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Issue Brief

Project 2025 and US Domestic Politics

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S*ummary*

Project 2025 seeks to erode the independence of the Department of Justice (DOJ) by proposing to place it under Presidential control. It also advocates replacing apolitical bureaucrats with political appointees loyal to the individual in charge of the Oval Office and calls for adopting an aggressively hostile border policy to deter immigration.

As the United States heads towards the Presidential elections, Project 2025, an initiative backed by Heritage Foundation, a right-wing American conservative think tank, has caused an uproar. The document has reinforced the threat of growing ideological divide in a deeply polarised American society. Its overall policy agenda is a reminder of the push to normalise an illiberal and extremist policy agenda through a top-down approach when it states:

This book is an invitation for you, the reader – Mr. Smith, Mrs. Smith, and Ms. Smith – to come to Washington or support those who can. Our goal is to assemble an army of aligned, vetted, and prepared conservatives to go to work on Day One to deconstruct the Administrative State.¹

Kevin Roberts, President of the Heritage Foundation, during a podcast with Steve Bannon, a former advisor to President Donald Trump stated that “We are in the process of the second American revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be.”²

The narrative initially popularised by the Heritage Foundation was that unless the non-Trumpists (Left-wing, liberals, etc.) concede ground to its polarising narratives, bloodshed (as the last remaining option available to the right-wing) would become inevitable if Democrats do not lose the US elections. Despite President Joe Biden withdrawing his candidature from the upcoming election, Vice President Kamala Harris and the Democratic Party have been criticised by hardline conservatives for their immigration policies.

R.J. Hauman, a Visiting Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, has recently argued that

Everything Kamala Harris has said and done in her career proves that she bows to the demands of far left, open-border activists. The American people will have a clear choice in November – mass deportation or mass release of illegal aliens and violent criminals into American communities.³

Roberts and Hauman’s assertions are in line with the hardline and extremist narrative promulgated by Republican lawmakers in the House of Representatives and Senate and Trumpists (President Trump’s supporters) nationwide who believe in

¹ Paul Dans and Steven Groves (eds), [*Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*](#), The Heritage Foundation, Washington D.C., 2023.

² Mike Wendling, [“Project 2025: A Wish list For Trump Presidency, Explained”](#), BBC News, 5 July 2024. Bannon has begun serving a four-month prison sentence for defying the congressional subpoena ordering him to present himself before the House Select Committee investigating the Capitol Hill riots.

³ Adam Shaw, [“Extreme Agenda: Harris’ Past Record on Illegal Immigration Resurfaces After Biden Drops Out”](#), FOX News, 23 July 2024.

a culture war against the ‘wokeist’ liberal ideology that is allegedly against American national interests and White Christian values.

It has been argued by the consolidated book spanning over 900 pages that members of the Biden administration will use unconstitutional and illicit measures to retain power in the event their party loses the upcoming election. Individuals associated with this project have not modified the following stance in light of President Biden’s announcement to withdraw from the Presidential campaign. Furthermore, some right-wing Republican lawmakers, such as Andy Ogles (a House Representative from Tennessee), have filed impeachment articles against Harris (denigrated as the border czar)⁴ to undercut her Presidential campaign, referring to her alleged inability to control illegal migration into the US.

The lawlessness of the Biden Administration – at the border, in staffing considerations, and in routine defiance of court rulings – makes clear that the current president and his administration not only possesses the means but perhaps also the intent, to circumvent constitutional limits and disregard the will of the voters should they demand a new president.⁵

Such unsubstantiated arguments raised by Project 2025’s authors are likely to polarise American society further and cultivate an even more conducive atmosphere for political violence and violent extremism.

Among other things, Project 2025 seeks to erode the independence of the Department of Justice (DOJ) by proposing to place it under Presidential control. They have also advocated replacing apolitical bureaucrats with political appointees loyal to the individual in charge of the Oval Office and adopting an aggressively hostile border policy to deter immigration, which they believe Homeland Security (now proposing that it be demolished) has failed to do by disregarding illegal immigration. They want to cease funding programmes concerning diversity, equity and inclusion, deeming them illegal, and override green energy reforms.

As per the reforms proposed, they have called for restrictions to be placed on access to published literature that gives space to discussions about critical race theory and gender debates, eliminate access to safe abortion nationwide, and undermine the

⁴ Nick Robertson, “[Tennessee Republican Files Articles of Impeachment Against Harris](#)”, *The Hill*, 23 July 2024.

⁵ Gary Fields, “[Conservative Group Behind Project 2025 Floats Conspiracy Idea That Joe Biden Could Retain Power by Force](#)”, *ABC News*, 12 July 2024.

transition to green energy.⁶ These issues have been at the centre of a wider far-right surge across the United States and Europe, where political leaders have mainstreamed extremist viewpoints on such matters through their policies and rhetoric.

Project 2025 and Trump

Their ideal candidate in the lead-up to the 2024 election to implement such radical policies is Donald Trump. Despite distancing himself from such policy recommendations and expressing his lack of knowledge about the Project 2025 initiative, Trump’s close-knitted association with members of the Heritage Foundation, including those who served in his cabinet, such as Stephen Miller (Advisor) and Mark Meadows (Chief of Staff),⁷ has created a wave of uncertainty about the viability of US liberal democratic structure should he win the 2024 Presidential elections.

Furthermore, his Vice-Presidential candidate, JD Vance, has come under scrutiny for his ties to the far-right initiative and support for key policy proposals, such as firing

Every single mid-level bureaucrat, every civil servant in the administrative state. Replace them with our people. And when the courts – because they will take you to court – and when the courts stop you...say the Chief Justice (the President) has made his ruling. Now let him enforce it.⁸

John McEntee, an advisor to the Heritage Foundation, has avowedly declared that the Trump campaign will incorporate several suggestions put forth by Project 2025, including the need for the President ‘be able to advance his/her agenda through the bureaucracy without any hindrance from unelected officials?’⁹

Russ Vought is the 2024 Policy Director of the Republican National Committee’s (RNC) Platform Committee and has contributed a chapter to the policy document

⁶ Rachel Leingang, [“What is Project 2025 and What is Trump’s Involvement?”](#), *The Guardian*, 9 July 2024.

⁷ Steve Contorno, [“Trump Claims Not to Know Who is Behind Project 2025. A CNN Review Found At Least 140 People Who Worked for Him Are Involved”](#), *CNN News*, 11 July 2024.

⁸ [“This Week Transcript 2-4-24: White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries and Sen. JD Vance”](#), *ABC News*, 4 February 2024.

⁹ Melissa Quinn and Jacob Rosen, [“What is Project 2025? What to Know About the Conservative Blueprint for a Second Trump Administration”](#), *CBS News*, 11 July 2024.

released by the Heritage Foundation detailing the reformed image of the Executive Office under a Republican President. He previously led the Office of Management and Budget under the Trump administration. The RNC is the main committee of the Republican Party at the national level.

As per the July 2024 polling conducted by YouGov, a private British market research and data analytics organisation, most of the proposals suggested by the initiative have been viewed favourably by Republican voters.¹⁰ At the same time, as per the survey undertaken by the Pew Research Center, approximately 6 out of 10 voters¹¹ have expressed support for a second Trump Presidency.¹²

Threat Assessments and Conspiracy Theories

The Project 2025 initiative has to be contextualised within the security and threat assessment offered by Biden administration officials. Alejandro N. Mayorkas (Homeland Security Secretary) and Merrick B. Garland (Attorney General) testified before the US Senate in May 2021 that the greatest domestic threat facing the United States of America comes from “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists...specifically those who advocate for the superiority of the white race”.¹³ They warned lawmakers about the growing threat of far-right and domestic extremism, which seeks to undermine the liberal and rules-based order.

The above mentioned threat analyses comes on the heels of the mainstreaming of conspiratorial narratives and disinformation culminating in the Capitol Hill Riots in January 2021. As a result of this, efforts are underway to prosecute Donald Trump and several aides and allies for their role in instigating the large-scale mob violence that intended to stop the certification process of Joe Biden as US President.

Project 2025 must also be analysed amid a rising tide of mainstreaming of a disputed conspiracy theory—The Great Replacement—which believes that there is a deliberate attempt by liberal elites to replace white Christians with immigrants to expand the Democratic Party’s voter base and push the White community to the sidelines.

¹⁰ David Montgomery, “[What Americans Think About Project 2025](#)”, *YouGov*, 12 July 2024.

¹¹ “[Amid Doubts About Biden’s Mental Sharpness, Trump Leads Presidential Race](#)”, Pew Research Center, 11 July 2024.

¹² Anthony Salvanto, “[Increasing Number of Voters Don’t Think Biden Should Be Running After Debate with Trump – CBS News Poll](#)”, *CBS News*, 1 July 2024.

¹³ Eileen Sullivan and Katie Benner, “[Top Law Enforcement Officials Say the Biggest Domestic Terror Threat Comes from White Supremacists](#)”, *The New York Times*, 15 June 2021.

Additionally, there are reports that an advisory organisation, the American Accountability Foundation, has been assigned a budget of US\$ 100,000¹⁴ by the Heritage Foundation to put together a consolidated list of federal employees deemed detrimental to Trump’s second presidency. While it has not been outrightly specified, it would not be far-fetched to assume that targeted attacks against such employees, ranging from invasive investigations to groundless prosecutions, could be initiated.

Project 2025 on Department of Justice

The DOJ has played a key role in gathering evidence to prosecute those involved in the unprecedented violence during January 2021 and bring them to justice. However, if Project 2025’s policy recommendations were to be implemented, it would irrevocably reverse the hard-won victories of American liberalism, including the authority of the DOJ to investigate even the highest public office holder in the country, The President of the United States, for his complicity in violation of the Constitution and abuse of his authority. The extremist hawks who have engineered the foundations of what the next conservative Presidency would look like have fiercely attempted to undermine the DOJ’s independent posture by denigrating it as an extension of the Biden administration.

In one of the sections within the ‘Mandate for Leadership’ proposed by Project 2025, Gene Hamilton (a former Trump Cabinet appointee and a staunch anti-immigration proponent) has condemned the DOJ as

A bloated bureaucracy with a critical core of personnel who are infatuated with the perpetuation of radical liberal agenda and the defeat of perceived political enemies. It has become a Cabinet-level department whose leadership appears to care more about how they are perceived in the next Politico or Washington Post article or their stature with any number of radical leftist organisations than they do about justice and advancing the interests of the American people.¹⁵

The advocates of Project 2025 believe that liberals and Democrats have politicised DOJ to prevent Trump’s return to the White House and have been culpable for

¹⁴ Steve Contorno, [**“Trump Claims Not to Know Who is Behind Project 2025. A CNN Review Found At Least 140 People Who Worked for Him Are Involved”**](#), *CNN News*, 11 July 2024.

¹⁵ Gene Hamilton, [**“Department of Justice”**](#), The Heritage Foundation, Washington D.C., 2023, pp. 545–579.

allegedly stealing the election of 2020 to ensure Biden’s victory. On the other hand, they have espoused the idea that while the FBI has actively suppressed evidence leading to Joe Biden’s son, Hunter Biden’s federal criminal activities, it actively colluded with the Democratic Party to disseminate the popular narrative that President Trump’s victory in 2016 was due to Russian propaganda. Therefore, according to them, the only recourse in this matter is ensuring the re-alignment of the DOJ and the FBI’s activities with national, i.e., Presidential interests and objectives.

Conclusion

The statement by the Spokesperson of Project 2025 on X (formerly Twitter) on 5 July 2024 has failed to assuage the concerns of observers, and it is likely because the clarification issued by the initiative has been perceived as a ruse given its strong association with prominent individuals who have openly expressed extremist and illiberal views.

As we’ve been saying for more than two years now, Project 2025 does not speak for any candidate or campaign. We are a coalition of more than 110 conservative groups advocating policy & personnel recommendations for the next conservative President. But it is ultimately up to that President, who we believe will be President Trump, to decide which recommendations to implement. Rather than obsessing over Project 2025, the Biden administration should be addressing the 25th Amendment.¹⁶

Despite distancing himself from Project 2025 and declaring some of its proposals as ‘ridiculous and abysmal’, Trump has failed to reassure his critics. What makes it more challenging for his opponents to be convinced, besides the evidence provided earlier, is that the Heritage Foundation served as one of the primary sponsors of the Republican National Convention, which nominated Trump as its Presidential candidate.

¹⁶ [“Project 2025 Spokesperson: As We’ve Been Saying for More Than Two Years Now”](#), Project 2025 on X, 5 July 2024. The 25th Amendment allows for the President to be replaced in case he/she becomes incapacitated and is unable to discharge the duties of their office.

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