about their direct talks with the President either by phone or in person. I include the off-the-record luncheons, dinners, and meetings presidents sometimes have with reporters because inevitably information journalists have acquired in those sessions is shared within their news organizations and sometimes makes its way into print.

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

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

**WATCHING PRESIDENT TRUMP'S INTERCHANGES WITH REPORTERS ON FACTBA.SE.** You can watch most of President Trump's on-the-record video interchanges with the press as well as speeches at [Factba.se](http://factba.se). Click on Donald Trump and then in the dropdown menu, choose Topics and click on "Browse Speeches and Interviews."