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"Let Bartlet Be Bartlet:" The Presidential Politics of Aaron Sorkin's *The West Wing*

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“Let Bartlet Be Bartlet”
The Presidential Politics of Aaron Sorkin’s *The West Wing*

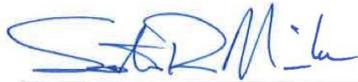
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Approved by:



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Contents

1. Abstract (p. 3-4)
2. Introduction and Media Literature Review (p. 5-14)
3. Presidential Literature Review (p. 15-24)
4. Issue Analysis (p. 25-49)
5. Presidential Analysis (p. 50-76)
6. Conclusion (p. 77-78)
7. Bibliography (p. 79-83)

Abstract

From 1999-2006, Aaron Sorkin's television show *The West Wing* entertained audiences with a weekly backstage pass to life in the White House. While the show featured plotlines regarding the characters' personal lives, it also centered the policy decisions of President Bartlet and his staffers, and it informed audiences about political issues and tools. With background research, I confirmed that the style of the show was a valuable educational tool, as it used both episodic and thematic framing devices when discussing different political issues. My understanding of its ability to influence audiences' understandings of political issues lead my interest in understanding how the show could influence audiences' understanding of the American presidency as a whole. I used three theories to understand how presidential behavior is interpreted in both public and private affairs. Greenstein's theory of presidential characteristics explains how the president's personality will predict his success in office by viewing a president's strengths and weaknesses in political skill, vision, organizational capacity, cognitive style, public communication, and emotional intelligence. Skowronek's theory of political time predicts the behavior of a president within the cycle of reconstructive, articulative, preemptive, and disjunctive presidents that Skowronek traces throughout America's modern presidency. Lastly, Howell's theory of presidential power articulates his belief that presidents are constantly seeking to expand the power of the office and display power externally to other countries in order to maintain the vision of strength that the American people demand of their leaders. Through analysis of Bartlet's discussions and policies surrounding homosexual rights, gun legislation, terrorism and foreign intervention, presidential nominations and endorsements, the First Lady, and scandals, I compared Bartlet's political actions to the actions of Clinton and Bush in order to gain a detailed understanding of Bartlet's political style and his decisions on topics that were relevant in the modern world. Through this, I determined that Bartlet's greatest strengths are his organizational capacity and public communication, and that while his vision and political skill are his biggest weaknesses according to Greenstein, Sorkin frames them as strengths

because his flexibility allows him to respond freely to a rapidly-changing nation. Bartlet largely defies Howell's theory of presidential power, begging the question of the necessity and ethics of constant presidential power expansion. Lastly, I determined that Bartlet is a preemptive president because he prioritizes his personal political beliefs over fulfilling the desires of his party or predecessors. With all of these ideologies considered, I came to realize that Sorokin's biggest argument with Bartlet is the idea that a president's personal ethics and political decisions should align, and that Bartlet is an ideal president because he prioritizes the nation's needs over his personal political gain.

1. Introduction and Media Literature Review

The West Wing (referred to in this thesis as *TWW*), a television drama created by Aaron Sorkin that aired from 1999-2006, explored the fictional presidency of Jed Bartlet and his administration. The show balanced its focus on the political decisions of the Democratic administration with its rich portrayal of the characters' personal lives, creating a realistic view of politicians that was not offered by traditional media. During its run, the show won multiple awards, and over 17 million viewers tuned in for its season three finale. *TWW* has had an enduring impact, with many fan websites and even a cast-sponsored podcast ("The West Wing Weekly") being produced today – its endurance is not only due to its witty writing and realistic performances, but also its political impact on its viewers. By "pulling back the curtain" on the White House staffers and offering a peek at the administration's personal lives, the show created a strong narrative surrounding the morals of politicians and policies that were appearing in current news.

I fell in love with *TWW* when I began watching it as a teenager. It portrayed the White House as a fantastic hub of the finest minds in America working together to solve the world's problems, all while strutting through the hallways and exchanging witty banter. Not only was I learning about politics and government through their discussions, but I was also gaining admiration for the White House officials. As I grew older, I realized that the optimism portrayed in *TWW* contrasted from average American feelings toward the government, and I began to wonder how the show could portray such a loathed institution while inspiring hope and excitement from the audience. I became further invested in understanding what the show was trying to say about the executive branch after the presidential election in 2016, when I saw how the image of the President dictates the mood of the entire country. I wanted to explore Bartlet's presidential qualities and politics in order to understand the message that Sorkin was trying to send about the presidency. My biggest question became, "what makes Bartlet an ideal

president?” I wanted to see what qualities Sorkin argued were necessary for a good president by exploring how Bartlet responded to current events. By understanding how Bartlet uses the office, I wanted to understand how Bartlet can shape the way that audiences view the American presidency.

I will use three different schools of thought in order to classify and compare Bartlet’s presidency with the Clinton and Bush administrations. The importance of each of these theories comes from their focus not only on the acts of the presidency, but also on public perceptions of the presidency and their impact on the president’s decisions. After exploring this body of literature, I will examine episodes from the first four seasons of *The West Wing* in order to understand how the show interpreted the presidencies of both Clinton and Bush. I will only be using the first four seasons because Sorkin wrote the show as a direct response to current events, and after he left the show at the end of the fourth season, the new writers did not follow his writing model; since I am exploring how the show commented on reality, seasons five through seven are not as relevant to my research. I am interested in the ways that the show uses framing devices to sway public opinion on various dimensions of the administrations; by portraying characters and their decisions as positive or negative, the show comments on the actions of the real administration at the time. I expect that Bartlet will reflect Clinton’s policy decisions closely because they are both Democrats, but that his leadership style will differ to rectify Sorkin’s perception of Clinton’s faults. I also expect that both Bartlet’s decisions and demeanor will oppose Bush’s presidency due to the opposition of their parties.

Media Types

An important piece of understanding *TWW*’s impact is understanding its unique and specific position in the world of entertainment. While the scope of entertainment options in the late 1990s through the early 2000s was largely the same as our current media environment, crucial differences may have made the political messages of *TWW* more salient than they would be today. Prior argues that the environment in which media exists directly impacts the way

media informs its audience (2007). While the number of TV shows and channels is essentially the same, there was no access to on-demand entertainment as there is in our current media environment, so at any given time of day the number of options of television shows was far fewer. Because of this, shows that aired during primetime slots had more viewers and therefore a broader influence in popular culture. Additionally, due to the lack of smartphones and social media, there is a possibility that audiences paid more attention to the television shows while they were being aired, as opposed to using them as background noise while communicating on a personal device. Increased viewership and attentiveness while viewing may have increased the salience of *TWW*'s political messages.

In the vast world of entertainment media, political messages can be found in a variety of different media types, and each type changes the way viewers pick up and perceive information. Gaining understanding of political issues through entertainment media is fundamentally different from learning about issues through the news, mostly due to the existence of the by-product effect (Prior 2014). When people watch the news, they expect to gain information about world events, and depending on the news source that they're consuming, they may expect to gain information on the opinion they should have about the issue as well. However, when people watch entertainment media, they may not expect to gain political understanding, but depending on the plotlines and characters' viewpoints, audiences may ingest political opinions without attempting to do so. Audiences do not have to exert any extra effort to gain political knowledge that may be embedded in the production. Due to the prominence of subtle political messaging in entertainment, people may have strong opinions about a variety of issues despite the fact that they may not be fully informed on specific policies or issues because they watch popular television programs.

There are many different forms of entertainment television, and each form can create a distinct political impact on its audience. Different entertainment types produce different levels of the byproduct effect, and understanding how *TWW* fits into these entertainment types will

help describe the way that it educates its audiences. For traditionally politicized media, Holbert argues that satire and political docudramas are the two farthest ends of the political entertainment spectrum due to the opposite ways that audiences perceive information from the two sources (2005). In traditional satire, audiences usually expect jokes about politics, but do not necessarily expect the jokes to help them gain any further understanding of policies or issue positions. However, through humor, satire can be an important educational tool, and it can be more enticing to watch than traditional news sources. While people can watch politically satirical shows because they want to see embarrassing renditions of politicians, they often do not watch the programs for their educational value, despite the fact that many people are more informed after watching satire (Holbert 2005). The byproduct effect is high in traditional satire because audiences tune in for the humor but gain knowledge through their viewership.

In opposition to traditionally satirical programs are political docudramas, such as *Good Night and Good Luck* and *Milk*, which explicitly aim to inform the viewer about a certain political issue. Through dramatization of a historical event, the filmmaker can make a statement on politics, and audiences expect that the information will be political because of the subject matter. While there is still a bystander effect because the message about the topic of the docudrama informs audiences' viewpoints beyond the film alone, it is very minimal because people watch the film knowing that they will be shown political content (Holbert 2005).

TWW is classified as a fictional political drama because it takes place in a political setting and features underlying political messages. While the bystander effect still exists because some audience members may be viewing it only for the entertainment, it is decreased because the issue positions of the show are so explicit. However, the political messages of the show extend beyond issue positions, because the audience learns about the duties of the executive branch through watching the show. The show's setting allows audiences to make judgments on the policies of the administration as well as the character of the people working in the White House. As people began to follow *TWW* as they would follow real American politics, the opinions they

formed became increasingly visible in their real political activity (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles 2006). The increased political impact of *TWW* is due to its combination of fiction and politics and the different ways that our brains interpret what we perceive as fictional and non-fictional media.

TWW's political effects are especially salient because it includes fictional dramatization, which induces a variety of psychological effects that influence political opinions. Dramatization of political issues in daily life, and the resolution of those issues, allows television writers to send messages about their political views. Watching important problems being resolved according to the same moral code repeatedly signals to audience members that the moral code should be universal, and influences the way that the audience interprets decision-making in other arenas (for *TWW* specifically, it impacts how audiences judge the decision-making in the White House). This long-term shift in judgment is referred to as "cultivation theory" (Swigger 2016). Additionally, as the show is continually viewed over time, its impact on audience decision-making increases, which is referred to as a " sleeper effect" (Mulligan and Habel 2011). This means that faithful *TWW* viewers were more likely to feel strongly about liberal ideals as they continued to watch the show throughout all seven seasons.

Cultivation theory, created by Professor George Gebner, suggests that television helps define viewers' overall world-views (1976). Television reaches a wide portion of the nation, and television programming continues to increase while still largely portraying the same moral code and obedience to laws. Due to the consistency and broad reach of television programming, Gebner argued the moral codes and social ideas portrayed on TV extend to all of society over time. He called the theory "cultivation theory" because he believed that television could collect national group consciousness on issues in a certain pattern and instill consistent values to all viewers. Gebner also found distinctions between "light" and "heavy" television viewers, and found that while light viewers, who watch television less often, may be drawn to other forms of information and therefore be less impacted by cultivation, the effect of long-term dedicated

television viewing was much more prominent in heavy viewers. His ideas speak to the power of television to influence audience opinion, especially through a show that runs over a period of years, as *TWW* did.

The West Wing and Political Ideology

Additionally, Gebner's theory of cultivation specifically addresses the manipulation of political ideology through television. Gebner argues that the consistent moral code in television programming defines itself as the societal norm to viewers, and due to their frequent exposure to a specific political lean, heavy viewers are more likely to self-identify as politically moderate. This phenomenon is called "mainstreaming" (Shrum & Bischak 2001). However, Morgan argues that most viewers are not in fact politically moderate, they just perceive themselves to be that way due to their understanding of social reality. By broadcasting liberal messages in television shows and portraying those messages as unquestioned realities by the characters, audiences may not pick up on the liberal swing and will consider the show neutral, and may consider themselves neutral as well. This fits into a larger narrative of voters whose perceptions of their beliefs do not line up with their actual policy preferences; many Americans are "symbolically conservative" but "operationally liberal," meaning that voters often identify as conservative despite the fact that they actually support liberal policies (Ellis & Stimson 2013). Ellis and Stimson argue that this is mostly due to the stigmatization of liberalism in America, with conservatism having a much stronger and more successful reputation and seemingly aligning with American beliefs whereas liberalism has been stigmatized to be perceived as lazy and deviant (Grossman & Hopkins 2016). While this disconnect between perception and reality may seem to be evidence of the fact that television is not a strong educational tool, the commentary that television shows can make can be impactful for decision-making in viewers' lives.

I believe that the operational liberalism of many Americans was part of the reason why Sorkin chose to make Bartlet a fairly liberal Democratic president, as I believe that Sorkin knew that more viewers would agree with Bartlet's liberal policies even if they identified as

conservatives. However, since this show makes Bartlet's ideological views clear, the operational liberalism but symbolic conservatism of viewers might not have changed, as the "mainstreaming effect" may have negated their instinct to switch parties. While *TWW* makes the political lean of the show transparent through Bartlet's Democratic affiliation, his policies are largely center-left, and while he enjoys beating members of the GOP in intellectual battles, he does not use aggressive rhetoric towards Republicans and conservatives as a whole. This allows viewers of both ideological labels to enjoy the show, which is important for increasing viewership and ratings, but makes the show's political effects more subtle.

The portrayal of Bartlet was undoubtedly significant in creating the politics of *TWW*, and Sorkin used many stereotypes and American leadership ideals to create a strong yet empathetic figure. A paradox within the presidency is the idea that Americans want a president who is strong enough to demand cooperation and respect, but sensitive enough to lift up the nation in times of trouble. While Americans want the president to be powerful enough to cause change, too much presidential power can be interpreted as tyrannical, and the people are seemingly never satisfied by a president's action or inaction (Howell 2013). The structure of the show alone helps satisfy audiences with presidential action, as they can see the meetings and discussions that are formative for every decision that Bartlet makes. Since the audience can see that Bartlet is largely motivated by his moral compass, they understand that the impetus for using power comes from love for America, not from any desire to advance his personal agenda.

Personifying the President

However, the American people also enjoy making fun of their president, and Bartlet offers many moments of comedic relief that allow him to be more beloved by viewers. The entire series opens with the cabinet stressfully sharing the news of Bartlet crashing his bike into a tree – while he is quickly moved out of the "buffoon" role throughout the episode, the fact that the show begins with a portrayal of a president who makes hilariously human mistakes is no coincidence. Just as politicians appear on late-night comedic TV shows and make fun of

themselves in order to appeal to constituents, Sorkin created Bartlet so that he is able to laugh at his flaws in order to make him more favorable to the audience (Hayton 2003). The behind-the-scenes role of *The West Wing* also fulfills the public's desire to get to know the true character of the President, which Hayton argues is a distinct trademark of the postmodern presidency (2003). Again, appearances in social media viral videos or non-news entertainment media can "blur the line" between politician and relatable human being, making presidents more appealing to their constituents.

The portrayal of Bartlet as both a real father and a father to the nation help fulfill an American ideal of a compassionate and trustworthy ruler. While Bartlet's three daughters are all present throughout the series, Bartlet's relationship with his youngest daughter Zoe is a prominent storyline, and his protective nature toward her mirrors his protective nature toward the country. The insight that the show gives the audience on Bartlet's parental style gives commentary on his personal character as well as the relationship that the writers argue that the president should have with America. For example, when Bartlet meets with Zoe's Secret Service agent Gina Toscano (1x16), he establishes a friendly personal relationship while emphasizing his desperation for his daughter's safekeeping, but also makes sure that Gina understands that he wants Zoe to maintain a fun and "normal" college experience despite her security arrangements. He jokes that Gina should only alert him if there is a security threat, not for Zoe's personal concerns, such as "skipping English lit." However, as Gina is leaving the room, Bartlet jokes that he would actually like to be alerted if Zoe is skipping classes, to which Gina responds, "No deal, sir," and Bartlet laughs as Gina exits the room.

Through this short meeting, viewers gain an understanding of Bartlet as a father that helps define him as a leader; mainly that the basis of his relationship with his daughter is deep love for her and desire for her to have fun and succeed. While his final interaction with Gina shows that he is concerned for knowing his daughter's every move and being able to steer her in the direction he thinks is best, his joking nature illustrates that he is aware that he can not

influence every aspect of her life, and he must let her behave how she chooses. When applying this mentality to his role as a leader, it shows that he understands that he can not be dictatorial, and while he cares deeply about the country's safety and prosperity, he knows that he is just one influential force and that sometimes the other branches of government and his constituents may behave otherwise. For example, he is also seen as a father to his staff, as is apparent in his relationships with many of his staffers along with his cabinet as a whole. In the pilot episode, he chastises Josh's crudeness in an interview with little but the fatherly statement, "Don't ever do it again" (1x1). In other episodes, he brings cabinet meetings into his personal bedroom (1x20) and in almost every episode he has a story to share, hoping to cultivate worldly wisdom in everyone he meets (Hayton 2003). Framing Bartlet as a paternal figure in all of his relationships helps the audience understand his personal and political priorities, giving them insight into his personal character that makes him likeable, as it proves that all of his decisions are made with the foundation of compassion and care.

Other scholars have also focused on how the framing of Bartlet impacted the audience's understanding of him and his office, and how *TWW* frames the president as an intellectual politician and a friendly, down-to-earth father. While his fatherly instincts are ingrained in his personal character as a private citizen, he also fulfills the roles of chief executive and political candidate, and his framing in those roles offers further insight into how Sorkin wanted him to be perceived (Holbert 2005).

Media Frames

Framing is also an important device for the show as a whole, as the personal perspectives of the characters illustrate Sorkin's ideal governmental body. In news media, two frames that can impact a viewer's understanding of a story are "episodic" frames and "thematic" frames (Wolfsfeld 2011). Episodic frames portray a story as its own singular incident, often focusing on personal reactions from victims and witnesses, while thematic frames focus on a story within the context of the world, often focusing on statistics of similar incidents or political decisions that

have affected the circumstances of the story. For example, an episodic frame may look at a homicide as a terrible incident affecting the life of a promising young man, while a thematic frame would report that the homicide is an example of skyrocketing crime rates in the area. These frames are subtle to the uninformed viewer, but they have distinct effects on who the viewer blames for the issue; in an episodically-framed homicide story, the viewer will blame the murderer, while in a thematically-framed homicide story, the viewer will blame the authorities or government for inability to control the issue (Wolfsfeld 2011).

TWW has the advantage of being able to use both episodic and thematic frames in order to make commentary on realistic events and the policies that are created as a result. Many of the social policies that are argued about in *TWW*'s White House are brought to the discussion table in the form of an episodic story, but through discussions with other staffers, congresspeople, and experts, the thematic frame is also discussed, as statistics are often necessary when discussing policy. By utilizing both frames, audiences understand both the scope of the issue at hand as well as the personal consequences it has for constituents, allowing for deeper audience interest and therefore a higher chance of lasting impact on viewers' political opinions.

Understanding media's effect on viewers not only reaffirmed my belief that television is an important source of information and education, but will also help me analyze the messages that Sorkin sends through *TWW* in a more accurate way. While these media frames help unpack the show as a whole, presidential analysis is needed in order to compare Bartlet to real presidents.

2. Presidential Literature Review

I will use three different schools of thought in order to classify and compare Bartlet's presidency with the Clinton and Bush administrations. Each of these theories provides insight into different important areas of the presidency. Skowronek attempts to understand how external factors can predict a president's term by explaining the cyclical nature of the presidency that he has observed. Howell observes the impossible standards that the public has for the president, and studies how presidents try and change the office to meet the people's needs. Greenstein observes the president's personality, offering observation on how the personal characteristics of the man in the office shape the role and its impact. These three schools of thought create a cohesive and complete picture of the executive branch, and they offer insight on three of the most important aspects of Bartlet's presidency according to the show: the factors surrounding Bartlet and his ability to act in the ways he wants, his decisions within the role of president, and his personal characteristics.

Skowronek's Political Time

One of the theories I will be using is Stephen Skowronek's theory of political time (2011,) which looks at historical patterns throughout the last 200 years and identifies presidents by their historical role. Skowronek argues that presidential politics are cyclical, and that each president fits into one of four categories based on the national political climate as well as world events. He believes that each president's placement in political time dictates the goals and restraints of their presidencies; the factors of each placement in political time, including regime strength, voter support, and citizens' faith in government in general, play a critical role in understanding each president's behavior. Skowronek's presidential cycle starts with reconstructive presidents, who use the previous political climate as their enemy and use their party's new power to make a plethora of changes that overhaul the political scene. The "politics of reconstruction" are defined by presidents who take office when they are of the opposing party of the previous regime and the support for the presidents' party is weak, which allows the

president to revamp his party's image in order to regain strength and support. Reconstructive presidents often inherit dramatic circumstances which they can use to wield new presidential powers and shift the office as well as their party. However, despite the fact that reconstructive presidents can change the office significantly, they tend to cite their strategies as an attempt to restore former order, which helps maintain favor from Congress and the public. Skowronek uses FDR as an example, as the Great Depression was a perfect backdrop for Roosevelt's overhaul of presidential duties and the role of the federal government, and the changes that he made to the executive moved politics into the "modern presidency." FDR's actions in the time of crisis redefined liberalism and changed the scope of the presidency, effectively reconstructing what would be a Democratic regime for the next five decades.

After reconstructive presidents, the cycle continues to presidents of articulation, who use the changes made in the previous administration to expand and solidify the party platform. Due to the platform strengthening that occurs as a result of reconstructive presidents, articulative presidents enjoy the resilient strength of majority party support. These presidents adopt their party's new priorities and aim to further the goals that the reconstructive president put into place. However, despite the initial strength of the administration, articulative presidents struggle as their base withers throughout their presidency due to fracturing that occurs as details of the ideology become clearer. Additionally, the ideas of the articulative president are viewed as a mandate for action from the people, and any attempt to change course from the ideology in place at the election is met with backlash from the party and the public. Due to the inevitable disappointment of an articulative president who leads while the shine of the new regime is dulling, articulative presidents struggle to be reelected. George H. W. Bush is one of Skowronek's main examples of an articulative president, as his enthusiasm for following in Reagan's footsteps quickly withered and his most prominent campaign promises ("No new taxes!") were broken. George W. Bush is also considered an articulative president, as he continued expanding on the work of the Reagan regime.

Preemptive presidents come when the current regime is starting to crack, and preemptive presidents try to combine the strengths of the existing regime with new ideas. As the previously reconstructed regime loses favor, preemptive presidents act in an attempt to oppose the regime, not to establish a strong basis for their party; Skowronek describes this “unabashedly mongrel vision” as “the third way” due to its distinctly anti-majority platform (2011). The “third way” mentality also involves the preemptive president attempting to mobilize both parties as he appeals to bipartisan issues, proving that he prioritizes widespread support over party loyalty. However, the centrist, fluid stances of preemptive presidents rarely impact the parties’ core tenets and the compromised ideas do not last beyond the president’s administration. The interpretation that preemptive presidents are not politically faithful to either party often bleeds into the public’s interpretation of the president’s personal character, and preemptive presidents are the more likely than presidents in other political times to undergo impeachment proceedings as a result of character misjudgments. Skowronek classifies Clinton as a preemptive president, as he was the first Democrat to come to power under the Reagan regime and did not label himself as a liberal, but as a member of the “New Democratic Party”. Clinton blurred the lines of the old parties in order to try and re-establish Democratic legitimacy, but his lack of a strong stance was also interpreted as moral uncertainty, an interpretation which was affirmed throughout the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Then come disjunctive presidents, who try to reconcile modern issues with the party platform that was established by the reconstructive president years ago. Disjunctive presidents are the last of their regime to hold office, and while they try to convince the nation that their policies are still viable, the failure of disjunctive presidents leads Americans to vote for another reconstructive president in order to start the cycle again. Skowronek argues that disjunctive presidents occupy the last position of their party’s era because they are able to grasp on to various aspects of the old order and the new order, but since the nation and party have changed since reconstruction, full overhaul is needed again after their presidencies. Disjunctive

presidents tend to campaign on the fact that they are removed from the party that they represent, but this distance creates difficulties finding necessary party support once the president takes office, leading to the end of the party's regime. President Jimmy Carter is one of Skowronek's examples of a disjunctive president, as he struggled to find legitimacy throughout his term. His television address in 1979, in which he questioned the capability of the legislative process, showed his vulnerability to the public, and he eventually lost the favor of his own party (Skowronek 2011).

Understanding Bartlet through the lens of his political time and comparing his political time with Clinton and Bush will help distinguish the motivations and justifications for their actions and how they differ. While specifics about the line of succession before Bartlet are not incredibly clear, his leadership style and rhetoric regarding the party and his commitments should help clarify the category to which he belongs. By aligning Bartlet with a political time, his strategies and messaging will become clearer, and I will be able to provide a more accurate analysis of his effectiveness as a leader.

Greenstein's Presidential Characteristics

The second presidential analytical theory that I will be using is Greenstein's theory of presidential qualities, as outlined in *The Presidential Difference* (2009). As the modern presidency has increased the power of the executive branch, personal qualities of the president have enormous impact on the nation. Greenstein outlines each president in terms of his political skill, vision, cognitive style, organizational capacity, ability to communicate, and emotional intelligence; he uses emotional intelligence as the biggest predictor of a president's success. Greenstein defines political skill as the president's ability to pass the policies that he wants. While the president can do this through unilateral action, Greenstein notes that true political skill involves the president convincing other policymakers that his choices are in their best interests. Presidential vision is the president's large-scale view of goals for the nation, and Greenstein believes that a strong vision can unify the country and keep the administration

accountable for fulfilling promises. While a strong vision can inspire and unite the nation, if a president is unable to fulfill the promises of the vision, his public approval will suffer. Cognitive style determines the way the president processes information by analyzing if a president is more likely to view issues as big-picture problems or to focus on the details of the impact of his decisions. Greenstein argues that while a president's cognitive style will not make or break a presidency, it impacts the way the president communicates with his staffers and with the public. Organizational capacity is a president's ability to establish a strong support system of staffers and advisers and to organize them in a productive way. While the size of the executive staff grows with each presidency, the functions of the staff vary greatly with each administration; whether the staff is a large network who can offer their opinions to the president or a small group of trusted advisers who blindly follow the president's orders has a strong impact on the president's leadership. Public communication is the president's ability to deliver speeches and messages to the public, and it incorporates not only his oratory style but also his accuracy and clarity when explaining policies and situations. Emotional intelligence is the extent to which emotions rule the president's decision-making, and Greenstein argues that a president's personality is an important factor in his leadership style. While some presidents can control their emotions and maintain rational decision-making during times of high stress, others are more impulsive and allow their emotions to dictate political decisions, which can create long-term issues for the nation. Greenstein believes that emotional intelligence is the most important aspect of a president because the president's ability to use his emotions as motivation for change makes him great, but a lack of emotional control makes a president weak.

Greenstein's Analysis of Clinton

Greenstein's chapter on President Clinton is titled "The Undisciplined Bill Clinton," which foreshadows Greenstein's understandings of Clinton's emotional intelligence. While Clinton's life at home was tumultuous, he maintained an outstanding academic record, and he became a Rhodes scholar before attending Yale Law School. He became state attorney general

and then governor of Arkansas, although he was not reelected to a second term. His initial lack of political success was due to his leftist policies and his relationship with Hillary, as Hillary was often criticized as being too unfashionable and nontraditional for the public to take seriously. After this humiliating defeat, Clinton transformed his political image; while his rhetorical style had always been impressive, he moved his policies and views to the center, and Hillary redefined herself as a more traditional housewife. Despite scrutiny for not serving in Vietnam and allegations of adultery, Clinton won the election, and after a tumultuous first 100 days, he corrected his mistakes and returned to his election approval ratings. Despite various personal scandals, he maintained his strong political skill and communication, as well as a stronger emphasis on conservative ideals. He won reelection, but his second term concluded in the Lewinsky scandal and an impeachment trial. While his lack of emotional intelligence has plagued his legacy, his approval polls during his time in the White House show that the public was still supportive of his political actions.

Greenstein has mixed reviews of Clinton in the various categories, but overall finds Clinton one of the best examples of the damage that lack of emotional intelligence causes a president. Greenstein finds that Clinton's strongest categories are public communication and cognitive skill, although neither are perfect; Greenstein cites moments of Clinton rambling off script, and while he was incredibly intelligent, Greenstein finds that Clinton's inability to cut to the core of issues diminished his decision-making abilities. Clinton's cognitive style impacted his (lack of) vision, as he was so detail-oriented that it was hard for him to understand broader ideas; without a broad vision it was hard for him to gain political allies, which Greenstein classifies as a lack of political skill. However, Clinton's varying performance in other categories does not compare to his lack of emotional intelligence, which had plagued him throughout his political career but climaxed during his presidency. For these reasons, Clinton is often one of Greenstein's examples of the importance of presidential emotional intelligence, as a relatively strong presidency was brought down by rash emotional decision-making.

Greenstein's Analysis of Bush

George W. Bush's chapter is entitled, "George W. Bush and the Politics of Agenda Control," which communicates less judgment than Clinton's chapter title. Greenstein outlines Bush's upbringing in contrast to his father's; where George H. W. Bush was primed to be an East Coast intellectual, George W. spent his childhood in Texas, although he attended Harvard Business school. George W. worked on his father's senatorial campaign which gave him political insight and experience, but his biggest professional achievement was coordinating the purchase of the Texas Rangers, which gave him publicity and name recognition separate from his father's identity. He was elected governor of Texas, and while he was in office he established many of his presidential habits, such as frequent delegation and his platform of "compassionate conservatism." When he took presidential office, he was criticized for the content of his speeches and the way he delivered them; he seemingly ignored issues like the economy to promote his "No Child Left Behind" policy, and he often flubbed words or misspoke during public addresses. However, he picked a strong staff and delegated tasks frequently, which helped him pass his education and tax policies.

Bush's image drastically changed after the events of 9/11, and his visit to the ruins of the Twin Towers brought him soaring approval ratings. Despite his early successes, he lost support as he launched military attacks in the Middle East, as the public did not understand why the U.S. was invading all of Iraq when Al Qaeda was responsible for terrorism. Despite lower approval ratings regarding the Iraq war, Bush won reelection, but his second term fared far worse than his first. As the casualty numbers of the Iraq War accumulated, Hurricane Katrina wracked the coasts of Louisiana and Florida, and Bush infamously surveyed the damage from Air Force One as opposed to joining victims on the ground. This solidified his reputation as "the flyover president," and his reputation never recovered.

Despite Bush's low approval ratings overall, Greenstein applauds some of the facets of his presidency, mainly his emotional intelligence and his vision. While some critics claimed that

the Iraq War was Bush's attempt to eclipse his father's presidency, Greenstein's interviews with other staffers and internal figures did not agree, as he found that Bush was generally calm and thoughtful when making decisions. His organizational capacity helped maintain his composure, and he would often rely on staff to provide him with a variety of opinions to help him make decisions. While Bush's political vision was not always attainable, Greenstein notes that it was always strong and clear, which contrasted with George H. W. and from Clinton. However, with 9/11 and its immediate aftermath as the overall exception, Greenstein finds that Bush's political skill, cognitive style, and public communication were fumbling and underwhelming.

Howell's Theory of Presidential Power

The last presidential theory that I will be using is Howell's understanding of the presidential need for power (2013). Howell argues that Americans have an unrealistic model for their leaders, as they desire strong leaders who pursue power while fearing autocratic dictators who only prioritize power; when the public's expectations are out of the realm of possibility for their president, the public is consistently disappointed with the presidency. In order to try and satisfy the public's desires, Howell believes that presidents are constantly trying to expand the power of the office and display power externally through use of the military. While checks and balances still keep the executive branch in line with the other branches, since FDR's initiation of "the modern presidency," presidents have used various political tools in order to work around the other branches to achieve what they desire.

Howell cites the use of National Security Directives, the appointment of "czars," and signing statements as presidential attempts to move past the restrictions of the office. National Security Directives are Howell's first example, as they came into practice after the bombing at Pearl Harbor during WWII in an attempt to streamline command of the armed forces. The unification of the armed forces received bipartisan support, and the National Security Council (NSC), which included the President, Vice President, and high-level military experts, was created to control the different sectors and advise the government on military action. NSC policy

papers were created as a way to inform the president of policy proposals; however, when the president signed the papers, they became direct orders from the president. As they continued to evolve, they have also become classified, meaning that the president can perform direct military actions without the approval of Congress. As they have continued to change names and expand their abilities, these papers have become an important tool for the president, especially when facing terrorism where the undercover status of an operation is crucial.

Similarly, signing statements are an important presidential power-wielding tool that have been used since the mid-1900s. Starting with Truman, presidents regularly issued hundreds of signing statements, which were addendums at the end of signed bills that could include notes on how the president wanted the bills interpreted by judges. The power of signing statements comes from Article II of the Constitution, which enforces the president's duty to "Take Care that the Laws be Faithfully Executed." While the Supreme Court ruled that signing statements have no legal standing during Nixon's presidency, they are still used by presidents to inform the other branches about how the president will be interpreting certain language within the bill or noting the president's objections to different parts of the bill. Through this tool, presidents can refrain from fully vetoing new legislation, therefore gaining favor from Congress and constituents, while still applying personal judgment and interpretation to new laws.

Applying Howell's theory will help me understand the extent to which Bartlet follows the model of previous presidents as well as the extent to which he tries to fulfill his constituents' impossible standards. Presidential power works both within the office and externally, as the president must display his power externally to prove that he and his administration are effective while also working to expand his power within the office in order to achieve his goals. Because *TWW* gives the audience an opportunity to see the President's bargaining, they understand the internal barriers that exist that keep presidential power at bay, and they see how the president deals with these barriers and attempts to eradicate them. Additionally, they see the decision-

making that leads a president to use power externally, and they are exposed to the different influences that impact why, when, and how a president chooses to use power.

When used together, these three theories will allow me to look at Bartlet's effectiveness as a leader. Bartlet's personality and leadership within his administration, as well as his staff's ability to communicate and coordinate, are the main focuses of the show, but in order to understand how Sorkin is using Bartlet to comment on the presidency, it is equally important to analyze his effectiveness as a leader to the nation.

3. Issue Analysis

Since Sorkin wrote *The West Wing* in response to current events (Malina 2018), comparing Bartlet's actions to the real White House will provide insight into how Sorkin interpreted Bartlet in relationship to the actual presidents who were in office throughout the show. In this section, I have chosen six different areas of Bartlet's presidency that are discussed throughout the seasons: the legal status of homosexuals, gun legislation, terrorism and foreign intervention, nominations, the First Lady, and scandals. These six topics offer insight into Bartlet's policy successes, his use of the military, his alignment with the other branches of government, and his relationships within his home and with the country. As these topics also had current relevance at the time that their episodes were aired, the messages that Sorkin writes about them will also provide ideas as to how Sorkin is aiming to inform the viewer about these issues. By analyzing Bartlet's strategies in these areas, it will be easier to understand the entirety of his presidency under the three presidential frameworks.

Homosexuality and Legislation

Discussions of homosexuality in *TWW* happened primarily around the topics of gay people in the military and hate crime legislation. Hate crimes enter the administration's conversation through an episodic frame when a teenage boy, Lowell Lydell, has been brutally physically bullied because he is homosexual (1x10). The boy dies the next day, and while CJ feels that hate crime legislation should be discussed as a result, the rest of the staff does not agree; Leo tells her repeatedly to "dial it down" despite her deep emotional investment in the issue. Later, Lydell's parents are invited to attend the signing of a hate crime bill, despite fear that Mr. Lydell should not attend because he is embarrassed of his son's sexual identity (1x13). However, when C.J. addresses Mr. Lydell, it becomes clear that he is not embarrassed of his son's homosexuality, but of the weak stance on gay rights that the Bartlet administration has taken (gay people are not allowed to adopt children, to marry, or to serve in the armed forces). C.J. and Mandy then leave the room to discuss whether or not the Lydells should stay for the

televised coverage of the bill signing, and while C.J. still feels that their stances are justified and wants their voices to be heard, Mandy convinces her that it is best if they go home and that the Lydell's frustration with the White House does not get to the press. C.J. ultimately agrees and sends them home.

The story of Lowell Lydell is based on the murder of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old college student who was attacked and consequently died in Wyoming because he was homosexual. He died on October 12, 1998, approximately a year and two months before 1x10 aired. According to a first-person account from an aide, the conversation that C.J. had with the Lydells is strikingly similar to Clinton's conversation with the Shepards after the incident; the father lashed out with anger and rage while the mother calmly thanked Clinton, absent of comment on the state of legislation (Socarides 2018). Increasing hate crime legislation to include crimes against the LGBTQ community had been an issue throughout Clinton's presidency, as the Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act had been passed in 1993. Clinton himself had advocated for stronger protection of gay people against hate crimes since 1997, but Shepard's death in 1998 incited stronger action for hate crimes legislation, and Clinton called for bipartisan support as he proposed the Hate Crimes Prevention act, also known as the Matthew Shepard Act. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act would have extended the recourse for hate crimes to include crimes against people on the basis of their sexuality, as it previously had only included race and participation in societal activities such as school and church. However, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act was not passed until 2009 under President Barack Obama (Riley 2019).

Additionally, the issue of changing the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is debated by Sam and military officers in a thematic framework, as the military officers argue that openly homosexual soldiers will disrupt unity within the armed forces (1x19). Sam argues, however, that many of the soldiers who have been discharged for homosexuality have not revealed their sexual identity voluntarily; he cites examples of soldiers who have been discharged for discussing their sexuality in therapy or after months of threats and harassment. In the midst of this debate,

Admiral Fitzwallace enters the room and reveals that the comments being made about homosexual soldiers are the same comments that were made about black soldiers until after the Civil War, and ends the discussion with his opinion that the policy should be changed.

Policy surrounding gay soldiers in the armed forces was one of the first issues that Clinton handled in office, as he had expressed support for the LGBT community throughout his campaign. Clinton had received around \$2.5 million for his campaign from gay rights organizations (NDRI 2010). Most of the rhetoric surrounding gay rights, specifically gay military rights, had come from the Republican party and was strongly against the acceptance of homosexual soldiers. Discussions of Clinton's policies surrounding gays in the military had begun before his inauguration. Although he wanted to lift the ban, he found himself in the minority as many conservative Democrats also supported writing the ban into law, and he was forced to accept some substantial compromises in order to pass legislation. His final order was a Pentagon directive that made it illegal to interrogate a soldier's sexual orientation, both through questioning the soldier him/herself or through questioning his/her comrades. However, this directive did not decriminalize homosexual acts within the military, and kept private disclosure of these events federally punishable. While Clinton touted that he thought the directive was a "substantial advance" for the LGBT community, the community itself disagreed, as they felt betrayed by a President whom they had supported throughout his campaign (Riley 2019).

Hate crime legislation that included protection for homosexuals was not passed until 2009 and Don't Ask Don't Tell was fully repealed in 2010, two administrations after Clinton, but the success of those policies in the show allows Sorkin to comment on the president's ability and power. While Bartlet is able to pass anti-hate crime legislation, his inability to repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell speaks to Sorkin's view of the presidency. Hate crime legislation is divisive, but C.J. clearly feels ethically motivated to push the legislation into debate, though the rest of the administration encourages her to keep quiet because they do not believe that it will be successful. Despite their fears, however, the Hate Crimes Protection Act is signed into law just

three episodes later. To the audience, Sorkin seems to be arguing that the need to “do the right thing” can overcome partisan boundaries to create successful policy, which can be seen as a critique of Clinton and his cabinet; perhaps they did not support gay rights as strongly as was initially perceived.

However, this image becomes more complicated when the discussion of the military policy is added. While Sam is passionate about removing the ban on openly gay soldiers, and Admiral Fitzwallace ends the debate with his support for the ban repeal, the actual policy outcomes of this discussion are never revealed to the audience. Optimistic liberal viewers may infer that the close of the debate on Fitzwallace’s point signals the end of the ban, and may be seen as a response to Mr. Lydell’s passionate claims that the administration does not actually support LGBT people. However, the vagueness of the outcome of this policy may also signal that it is unsuccessful, but that other issues take over the priority of the presidency and further action is not pursued. The latter interpretation seemingly aligns with the reality of the Clinton administration, which can be interpreted as Sorkin’s endorsement of Clinton’s values and understanding of his choice of action. While Clinton and his administration may have cared deeply about equality for the gay community, Sorkin argues the realities of the legislative branch and the myriad of other issues that a president must deal with may have made *Don’t Ask Don’t Tell* the best possible outcome, despite its reception as a ripoff for the LGBT community after their support during his campaign.

Firmer evidence for the idea that Sorkin modeled Bartlet to justify the reality of Clinton’s outcomes surrounding homosexual rights comes when Bartlet is hosting a reception for radio hosts at the White House (2x3). He begins a scathing debate with a right-wing radio host who often justifies anti-homosexual views with the Bible. In response to her steadfastness in sitting when the President enters the room (a sign of deep disrespect), Bartlet quotes some of her homophobic statements and the verses she uses to defend them, and then offers a plethora of other Biblical passages and laws that are irrelevant in our current society, such as selling

daughters into slavery, putting people to death for working on the Sabbath, and burning people who wear garments of two different fabrics. The argument ends with Bartlet telling the radio host to stand, which she reluctantly does, signaling that he has won the debate. While this displays many of Bartlet's character traits, such as his strength of faith and his intellectualism, it mostly displays his strong hatred for homophobic beliefs, especially homophobic beliefs that are based in Christianity. This outburst can be interpreted as Bartlet's passionate and honest support for the LGBT community, despite the fact that his policies may not reflect his beliefs entirely. I believe that in the context of Clinton's presidency, Sorkin is seeking to fill in the gaps for the gay community and assure them that the president truly does care about their rights, but is restrained from giving them these rights by the other branches.

Gun Legislation

The topic of gun control was more prevalent in the first two seasons of *TWW* than in the rest of the series, but the wealth of opinions that are expressed by a variety of characters prove that Sorkin was interested in exploring the topic. Gun control legislation is first discussed thematically when the administration must lobby for five more votes in order to pass a ban on certain assault rifles with an extended barrel or handle (1x4). Josh is sent to whip votes from three Democrats who had chosen to vote with the NRA, and he threatens the president's endorsement in order to make one of the delinquent congressmen return to voting with the party, while he promises another a photo opportunity with the president. Leo's conversation with the third congressman, however, shows the nuances of the debate; while the congressman argues that this bill creates minimal change, Leo expresses that changes to gun legislation must be made incrementally. Leo tries to argue that any increase in gun legislation helps save lives in the inner cities, but the congressman fires back that the small changes are useless and that eliminating guns is the only way to solve the problem.

The discussion surrounding gun control gains fervor after a white pride organization mounts an assassination attempt on the president's personal aide Charlie, an African-American

man who is dating the president's daughter (1x22). While they do not succeed in assassinating Charlie, both the president and the Deputy Chief of Staff are shot, and a civilian woman is injured. In a press briefing after the incident, C.J. shares that along with the attack on Charlie, a multitude of civilians were killed or injured in other gun-related incidents on the same evening, which helps relate the episodic incident of the president's injury with the thematic frame of gun violence nationwide. She ends the briefing by encouraging reporters to reconsider their beliefs that allowing civilians to arm themselves will decrease the amount of gun violence because "the President of the United States himself was shot last night while surrounded by the best trained armed guards in the history of the world." Later, speechwriter Sam Seaborn is arguing with Republican Ainsley Hayes, the new Associate White House Counsel, when she opens up the topic of gun control (2x4). Sam explodes, citing the reality that until they fired the guns, the white extremists who shot the President and Josh had not committed any crimes. Leo also participates in a thematic television debate about gun control, where he adds the populations of eight other countries to make up a population equivalent to the size of the U.S., and then states that the U.S. "had 32,000 gun deaths last year and [the other countries combined] had 112"(2x13). He shoots down the idea that the Second Amendment protects private citizens owning firearms, as he believes that private owners do not qualify for a militia, which the Constitution requires. The last conversation surrounding gun control that occurs in Sorkin's seasons happens after a citizen opens fire in a church in San Antonio, and despite the fact that one of the churchgoers was armed and fights back, a nine-year-old girl is injured and dies (3x6). Bartlet sends Hoynes as a representative to comfort the family of the child because he understands the heartbreak that must accompany the incident.

It is not surprising that the issue of gun control happens early in the show, as the Columbine shootings had happened mere months before the show began airing (the Columbine shootings happened on April 20, 1999, and season one began airing on September 22 of that same year), and therefore gun control was a huge topic of current public discussion. In 1993,

Clinton had signed what became known as “The Brady Handgun Bill,” which was an addition to former legislation that established a five-day background check before gun purchasers could own a firearm. This bill received bipartisan support, as it was named for Reagan’s press secretary who was wounded and paralyzed in an assassination attempt on Reagan, and it established the idea of “common sense” gun reform (Ross 1991). However, it was not a new piece of legislation, and many states had already passed similar laws, so it was not seen as a strong move by the Clinton administration. The bill also attempted to include mandatory registration for all gun owners into a single searchable platform, but this was unsuccessful under Clinton. Additionally, Democrats also wanted the bill to include registration and background checks for guns purchased through auctions or brokers, but this was unsuccessful as well. Overall, gun control activists were deeply unhappy with Clinton’s inability to create stricter policies, especially with gun violence increasing across the nation (Goss 2006).

The Federal Assault Weapons Ban caused both Clinton and Bush issues, as supporters of gun restrictions believed it only created minimal change, while gun rights supporters believed it restricted their constitutional freedoms. In 1994, Clinton passed a ban on certain semiautomatic weapons as well as extended magazines. While critics argued that this ban would not have a large impact in reducing gun crimes, as shootings that had occurred with these kinds of weapons were only a small fraction of total shootings, advocates of the ban believed that the lethality of gun crimes would decrease due to the reduction of the amount of ammunition in each gun (Koper & Roth 2001). However, Clinton’s ban was not permanent; it required renewal after 10 years, and Bush did not sign the renewal for the ban. Despite the fact that the gun was only seen as a small compromise during Clinton’s era, Bush’s failure to renew the ban outraged critics and was viewed as proof that he responded primarily to the NRA over the rest of his constituents. Bush frustrated gun control advocates even further when he signed the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act in 2005, which protected gun manufacturers from lawsuits that held the manufacturers liable for criminal activity that involved their guns. Citizens who felt that gun

crimes were becoming an increasingly urgent issue were frustrated by Clinton's small steps and Bush's reversal of any progress toward their goal (Genovese & Lammers 2014).

The frequent discussions of gun control on *TWW* serve to fill in the gaps of discussion coming from the real White House for audiences, and show that despite the fact that the administration wishes broad changes could be made, only small changes are possible. Despite an assassination attempt, Bartlet is still unable to significantly decrease gun ownership, proving that the deadlock around gun issues is so strong that nothing can break it. However, this storyline also fights against Bush's small protections for gun owners, as his actions seem ignorant considering the frequency and severity of gun crimes in the world of *TWW*. C.J.'s point opposing the idea that allowing people to have guns will increase self-defense is difficult to oppose given the context of the assassination, and viewers may apply this example to their own lives when they are discussing or voting on gun control issues. By writing storylines that both discuss gun control in a policy context and involve the effects of gun legislation in the characters' lives, the audience can both understand why solutions are achieved so gradually and contextualize the reasons why these changes are necessary, which may inspire them to fight for these changes in their own lives.

Terrorism and Foreign Intervention

Turmoil with the Middle East was Bush's priority for most of his presidency, and *TWW* portrays the many complications and considerations that the president and his administration must consider when managing terrorist threats. While Clinton was involved in anti-terrorist efforts throughout his terms, 9/11 made combating terrorist threats the hallmark of Bush's presidency; Sorkin also shifts the focus of the show to include more stories of anti-terrorist efforts in order to offer his commentary to the audience. Sorkin lays out his philosophy towards terrorism in the season three opener, "Isaac and Ishmael," a special episode that includes a

foreword informing the audience that the episode is not meant to fit into the series chronologically.¹

It is no coincidence that “Isaac and Ishmael” aired on October 3, 2001, a mere three weeks after the attacks on 9/11, as the episodic plot follows Josh as he entertains a visiting group of high school students in the midst of a lockdown due to a supposed terrorist threat. The CIA has linked the alias of a potential terrorist to the name of a White House employee, so Leo takes the employee into interrogation. During his questioning, Leo makes a variety of pointed and racist remarks; however, the CIA finds the real attacker elsewhere, and Leo apologizes for his racist profiling. Sorkin displays his other opinions thematically when Josh declares that “Islamic extremist is to Islamic as the KKK is to Christianity” and clarifies that it is a small section of people, not an entire religion or country, that is committing the evil acts. Bartlet himself only appears in the episode for about a minute, but his quick interaction with the visiting students offers deep insight into how he views the terrorists; when asked if there is “something noble about being a martyr,” Bartlet responds that committing acts of terror is not martyrdom, it is “sick, twisted, brutal, dumbass murder.” From this interaction, it is clear that Bartlet carries personal hatred for the terrorists, and his actions throughout the rest of the season fall in line with that trajectory.

This episode emphasizes the importance of distinguishing strong anti-terrorist sentiments from racial or religious profiling. Days after the attacks, Bush delivered a speech declaring that “Islam is peace” and encouraging non-Muslim Americans to embrace and support Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the attack. Both the timing and the content of the speech emphasize that the terrorists are a separate extremist group, and that the ideology of that group is very different from the ideology of the Islamic religion or the Muslim people. The show echoed this message through Leo’s learning curve, as it illustrates the pain and embarrassment

¹ Because this appeared as a special episode, it is not counted when citing other episodes in the third season, meaning that “Manchester: Part 1” is referenced as 3x1.

that Leo feels when he incorrectly labels the employee as a terrorist, as well as the pain and anger that the employee feels as a result of the confrontation. This storyline echoed the Bush administration's efforts to keep racism at bay while expressing zero tolerance for terrorists.

The following episodes of seasons three and four emphasize two main storylines: Bartlet's campaign and reelection, and Bartlet's decision to secretly assassinate the defense minister of Qumar. The country of Qumar is first discussed when it is revealed that the U.S. provides Qumar with weapons and ammunition in exchange for a lease on a military base (3x8). While President Bartlet does not comment on the nation this in the episode, C.J. is repeatedly silenced when she points out the ethical dilemma of selling weapons to a country that abuses women; while her anger has no effect on the arms agreement, she gives context to the country as a whole, setting it up as a foil to democratic and liberated American ideals. Later, relations with Qumar become strained when Bartlet is informed that terrorist activities in Maryland and San Francisco had been detected (3x19). The terrorists were connected to a Qumari extremist group, and they were arrested, but the Qumari Defense Minister Abdul Ibn Shareef had not warned the U.S. of the attacks. Shareef's silence leads Bartlet and the rest of the Defense Department to believe that Shareef himself is a terrorist. Bartlet initially struggles to agree with labeling Shareef as a threat, but as evidence of Shareef's involvement with terrorist operations mounts, the Joint Chiefs propose an assassination plan that involves rerouting Shareef's flight home from visiting the president; however, assassinating Shareef would be illegal because Shareef has diplomatic immunity (3x20). Shareef visits, and the tension between him and Bartlet is palpable— Bartlet refuses to shake Shareef's hand. However, Bartlet is still unsure of the assassination plan, as he believes that committing the act of violence will not remain anonymous for long and that it will degrade the standards of the U.S. Despite his reservations, Leo convinces him that he must follow through with the plan, and Shareef and his bodyguards are murdered (3x21).

Qumari intelligence originally blames Israel for the murder of Shareef, and war breaks out between the two nations; the U.S. intervenes with a weapons shipment sent from Qumar,

and forces the boat to turn back around; this leads the Qumari intelligence agency to believe that the U.S. may have been involved in Sharif's assassination (4x5). When five Qumari terrorists go missing weeks later, U.S. intelligence believes they are hiding to attack America (4x22). Later that evening, Zoey Bartlet's panic button is found outside of a club, and her S.S. agent is found dead in the alley. The White House receives a fax from the kidnappers demanding release of Qumari prisoners and removal of U.S. troops from Qumar. Bartlet's emotional state inhibits him from making a clear decision about the proper response to the kidnapping, so he invokes the 25th Amendment, temporarily resigning from office because he feels he can no longer perform his duties properly.

Sorkin's storyline varies greatly from realistic events, which I interpret as an attempt to sustain viewership among a brokenhearted nation. Many viewers and critics believed that "Isaac and Ishmael" was aired too immediately after 9/11, and that it was both emotionally manipulative and self-righteous, which was not what the audience wanted to see in their time of mourning (Poniewozik 2001); while I don't think that Sorkin would have written a story about a horrific terrorist attack without that direct cue from the public, it seems that changing the fictional events to spare American civilians was more palatable for the audience. While the show can relay stories of the campaign to change the subject from terrorist threats, terrorism seemed to overtake Bush's presidency, and because of his actions, homeland security in America would be changed forever. Despite starting his presidency with a divisive election which led to a split nation, the attacks on 9/11 proved that Bush was a unifying president, and his strong immediate reaction earned him the highest presidential approval rating ever recorded (90% approval) (Holmes 2007). He immediately framed himself as the protective father of the nation; he refused to hide outside of the White House on the night of the attacks, and he visited the rubble of the Twin Towers to assure families of victims that "the world hears you!" He established the Bush Doctrine, which aimed to wage war against all enemy nations and terrorist groups to deter future terrorist attacks while spreading conservative democratic ideas to other nations. He

created the Transportation Security Agency and the Department of Homeland Security to help make sure that the country was secure, and he immediately began planning his response, often calling on the second article of the Constitution to legitimize his use of force. He called his war on terror “Operation Enduring Freedom.” Air strikes against the Taliban’s military installations and Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan began in October of 2001, and American troops moved into the country to hunt down the terrorist organizations while creating a democratic society for civilians (Holmes 2007).

Bush’s decisions, and his decision-making style, were opposed by critics who believed that his use of violence was too broad. Bush had been lambasted by critics during his campaign for only serving for a short time in the National Guard, and he surrounded himself by military experts in order to make up for the military expertise he did not have; his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was a decorated military official with experience in Bush’s father’s administration, and his Chief of Staff Karl Rove and Vice President Dick Cheney also influenced him greatly. However, despite receiving input from many members of his cabinet, Bush maintained authority over all operations and was adamant that he acted of his own accord, not as a puppet of other people in the administration (Calabresi & Yoo 2008). The war on terror continued to rage through Afghanistan and Iraq after Sorkin had finished writing, and resulted in the loss of over 4,200 American soldiers under Bush’s presidency alone. Ironically, the murder of Osama bin Laden, which symbolized victory of the war on terror, did not happen until four years after Bush left office.

The consequences of terrorism in Bartlet’s America and Bush’s America are very different, but their defining principles towards terrorism are also vastly different, proving that even if the show had been written to reflect the nation’s reality, Bartlet’s responses would have differed greatly. Bush took pride in an immediate and expansive response to the 9/11 attacks, and even when he was criticized for the length of the war and the amount of American casualties, he felt passionately that eradicating all terrorists was the only way to bring security to

the nation and the world. Alternatively, Bartlet shows restraint in using force against Kumar, and only retaliates against the leader who they can ascertain was involved in the attacks (at least while Sorkin was writing). Where Bush created a doctrine to declare his vast war against all terrorists and terrorist-supporting nations, Bartlet only fulfills the assassination of Shareef after Leo declares that it is his duty to do so. Where Bush's emotions over the state of the nation after 9/11 led him to commit the U.S. to a massive war effort, Bartlet's emotions over the kidnapping of Zoey lead him to retreat from the office and give the decision-making power to the Republicans. Bartlet serves as a morally-driven critique of Bush's actions, which contradicts his role in earlier seasons; it is not a coincidence that this change in tactic occurs as a result of the change in the White House. In seasons 1-2, when Clinton was still in office, Bartlet generally follows Clinton's decision-making style and thought processes, and tends to teach audience members that despite the policy outcomes that might be blocked due to the separation of powers, the president and his staff care about the needs of the people and want to fulfill those needs. However, in seasons 3-4, Bartlet's decision-making processes depart from those of the sitting president, making Bartlet a liberal fantasy in a conservative reality. By watching Bartlet struggle with the ethics of killing others for any reason, the audience may consider the ethical issues behind killing hundreds of Afghans and Iraqi people, both civilians and terrorists, and may oppose Bush for championing those attacks.

Nominations and Endorsements

Within the four Sorkin seasons, there is only one Supreme Court nomination, but it involves scandalous complications that reflect the processes of nominations for Clinton and Bush. A sudden retirement of a Supreme Court justice gives Bartlet the opportunity to put someone on the bench, and the staff settles on Peyton Cabot Harrison III, a highly-qualified Ivy League-educated Democrat (1x9). Despite their excitement for Harrison, the retiring judge indicates that the administration should consider Roberto Mendoza instead. While investigating Harrison's past, Toby reveals that Harrison does not believe that the Constitution protects the

right to privacy, which the administration emphasizes as a crucial issue for the future; Sam exclaims, “The twenties and thirties it was the role of government, the fifties and sixties it was civil rights, the next two decades are going to be privacy. I’m talking about the internet. I’m talking about cell phones. I’m talking about health records and who’s gay and who’s not. Moreover, in a country born on the will to the free, what could be more fundamental than this?” The administration follows Sam’s impassioned advice and gives Mendoza the nomination, and despite a racist incident with law enforcement in the interim, he is confirmed weeks later (1x18).

While there is only one example of the Supreme Court nomination process in the first four seasons of *TWW*, the woes of the nomination process are also reflected in the White House’s endorsement of a potential congressman (2x3). Tom Jordan is an attorney who has been friends with Sam since law school, and Sam meets with Jordan to tell him that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has vetted him as a potential candidate, and that if he were to run for Congress, the White House would give him their endorsement. However, when the White House checks his history, they find that he has a history of selecting white juries for black defendants and that he belonged to an all-white fraternity in college. Despite Sam’s protestations, Leo demands that the White House must stop supporting Jordan in light of these issues.

Nominations had been increasing in difficulty since Reagan’s administration, and the frustration and chaos that was portrayed in *TWW* only reflects a fraction of the issues that occurred for Clinton and Bush surrounding nominations. While the Supreme Court had previously been considered “above the law,” with nominations being given to judges who were qualified over judges who supported one party or the other, the Reagan era had defined that the Supreme Court had become another place to fulfill party ideals, and nomination processes had become much more contentious as a result. Studies prove that nominations become even more difficult during periods of divided government, which both Clinton and Bush had at the ends of their presidencies (Stiegerwalt 2010). Clinton had expressed during his campaign that he

prioritized the view that the Constitution protects the right to privacy and that he would not select a judge who was pro-life, so Republicans were looking to deny his choice because he or she would be following a liberal agenda (Theirault & Moeller 2016). When his first Supreme Court seat opened, he had expressed his desire to nominate Mario Cuomo, but Cuomo was unclear about his desire for the position. Second to Cuomo, Clinton wanted to nominate his wife, but his advisors warned him that she was not a safe bet and that he should probably nominate someone who Congress was more likely to approve (Friedman 1993). His nominations of Ginsburg and Breyer satisfied both parties because they did not take strong ideological stances in either direction.

However, his seeming success in the Supreme Court did not reflect his overall nomination process, where he suffered some damaging losses. Clinton nominated Zoë Baird for Attorney General in 1993, but she withdrew her nomination after vetting revealed that she had hired illegal immigrants for her housework and home assistance (Rosenbaum 1997). This discovery made the vetting process for other candidates even more difficult, as this level of private behavior had not traditionally been scrutinized in vetting proceedings. Clinton's nomination of Hershel Gober for Secretary of Veterans Affairs in 1997 was also withdrawn after accusations of sexual harassment against Gober came to light (Riley 2019). These withdrawals both illustrated that personal ethical flaws would no longer be tolerated in any position, a bad sign for Clinton as his term continued.

Bush's Supreme Court nominations were notably chaotic and reflected the growing tension accompanied the nominating process. Both of Bush's nominations occurred in his second term, which was to his disadvantage due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and Bush's "flyover" response to Katrina, all of which decreased his favorability within the nation and with Congress (Long 2009). Replacing Justice William Rehnquist happened rather quickly, but replacing Justice Sandra Day O'Connor continued to cause distress, and his nomination of Harriet Miers proved to be his biggest loss of all. While Miers' record had shown her

conservative ideology, Republicans in Congress were unsatisfied and believed that she would not vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade* or support other key conservative issues. Three weeks after her nomination, she withdrew herself from consideration, leaving Bush with the humiliating task of finding yet another replacement (Whittington 2006). He decided upon Samuel Alito, which satisfied his Republican base but infuriated Democrats, as Alito's record was remarkably conservative. While these events happened after the first four seasons of *TWW*, they seemed to be the natural outcome of increased polarization and scrutiny in all nominations, so the incidents regarding nominations in *TWW* almost predict the issues that occurred within the Bush administration.

Overall, *TWW* argues that prioritizing nominees who are in touch with the people is more important than upholding the status quo. Mendoza has controversial opinions regarding many important institutions such as the American Bar Association and the New York State Legislature, and he seems to forego systemic norms in favor of pursuing his own happiness (when the President calls him into the White House, he insists on taking a three-day road trip with his family, where others who are called in to meet the President traditionally respond within a few hours (1x15)). However, his lived experience in the Brooklyn Public School system and as a recipient of disability stipends after he was shot as a police officer give him insight into the ways that law affects citizens, which Bartlet prioritizes over the Ivy League education that Harrison received. The prioritization of moral character over professional accomplishments opposes Clinton's choices, which largely supported establishment figures and personal friends over ethical leaders. Additionally, the incident where he is pulled over for drunk driving despite his medical inability to drink argues that despite the deep scrutiny that candidates undergo, ethically clear candidates should be able to pass such scrutiny without issues. Mendoza's confirmation despite his anti-establishment views additionally argues that the Court should not push a certain ideological agenda, but should instead serve its purpose of acting above the law, and judges should be chosen on their merits as opposed to their stances on key issues. Even in

such a small story arc, Sorkin manages to criticize both the status of the Court as well as the nominees that are being chosen to serve on it.

The First Lady

Abigail Bartlet, Jed's wife, combines aspects of traditional femininity and progressive feminist in her approach to the role of First Lady. While Abigail's undergraduate education is not specified, she received her M.D. from Harvard Medical School and is a specialist in internal medicine and thoracic surgery. She advocates for various issues, such as child labor and women's rights, and while she is not shown giving Jed much advice on specific policies, she often advises him on how to manage his staff. However, her two biggest moments in the first four seasons are when she reveals that she has been secretly administering MS treatment to Jed and when Jed announces that he is running for reelection, which is not what he had promised her when he ran for his first term. As a result of the MS scandal and all of the hearings that follow, Abigail voluntarily gives up her medical license until Jed is out of the White House, though she continues to help the community by working lower-level positions at various medical clinics in D.C. Her frustration with having to pander to approval ratings becomes even more apparent when Jed announces his campaign for his second term; she spends most of the third season upset with Jed about this choice, both because it compromises his health and it changes the timeline that they had discussed prior to his first term. However, she ultimately compromises her plans and supports his campaign and his second win.

Abbey's frustrations with compromise and pandering climax when she tries to make a direct appeal for Zoey's return after her kidnapping (4x22). Although Abbey is advised against it, she steps into the press room to ask for Zoey's release, but when she is bombarded by cameras and reporters, she is unable to speak, and is quickly ushered out of the room by her advisor and C.J. As she goes to take a moment alone in C.J.'s office, and her advisor reminds her that a direct appeal may appear to be an attempt to negotiate with terrorists, Abbey expresses sadness with

the fact that she can not speak to the press because she has “seen other mothers do it.” While she has had to compromise her political and professional goals for her role as First Lady, Zoey’s kidnapping forces Abbey to compromise her role as a mother as well, as she is unable to fulfill her emotional needs because of political concerns.

Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush both provided opposing images of the First Lady’s role, with Hillary offering a sharp progressive turn from the traditional domesticity of the past. Before moving to the White House, Hillary had been the primary earner in the Clinton household, working as an attorney while raising their daughter (Riley 2019). However, Hillary also had her own political and professional agenda which was independent from Bill’s goals. Hillary’s role as a policy advisor was apparent not only from her interactions with Bill in political settings, but also from the layout of her two offices; one in the East Wing, traditional First Lady real estate for party planning and hosting, and one in the West Wing, traditionally the center of decision-making and policy (hence the title of the show). Hillary was the first First Lady to have offices in both wings, and many saw this as a symbolic and literal representation of the power she would have over Bill’s decision-making (Parry-Giles 2014). Her policy role was also clear from her consideration for top political positions, such as Supreme Court Justice, and from her campaign for healthcare reform. Bill assigned Hillary the issue of healthcare reform and hoped that it would become “the hallmark of [his] presidency,” but the bill was never successful and became one of the greatest failures for the Clintons. Hillary found difficulty acting within the gendered space of policy; the media critiqued her for being too intense and heartless, and stated that “political opponents have long questioned her warmth and sincerity,” which opposed the idea of the domestic First Lady and the assumed ethics and care of femininity. Additionally, Hillary’s involvement with the Whitewater scandal was under ongoing investigation while she advocated for healthcare policy, making her personal character seem questionable; her character was further questioned when she loyally stood by Bill during the Lewinsky scandal, appearing on *60 Minutes* to assure the public that their marriage was stronger than ever.

Despite her lack of success and constant critique, she did not regret her political approach in the White House, and continued to have a strong political career with two presidential campaigns of her own (Parry-Giles 2014).

While Laura Bush also campaigned on political issues, she fulfilled a much more traditional image of a First Lady, which helped her maintain bipartisan appeal. While Hillary's unprecedented authority as First Lady resulted in frequent polls and media attention, Laura largely returned to the background of her husband's political affairs, which meant that she received much less media attention and critique. While First Ladies almost always maintain higher approval ratings than their husbands, Laura maintained an especially high rating throughout both the extreme highs and lows of her husband's presidency (Burrell and Frederick 2011). She was visibly supportive of her husband throughout his campaign, and even campaigned for increased stem cell research, which was a one of Bush's more contentious issues given his pro-life stance; however, this was not interpreted as being an act of Laura's own political agenda, but as her way of assisting her husband's political efforts. She also leveraged her background as a librarian to campaign for No Child Left Behind, gave money to schools that had been destroyed in Hurricane Katrina to rebuild their libraries, and spoke internationally about the importance of early education and literacy. Instead of taking credit for these initiatives, Laura would often deflect and say that she was working at the will of her husband, and frequently insisted that she was not an elected official and therefore did not have much influence (Sulfaro 2007). In these ways, Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton seem to have found opposite paths within the same role, and emphasize how the office can change depending on the person sitting in it.

Abigail Bartlet combines the feminist ambitions of Hillary with the passivity of Laura. While Abigail pursues ambitious policies and offers advice to Jed on his staffers, she understands that she needs to sacrifice her personal ambitions for the ambitions of the President, such as when she sacrifices a child labor amendment in order to pass other

amendments that the President finds more necessary. Her professional achievements outside of the office reflect Hillary's professional successes, but her willingness to forfeit her medical license proves that she prioritizes Jed's success over her own. However, her insistence that she continue her work at medical clinics and her continued campaigns in various foreign nations also show that she understands her influence and is dedicated to bringing her political passions to the nation. Overall, while she has many opinions about Jed's campaign and does what she can to make sure his political goals are fulfilled, she simultaneously fulfills her own goals and refuses to sacrifice everything for Jed's success. By fusing the traditional femininity of Laura with the professional goals of Hillary, Abigail combines the most likable traits of both first women; Laura remained likable amongst Republicans and men for her traditionally feminine aspects of care, while Hillary remained favorable with women, Democrats, and minority groups throughout Bill's terms for her ability to push the boundaries of traditional First Ladies.

Scandals

Bartlet's MS scandal, described in the First Lady section above, illustrated the downfalls of presidents failing to disclose pertinent information with the public. Clinton's presidency was plagued by scandals, and the differences in handling of scandals between Bartlet and Clinton illustrates Sorokin's ideas on the character of the president.

While the Lewinsky scandal stands out as a hallmark of Clinton's presidency, it was far from the only scandal that was handled by the administration. His longest scandal, known as the Whitewater scandal, began before his campaign, and the investigations that were initiated during this scandal continued throughout his entire presidency and ultimately resulted in him being the second sitting president to ever be impeached. Additionally, it highlighted Hillary's impact on his image, as her actions and testimonies were criticized as harshly as his were (Bennett 2002).

In 1978, the same year that Clinton was elected governor of Arkansas, the Clintons paired with the McDougal family and borrowed over \$200,000 in order to start a vacation home business. Finances for this business became complicated, as James McDougal began acquiring banks and exchanging money with the Clintons from those banks. McDougal's economic practices were initially questioned by federal regulators in 1984, and witnesses reported that Hillary was ordering the destruction of certain files in 1988. The Clinton campaign investigated the Whitewater transactions, and while they reported that the Clintons lost money on the business venture, the Federal Resolution Trust Corp. also investigated the matter and reported that, while there was no conclusive evidence, the Clintons were "potential beneficiaries." In 1993, the White House Counsel filed three years of delinquent Whitewater tax returns and committed suicide shortly afterward, leading investigators to believe that he may have known that the scandal would only get worse as more was found. White House aides were reported to have removed files from his office before investigators arrived on the scene, which led to public suspicion (Watts & Domke 2002).

As many peripheral Clinton connections were subpoenaed and asked to testify, Kenneth W. Starr took over the special counsel; Starr was a lawyer who had sat on the U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit under Ronald Reagan and was the U.S. Solicitor General under George H.W. Bush. He was appointed to continue the Whitewater investigation, and he found that much of the previous investigative work had not been up to his standards, specifically in D.C. While the previous independent counsel had prioritized time management and focused specifically on financial fraud, Starr "pushed the investigation toward a more open-ended inquest" (Wittes 2002). Starr hired many career prosecutors to help him, the most influential being W. Hickman Ewing Jr., a right-wing prosecutor who openly expressed his belief in the Clintons' criminality. As Ewing was promoted to Deputy Independent Counsel, he supported Starr in his desire to expand the investigation and also advised Starr to keep cases open for as long as possible in the hopes of finding additional evidence. Starr's obsession with

finding the truth and Ewing's deep conviction that the Clintons had participated in criminal activity resulted in six years of investigations. While the Clintons were never found guilty of criminal activity in relation to Whitewater, the counsel pursued various sexual harassment claims that were revealed throughout the investigation. Clinton's famous "I did not have sex with that woman" line came during questioning in the Whitewater case.

President Clinton was accused of various forms of sexual harassment by three different women during his presidency; one at the beginning of his term, in 1993, and two more in 1998 when the Lewinsky scandal began. Paula Jones was the first woman to come forward with sexual assault accusations. Jones' testimony ultimately led investigators to search other areas of his personal life, as Clinton had testified that he was not guilty of an inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky during his proceedings regarding Jones. Jones' allegations were dismissed in 1998, four years after the case was initiated, and her appeal was settled out of court. However, both Clinton and Lewinsky's testimonies were used as evidence for impeachment as evidence mounted that Clinton and Lewinsky had, in fact, participated in sexual engagements (Halpern 2002). Clinton was impeached on charges of perjury in 1998 and was ultimately acquitted on all counts. His job performance approval ratings hardly suffered, but his lasting reputation has been tainted forever.

Basinger and Rottinghaus identify that the two typical responses for modern presidents plagued with scandal are to cooperate or to stonewall; cooperative presidents reveal the complete information quickly, fire the accused parties, or launch internal searches, while presidents who stonewall will selectively reveal truthful information or attempt to stall investigations (Halpern 2002). Clinton largely stonewalled throughout his investigations; after his attempt to claim executive privilege was rejected, he removed evidence from Foster's desk, Hillary ordered the destruction of files, and he lied under oath about his relationship with Lewinsky during the Whitewater proceedings. Additionally, during his impeachment, he responded to the accusation that he had previously lied under oath by countering, "It depends

on what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is,” an example of desperation to stall any decision-making. However, Bartlet largely cooperated with his investigators, and admitted the reality of his condition and the choices he had made to the public in full. In an attempt to fully cooperate, C.J. informs Leo that they “need to be investigated by someone who wants to kill [them] just to watch [them] die” (3x3), and Leo agrees, proving that they welcome a thorough investigation because they know there is nothing to hide.

The variation in reactions to scandal from Clinton and Bartlet is due to the difference in ethics behind each of their scandals. Clinton’s scandals hinged on actions that were largely believed to be immoral, and his stonewalling seems to be a tactic to hide these actions so that the public would not be exposed to the bad parts of his character. His transactions for the Whitewater financial corruption, while illegal and wrong, were not as morally contemptible as an extramarital affair with a 24-year-old intern. Clinton’s repeated lying about his relationship with Lewinsky revealed that he also knew that his actions were problematic. Additionally, not only did Clinton involve himself with the Whitewater scheme and Lewinsky, but he continued both scandals for prolonged periods of time, seemingly making the same mistake over and over again without understanding the consequences of believing that the consequences would apply to him. In this way, Clinton compounded his mistakes; he messed up, he continued messing up, and then he lied about it.

Both Bartlet’s scandal and the way he handles his questioning are very different from the reality of the Clinton scandals. Bartlet’s scandal was not based upon a moral dilemma—having MS is not an ethical issue. This alone shows Sorkin’s commentary on the morality of the president and can be viewed as an ideal for presidential behavior; despite the stresses of the office or the desire to win politically, the President should be an ethically good person. However, Sorkin also allows the audience to see Bartlet’s personal regret for the scandal, as he apologizes to his staff in an energizing speech (3x3). Clinton also claimed his innocence for years while his colleagues and wife testified and were punished (the McDougals both spent time in prison for

their crimes), but Bartlet revealed his condition relatively quickly after he realized that he was incriminating others by giving them knowledge of the situation without informing the public. Through these differences, Sorkin uses Bartlet to critique Clinton's personal character and decision-making abilities; where Clinton denied responsibility for his crimes for as long as possible, Bartlet admitted his mistake to the nation as soon as he realized the cost to others was outweighing the cost to himself. Sorkin shows the difficulties of scandal, though, by illustrating the turmoil that scandal brings to Bartlet and his administration. As Bartlet shares his news with others, his relationships with his staffers are temporarily wounded, he expresses anxiety and frustration towards the situation, and his polling numbers drop (which is a departure from reality— Clinton's polling numbers improved during the Lewinsky scandal). However, despite the stress and pain that the incident causes, Bartlet's successful reelection and second term illustrate that following the morally correct path leads to success.

Comparing Bartlet with Clinton and Bush on specific topics helps align his presidential ideology with theirs, and illuminates Sorkin's argument that Bartlet is an ethically-motivated president. Through the issues of gay rights and gun legislation, the audience is taught that the president advocates for constituents' needs, and that his lack of political success is due to his inability to pursue unilateral action. When analyzed in comparison to Clinton's (lack of) political successes, this messaging may bring Clinton supporters hope, as they may maintain faith that their president is working on their behalf despite his inability to pass major policies on these issues. Bartlet's approach toward terrorist activity is strong, yet he focuses his attacks only on terrorists and tries to spare civilians, which illustrates that he is using his power only against threats. This is a large contrast from Bush's use of power, as Bush launched a war in Afghanistan that cost millions of American and Afghan lives. Bartlet's departure from Bush's actions may have taught viewers that the war was not inevitable, and that if the president had used power more sparingly, more Americans could have been saved. Through Bartlet's nominations, it is clear that he does not follow traditional party standards, but that the qualifications of his

nominees are high enough that they are supported by Congress. This contrasts with both Clinton and Bush, as both of them suffered embarrassing nomination withdrawals due to lack of experience or questionable moral character of the nominees. The presentation of the First Lady is an important part of the public's reception of the president, and while Jed and Abbey suffer interpersonal troubles when Abbey is not able to pursue her career or policy agenda, she ultimately bows to the choices that are best for Jed's political career. This image of the First Lady combines aspects of both Hillary and Laura; Abbey has Hillary's career and policy aspirations with Laura's public demeanor of a supportive and subservient spouse. Lastly, the nature of scandals in Bartlet's White House contrasts greatly with Clinton's White House, as Bartlet's scandal was not sparked from a moral flaw as all of Clinton's were. Understanding how Bartlet's actions reflected real political events illustrates how the show sought to inform viewers and illuminate their understanding of the political reality around them. By writing Bartlet as a foil to the real president, Sorkin could frame Bartlet as an alternative reality, showing the audience how personal characteristics influence a president's political action. While the arguments being made about issues are important, the scholarship surrounding the personal nature and impact of the president speaks more to the heart of *TWW*, as Bartlet is portrayed as much more than just his political decisions and actions.

4. Presidential Analysis

Greenstein

Organizational Capacity

When analyzed through Greenstein's typology of leadership qualities, Bartlet scores fairly well in every category, with his highest strengths being organizational capacity and public communication. Bartlet's staff is the heart of his administration; while Bartlet occasionally acts without the approval of his staff (such as when he announces his reelection immediately after he announces his MS diagnosis), most of his actions are thoroughly vetted and advised by multiple members of his cabinet. The heart of Bartlet's organizational capacity is his Chief of Staff, Leo McGarry, his lifelong friend and the person who inspired him to run for President. Leo brings challenges to the White House, as he has a history of alcoholism and drug addiction that Republicans try to use as proof of Democratic illegitimacy, but Bartlet and the rest of the staff protect him from these attacks as they understand the necessity of his leadership. Leo proves his central role in the administration when he energizes the President's vision in the wake of the circulation of a devastating memo (1x19). The memo accuses Leo of "driving [Bartlet] to political safe ground," and Leo and the President begin arguing about which one causes the other to stay neutral. Leo gets angry with Bartlet, and reminds him of his reasons for running while shaming him for falling into the trap of prioritizing reelection over making substantial national change. Bartlet quickly realizes that Leo is right, and vows to push his ideas further once Leo helps him realize that the staff will support him in his initiative to "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet." This slogan and the reinvigoration of the administration lead to increases in polling numbers and stronger political acts throughout the rest of the season, proving that Leo is an effective and crucial leader and advisor for Bartlet.

Leo also represents the focus on constituents by organizing an annual Big Block of Cheese Day, a tradition started by Andrew Jackson where small organizations have the opportunity to discuss potential policies with White House officials. Despite the laughable goals

of some of the constituents and the reluctance of the staff to give up the time to meet with these organizations, both Leo and Bartlet emphasize the importance of connecting with these citizens, who are working hard to create changes they believe are necessary – much like the administration. The first Big Block of Cheese day is commenced with a homemade chili dinner hosted by President Bartlet himself, where he offers a rousing toast to the power of citizens to progress the nation by believing they can solve the world's biggest problems. This offers proof of Bartlet's organizational capacity on many levels; first, he has chosen a Chief of Staff who is dedicated to the people, secondly, his Chief of Staff can empower his staffers to follow through with his plan despite their personal protests, and third, he takes the time to thank them while also inspiring them to continue working hard for his goals.

Bartlet's organizational capacity is illustrated through his reliance on Leo and the Department of Defense, mainly Admiral Fitzwallace and Dr. Nancy McNally. Bartlet himself has no military experience, but Leo served in the Vietnam War, and Leo often takes the time to explain the consequences of the military directives that Fitzwallace and McNally propose. Bartlet rarely approves military action without gaining Leo's approval first. Bartlet's reliance on Leo for military strategy is established early in the series with the episode "A Proportional Response," which is the third episode of the first season. At the end of the preceding episode, a U.S. diplomatic mission was shot down by Syrian terrorists, and Bartlet threatens to "blow them off the face of the earth" for their crimes. However, in "A Proportional Response," Leo convinces the President that attacking Syrian civilians will not balance the damage done to American citizens, and that following the Defense Department's recommendation to attack high-rated targets as opposed to civilian centers is "how the last superpower behaves". Another example of the President relying on Leo's military leadership is when Leo convinces Bartlet that Abdul ibn Shareef must be assassinated in season 3 episode 23, "Posse Comitatus." While the President has reservations about assassinating Shareef, as he is afraid it brings the U.S. down to the "league of ordinary nations," Leo convinces him that it must be done, and the President finally

concedes and orders the assassination. While Bartlet often disagrees with the Defense Department on key strategies, when Leo argues for his ideas on military strategy, Bartlet inevitably follows him. Without Leo's military experience and advising expertise, the Bartlet administration probably would have had to deal with much stronger terrorist and military activity; however, since Bartlet is able to follow Leo's logic for the amount of military power that should be employed at any time, he controls the level of response from enemy organizations.

Bartlet's staff is equally important for his success, as each of them is deeply dedicated to him and his mission while also having and voicing their individual opinions when they find it necessary. Each of his staff members has a distinct administrative role that they fulfill, but they often cross-check their ideas with one another in order to make sure that they are fulfilling their roles to the highest degree. While Bartlet demands respect from his staff, he also treats each of them with love, and he is understanding and patient when they make mistakes; for instance, he forgives Josh for insulting a Republican on TV (1x1), and he apologizes for his harsh punishment of C.J. after she makes a major gaffe at a press conference following his reveal of his diagnosis (3x3). It is very clear to the audience that the staffers not only love Bartlet as a politician, but also as a person, and that he loves them as well.

Bartlet's staff also provides him with a variety of different opinions, which fulfills another standard of Greenstein's organizational capacity. By bringing multiple staff members to different meetings and allowing them to present different opinions, Bartlet allows himself to hear multiple viewpoints in order to make fully informed decisions. While he does not always agree with his staff or allow them to pursue their own agendas, he values their ideas and schedules face-to-face discussions frequently. By using his staff as a sounding board and encouraging them to express their personal views, Bartlet also creates a respectful atmosphere, as everyone on the staff is valued.

One final example of Bartlet's organizational capacity is his decision to hire Ainsley Hayes, a Republican who has criticized the Bartlet administration, as Associate White House

Counsel. Despite initial resistance from the staff, Ainsley accepts her position, and becomes a valuable oppositional voice in the staff while also defending the administration. She mainly debates with Sam on issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, which he supports but she does not, as she argues that her rights are protected in the 14th Amendment given that she is an American citizen. When she successfully convinces Sam to reverse his position on small business fraud, and his new position is quickly adopted by Toby and eventually the President, she is astounded by her ability to influence the workings of government; while her reaction spawns a response from Sam about the fast pace at which decisions must be made, her actions also illustrate the administration's ability to change their minds on partisan issues when proven wrong, showing that the President is not just in office to serve his party, but to decide what is best for all citizens. Bartlet's organizational capacity is the hallmark of the show, hence why the show is titled *The West Wing*, which emphasizes all of the staffers who work there.

Public Communication

Bartlet's public communication skills also stand out as a highlight of his presidency, as both his public addresses and personal speeches with his staff rouse inspiration and passion from his audiences. It is revealed that the reason why Josh and Sam join Bartlet's campaign is because Josh was deeply moved by a speech Bartlet gave on the campaign trail, where he responded to a question regarding an agricultural bill by admitting that he had made a mistake by passing that policy (2x1). Josh is so moved by the then-future president's honesty that he relays to Sam that he's found "the real deal," and both of them quit their jobs to join the campaign. Another moment of emotional communication comes when Bartlet responds to a terrorist attack at a college swim meet by praising students who ran into the fire to save other victims and calling upon "American heroes" to "do what is hard" and "achieve what is great" (4x2). He also proves that he can improvise when he debates the Republican nominee for his second term of his presidency (4x6). The Republican gives a perfect "ten-word answer" to a debate question, which creates an ideal soundbite for his supporters and advertisers to tout as

his political promises, but Bartlet lashes out against the ten-word answer as a concept, claiming that ten words is not enough to explain any sort of plan or process. By doing this, he frames his political opponent as a liar without having to debate his actual policies, and he handily wins the debate and the presidency. While Bartlet is a skilled improviser and can deliver rousing speeches on the fly, he also rehearses with his staff, and Toby and Sam meticulously craft every word of his bigger public addresses. For example, his televised address about the possible landing of a NASA space probe on Mars is run through his entire communications staff before the final message is solidified (2x9). While he makes occasional flubs, such as when he accidentally insults a Republican on television (3x17) or when he remarks on the “magnificent vista” of an indoor lecture hall (1x19), public communication is a major asset of the Bartlet administration.

Cognitive Style

Bartlet’s intellect is unquestionable, and he tends to start with understanding the details of an issue before he understands the larger concepts. While he often needs Leo to help him understand the big picture of his policies, he does not make a decision without full comprehension of the consequences and the alternatives. Bartlet graduated summa cum laude from Notre Dame and earned his masters and Ph.D. from the London School of Economics; however, it is mentioned that he was accepted to many Ivy League schools and chose not to attend due to his interest in theology, proving that he could have joined the ranks of the Ivy League-educated presidents. His knowledge of the Bible becomes one of his greatest strengths, as he uses Biblical examples and and parables to explain his ideas, such as when he quizzes a Chinese man seeking asylum to ensure that his faith is genuine (2x8). He also uses his knowledge of scripture to chastise Dr. Jenna Jacobs, a right-wing radio host who uses the Bible to defend her homophobic beliefs (2x3). However, his knowledge extends far past Biblical facts, and includes many seemingly random trivia facts that Bartlet enjoys using to quiz his staffers. Throughout a poker game with his staffers, Bartlet frequently interjects the conversation with

trivia questions that Josh classifies as “inane,” as he asks which fruit has seeds on its outside, what are the fourteen punctuation marks in Standard English grammar, and what are the three words in the English language that begin with the letters “DW” (1x6). This exercise in particular proves that Bartlet enjoys his intellect not only in order to defeat his political enemies, but also to assure that his staff is performing at their peak mental capacity. Bartlet’s brilliance also adds to his characterization as a father to both his real family and his staffers; while deciding how to interfere in a Chinese crisis, Bartlet maintains two separate games of chess with both Toby and Sam, which ends with Bartlet telling Sam that he will run for president one day (3x15). Bartlet’s ability to play both chess games while carrying two separate conversations about policy proves his incredible mental ability and illustrates the emphasis he puts on furthering the education and intellect of his staffers. His supportive relationship with Sam proves that their relationship is more similar to a father and a son than a boss and an employee.

Bartlet’s intellect is a crucial part of his characterization due to his opposition from the “homespun” portrayals of Clinton and Bush. Despite his extensive political experience, Clinton presented himself as a traditional family man, harkening back to his Arkansas roots to maintain a presidential character that he believed was more relatable to constituents. Bush chose a similar portrayal, also despite his family’s long political history, and used a homegrown Texan image throughout his campaigns and presidency despite his Ivy League education. Sorkin seemingly rebukes the idea that presidents must present as “common men” in order to provide leadership, and instead shows the positive impact that an intellectual, highly-educated president can have on the country. By framing his decisions through parables and drawing on quotes from historical figures to guide him through difficult moments, Bartlet illustrates how a strong intellect can lead to strong leadership, and Sorkin argues that being able to think beyond the immediacy of the nation due to a strong education makes Bartlet a better leader for America. Bartlet’s thought processes are crucial to his personality and his presidential style, and Sorkin

uses Bartlet to argue that advanced thinking and elevated intellectual status are important for a successful president.

While some earlier episodes portray Bartlet as not understanding the larger impact of his actions (i.e. when he wants to begin war with Syria due to his personal connection with one of the passengers on the plane they had attacked (1x2)), it becomes clearer that he grasps the details of policy as the show continues, mostly due to the increased terrorism in the US. Leo plays a crucial role in helping Bartlet understand his role, as Leo often has to remind Bartlet that he was elected to make difficult choices and perform difficult actions; this occurs when Bartlet assassinates Shareef (3x22) or when he launches a military rescue of federal drug agents who had been taken hostage in Colombia (2x14). However, Leo rarely has to explain what the issues are, proving that Bartlet usually understands what is happening politically, though it is difficult for Bartlet to understand how his choices will affect the world. Bartlet proves his political knowledge when he vetoes the repeal of the estate tax (3x4), and he responds to his staff's trepidations of vetoing the bill without knowledge of the Republican voting numbers by stating that "If the House overrides the veto, we are weak." This statement gives the audience insight that the president understands the political consequences of his actions not going as planned, but that he feels strongly enough that his ideas are correct that he is willing to take a political risk to defend them. While he understands the stakes of his decision for the country, he is also comprehending how the decision reflects on his administration, which proves that he fulfills Greenstein's ideal of strong cognitive style.

Bartlet illustrates his ability to see larger concepts, however, as he encourages Sam to "See the whole board" when he is considering his next move (3x14). Bartlet only offers his support and encouragement of Sam's potential future presidential campaign after Sam correctly guesses the outcome of the crisis with China, proving that he has been able to consider all of the factors of the situation and analyze the larger picture. This interaction proves that Bartlet sees big-picture thinking as crucial to the role of the presidency.

Emotional Intelligence

Bartlet's emotional intelligence is mostly high, although some big mistakes lead to both political and interpersonal issues. Season two provides a variety of flashbacks to Bartlet's presidential campaign, where he is seen as gruff, frustrated, and untrusting of his staff, though his demeanor changes when Josh's father dies the night that Bartlet wins the primary (2x1-2). Instead of celebrating his victory, Bartlet follows Josh to the airport, thanks him for his work on the campaign, and reassures him that his father would be very proud of the work that he has done. His emotional intelligence is also explored in his relationship with his personal aide Charlie Young, a young black man whose mother died while on patrol as a police officer. While Charlie initially meets Bartlet in a stressful moment (1x3), and Bartlet snaps at Charlie due to the situation, Bartlet later offers Charlie the role of personal aide. From then on, Bartlet acts as a father to Charlie, even bestowing him with his father's Thanksgiving turkey knife, which was a gift to his great-grandfather from Paul Revere (2x8). When a white supremacist group attempts to assassinate Charlie due to his relationship with Zoey (1x22), Bartlet does not stop his support of Charlie or Charlie's relationship with his daughter, proving that he values Charlie over his own safety. This is a display of emotional intelligence that proves that while Bartlet clearly respects the presidency, he respects his relationships more.

Another example of Bartlet's emotional intelligence is when he invokes the 25th Amendment after Zoey is kidnapped because he knows that he will not be able to perform the duties of the presidency to his fullest extent (4x22). After Bartlet is alerted that Zoey has disappeared following her graduation from Georgetown, Bartlet is flustered and distracted while others ask him for his decisions on next steps, and after two meetings in the Situation Room, he asks Leo to assemble the Cabinet and find Glen Allen Walken, a Republican who is Speaker of the House, who would be next in line for Presidential succession since there is no Vice President at the time. Bartlet then invokes the 25th Amendment, removing himself from power because he believes he can not act as President with the emotional turmoil of his daughter's disappearance.

Although surrendering his presidential powers brings chaos to his staff, he knows that his compromised decision-making ability could lead to major international trouble, and he also knows that he is unable to act impartially as President without knowing his daughter's location or status of her being. His ability to prioritize the nation over his presidential power proves his emotional intelligence by showing that he will not risk the nation's well-being due to his personal trauma.

However, Bartlet's emotional intelligence is not always perfect, with the biggest example of his flaws being his failure to disclose his MS diagnosis with the public during his campaign, which puts him and his staff at risk of impeachment and jeopardizes his chances of reelection. As Bartlet increasingly alerts his staffers to his condition, he realizes that he is incriminating them, and soon after he alerts the public in order to relieve the staff of having to keep his secret at the risk of their jobs (2x22). While he later apologizes for having kept his true health condition a secret, his initial meetings with his staffers do not reflect this remorse (at least not verbally). His meeting with Toby illustrates his lack of preparation for the reactions he would get from his confession, as Toby's anger at Bartlet for the many layers of lies that were used to mask his diagnosis spark fury from the President, and Bartlet then yells at Toby and accuses him of not actually caring about his well-being (2x18). This incident leads to an icy period between the President and Toby that lasts throughout the rest of the season. While Bartlet's reveal of his diagnosis obviously requires emotional strength, his lack of understanding as to why the staff is upset that they were not aware of the situation and his delay in apologizing for lying to them shows that he is not a morally perfect character.

Additionally, his decision to announce reelection without consulting his staff or his wife is another moment of weakness for his emotional intelligence, as it results in him and his wife arguing throughout most of the rest of the third season. Bartlet is inspired to run for reelection in the aftermath of the passing of his lifelong friend and assistant, Mrs. Landingham (2x21). As he reflects on the lessons she has taught him about advocating for the people who need it most,

he realizes that his leadership as president is still needed, and he makes the decision to run for a second term. However, it is then revealed that Abbey and Jed had agreed that he would only serve one term in order to preserve his health (3x1). Running for reelection also increased the chances that Congress would investigate him and his staffers, which could have resulted in bigger consequences for his administration, but Bartlet is so committed to his service of the country that he maintains his position, and refuses to discuss alternatives with his wife. Mrs. Bartlet then spends most of the first half of the third season traveling, and it is clear that she and Jed are having interpersonal issues until they have a conversation regarding her medical license during her birthday party (3x15). When Jed reveals that he has tried to pull strings to allow Abbey to keep her medical license, she tells him that she will voluntarily relinquish it until they leave the White House, signaling her support of his second campaign and ending their argument. Bartlet thanks her for her decision and tells her that he loves her. The strength of Abbey and Jed's relationship is clear from the beginning of the series, and is illustrated by her choice to break medical protocol and secretly administer treatment to a family member. Due to the existing evidence that Abbey would support Jed through thick and thin, his choice to announce re-election despite their agreement and without warning shows a lapse of emotional intelligence on his part, as he then suffers frustration and stress in the aftermath of his decision. While they are able to work through this difference of opinion and return to a loving marriage, this is another example of Bartlet's imperfection.

Political Skill

Although Bartlet's political outcomes are not Sorkin's priority in the storylines of the episodes, Bartlet's political skill is showcased just enough to maintain audience belief in the ability of government officials to achieve their goals. Bartlet's organizational capacity serves him again in this regard, as he can rely on his staffers to whip votes necessary to fulfill public promises (1x4) and frame his opponents as unqualified and disorganized (3x23). His intellect also helps him defeat opponents in debates, illustrated in his improvised debate response

condemning the vagueness and uselessness of common current debate answers (4x6). Additionally, his political skill becomes more apparent during seasons three and four, when the terrorist activity of Qumar becomes a central issue for the administration while he balances the investigation of his MS cover-up and his reelection campaign. His biggest use of political skill comes when he decides to order the secret assassination of Shareef, as he understands that Shareef's death may bring retaliatory strikes from extremist forces but is assured by Leo that it is his job as leader of the free world to remove a leader of hatred from the world (3x23). While he does not get political credit for this assassination, as information that the US fulfilled this order is classified, Leo helps calm Qumari relations after the assassination, securing peace in the Middle East (4x6). Bartlet's use of political skill for the sake of the world's well-being over his own political clout continues to support the idea that Sorkin believes that politicians should be motivated by their desire to do good, not for the sake of politics as a career.

Prioritizing the good of the world over the president's own power is Sorkin's critique of common political strategies. Greenstein and other political scholars would argue that the enhancement of the role of the presidency should be the priority of the office, as increasing political power is the way to maintain the president's ability to get things done. Those scholars argue that as the other branches attempt to increase their power in order to pursue their agendas without barriers, the president must do the same, even at the expense of personal political goals. The fact that Bartlet prefers to solve current issues at the expense of political power is Sorkin's argument that political skill is necessary, but that its current form benefits the president over the constituents, and that moral presidents would ignore that philosophy and focus on solving issues instead.

There is ample evidence that Bartlet has viewed politics and government as tools for positive change and that his mission for the presidency has been to do good for the nation and the world. While lamenting the loss of Mrs. Landingham and coming to terms with the reality of having to reveal his diagnosis, he asks for the Secret Service to allow him a private moment in

the cathedral, where he calls God a “son of a bitch” and discusses his political wins in order to question why God has given him such grief (2x22):

Have I displeased you, you feckless thug? 3.8 million new jobs - that wasn't good? Bailed out Mexico, increased foreign trade? 30 million new acres for conservation? Put Mendoza on the bench? We're not fighting a war - I've raised three children - that's not enough to buy me out of the doghouse?... I was your servant here on Earth, your messenger. I did your work.

Through this monologue, Bartlet proves to the audience that he has no secret agenda for his presidency, but that he finds the executive office the best place to spread the love of God to as many people as possible. Additionally, he occasionally wields his political power to do good when he knows the political backlash could be strong, such as when he sends troops into Haiti to rescue American and Canadian citizens despite the possibility of inciting conflict with Haitian Colonel Bazan, who has mobilized the army against citizens protesting for freedom (s3x2).

While the Haitian crisis did not escalate further into a war, Bartlet's decisions showed that he was willing to involve the US in peacekeeping missions in order to keep civilians of all countries safe. He also understands that he must wield power even when it is against his ethical code, such as when he orders Shareef's assassination because Leo tells him that it is his duty as the man who was elected (3x23), proving that he does not prioritize his ethics over the good of the country. Bartlet also does not dwell on his victories for long, and instead reflects on how he could push boundaries further to create an even greater nation, which is characterized by his catchphrase, “What's next?”

Vision

While each episode portrays the administration working to solve political problems, and the personal beliefs of Bartlet and his staff are often discussed and debated, the reasoning behind their beliefs is usually a singular incident or experience as opposed to a guiding vision, and the policy outcome of these discussions is not always disclosed. By highlighting the

discussions surrounding policies as opposed to the policies themselves, Sorkin argues that presidents should release political and party expectations and fulfill the needs of the people as inspired by the changing realities of the world, not by the party's traditional goals. Additionally, he argues that morally good politicians do not work for the benefit of their own political careers, but for the good of the people, although he implies that political success will come to ethical politicians.

From the beginning of the show, the audience experiences many discussions and debates about a host of issues that affect the world, including Don't Ask Don't Tell legislation (1x19), school vouchers (1x18), gun control (1x4), the sale of AIDS medication to third-world nations (2x4), nuclear weapons (2x6), and terrorism (recurring throughout the third and fourth seasons), along with many others. While the discussions about these issues are often emotional and dramatic highlights of the episode, the actual policy outcomes are rarely given much importance, if they are discussed at all. For example, despite the discussion between Fitzwallace and his generals where Fitzwallace argues for LGBT inclusion (1x19), the actual policy outcome of trying to repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell is never mentioned again in the show. Through this, Sorkin argues that the discussions and intent are what are most important in an administration; while the political fight might not be successful, leaders should care about the needs of the people and fight to protect those needs. Additionally, Bartlet's devout Catholicism serves to enhance his liberalism, which is best illustrated on the issue of homosexuality with his verbal defeat of Dr. Jenna Jacobs (2x3). Considering that conservative opponents of homosexual rights tend to cite biblical passages and devotion to religion as the evidence that gay people do not deserve the same rights as straight people, Bartlet's use of the Bible to serve his liberal ideas eradicates the conservative argument. However, despite Bartlet's conservative smackdown, no policies are changed or created, and his intent in using his knowledge of religion is not with the intent of leading others to join him in his faith, proving that his vision is not a Catholic nation. Bartlet uses his Catholicism as a moral compass, and just as he prioritizes values throughout his

political decision-making, he uses his religion to guide his vision. The lack of political change regarding Don't Ask Don't Tell illustrates that the outcome of the discussions is not the emphasis of the show, the discussions themselves are the paramount importance.

Discussions prove to be the most important action taken for other political issues as well. When Leo's daughter Mallory, a public school teacher and Sam's almost-girlfriend, finds a memo that Sam had written defending the use of government vouchers that cover private school tuition for public school students, she and Sam debate the details of public school funding (1x18). While Sam had written on the position that students should be able to go to the best schools available, which in many low-income areas is a private school, Mallory argues that the funding given to cover the tuition should be given to public schools in order to help them improve. Although they spend the entire episode in a heated debate, Leo finally admits to Mallory that Sam's paper had been written as opposition research. Sam admits that he was debating her for the sake of the debate, as he personally agrees with her that public schools should receive the biggest portion of the federal budget because education should be the US's chief concern. However, education policy and school vouchers are not discussed on the show again, which implies that policy changes were not pursued by the administration. When other staffers are given the chance to speak about their ideas on different political issues, Sorkin also implies that those ideas align with Bartlet's ideas, and that the collective will to do what is best for the country from the entire administration is blanketed as Bartlet's vision.

Part of the reason why Bartlet's political vision is not entirely clear is because his voice is one of many that are heard on the show. As was discussed earlier, Leo's viewpoints are crucial to Bartlet's decision-making, and he advises the designated survivor for his second State of the Union speech to also pick a best friend who is "smarter than [himself]" for a Chief of Staff should he have to take over the presidency (1x12). Additionally, many of the staffers, such as C.J., Josh, Sam, Leo, and Toby are consistently given equal time in the spotlight to discuss their beliefs on issues, and some of those issues are never discussed by the President himself. Judging

by his reliance on his organizational capacity, it can be argued that Bartlet's vision is the collaboration of all of his staff's visions, making a single thread of motion unclear. For example, after hearing about groundbreaking research advances, Bartlet is inspired to include a promise to cure cancer within 10 years in his State of the Union speech (3x11). However, Sam and Toby discuss how despite the fact that a promise of that nature would poll well and help Bartlet's chances of reelection, and the fulfillment of that policy would be helpful to many Americans, he can not include that statement in the speech because it is highly unlikely to be true. In this instance, Bartlet looks to expand his vision, but his staffers' visions are included in the final product of his address. Despite the fact that cancer treatment has been a central issue of the episode, it is not mentioned in the final draft of the speech, which proves that he prioritizes truthful communication over his polling numbers.

Additionally, Bartlet's idea to include eradicating cancer in the State of the Union does not come from a personal history with the disease, but from a discussion he and his wife have where he is informed that there is a breakthrough in cancer research. While it is highly possible that Bartlet had a personal attachment to cancer, as it is a disease that affects such a large number of people, it is simply his desire to do what is best for the people that inspires him to try and pursue that policy. His guiding principle for decision-making is his desire to do good, and he is able to change his ideas on what is the best decision because he does not have an ultimate vision in mind; while curing cancer would save millions of lives, the heartbreak and frustration caused by an unfulfilled promise to cure cancer would outweigh than the political gain of making a promise he can not keep. Through this example, Sorkin argues that a flexible President who prioritizes doing good over political status is the most moral President, as he will remain open and available to hearing and reacting to criticism instead of only focusing on pleasing his party. By allowing his staffers to express their opinions and remaining available to alternative policies and ideas, Bartlet removes his presidential ego, and prioritizes his role as a problem-solver over his role as a politician who serves for the benefit of his party and his personal career.

While he still needs to wield his power and achieving political victories is still important, as political power is only useful if it is utilized, through the episode model that emphasizes discussion over political victory, Sorkin argues that politicians should be working as servants of the people.

Overall, Bartlet carries many of the presidential qualities that Greenstein highlights, but Sorkin highlights Bartlet's flexibility over his need to fit into previous presidential models. Bartlet's biggest strength is organizational capacity; his Chief of Staff advises him in all areas and has experience in areas where Bartlet does not, such as the military. Bartlet weighs Leo's opinions heavily before making his own choices, and often ends up following Leo's recommendations. The rest of the staff is also highly valuable to Bartlet, and they act as a coordinated team that works together to solve problems and give the president advice. Sorkin highlights the staff within the show in order to express how crucial their work is to the administration. Leo also helps Bartlet understand the details of policies, and Bartlet's ability to understand-big picture ideas helps him as a public speaker, as he delivers consistently inspiring speeches. Bartlet's political successes are not emphasized during Sorkin's seasons, but where Bartlet does not express a strong political vision, Sorkin argues that the lack of vision is a strength, because it allows Bartlet to respond to the nation instead of feeling pressured to commit to campaign promises. Greenstein argues that emotional intelligence is the most important characteristic of a president, and while Bartlet shows some flaws in that category, overall his emotional intelligence is very high, especially when dealing with his staffers. Because of the framing of each of these categories, while Bartlet might not seem very successful in political skill or vision according to Greenstein, Sorkin argues that Bartlet's variance from the institutional norm is a strength, while still illustrating that Bartlet is a successful president. These categories help support the idea that Bartlet is not aiming to completely overhaul the office of the presidency, but can re-prioritize previous presidencies to create his own presidential model.

Howell

Bartlet does not fit Howell's model for a president pursuing power; though he makes strides to increase the office of the president, he does not work to expand international power in the public's view. When viewed in relationship to Howell's idea of the impossible balance that Presidents must maintain to please their constituents (using enough power to seem effective, without using so much power that they seem dictatorial), Bartlet wants to use more power than his staff thinks is acceptable at the beginning of his presidency. For example, Bartlet listens to Leo's advice that he should refrain from launching a large military attack in response to the Syrian army shooting down an American plane (1x3). Although Bartlet wanted to extend his power by attacking the Syrians, he is made aware by his advisors that a dramatic response would bring more harm than good, and he is convinced to wield a smaller military mission instead. He expresses similar restraint when he and Toby discuss hate groups, specifically West Virginia White Pride, the terrorist group that attempted to assassinate Charlie (2x3). Bartlet claims that while he frequently considers attacking the headquarters of the organization, "it gets a little better every day". In these instances in the earlier seasons, the audience gets a glimpse of Bartlet's personal desire to use immense power, though he shows restraint at the urging of his staffers.

However, his mentality towards power changes in the later seasons as terrorist activity increases. Season three opens with a Haitian crisis, and Bartlet agrees to launch a rescue mission in order to save American citizens who are being targeted by the rebel group (3x1). Although this is a display of power from the US military, considering that it is simply a rescue mission and the media is also covering the MS investigations and the upcoming election, it was likely not very noteworthy to many citizens. However, in response to a targeted attack on two Americans in Israel, Bartlet responds that he wants "some temperature-cooling options", and despite the fact that he is emotionally affected by the loss of the two boys, he understands that a retaliatory attack would lead to bigger issues (3x4). Instead of engaging the military, Bartlet calls

the Israeli Chairman and barter a diplomatic exchange. The middle of the third season shows Bartlet in a number of situations where he almost uses power, but the situation is resolved peacefully before he can do so; he does not deploy a rescue mission for a submarine in North Korea because it is located before action is necessary (3x6), he renews an arms exchange with Qumar despite their history of domestic terrorism (3x8), and he helps negotiate a peace treaty between China and Taiwan (3x14). However, as evidence mounts of Qumari Defense Minister Abdul ibn Shareef's leadership of a terrorist organization, Leo convinces Bartlet that Shareef should be assassinated, and he is secretly murdered on his trip home from America. Given that the assassination must be a covert operation in order to reduce the probability of retaliation, Bartlet is not given public credit for this assassination, and the rest of the government seems wary that he has not used enough power to maintain public support; the representative from Israel expresses his frustration to Leo that "right now, we're losing" (4x4). However, Bartlet maintains cover on Shareef's assassination, but exercises military power to settle the genocide in Equatorial Kundra. While the troops are originally dispatched as a peacekeeping force (4x15), when three soldiers are taken hostage, he then dispatches a separate rescue mission to force the Kundraese government to comply with the peace treaty (4x17).

However, Bartlet's biggest departure from Howell's theory comes when he relinquishes all presidential power by invoking the 25th amendment (4x22). Zoey's kidnapping puts Bartlet in a crucial situation, as they cannot locate her nor do they know who orchestrated the crime. Bartlet could have attempted total war on all enemies. He could have bombed Kundra and Qumar because those were the most likely perpetrators, he could have threatened nuclear activity against whomever was found to have been guilty, or he could have called for any other display of immense presidential power, and the military probably would have complied. However, instead of considering these options, he decides to remove himself from the position, stripping himself of all the power he could have used. In this instance, Bartlet removes himself as a person from the power given to the office of the President, as he is able to understand that

his emotions should not impact the way he uses the position. Through this decision, Bartlet works against Howell's idea, and despite the fact that the public might want the president to use extreme power in the wake of this incident, Bartlet does not fulfill their desires, which results in an overall better outcome for the country. Bartlet's restraint is an argument against the actions of George W. Bush.

In the wake of 9/11, Bush ordered total retaliation against all terrorist nations, and authorized preemptive attacks against known terrorist organizations in an effort to showcase the power of the American military in order to deter future attacks. Howell argues that Bush's response is to be expected of American presidents, who look to pursue increases in power in order to assure their constituents that they are working to achieve their goals, which in Bush's case was the safety of the nation— and his record-setting approval ratings prove that the country supported him in his power-wielding. However, as the initial retaliation turned into a prolonged conflict with hundreds of thousands of casualties, the American people became frustrated with the prolonged military action, no longer sure of who or why they were fighting. Sorkin's removal of Bartlet from office illustrates that Bartlet would not have made the same choices as Bush, which could have led to a less deadly outcome on both sides. Instead of a strong immediate response, which could have garnered him immediate polling numbers that were as strong as Bush's, Bartlet takes a break to gather his emotions, and once he has fully restored his mental health, he resumes the office and is able to balance the options of power with an even hand. While Sorkin proves through other interactions that he is aware of the public's desire for the president to wield power, through all of Bartlet's actions Sorkin argues that presidents should largely ignore that desire and, as Bartlet tells Sam, "see the whole board" when making military decisions, especially when high emotions are involved.

Bartlet shows presidential restraint in his role of Commander in Chief, but he makes other strides within the office to increase his power, the biggest example being his choice to nominate his own two members of the Federal Election Commission (FEC), despite protocol

where each party's leadership nominates a candidate (1x20). Bartlet sees an opportunity to mobilize aggressive campaign finance reform by nominating two commissioners who agree with his stance against soft money contributions, although he initially doubts that they will have a successful confirmation when he refers to the nominations as "dangling [his] feet in the water" (1x19). Leo and Josh have no faith that the initiative will have positive results, but they look into possibilities anyway. While the staff's low morale is a direct response to a scathing report about the ineffectiveness of Bartlet and his staff that has been circulating the White House, both the report and the staff are lamenting the lack of action that the President has taken; Bartlet's favorability polls have dropped 5% in the past week because he has not done anything, and the only victory that the administration has had in the past year was the confirmation of Roberto Mendoza as Supreme Court Justice (1x9). This incident launches Leo and Bartlet into an argument about the status of the administration, with Leo expressing frustration with Bartlet's prioritization of re-election, which forces him to try and cater to future voters as opposed to trying to solve problems, which could alienate voters but would result in lasting change for the party. Bartlet vows to increase his use of power and the staff pledges their loyalty.

However, despite their fiery argument and the optimistic resolution, his power-using habits (or lack thereof) largely do not change, and when he decides on power-wielding actions in subsequent episodes it is often at Leo's urging. However, his discussion with Leo does not fully signal his desire to wield more presidential power, as the slogan "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" can also be seen as a statement supporting his choices to strategically utilize power despite the expectations of the people. When Bartlet repeats that acting on his own behalf "is more important than reelection"(1x19), he is not arguing that an increase in the power of the presidency is his priority, but that creating meaningful change on the issues he cares most about is the reason he entered government. The slogan itself signals that Bartlet is not aiming to follow the pursuits of previous presidents; he is choosing to "Be Bartlet," implying that he will have a different approach to power than his predecessors.

Howell's theory helps explain how Bartlet uses the powers of the office, and Sorkin uses Bartlet to argue that power is necessary, but should be used sparingly. Bartlet does not give much focus to expanding the power of the presidency as an institution, which can be interpreted as Sorkin not seeing presidential expansion as a necessary concern. Similarly, Bartlet does not display power externally very often, despite Howell's argument that the American people demand that their president uses power often in order to prove that the office is productive. Additionally, when Bartlet displays power, it is often for the good of the American people, not for the sake of political benefit. Overall, through Howell's lens, Bartlet breaks from previous presidents and does not constantly seek power in order to fulfill his desires, which aligns with his lack of Greenstein's vision. Since the president does not have lofty campaign promises to fulfill, he is able to use power only when he finds it is best for the people, and does not need to do so in order to create policies outside of the checks and balances model.

Skowronek

Bartlet's placement in political time is subject to debate, as the policies and party affiliations of his predecessors are unclear. However, due to Bartlet's centrist policies and lack of strong party affiliation, as well as his reflection of real political time, I believe that Bartlet is a preemptive president. Preemptive presidents are categorized by finding "a third way" in the two-party system, as they work to combine the strongest beliefs of both parties in order to satisfy voters who are exhausted by the battle of the two extremes. They attempt to redefine party goals by moving the party to the center in order to maintain support, and work against traditional party ideals in small ways to show that they are a new face of the party. Their attempt to push the party to the middle can be interpreted as lack of loyalty on both sides, and their distancing from the powerful party machine usually results in personal disaster, as was the case with Clinton and Nixon. Additionally, in an attempt to maintain favorability, preemptive presidents are unlikely to become engaged in prolonged wars; however, lack of foreign interference

increases voter focus on domestic affairs, which can lead to increased scrutiny of the presidency and lower approval. While Bartlet's political ideology is centrist, and he does encounter personal scandal while in office, his ability to interact with foreign nations without engaging in warfare saves him from the pitfalls of most preemptive presidents, allowing him to maintain favorability despite his precarious position in political time.

The history preceding Bartlet's presidency is not thoroughly explained, making his placement in regards to a regime more difficult to ascertain. *TWW* fanatics largely agree that according in the show's "alternate universe," the history of the U.S. follows its real timeline through the presidency of Richard Nixon. However, every president through Ronald Reagan is mentioned at some point in the series, proving that idea is not entirely true. The audience learns Bartlet is not originally the party's favorite candidate, as his defeat of Hoynes in the primary was viewed as an upset. Although he obviously wins the presidential election, he does not do so with a majority, having only received 48% of the popular vote (1x19). Leo refers to this statistic as being elected "without a mandate"; this references presidential analysis that argues that when the president is elected with an overwhelming majority, the public then mandates him to carry out his election promises. Because Bartlet did not win with a majority, Leo believes that Bartlet has more freedom to follow his own policy ideas once he is in office because the public's expectations for his actions are lower. The lack of a mandate could also occur because Bartlet is attempting to find a middle road, and his centrist policies picked up voters from both sides who had different draws to his presidency, meaning that there is no clear vision for the goals his administration will achieve.

While Bartlet's attitude, rhetorical style, and personality give him the grandeur of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, two reconstructive presidents, he does not dream of overhauling the party or dramatically changing the political atmosphere, but of working within the existing structure to create change. This proves that he is not a reconstructive president. Additionally, given that the presidency is not failing, and the

Democratic party is not collapsing under Bartlet's power, Bartlet is not a disjunctive president. Bartlet does not take office with the mandate to fix the party or the office, and instead can focus on a variety of issues as they come into the national consciousness. Since he can wield the power to increase employment, expand conservation efforts, and successfully operate foreign affairs, Bartlet is not a disjunctive president. I do not believe that Bartlet is an articulative president, as an articulative president strives to continue the work of the regime, and Bartlet never mentions his predecessor nor any model that he is attempting to follow; he is forging his own path, and wants the rest of the political world to "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet." Bartlet's independence as president and as his lack of party grooming place him in the preemptive president category.

Where preemptive presidents usually do not engage in foreign warfare, which leads to increased scrutiny of domestic policies (and usually the uncovering of scandals), Bartlet engages with foreign nations as a response to terrorist activity, which helps alleviate pressure from his domestic agenda. When Bartlet and his administration are being investigated for his non-disclosure of his MS diagnosis, Bartlet decides to launch a rescue mission in Haiti. The staff discusses how the foreign intervention may be seen as an attempt to distract the public from the ongoing scandal; however, the mission is successfully completed, and any public reaction that may have involved public discussion of Bartlet's need to use foreign intervention as a veil is never mentioned. After his intervention in Haiti, Bartlet continues to use military power in Equatorial Kundra and Qumar, as well as addressing terrorist threats at home, such as threats to firebomb black churches in Tennessee (3x9) and the bombing at a swim meet at Kennison State University (4x2). Although Bartlet's political time is preemptive, the political events happening globally allow him to escape the pitfalls that usually trap preemptive presidents and plague their legacies with memories of failure.

Additionally, the evolution of Bartlet after season four provides insight into his presidency and commentary on Sorkin's point of view. After Sorkin left the production, the new creators no longer wrote *TWW* as a response to real events, and instead planned storylines and

character arcs season-by-season in a more traditional television writing style. Bartlet becomes a much more successful president in terms of policy in these later seasons; he achieves groundbreaking Social Security reform with bipartisan support (5x12), negotiates a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine (6x2), and balances the polarization of the Supreme Court by coordinating the nomination of a conservative justice in conjunction with the nomination of a liberal chief justice (5x12). While Sorkin focused on the difficulties and roadblocks of being a preemptive president, as Bartlet does not have many policy achievements, the later writers emphasized the bipartisan victories that are possible when a president attempts to pursue a centrist political agenda. Although these episodes are not written as a response to political events in real time, they arguably respond to the political frustration of the 1990s and early 2000s in general, as many voters had become frustrated with and distrustful of government. Additionally, these episodes reflect the successful policies of other preemptive presidents; Nixon and Clinton both had political successes despite their positioning outside of the party (Skowronek 2011).

Skowronek himself called the 1990s “perpetual preemption”; instead of feeling tied to lofty expectations of either party or of the office, Skowronek notes that presidents had been forgoing political time in exchange for the “third way” throughout the decade (Skowronek 1998). Given that Bartlet’s presidency began in the 1990s and was written to reflect the current political scene, it makes sense that he followed a perpetual model. Bartlet did not have many substantial policy changes, he refrained from using strong military power whenever possible, and he responded to terrorism and terrorist threats, which were the most important issues in real America at the time. Bartlet’s ability to organize the priorities of the nation and act accordingly proves he is a preemptive president and speaks to his effectiveness as a leader.

Impact on Understanding the American Presidency

TWW argues that that the president should prioritize the safety and prosperity of the American people over fulfilling party or personal aspirations. His low score in Greenstein’s

“vision” category is framed as a strength by the show, as he keeps himself available to address the most pressing needs of the country without feeling responsible for fulfilling campaign promises that may no longer be the most relevant issues. He uses his power when necessary, but does not overexert the military so that he can maintain control over foreign affairs instead of getting embroiled in prolonged warfare. While preemptive presidencies are usually categorized by inevitable failure, Bartlet wields the most positive aspects of preemptive political time, such as a lack of party pressures and the ability to create an independent political path, in order to make decisions that he believes are best instead of responding to party interests. However, the Democratic party does not have unified party interests to the same extent as the Republican party, so Sorkin could also be arguing that the most moral and constituent-driven presidents are Democratic presidents.

Polarization scholars argue that the Republican and Democratic parties have very different structures, which makes comparison of the strength of the parties difficult. President Ronald Reagan was a Republican reconstructive president, and he overhauled the party to focus on conservative ideals, which united all of the interests of the party into three main pillars: “free-market capitalism, a hawkish approach to national defense, and moral traditionalism” (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). This “three-legged stool” streamlined the party’s platform, and the emphasis on conservative ideals has become a rallying cry for Republican politicians, who gain support when they claim they are inspired to follow conservative goals. However, the Democratic party model is considered an extended coalition, with a variety of interest groups coming together under an umbrella of liberalism. This makes it more difficult for politicians to act in the name of the party, as the party has a wide variety of initiatives and interests. Additionally, part of Reagan’s strengthening of the conservative label came from his weakening of the liberal label, as he equated conservatism with American freedom, strength, and progress while denouncing liberalism as subversive and anti-patriotic, which affected its favorability with older voters who had lived through international wars (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). While

liberal ideals are hard to reference due to their quantity and diversity, referencing liberalism also carries a largely negative connotation among many Americans, which makes it a damaging strategy for politicians. For this reason, Democratic presidents are less likely to reference their ideology when discussing their justification for policies, and instead focus on the impact that the policies will have or the necessity for change in America.

Bartlet's political flexibility is inherently liberal, as he is able to pursue a variety of different initiatives without having to justify them with an ideology or specific mindset. For example, where the Republican party would have preferred a groomed and consistent party supporter on the Supreme Court, Bartlet is free to nominate Mendoza, despite the fact that Mendoza has some controversial opinions and is not deeply dedicated to "liberal ideals". Although the Republican party believes in a strong and active military, the Democratic party understands that the need for military intervention is based on circumstance, and Bartlet is supported when he uses military power. I believe that this understanding is why *TWW* is considered a liberal fantasy despite the fact that Bartlet himself is not an incredibly liberal president; Republicans prioritize a president who upholds conservatism, where Democrats have a more malleable image of presidential leadership because of the nature of the Democratic party, and they are more likely to accept a president on any point on the liberal spectrum as long as he works for the good of the coalition. Sorkin's choice to frame Bartlet as ethical and inspiring illustrates Sorkin's argument that presidents should be more focused on the outcomes of policies than the reasons for creating policies, which better aligns with the current Democratic party's model than the Republican party's model.

While Sorkin uses *TWW* to make an argument about the character of the presidency, through scrupulously analyzing the show and discussing this project with friends and family, I also believe that Sorkin wrote the show to argue that government is good. In our current media environment, the majority of political television shows portray sleazy politicians taking advantage of the corrupt government using salacious or violent means. The news also

contributes to these images; in the months that I've been writing this paper, the President's campaign chair has been sentenced to over seven years in jail on 25 different counts, his long-time adviser has been jailed for lying about trying to access illegal information, and the government shut down for the longest period in history, along with many other stories that oppose *TWW*'s sunny portrayal of government. These reflections might lead to the conclusion that *TWW* just adds to the pile of exhausting presidential imagery, but everyone I've spoken to who has watched *TWW* has been inspired and rejuvenated by it, as it shows the government dealing with real issues in an empathetic way. While this idea might seem to be a distant fantasy to many Americans in our current political environment, I believe that *TWW* and its political romanticism remain important; without showing the positive side of government, how can we inspire future public servants that "a small group of thoughtful, dedicated citizens can change the world?"

5. Conclusion

Understanding *TWW* begins with understanding how television influences audiences. *TWW* provided a “behind-the-scenes” look at policy-making in a fictional White House, which allowed the audience to make their own judgments about the staffers and policies. Cultivation theory and the sleeper effect support the idea that *TWW* had political relevance to its audiences despite the fact that it was a fictional work, and the popularity of the show, both at its time and in our current era, argue for the longevity of its impact. By framing President Bartlet as a loving and intellectual father figure, Sorkin argues that the president should be upstanding and praiseworthy in his personal life as well as his political life.

After analyzing Bartlet through historical comparison and presidential theories, it becomes clear that Sorkin uses Bartlet to argue for the necessity of an administration that is focused on positive outcomes for the people. When compared with other presidents, Bartlet excels in his ability to organize a staff that will challenge and support him and his communication with the public. His staff provides him with a variety of opinions that he values deeply, and he fosters a supportive family community within the executive branch. He understands how wielding power can create long-lasting effects, and he surveys all of his options and all of their consequences before choosing to utilize the power of his office. Assassinating Shareef is his ultimate display of power, and he only follows through with his plans after Leo convinces him that it is absolutely necessary; through this, Sorkin proves that he is not a power-hungry or vengeful president. While he makes some strides toward expanding the office by nominating his own commissioners to the FEC, he wins most of his political battles through persuasion, proving his political skill. Bartlet regularly delivers rousing speeches to his staffers and to the nation, using his intellect and strong oratory style to gain support in times of trouble.

While Bartlet’s personal decisions bring him some trouble in the White House, his humility and emphasis on rectifying the harm he has caused for others allow him to move past his problems gracefully. Although hiding his MS diagnosis from the public is originally

perceived to be an impeachable offense, Bartlet accepts the censure in order to spare Leo's reputation. Additionally, his decision to run for re-election upsets Abbey, but after discussing how he feels his leadership is necessary, Abbey decides to voluntarily forfeit her medical license in order to support his ambitions, and the two pursue the second campaign as a united front. His personal character is also displayed in his presidency through his nomination of Roberto Mendoza for Supreme Court Justice; despite Mendoza's nontraditional views and behaviors, Bartlet finds Mendoza to be the best for the job, and nominates him for the position despite his lack of party grooming. These examples illustrate how Bartlet's demeanor leads to his decisions in the office, as he uses his empathetic nature and personal judgment to make decisions that impact the country. Bartlet's political timing as a preemptive president supports him in putting a personal stamp on his presidency, as he can create a unique political path as opposed to following party ideals.

Sorkin frames Bartlet as an ideal president to argue that presidents should be focused on serving constituents through the outcomes of their political decisions. Sorkin's model for a strong presidency aligns more closely with the Democratic party's model, as Democratic presidents are not expected to serve liberal ideals in the way that Republican presidents are expected to serve conservative ideals. However, even if the party models change with the next reconstructive president, *TWW* will remain impactful and important due to its positive portrayal of government's impact.

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