

President Bush's 2004 Campaign Travel
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Where and when presidents choose to travel are two highly strategic questions. While some events necessitate a presidential visit (e.g., natural disasters), other travel is purely discretionary. Where a president chooses to make a post-State of the Union trip, promote a policy or unveil a new federal program may well be selected on the basis of a locale's support or interest in a particular presidential initiative. However, a far more strategic rationale was revealed in a previous Brookings analysis. (See www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20040329tenpas.pdf) This study revealed the integral role of electoral considerations and was supported by the disproportionate share of time presidents spent in swing states (the 16 states in which the presidential election winner won by less than 6% points in 1992 and 2000). Not surprisingly, over the course of a president's first term, the percentage of time spent in these swing states significantly increases.

In an effort to place the Bush data in context, we compared his travel during the first three years of his administration to that of his predecessor, President Clinton. The comparison revealed that President Bush has both out-traveled and out-targeted his predecessor. In a continuing study of presidential travel, new data examine the fourth year of the president's term, a point at which the campaign is in full swing. Our data reinforce our earlier findings. From January 1 through May 31, 2004, the President racked up 75 visits within 29 states. Of these 75 visits, 56% have been to swing states. By this point in the Clinton administration, President Clinton had made 58 visits in 25 states. Of these visits, 47% were to swing states.

The period from January to May of 2004 was troublesome for the Bush administration, primarily in regard to the mounting violence in Iraq that spiked in March, as well as the continuing terror threats around the globe. Rather than comparing President Bush's travel schedule to that of Clinton, a more relevant comparison might be President Jimmy Carter. He too was burdened with problems abroad, particularly the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Both presidents were also seeking reelection in a period of rising gasoline prices and a sluggish economy. Of course, the Carter years were much more problematic in this regard.

Despite an intra-party challenge from Senator Edward Kennedy, President Carter made eight domestic visits in the same period that President Bush made 75 visits. When pressed by reporters about his lack of campaigning, the president responded, "I don't consider myself to be confined to the White House as such, but I do think it's better for me, in a time with Afghanistan and with the hostages being held, not to go out and assume the role of a partisan political campaigner." These words, spoken at the end of January 1980, held true until after the failed rescue attempt in late April when he

announced that he would be able to embark on a limited travel schedule. The next month he took seven campaign trips.

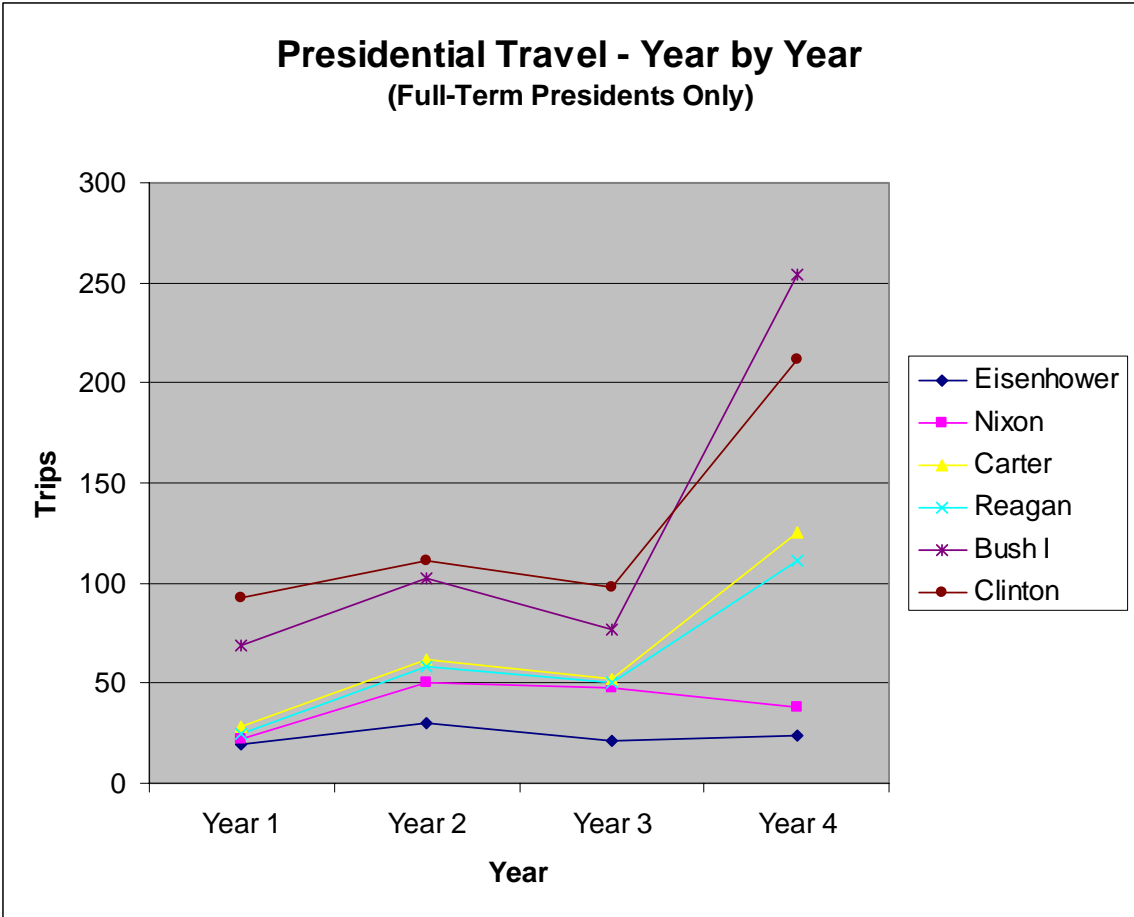
Regardless of his predecessors' behavior, no president faced as tight an election as George W. Bush in 2000. Given the closeness of the race in a number of states, it should not be surprising that he has spent the bulk of his time in these states. But which swing states carry the most weight this election year? The state of Ohio led the pack with 7 visits within the state, followed by Pennsylvania (6), Florida (5) and Wisconsin (5). If one looks at travel throughout President Bush's term, Pennsylvania leads the other swing states, racking up 29 visits by President Bush. Florida is a close second with 27 visits, followed by Ohio (20) and Michigan (19) and Missouri (19) rounding out the top five swing states.

It may well be that the declining impact of campaign television advertising has, in fact, led to the increased importance of retail politics. If human contact is the antidote to burgeoning cable channels and the remote control poised to avoid campaign ads at all costs, then presidential travel is but another component of the "ground war". Assuming the Bush administration is as politically savvy as reported, this strategy of extensive presidential travel reinforces this perception. The extent of President Bush's travel, particularly when compared to prior presidents, is not a coincidence, but rather the product of careful study and a deep desire to get reelected.

Percentage of Presidential Travel to Swing States by Year

	<i>Year 1</i>	<i>Year 2</i>	<i>Year 3</i>	<i>Year 4 (Jan-May)</i>
Clinton	28	33	40	47
*Clinton	20	25	28	45
Bush	34	46	39	56

*One of President Clinton's swing states from the 1992 elections was Virginia. Given the proximity of the White House to Virginia, as well as the presence of various executive departments and agencies, presidents frequently visit the northern suburbs. For example, in the first three years of the Bush administration, Virginia was the top ranked state for presidential travel. In the case of the Clinton administration, it ranked number two overall. In an effort to compare the two administrations without the outlier, we substituted the 17th most competitive state (Tennessee). We believe that these figures are a more accurate depiction of "strategic" travel.



*This chart does not include the current president since the chart reflects domestic travel over the course of a full-four year term. However, the data from the first three years of the Bush administration exceeds the Clinton administration.

**Presidential Swing State
Travel
BUSH II**

State	2001	2002	2003	Jan-May 2004	Total Visits
Arkansas	2	3	2	3	10
Florida	8	7	7	5	27
Iowa	3	6	0	2	11
Maine	1	3	0	1	5
Michigan	3	6	7	3	19
Minnesota	1	5	2	1	9
Missouri	4	7	5	3	19
Nevada	0	0	1	0	1
New Hampshire	0	3	2	2	7
New Mexico	1	3	1	2	7
Ohio	3	5	5	7	20
Oregon	0	4	3	0	7
Pennsylvania	6	11	6	6	29
Tennessee	1	5	2	2	10
Washington	0	0	2	0	2
Wisconsin	5	5	1	5	16
Total to Swing States	38	73	46	42	199
Total Trips	110	160	118	75	463

% In Swing States	34.5	45.6	39.0	56.0	43.0
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President Clinton - (with Virginia)

State	1993	1994	1995	Jan-May-96	Total Visits
Arizona	0	0	0	0	0
Colorado	1	0	4	0	5
Florida	4	6	4	1	15
Georgia	1	2	3	1	7
Kentucky	1	1	0	1	3
Louisiana	2	2	0	5	9
Montana	0	0	2	0	2
Nevada	0	0	0	0	0
New Hampshire	2	2	2	9	15
New Jersey	2	2	3	4	11
North Carolina	1	3	1	0	5
Ohio	2	7	2	2	13
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	1	2	5	1	9
Virginia	8	9	13	2	32
Wisconsin	1	1	0	1	3
Total to Swing States	26	37	39	27	129
Total Trips	93	111	98	58	360

% In Swing States	28.0	33.3	39.8	46.6	35.8
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President Clinton – Substituting Tennessee for Virginia

State	1993	1994	1995	Jan-May '96	Total Visits
Arizona	0	0	0	0	0
Colorado	1	0	4	0	5
Florida	4	6	4	1	15
Georgia	1	2	3	1	7
Kentucky	1	1	0	1	3
Louisiana	2	2	0	5	9
Montana	0	0	2	0	2
Nevada	0	0	0	0	0
New Hampshire	2	2	2	9	15
New Jersey	2	2	3	4	11
North Carolina	1	3	1	0	5
Ohio	2	7	2	2	13
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	1	0	1	1	3
Texas	1	2	5	1	9
Wisconsin	1	1	0	1	3
Total to Swing States	19	28	27	26	100
Total Trips	93	111	98	58	360

% In Swing States	20.4	25.2	27.6	44.8	27.8
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Methodology: All data obtained from official government documents published by the Government Printing Office. Clinton travel data obtained by author from successive volumes of the *Public Papers of the President*. Bush travel data obtained from the Government Printing Office's on-line site (www.gpoaccess.gov) by Brookings Intern, Emily Charnock. These numbers reflect visits within a state, such that a trip to California in which the president delivers remarks in Newport Beach, Pasadena and Anaheim counts as three rather than one visit. This approach captures the complete extent of the "public presidency" by taking note of the number of presidential visits to cities within a state. All vacations, trips to Camp David, visits within the District of Columbia, or personal trips were excluded from calculations.