

to be very nice. As I say, this is part of the mythology of American life. We don't want to admit that a President has to be a good politician, if he's going to be halfway effective as a President.⁶⁸

Elsey's point about effectiveness is worth emphasizing. The Carter White House designated an aide to focus on political affairs in 1978 not because it had been apolitical before then, but because of complaints that it had handled political questions and relationships poorly. If having a White House Office of Political Affairs is problematic, not having coordination of political concerns in White House decision-making can also lead to poor presidential leadership. Former Clinton political director Sosnik contended in 2004, "The notion that there's no politics in government, in the White House in particular in an election year, is laughable. It transcends political party, it transcends what year it is, it transcends who's in power because everything in government is a mix of policy and politics."⁶⁹

The presidency is, has been, and will continue to be a political office. But the institutional arrangements designed to help political actors navigate the lines between campaigning and governing do indeed matter. Understandably, presidents want trusted advisers close to them who can advise them about the political dynamics of the decisions they make. But having White House aides whose sole job is to think about how political and electoral concerns should be taken into account has resulted in the increased blurring of the lines between campaigning and governing. No longer do presidential administrations outsource most political planning to the national committees. Instead, the handling of political questions has been institutionalized within the White House itself, which means that each new president inherits a White House where the path of least resistance is one that facilitates the perpetuation of the permanent campaign.

In the next chapter, I turn to the implications of the permanent campaign. What do the rise of presidential fundraising and strategic travel and the centralization of political decision-making in the White House mean for the nature and effectiveness of presidential leadership?

6. The Implications of the Permanent Campaign

But what frustrates the American people is a Washington where every day is Election Day. We can't wage a perpetual campaign where the only goal is to see who can get the most embarrassing headlines about the other side—a belief that if you lose, I win. . . . Washington may think that saying anything about the other side, no matter how false, no matter how malicious, is just part of the game. But it's precisely such politics that has stopped either party from helping the American people. Worse yet, it's sowing further division among our citizens, further distrust in our government. So, no, I will not give up on trying to change the tone of our politics. I know it's an election year. And after last week, it's clear that campaign fever has come even earlier than usual. But we still need to govern.

Barack Obama, State of the Union address, January 27, 2010

As I conclude this book, the 2012 presidential election campaign is in full swing. With the election still well over a year away, President Barack Obama has already headlined more fundraisers for his reelection campaign committee than Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton attended for their campaign committee throughout their entire reelection bid. Obama has just concluded a bus trip through the Midwest that took him to rural communities that was nominally an official presidential journey. This three-day sojourn carried him to the battleground states of Minnesota and Iowa, as well as his home state of Illinois, earning him criticism for campaigning on the taxpayers' dime. Both the nature of the trip and the negative reaction from the other side of the aisle have many precedents in recent presidential administrations.

The aim of this book has been to systematically examine key elements of the permanent campaign and offer an argument explaining the dynamics we have seen. My goal is not to criticize any particular president for a focus on electoral matters, but instead to better understand the ways in which political actors respond to the institutional incentives of our electoral system. No political system is neutral. Each sets up a series of rules that help to structure the behavior of goal-oriented politicians. While the term *permanent campaign* is often used broadly to refer to presidential efforts to win public opinion, the use of extensive public opinion polling by presidential aides, and more, I have focused my analysis on actions that relate directly to electoral questions—presidential fundraising, targeted travel

that corresponds to the incentives of the Electoral College and the presidential nominating system, and the key players in and outside the White House who help to make decisions about these matters. In this chapter, I will briefly review my key empirical findings and discuss their implications for presidential leadership.

Over the three and a half decades since Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977, presidents have devoted increasing amounts of time to electoral concerns throughout their time in office. The exigencies of campaigning have impinged more and more upon the demands of governing, as Barack Obama discussed in his 2010 State of the Union address, making it difficult to draw a line between when governing ends and campaigning begins. Presidential fundraising, which is an unambiguous indicator of presidential attention to electoral concerns, has increased sharply, and presidential travel has increasingly reflected the institutional incentives of both the Electoral College and the nominating process.

The frequency of presidential fundraising has steadily increased, with new presidents shattering the fundraising records of their predecessors. Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan each took part in an average of about two fundraisers per month. George H. W. Bush headlined about three fundraisers per month, as news accounts hailed him as the most prolific presidential fundraiser in history. Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama outdid the first President Bush, averaging almost four fundraisers per month in their first terms, or about one per week. Clinton's second-term fundraising effort was unprecedented, as he attended a fundraiser every 3.1 days, or about ten per month, which was about five times the rate of fundraising by Carter and Reagan. Two and a half years into Obama's term as president, he is on pace to set a new record for the most first-term presidential fundraisers. To a greater and greater extent, the president is indeed the fundraiser-in-chief and party-builder-in-chief, and that activity is by no means confined to the traditional campaign season.

As presidents have spent increasing amounts of time headlining political fundraisers, they have done so both for themselves and for the benefit of their fellow party members. Of the presidents first elected via the plebiscitary nominating system and who have served during the evolving campaign finance regime created by the Federal Campaign Finance Act of 1974, all except Carter have been dedicated party builders. Most presidential fundraising has not benefited the president's own reelection campaign committee but instead has filled the coffers of the national committee and other party beneficiaries. While a president's reelection prospects might be directly strengthened by a well-funded national committee, they will benefit only indirectly from efforts to elect more senators, House members, governors, and other officials of their same party. While Reagan focused more on raising money for his party than for himself in his first term, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama all devoted much time to their fellow party members

in their first or only midterm election year and then shifted their efforts primarily to their own reelection committee and the national party in their third and fourth years in office. All three presidents since the mid-1970s who have served two terms committed substantial time and effort to party building in their second four years in office. The beneficiaries of presidential fundraising have varied by president, revealing the political priorities of a presidency and how presidents see their role as party-builder-in-chief. Two clear themes have been the consistent focus on Senate races and a rise in the importance of national party fundraising at the expense of state parties.

Presidential fundraising both for themselves and for their fellow Democrats and Republicans has been on the rise in large part because competitive presidential elections and narrow margins of party control of Congress have raised the importance of all federal and gubernatorial elections. The costs of presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial races have risen dramatically, and when presidents raise funds for their fellow party members, they must do so in the small increments prescribed by campaign finance legislation. Unregulated soft money in the 1990s and 2000s led to even more presidential fundraising for party committees, as presidents helped their parties to raise large sums of political cash in unlimited amounts, but its ban in 2002 did not lead to a slowdown in presidential fundraising. If anything, presidents pressured to raise increasing amounts of money have been incentivized to devote even more time to fundraising, as money now has to be gathered in smaller, regulated increments. Ironically, campaign finance legislation designed in part to limit the importance of money in politics has incentivized presidents to devote more time to fundraising throughout their term in office due to the combination of rising campaign costs and the limits on contribution amounts.

As presidents have devoted more and more of their time to fundraising, the incentives of the Electoral College and the presidential nominating process are increasingly reflected in the places where presidents travel throughout their term in office. While presidents do spend the most time in the most heavily populated states, population does not account for important variation in presidential attention, as certain states have been disproportionately favored. Battleground states—those electorally competitive states that are critically important in our winner-take-all Electoral College system, have been disproportionately favored throughout presidents' first terms in office over the three and a half decades since Carter's inauguration, and they have been so most markedly for our most recent presidents, especially George W. Bush. Presidents have increasingly visited greater percentages of battleground states in their first year in office, showing that electoral targeting starts soon after a president enters the Oval Office. Both Iowa and New Hampshire, the states whose early caucuses and primary, respectively, are central to any presi-

dent's successful renomination, have been disproportionately visited by president after president. The states that presidents of both parties neglect to visit have much in common. They are overwhelmingly sparsely populated, noncompetitive states that were often carried by Republicans in the previous election. In the aggregate, states with greater numbers of Electoral College votes, smaller margins of victory or defeat in the previous election, and the interaction of these two factors—that is, larger states with more competitive elections—have been more likely to receive greater numbers of visits by the president.

Presidents are goal-oriented actors who respond to the incentives established by the rules of the game of the political system. Strategic presidents seek to win reelection in order to enact their policy priorities and secure their legacy. The evidence presented in this book shows that their efforts to win reelection are by no means confined to their fourth year in office. Why do we see an increasing prevalence of targeted presidential travel favoring key electoral states throughout a president's term in office? I contend that these dynamics are largely the consequence of the type of president produced in recent years by the rules structuring presidential nominating and general election campaigns. Presidents attain their high office by taking their case to the people in a way that responds to the strategic incentives of the nominating calendar and the Electoral College system. Once in office, presidents and their aides continue to employ the same strategies that landed them in the White House in the first place.

Presidents also respond to electoral incentives throughout their term in office because recent presidents are well aware that the chance of being frustrated in their bid for reelection is quite real. Before Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford in 1976, a sitting president had not been beaten at the polls for forty-four years, since Franklin Roosevelt unseated Herbert Hoover in 1932. However, three of the four presidents between 1976 and 1992 lost their bid for another term in the White House, as Ford, Carter, and George H. W. Bush all were defeated by the other party's presidential nominee. Of the three presidents since 1976 who have been reelected, only Reagan won in a landslide. Bill Clinton earned his clear Electoral College victory in 1996 by carrying only 49.2 percent of the popular vote, as a slim majority of voters chose a candidate other than Clinton. George W. Bush won a popular majority in 2004, but his narrow Electoral College majority rested on his victory in Ohio, which he carried by just under 120,000 votes.¹ Additionally, Ford, Carter, and George H. W. Bush all faced significant intraparty challenges to their renomination, which left them politically weakened and likely contributed to their defeat at the polls in the general election. In short, presidents are keenly aware that they might fail in their efforts to secure a second term and are determined to do what they can to make sure they do not follow in the footsteps of the defeated Ford, Carter, and George H. W. Bush.

Another important factor in the rise of these key indicators of the permanent campaign has been changes in the organization and nature of the White House staff. While the Truman administration, responding to both practical necessity and the norms of the day, depended on the Democratic National Committee to coordinate much of the political planning for the president, recent administrations have had offices within the White House itself that were responsible for taking into account political and electoral considerations throughout the president's term in office. These developments are part of a larger trend of the centralization of power within the Executive Office of the President, creating what has been called the presidential branch of government. The result is a substantial political apparatus that has been institutionalized within the White House on the government payroll.

THE POTENTIAL PERILS OF THE PERMANENT CAMPAIGN

The prospective rewards of the permanent campaign are readily apparent. Presidents who raise sufficient funds for their own reelection campaign and for their fellow party members and who pay disproportionate attention to the states important in the Electoral College and the nominating process hope to be elected to a second term in the White House and to help their fellow party members to victory at the polls as well. Electoral success allows a president to work to realize his policy goals and leave a legacy that brings the country closer to his vision of a more perfect union. Placing trusted political advisers in the White House helps a president to achieve these aims. But there are potential perils that can result from the permanent campaign as well.

The Trade-offs of Allocating a President's Time to Electoral Concerns

Because time is a president's scarcest resource, the ways in which he allocates it can reveal a great deal about his priorities. When a president devotes so much time to fundraising, one must ask what he might have done had he not been raising money for himself or his party. In October 1982, White House deputy press secretary Larry Speakes made clear the trade-off inherent in a president focusing on electoral concerns when he gave a preview of Reagan's campaign schedule for the weeks leading up to Election Day: "The man will be out [campaigning] three days this week. The rest of the time he will govern."² Decades later, a spokesperson for Obama's reelection campaign made the case in May 2011 that Obama was at a competitive disad-

vantage because he “doesn’t have the luxury of spending much time fundraising like the full-time GOP candidates.”³ Both spokespeople acknowledged that time spent campaigning takes away from time devoted to the task of governing.

The pressing concerns of governance often lead presidents to cancel plans to attend political fundraisers. Carter did so in late 1979 and 1980 after American citizens were taken hostage in Iran. Both George H. W. Bush and Obama did so when they were in the midst of difficult budget negotiations with the Congress. George W. Bush canceled fundraisers in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These decisions clearly indicated that when the nation’s business was so urgent, the president could not spare time for political fundraising, or at least that he was sufficiently concerned about the perceived inappropriateness of fundraising at such a time. Even before the hostage crisis began in 1979, Carter’s aides acknowledged these dynamics. In March 1979, Carter first set up his reelection campaign committee, which began laying the groundwork for the fundraising efforts necessary to reelect the president. The head of Carter’s campaign, Evan Dohelle, indicated that Carter himself would not participate personally in any fundraising until he formally declared his candidacy later that year because he wanted to focus all his efforts on his responsibilities as president.⁴

When presidents do choose to fundraise, it means that they are not spending time tending to other pressing matters. A White House deputy chief of staff purportedly suggested in 1996 that Clinton’s policy briefings be shorter so that he would have more time to spend with Democratic political contributors.⁵ In December 1997, as Clinton was in the midst of a stretch in which he would headline thirty-two fundraisers in under two months, White House press secretary Mike McCurry said that the president “is confident that he can fulfill all the duties that he has been elected to pursue by the American people....I think he has a lot of regret that he has to spend as much time raising money.”⁶ Karl Rove, who is quite familiar with the demands of fundraising on a president’s time, examined Obama’s personal commitment to fundraising in the three months after he announced his reelection bid in the spring of 2011 and said, “Thirty-one fundraisers in a quarter is a big strain on any president’s schedule. Mr. Obama can’t keep that pace up and not just because he’s got a day job. There are also just so many cities capable of producing \$1 million and only so many times you can hold a million dollar fundraiser in them.”⁷ Obama’s day job is one of the most challenging in the world. Presidents always have more demands on their time than they can oblige; when they give priority to political fundraising, attention to other priorities must, to a certain extent, suffer. Whether what suffers is time spent in meetings with advisers, reaching out to members of Congress, formulating policy positions, getting a sufficient amount of much-needed sleep, or something else is a question that merits further study.

Electoral Politics on the Taxpayers' Dime

Ronald Reagan, like many other presidents, often paired fundraisers with official travel, which meant that the campaign would not have to bear the entire cost of the trip. When, in 1981, Reagan took a week out of his monthlong vacation at his ranch in California to headline three fundraisers for the state party, the Republican National Committee announced that it would pay for the costs of the president's week in Los Angeles instead of charging the taxpayers for the trip. The RNC received about \$50,000 raised at three fundraising cocktail parties, an amount sufficient to cover the expenses of presidential travel for the events.⁸ In 1982, Reagan's director of the White House Office of Political Affairs, Ed Rollins, said that the Republican governor of Texas, William Clements, covered the cost of the president's journey to Houston to help Clement raise more than \$3 million because the trip was entirely political. Said Rollins, "We always insist on the money up front because political people are the hardest to collect from."⁹ In August 1982, Reagan planned to attend a fundraiser in Los Angeles for GOP gubernatorial hopeful George Deukmejian at the start of a two-week vacation at his ranch. When he decided to postpone the beginning of his vacation to remain in Washington while Congress debated a tax measure, he still planned a brief overnight trip to California to keep his commitment to Deukmejian. But because the Republican's campaign would have then had to foot a much greater share of the cost of Reagan's trip, the expense became more than Deukmejian's team could afford, and the fundraiser was postponed until Reagan would be in California again on official business.¹⁰

It is up to the White House to declare which trips and events are political and which are official. When clearly political events are deemed to be official, presidents are in an awkward position. Reagan directly addressed these dynamics when he declared at an official event in Ohio in 1982:

This is a bipartisan meeting, so I'm not going to tell you how proud I am of Congressman Bud Brown and what an invaluable ally he's been in the fight against big government in Washington. And I'm certainly not going to tell you how he's won the respect of virtually everyone he's dealt with there, or of my confidence that he'll do a great job in any position the people of Ohio elect him to. And that goes for [Republican senatorial candidate] Paul Pfeifer, too. . . . But as I say, this isn't a political rally, so I won't say any of those things.

Reagan later delivered a similar speech at a fundraiser for Brown in another part of the hotel in which he gave the first speech.¹¹ In the eyes of the White House, the first event was nonpolitical, and was thus paid for by the taxpayer, while its doppelgänger fundraising event was a political affair.

Sometimes these official events are more substantive than others. In March 2002, George W. Bush traveled to Dallas, where he headlined a fundraiser for GOP Senate candidate John Cornyn. While there, he held an official event with local rescue workers, which allowed the White House to charge the taxpayers for much of the cost of the trip. This event, however, took a mere fifteen minutes, prompting a spokeswoman for the Democratic National Committee to comment, "The practice of adding political events to official travel for the purpose of saving candidates money seems to be of questionable merit."¹² She neglected to add that it was a common practice engaged in by Republican and Democratic presidents alike.

Even when the official events paired with fundraisers are substantive, they often have the feel of a campaign trip. When Bill Clinton headed to Florida in September 1995 for a fundraiser and several events deemed as official, only the fundraiser was designated as a political event. An event with police officers, a visit to a senior citizens' home, and an airport rally at which the crowd repeatedly chanted, "Four more years!" were all classified as official events, even though an Associated Press article covering the president's trip remarked, "The entire schedule resembled a day from Clinton's 1992 campaign."¹³

The financial advantage enjoyed by the commander-in-chief performing his official duties was made crystal clear when Reagan visited an auto assembly plant in Claycomo, Missouri, on April 11, 1984. Reagan used much of the same rhetoric that he did in his standard political stump speech, talking about the improving economy and the success of his policies. While Reagan made this official presidential trip, the cost of which was borne by taxpayers, Walter Mondale, the eventual Democratic nominee for the presidency, visited a Chrysler facility farther east, in Fenton, Missouri, in advance of that state's approaching Democratic caucuses, with the costs of his trip, of course, fully incurred by his campaign. Later in the day, Reagan traveled to Dallas, where he would hold an event at a construction site to highlight the recovering housing market. This trip would also be deemed nonpolitical.¹⁴

George H. W. Bush neatly summed up bipartisan presidential practice in this area in early 1990 when he discussed his itinerary for an upcoming trip in which he attended both official events and fundraisers in California, Nebraska, and Ohio. Bush met with the press corps flying with him aboard Air Force One and said, "This should be a very good trip, emphasizing some of our defense requirements, needs. And a little politics mixed in here. We'll be doing more of that this year."¹⁵ Ellen Miller, the director of the Center for Responsive Politics, argued that the central question is if Bush would have traveled to take part in the official events had there been no fundraiser, or whether the official events were planned for the purpose of defraying the cost to the beneficiaries of the fundraisers. "It raises a serious question about abuse of taxpayer funds," she contended. Alixe Glen, a White