

# How Newly Elected Presidents Spend Their Time before Inauguration Day

This study, prepared by the Center for Presidential Transition and the Boston Consulting Group, analyzes how newly elected presidents have allocated their time between the election and the inauguration, how their spouses handled the transition and the post-election roles taken by presidential running mates. Our analysis reveals, among other findings, that presidents-elect historically have focused their energy on five key areas and that they often split time during the transition between their home states and Washington, D.C.

## Newly elected presidents historically have divided their time across five areas during the transition:



### PERSONNEL SELECTION/POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Personnel selection and policy development occupy the largest non-vacation share of the time of a president-elect. The past five presidents-elect have spent an average of 31% of their time during this roughly two and half months between the election and the inauguration interviewing prospective political appointees and White House aides as well as attending internal meetings on policy matters. President-elect George W. Bush spent the most time (43%) during his 2000-2001 transition on personnel selection and policy development while President-elect Donald Trump spent just 20% on personnel and policy matters. See Figure 1 for details.



### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS

Post-election, a president-elect must engage various stakeholders, including members of Congress, governors, mayors and foreign dignitaries along with a variety of interest groups. President-elect phone calls to foreign dignitaries often follow a deliberate pattern requiring close coordination with the outgoing administration to ensure the government always speaks with one voice to foreign nations. President-elect Barack Obama spoke with more than 50 foreign leaders during his 2008-2009 transition. See Figure 2 for details.



### MEDIA AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS

Strategies for engaging the media and public during the transition have varied, with each newly elected president trying to strike their own level of visibility and mix of communications channels. The strategy typically includes appearances on talk shows, extended news media interviews and public appearances related to personnel

and policy announcements, including policy summits.

President-elect Obama had the most public engagements of any previous modern president-elect (55 events), perhaps because of the importance of public messaging as the country was in the throes of a financial crisis. He also used controlled communications such as video addresses via his transition website.

President-elect Bill Clinton devoted a large portion of his engagement time to public events. Presidents-elect Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush had more traditional approaches. Press conferences and question and answer sessions made up 52% of Reagan's public engagements and 65% of Bush's once he was declared the winner of the disputed 2000 election.



#### SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE BRIEFINGS

The Presidential Transition Act mandates national security briefings for the president-elect. These are traditionally provided by the intelligence community and typically include the President's Daily Brief.



#### PERSONAL TIME

Personal commitments—including well-deserved down time such as family vacations—historically have taken up the largest portion of a president-elect's post-election, pre-inauguration time. The past five presidents-elect have spent an average of 51% of their post-election time on personal commitments. Nearly all presidents-elect have chosen to take a family vacation. President-elect Obama, for example, spent 10 days in Hawaii with his family.

### **Presidents-elect spend time in their home state and in Washington, D.C., but most tend to remain outside the Beltway for as long as possible before the inauguration.**

Most presidents-elect choose to compress time in Washington, D.C. to a few intensive, high-visibility visits which are used to reach out to Congress and host major press events such as the announcement of Cabinet secretaries. President-elect Obama spent the bulk of his time in Chicago (58%) and a notable amount of time in Hawaii (13%). President-elect George W. Bush spent the bulk of his time in Texas (75%), while President-elect Clinton spent a great deal of his time in Arkansas (69%).

Presidents-elect often choose to host large public events in their home state. For example, President-elect George W. Bush hosted economic and education policy "summits" in Texas, and President-elect Clinton hosted an economic summit in Arkansas.

## THE RUNNING MATES

Vice presidents-elect have varying roles in transitions. Some have been assigned specific policy areas to oversee and others have been deployed to Washington, D.C. while the president-elect stays in the home state. In 2008, Vice President-elect Joe Biden, however, spent a significant amount of time in Chicago with President-elect Obama, participating in policy and personnel discussions.

Following the 2016 election, President-elect Trump appointed Vice President-elect Mike Pence to run the transition planning process, splitting time between Washington, D.C. and New York City, where the president-elect was based. Following the 2000 election, Vice President-elect Dick Cheney spent most of his time in McLean, Virginia, where he led the Bush-Cheney transition effort.

## THE FIRST FAMILIES

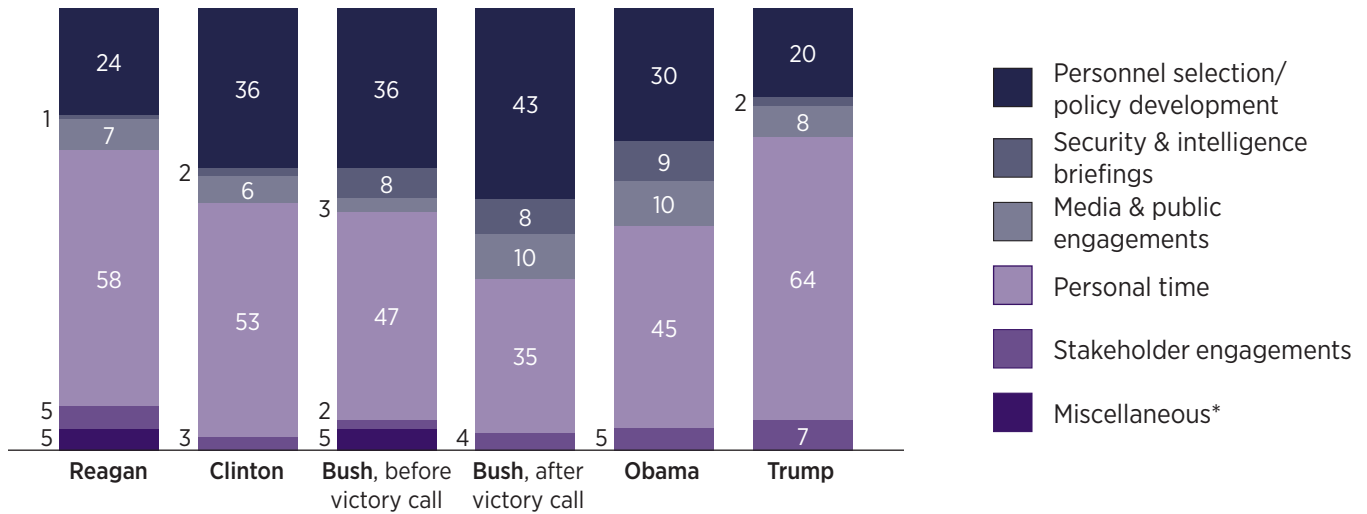
The first families of newly elected presidents customarily have a separate team coordinating and planning their movements with those of the president-elect. If a president-elect has young children, like Presidents-elect Obama and Trump did, much planning focuses on the children's transition. Michelle Obama spent most of the post-election period with her two daughters in Chicago before permanently transitioning to Washington, D.C. just before the inauguration. Melania Trump remained in New York until June of the president's first year to allow her son to complete his school year before permanently transitioning to the White House.

## Conclusion

During the period between Election Day and the inauguration, presidents-elect must shift from campaigning to governing. As our analysis reveals, this traditionally entails a mix of activities that include personnel announcements, policy development, and stakeholder, media and public engagement. Understandably, presidents-elect take some personal time off and also work from their home states before permanently transitioning to the nation's capital to begin their presidency.

### Figure 1: Share of Presidents-elect Working Hours by Focus Area

Estimated using analysis of public documents and transition documents from past five presidents-elect.

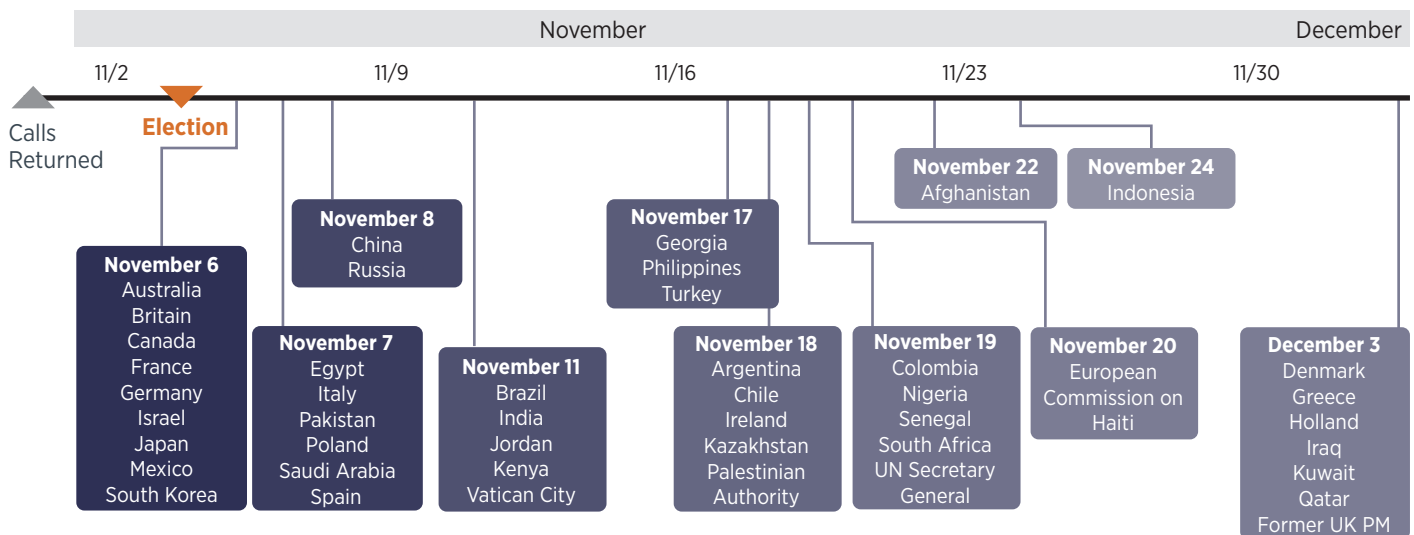


\*Includes election work (Bush) and cross-country travel (Reagan)

**Source:** Time study analysis based on historical records of public-facing time and assumptions to drive unaccounted activities (including 10- to 12-hour work days, weekend and vacation time off with exceptions, regular intelligence briefings, extra personnel and policy meetings daily).

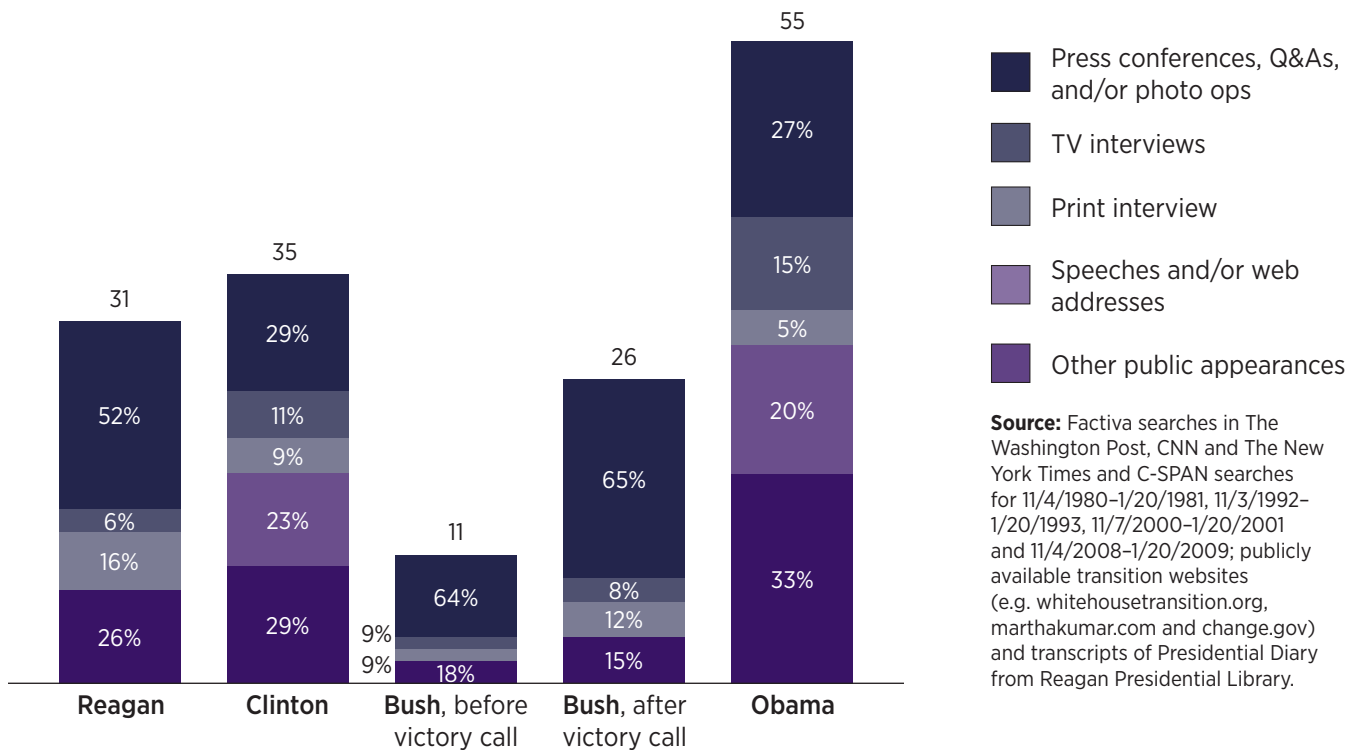
### Figure 1: President-elect Obama’s Engagement with Foreign Leaders

President-elect Obama strategically focused on speaking with allies first.



**Source:** Obama-Biden Transition Project website Change.gov; Factiva search for Nov. 5, 2008–Jan. 19, 2009 in Washington Post and CNN

**Figure 3: Media and Public Engagement by President-elect and Engagement Type**



**Figure 4: Geographic Location of President-elect by Administration**

