

Reality TV is now the reality of the presidency

With Trump's latest political advisor being Kim Kardashian, are we living in an Orwellian dystopia?

By [Patrick Walker](#)

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Image: Michael Vadon

North Korea really knows how to push Trump's buttons. On 1 June, a letter, speculated to include Kim Jong Un's request for a meeting, was delivered to the Oval Office by Kim Yong Chol. The event suited the President perfectly. Important official? Tick. Diplomatic event not seen this century? Tick. Massive envelope, too big to practically fit through even a White House letter box? Tick, and tick. Later that week Kim Kardashian's visit to the White House gave the President an-other shot at making headlines, this time to discuss prison reform. Reality TV stars and huge letters demonstrate a fundamental problem with this presidency: Trump's ability to use celebrity and glamour to dis-tract from important issues.

Up until two years ago, most people would have agreed that reality TV stars make lousy politicians. In the current political reality, this fact is important to remember. Let's not pretend that liberal Hollywood can make a tangible impact on the President's policies. Trump is legendary on the hill for ignoring his advisors. In March, aides reportedly wrote 'don't congratulate him', in capital letters, on Trump's briefing sheet for his call with Putin (who had recently been re-elected.) Trump congratulated Putin, then tweeted about it.

Hollywood has had failures in changing Trump's mind before. Just ask Caitlyn Jenner, who ad-vised Trump on LGBT issues for the campaign trail. Jenner was unable to change Trump's mind on the in-famous transgender bathroom bill. Celebrities in politics are generally more a source of brand recognition and credibility than they are policy advice. Obama fostered many 'working relationships' over his time in

office, but no one pretended they critically influenced his strategy. Kim Kardashian must be praised for drawing public attention to the plight of unjustly convicted American inmates serving sentences for non-violent drug offences. She did manage to get Trump to pardon the lady for whom she advocated, but other reform is unlikely. Changing Trump's mind is not easy.

Celebrities under Trump play a role of distraction and interference. Keeping up with the US news cycle is exhausting at the best of times, and Trump uses this cycle well. He bombards the American public with as much information as possible: Kardashian is the latest example.

As this article was being written, Trump disinvited Super Bowl winners from the White House, claimed he had the 'absolute right' to pardon himself if convicted, lied about Republican primary turn-out, and lied about his wife. When consuming news, it is hard to determine which stories are worthy of attention, and celebrities don't help with that. Of course, their ability to draw attention to worthy causes is worth applauding, but their interference in politics is also damaging the American media's ability to effectively report on Trump himself.

Moreover, one ought to question whether celebrities are qualified to advise politicians on strategy. While celebrities attract publicity for issues, for better or worse, their involvement should not be used to educate. For example, while I appreciate Bryan Adams' passion for peace in Gaza, I wouldn't consider him qualified to sit on a panel on the topic.

In this way, Trump is a hypocrite. He attacks the Parkland students' education when they argue publicly on the topic of gun control, yet simultaneously makes time for high-profile meetings with Kanye West. To the President, it seems that the power of celebrity is only acceptable when it can be utilised to garner support. It's easy to see that Trump views his presidency like a reality show. Like any good Apprentice candidate, he uses his association with certain individuals to look good, and launches an attack whenever his own credibility is questioned.

However, the power of the celebrity is limited. While almost all narratives in Trump's show are malleable in the hands of his Twitter feed, the Russia investigation is entirely different. He can't send unpopular candidates home, as he does frequently in the White House. He can't pick which stories the press choose, and he certainly can't change the result. Although the Russia investigation is unlikely to have much political impact be-cause of American partisanship, it aptly demonstrates the gaps in Trump's media strategy. When faced with complex political institutions, Trump's power of celebrity proves insufficient.

The Donald Trump reality show will go on for two more years, but to cover it properly, its tactics must be understood. Celebrities aren't advisors, they're focus-pullers, and in to-day's world of attention deficits and soundbites, news corporations must be more rigorous concerning what does and does not warrant cover-age. They must separate celebrity from significant political change. To conflate the two is to contribute to Trump's campaign of disinformation.

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, his famous exploration of show business, Neil Postman put it best: "we are in a race between education and disaster". In that race, the power of celebrity is not on our side.



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