

copies on the day it was released). Those leaks do not seem to be meant to advance the administration's message. Instead, they reflect a distrustful and suspicious staff that is convinced they need to protect themselves by leaking information that ultimately could be used against them.

In many ways, and for the first time in history, the president essentially runs the White House Communications Office himself. Several extraordinarily well-informed reporters who have connections in the administration (who regularly leak to them) characterize the “Trump Rules” this way:²

- # Deliberately make some people hate you. Polarization energizes his base and gives him a foil to rail against.
- # Exploit crises or even create them. Trump is comfortable in that high-adrenalin atmosphere and most people are not, which gives him an advantage.
- # Keep repeating your narrative, and people will believe it whether it is true or not.
- # Keep the people who work for you afraid and competitive for your favor.
- # Go for loyalty over skill.
- # Don't ever admit that you are wrong.

These reporters' observations of the Trump White House communications strategy show that much of what Trump does—while running counter to the methods of his more traditional predecessors—appears to be intentional. It is a strategy that has worked for him in the past, creating a brash persona that appeals to some of his strongest supporters.

Most presidents closely control their message in order to control their political fortunes. Unlike other presidents who avoided scandal and chaos, Trump seems to understand how to use it politically and is confident of his ability to control the consequences, even though the evidence doesn't always bear that out.

The cost of Trump's approach is hard to measure—it is so unorthodox that most journalists don't know how to report on it, and most of the public is either outraged by it, pleased by it, or just numb to his behavior. In that sense, one thing is clear: it has sharpened partisan divisions.

²<https://www.axios.com/donald-trump-rules-commandments-business-presidency-ecca0771-d27c-4b2f-b19e-536f6ee2747d.html>

