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## PROJECT 2025: A BLUEPRINT FOR TRANSFORMING DONALD TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION 2.0

## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the objectives of Project 2025, an initiative led by the Heritage Foundation and over 100 conservative organizations, proposing transformative policies for a potential second Trump administration. It focuses on the project's goals, the historical and current role of the Heritage Foundation, and its implications for American democracy. A qualitative analysis was employed, involving a review of literature, project documents, and public statements by key stakeholders to understand the initiative's intentions and consequences.*

*Project 2025 seeks to strengthen executive authority, replace career civil servants with ideological loyalists, deregulate key sectors, and implement conservative reforms in education, immigration, social policy, and national security. It also advocates for reduced U.S. involvement in global institutions and a more assertive stance toward adversaries like China. Findings reveal significant controversy: supporters view it as a means to curb bureaucratic overreach and align governance with voter priorities, while critics, including the American Civil Liberties Union, warn of threats to democratic checks and balances, civil liberties, and marginalized communities.*

*The study highlights the growing influence of think tanks in polarized policymaking and the evolving role of the Heritage Foundation. If implemented, Project 2025 could fundamentally reshape U.S. governance, raising critical questions about democratic resilience and ideological polarization. These findings underscore the potential impact of the project on the stability of democratic institutions and the need for further debate on balancing reform with the protection of democratic principles.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Project 2025, Donald Trump, Heritage Foundation, think tanks, federal administration, deregulation, conservative policy*

## INTRODUCTION

Think tanks, often termed *idea incubators*, are organizations that analyze public policy issues – encompassing social, economic, foreign, and defense domains – and propose evidence-based solutions to inform decision-making (Kaczmarek, 2011, p. 15). In the United States, their influence surged post-World War II, evolving from military advisory roles to dynamic institutions shaping policymaking, public opinion, and political agendas (Zbieranek, 2011, p. 23–25). Their multifaceted roles – spanning academic research, policy advising, and advocacy – resist a singular definition, ranging from scholarly nonprofits

like the Brookings Institution to advocacy-driven groups like the Heritage Foundation. Beyond generating ideas, think tanks increasingly act as brokers of influence, leveraging networks, media, and funding to bridge academia, government, and the public (Medvetz, 2012, p. 22). In a polarized political landscape, their ability to frame debates and mobilize constituencies has amplified their significance, though it raises concerns about impartiality and agenda-setting power (Drezner, 2017, p. 45).

This article critically examines Project 2025, a Heritage Foundation-led policy blueprint for a potential second Trump presidency, and evaluates its implications for U.S. governance, emphasizing the Foundation's historical and contemporary influence as a conservative think tank. The study addresses three research questions:

1. What are the core policy objectives, mechanisms, and ideological underpinnings of Project 2025?
2. How has the Heritage Foundation historically shaped conservative policy, and what strategies does it employ in driving Project 2025?
3. What are the potential consequences of Project 2025 for U.S. democratic institutions, civil liberties, and the conservative movement's internal dynamics?

The analysis draws on primary sources, such as the Project 2025 Mandate for Leadership (Heritage Foundation, 2024a), and secondary materials, including academic literature, media analyses, and critiques from organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). It situates Project 2025 within the broader context of think tank influence, exploring how ideological advocacy shapes governance in a divided America.

The literature on think tanks highlights their pivotal role in U.S. policymaking. McGann (2020) classifies them into academic (e.g., Brookings Institution), professional (e.g., RAND Corporation), advocacy-oriented (e.g., Center for American Progress), and contract-based entities, noting their fluid boundaries (McGann, 2020, p. 30–35). Abelson (2018) underscores advocacy think tanks' strategic use of research to promote agendas, often aligned with donor interests, which can blur the line between scholarship and lobbying (Abelson, 2018, pp. 89–91). Stone (2007) cautions that heavy donor influence

risks transforming think tanks into propaganda vehicles, undermining their credibility (Stone, 2007, p. 144). Recent scholarship explores funding transparency, with platforms like OpenSecrets exposing donor-driven conflicts (OpenSecrets, 2024), and the *revolving door* phenomenon, where experts cycle between think tanks, government, and industry, raising independence concerns (Li, 2018, p. 45–47). While think tank influence is well-documented, specific initiatives like Project 2025 remain understudied, particularly regarding their historical precedents, ideological roots, and potential to reshape democratic norms in a polarized era (Drezner, 2017, p. 48). Comparative analyses suggest U.S. think tanks wield unique influence due to America's decentralized system, contrasting with more state-centric models elsewhere (Pautz, 2011, p. 420).

U.S. think tanks thrive in a bipartisan, decentralized political system that creates demand for external expertise (McGann, 2020, p. 15–17). Academic think tanks prioritize peer-reviewed scholarship, professional ones secure government contracts, and advocacy groups champion ideological causes, often through media campaigns and grassroots mobilization (Abelson, 2018, p. 89–91). For example, the American Enterprise Institute promotes free-market policies, while the Center for American Progress advances progressive reforms, each tailoring research to influence legislation and public opinion (Rich, 2004, p. 15). Funding – from corporations, wealthy donors, foundations, and public grants – raises bias concerns, with OpenSecrets documenting donor networks that shape priorities (OpenSecrets, 2024). Diversified funding is touted as a safeguard for independence, yet reliance on sponsors fuels debates about objectivity, particularly when think tanks align with partisan or corporate interests (Monbiot, 2001, p. 211–213). The U.S. legal framework, including 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, encourages think tank proliferation but restricts overt political campaigning, though advocacy groups often skirt these limits through affiliated entities (IRS, 2023). The *revolving door* enhances influence by embedding think tank experts in government, but it risks conflicts of interest, as seen in appointments from think tanks to senior roles.

The Heritage Foundation, a flagship conservative think tank, exemplifies advocacy through its long-standing influence on Republican administrations and its leadership of Project 2025, a 922-page agenda for transformative

governance (Heritage Foundation, 2024a). This article analyzes Project 2025's objectives, Heritage's historical and strategic role, and the broader implications for American democracy, situating the initiative within the evolving landscape of think tank-driven policymaking.

## THINK TANKS IN THE MODERN U.S. POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The rise of advocacy think tanks like Heritage reflects broader shifts in U.S. politics, where polarization has elevated their role as ideological standard-bearers (Drezner, 2017, p. 50). Unlike earlier decades, when think tanks primarily advised elites, modern institutions engage directly with the public through social media, op-eds, and partisan media, amplifying their influence but blurring lines with activism (Medvetz, 2012, p. 25). Heritage's success stems from its ability to operate at multiple levels: producing policy papers for Congress, mobilizing voters via Heritage Action, and shaping narratives on platforms like X (Feulner, 2013, p. 120). This hybrid model contrasts with academic think tanks like Brookings, which prioritize peer-reviewed output, or professional ones like RAND, which rely on government contracts (McGann, 2020, p. 32–34).

Think tanks face growing scrutiny over funding. Heritage's donors, including the Koch brothers and corporate entities, contribute millions annually, raising questions about whose interests are served (OpenSecrets, 2024). For instance, its fossil fuel advocacy aligns with energy sector donations, prompting accusations of bias (Monbiot, 2001, p. 215). Progressive think tanks like the Center for American Progress face similar critiques, with labor unions and tech firms shaping their agendas (OpenSecrets, 2024). Transparency initiatives, such as OpenSecrets' donor tracking, reveal how funding influences priorities, yet think tanks often resist disclosure, citing intellectual freedom (Li, 2018, p. 49). The 501(c)(3) status grants tax benefits but requires avoiding direct campaign support, a line advocacy groups navigate carefully through sister organizations like Heritage Action (IRS, 2023).

The *revolving door* remains a hallmark of think tank influence. Heritage's placement of 66 affiliates in Trump's first administration mirrors patterns

across think tanks, with Brookings alumni in Democratic administrations and Amarian Enterprise Institute figures in Republican ones (Li, 2018, p. 47). This mobility embeds think tank expertise in government but risks entrenching elite networks, as seen in Project 2025's personnel strategy (Brennan Center, 2025). Critics argue this dynamic prioritizes loyalty over merit, undermining public trust in institutions (Drezner, 2017, p. 52).

Globally, U.S. think tanks are distinctive for their scale and autonomy, contrasting with state-aligned models in countries like China or Russia (Pautz, 2011, p. 422). Their ability to shape policy reflects America's pluralistic system, but polarization has intensified their partisan roles, with Heritage and its peers acting as ideological warriors rather than neutral advisors (Medvetz, 2012, p. 28). Project 2025 exemplifies this shift, merging policy expertise with political strategy to an unprecedented degree.

## THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION: A CORNERSTONE OF CONSERVATIVE ADVOCACY

Founded on February 16, 1973, in Washington, D.C., by Paul Weyrich, Edwin Feulner, and Joseph Coors during Richard Nixon's presidency, the Heritage Foundation emerged to challenge perceived liberal dominance in policy discourse (Smith, 1991, p. 45). Backed by initial funding from Coors, of the brewing empire, and Richard Mellon Scaife, a banking heir, it rapidly established itself as a conservative powerhouse (Edwards, 1997, p. 67). Heritage's mission centers on promoting free markets, limited government, individual liberty, traditional American values, and robust national defense, distinguishing itself through practical, actionable policy recommendations rather than abstract theorizing (Abelson, 2018, p. 93). Unlike academic think tanks, Heritage prioritizes rapid dissemination of ideas to policymakers, earning it a reputation as a *policy machine* that translates ideology into legislation (Feulner, 2013, p. 110).

Heritage's influence grew in the 1970s and 1980s through its responsiveness to political shifts. In 1977, Feulner launched the Resource Bank, a network connecting over 2,200 experts and 475 conservative organizations

worldwide, fostering coordination within the global conservative movement (Feulner, 2013, p. 112). This infrastructure positioned Heritage as a central hub during Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981–1989), when it became the intellectual backbone of the conservative revolution. Its influence rests on three pillars:

1. **Actionable Policy Recommendations:** The *Mandate for Leadership* series, launched in 1980, delivers detailed, implementable proposals, shaping landmark reforms (Healy, 2009, p. 89).
2. **Bridging Academia and Politics:** Heritage combines rigorous research with aggressive advocacy, directly engaging legislators and administration officials (Rich, 2004, p. 15).
3. **Grassroots and Elite Mobilization:** The 2010 creation of *Heritage Action*, a 501(c)(4) advocacy arm, amplified its ability to rally activists and pressure lawmakers, extending its reach beyond elite circles (Edwards, 1997, p. 72).

Heritage has consistently held Republican administrations accountable to conservative principles, critiquing deviations such as George H.W. Bush's tax increases or George W. Bush's Medicare expansion. This stance bolsters its ideological credibility but occasionally fractures party unity, highlighting tensions between purist and pragmatic factions (Healy, 2009, p. 94; Domenech, 2026).

## **HISTORICAL INFLUENCE ON REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATIONS (PRE-TRUMP)**

Heritage's impact was most profound during Reagan's presidency. The 1980 *Mandate for Leadership*, a 3,000-page document with 2,000 recommendations across taxes, regulations, defense, and social policy, became a blueprint for Reagan's agenda, with approximately 60% of its proposals implemented (Edwards, 1997, p. 69). Notable reforms included a 25% income tax cut over three years, credited with sparking unprecedented economic growth, and the Strategic Defense Initiative, which redefined U.S. missile defense strategy (Smith, 1991, p. 47). Reagan distributed a condensed 1,100-page version to his cabinet, underscoring Heritage's influence, and the Foundation

shaped key appointments, such as Norman Ture as undersecretary of the treasury for tax policy (Feulner, 2013, p. 115). Despite its alignment, Heritage maintained independence, opposing Reagan's second tax bill when it diverged from free-market principles, demonstrating its commitment to ideology over loyalty (Healy, 2009, p. 91).

Under George H.W. Bush (1989–1993), Heritage's influence waned due to Bush's moderate approach. The Foundation's vocal criticism of his broken *no new taxes* pledge led to public clashes, with chief of staff John Sununu dismissing Heritage as overly dogmatic (Smith, 1991, p. 48). Nevertheless, Heritage contributed to defense and foreign policy recommendations, particularly on post-Cold War strategy, and secured advisory roles, such as Kay Coles James in health and personnel positions (Feulner, 2013, p. 118). Its influence persisted but was tempered by Bush's pragmatism.

During George W. Bush's presidency (2001–2009), Heritage played a mixed role. It advanced welfare reform, building on Clinton's 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, by promoting work requirements for aid recipients (Rich, 2004, p. 17). Post-9/11, Heritage endorsed increased defense spending and the global war on terror, aligning with Bush's security agenda (Healy, 2009, p. 93). However, it sharply criticized the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act as a costly expansion of government, clashing with Bush's domestic priorities (Edwards, 1997, p. 74). On immigration, Heritage initially supported liberalization in the 1980s, advocating for legal pathways and higher quotas, but shifted to restrictive policies by the 2000s, reflecting conservative backlash (Abelson, 2018, p. 95). In healthcare, its 1990s proposal for an individual insurance mandate influenced Massachusetts' reforms under Mitt Romney and elements of the Affordable Care Act, though Heritage later disavowed it as incompatible with limited government (Rich, 2004, p. 19).

Heritage's legacy includes transformative reforms – tax cuts, welfare restructuring – but its ideological rigidity often strained relations with pragmatic Republicans, exposing fault lines within the party (Smith, 1991, p. 50). Critics argue that its reliance on corporate and wealthy donors, tracked by OpenSecrets, compromises its independence, aligning it with elite interests



over grassroots concerns (Abelson, 2018, p. 97; OpenSecrets, 2024). These tensions foreshadow Heritage's complex role in Trump's era and Project 2025.

## HERITAGE FOUNDATION AND TRUMP'S FIRST ADMINISTRATION (2017–2021)

Heritage solidified its influence during Donald Trump's first term by laying intellectual and personnel groundwork. In 2014, it developed a database of approximately 3,000 conservative candidates for government roles, a resource pivotal to Trump's 2016 victory (Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 12). By January 2017, at least 66 Heritage affiliates joined the administration, including high-profile figures like Betsy DeVos (Secretary of Education), Mick Mulvaney (Director, Office of Management and Budget), and Elaine Chao (Secretary of Transportation), with co-founder Edwin Feulner advising the transition team (Heritage Foundation, 2017, pp. 14–15; Hafner, 2016). This *revolving door* ensured Heritage's ideas permeated Trump's early governance.

The 2016 Mandate for Leadership provided 334 specific recommendations, with Heritage claiming 64% were incorporated into Trump's 2017 budget, regulations, or policy plans (Heritage Foundation, 2018, p. 3). Key implementations included:

- Paris Agreement Withdrawal (June 2017): Trump cited Heritage's economic critiques to exit the climate accord, prioritizing fossil fuel production (Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 248–250; White House, 2017a).
- Net Neutrality Repeal (December 2017): The Federal Communications Commission's rollback aligned with Heritage's deregulation advocacy (Heritage Foundation, 2018, p. 176–178; FCC, 2017).
- National Monument Reductions (December 2017): Trump reduced the size of Utah's Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments, echoing Heritage's push to limit federal land control (Heritage Foundation, 2018, p. 202–204; White House, 2017b).
- Mexico City Policy Reinstatement (January 2017): Trump restored restrictions on federal funding for NGOs performing abortions abroad,

a Heritage-backed pro-life priority (Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 289; White House, 2017c). The Mexico City Policy, first implemented in 1985 under President Ronald Reagan, restricts U.S. federal funding for foreign NGOs that perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning, even with non-U.S. funds.

Heritage significantly shaped the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, hosting debates with House Speaker Paul Ryan and providing economic modeling that projected growth (Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 101–105; Hulse, 2017). It also influenced judicial appointments, with Neil Gorsuch's Supreme Court nomination drawn from a Heritage-curated list, reinforcing conservative jurisprudence (Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 45–47; Savage, 2017).

Despite these successes, tensions emerged. Heritage criticized the American Health Care Act (2017) as insufficiently dismantling Obamacare, straining relations with the White House (Harwood 2017). Trump's policies – adding nearly \$8 trillion to the national debt and imposing tariffs on allies – clashed with Heritage's free-market orthodoxy, prompting internal debates.

Conservative commentators like Tucker Carlson accused Heritage of corporate bias, citing donations from tech giants, while emerging think tanks like the America First Policy Institute and Center for Renewing America, founded by Trump loyalists, challenged Heritage's dominance (Stein, Torbati, 2022; Domenech, 2016). These dynamics reveal Heritage's struggle to balance traditional conservatism with Trump's populist nationalism, a tension that informs Project 2025.

## HERITAGE FOUNDATION'S STRATEGIC ROLE IN PROJECT 2025: ADVANCING A CONSERVATIVE AGENDA

Launched in April 2022 under President Kevin Roberts, the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, formally the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, unites over 100 conservative organizations – such as America First Legal, Family Research Council, and Turning Point USA – to prepare a comprehensive policy and personnel framework for a Republican presidency in 2025, with an implicit focus on institutionalizing Trumpism (Heritage Foundation, 2024a; Heritage Foundation, 2024b). With a \$22 million budget and over 400 contributors, including former Trump officials like Russell Vought (nominated for Office of Management and Budget in 2025), John Ratcliffe, and Stephen Miller, the project builds on Heritage's Mandate for Leadership legacy, adapting its proven strategies – detailed policy blueprints, personnel pipelines, and media amplification – to a digital, populist era, despite Trump's July 2024 disavowal labeling it *ridiculous and abysmal* (Heritage Foundation, 2024a; Kanno-Youngs, Green, 2024; Domenech, 2016).

Project 2025 operates through four interconnected pillars: a 922-page Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise policy agenda advocating deregulation, fossil fuel expansion, stringent immigration enforcement (e.g., border wall completion, mass deportations), and the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs across government, notably in the Department of Defense (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 135–137, 589–592); a personnel recruitment database to replace career civil servants with loyal conservatives via *Schedule F*, reclassifying federal employees as at-will hires (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 69–73); an online training academy with nearly 30 courses led by conservative scholars to prepare appointees (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, pp. 23–25); and a confidential 180-day playbook for immediate executive actions to entrench policies swiftly (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 875–880). Heritage amplifies its influence through Heritage Action's grassroots network and partnerships with groups like Moms for Liberty, mirroring past successes while leveraging modern digital strategies (The New Republic, 2025). However, critics argue that Project 2025's unprecedented scale reflects

a concerted effort to consolidate conservative power, raising concerns about ideological conformity and the erosion of institutional independence, particularly as it prioritizes loyalty over merit in governance (Brennan Center, 2025).

## CORE POLICY OBJECTIVES

Grounded in a unitary executive theory that maximizes presidential authority, Project 2025 seeks to dismantle what it calls the *administrative state* and advance a conservative vision. Its ideological underpinnings emphasize traditional family structures, national sovereignty, and individual liberties, often framed as countering progressive *woke* policies. Key domestic proposals include:

- Social Policy: Banning pharmacological abortions, restricting gender-affirming care, and redefining Title IX to prioritize biological sex, reinforcing conservative family values (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 451–455).
- The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 advocates for a comprehensive ban on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in universities, arguing that such programs promote divisive ideologies and undermine merit-based education (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 319). This policy also includes redirecting federal funding away from institutions that implement DEI frameworks, aiming to prioritize traditional academic standards over what they describe as *woke* cultural agendas (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 320–325).
- Immigration: Completing the border wall, expanding deportations (targeting 11 million undocumented immigrants), and capping legal immigration, including refugee admissions (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 589–592).
- Economic Policy: Slashing regulations (e.g., environmental standards), cutting taxes further, and defunding agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and USAID (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 135–137).

- **National Security:** Expanding nuclear arsenals, prioritizing military readiness over social programs, and redirecting defense budgets to counter China (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 581–583).

## **FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES**

Project 2025's foreign policy reflects a nationalist, America-first stance, prioritizing unilateral action and skepticism of multilateralism. Specific proposals include:

1. **Reduced Global Engagement:** Exiting organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations agencies through cost-benefit audits, and freezing foreign aid programs, as evidenced by Trump's January 2025 executive order suspending aid allocations for 90 days (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, pp. 263–265; White House, 2025).
2. **Countering China:** Labeling China a primary threat, it advocates banning TikTok, closing Confucius Institutes, restricting Chinese investments in tech and real estate, and urging pension funds to divest from Chinese assets to curb Beijing's influence (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 189–195).
3. **NATO Reconfiguration:** Shifting responsibility for deterring Russia to European allies, reducing U.S. troop presence in Europe, and renegotiating NATO commitments to prioritize American interests (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 201–204).
4. **Unitary Executive Authority:** Granting the president unchecked control over foreign policy, including arms sales and military aid, bypassing Congressional oversight unless unanimous support exists (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 171–173).
5. **Immigration-Security Nexus:** Linking immigration to national security, it proposes integrating counterterrorism with border policies, including re-designating Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, despite weak evidence, potentially exacerbating migration pressures (Stimson Center, 2025).

6. Security Agency Restructuring: Eliminating the Department of Homeland Security, privatizing the Transportation Security Administration, and curtailing the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's election security role, citing overreach (Center for American Progress, 2024).

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES OF PROJECT 2025**

Project 2025 has ignited fierce debate due to its expansive scope and polarizing vision for reshaping American governance. Supporters, including Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts and former director Paul Dans, assert that it enhances democratic accountability by aligning unelected bureaucrats with the mandates of elected leaders, pointing to public frustration with federal inefficiency – highlighted by Gallup polls showing only 17% trust in government in 2024 – as a key justification for sweeping reform (Heritage Foundation, 2024b; Gallup, 2024). Critics, such as the ACLU, Center for American Progress, and Brennan Center for Justice, denounce the project as authoritarian, identifying three major risks:

**Erosion of Checks and Balances:** By centralizing executive power and politicizing agencies like the Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission, Project 2025 undermines institutional independence, potentially enabling selective law enforcement and weakening democratic oversight, with its reliance on the unitary executive theory risking the bypass of Congressional and judicial constraints in a manner reminiscent of autocratic governance (ACLU, 2025; Brennan Center, 2025; Center for American Progress, 2024).

**Politicization of the Civil Service:** The *Schedule F* proposal, which aims to reclassify 50,000–100,000 federal employees as at-will hires, jeopardizes expertise by replacing career professionals with ideological loyalists, a move critics liken to patronage systems in illiberal democracies that could entrench partisan control and erode the neutrality of public administration (ACLU, 2025; Politico, 2025).

Threats to Civil Liberties and Pluralism: Policies targeting DEI, reproductive rights, and immigration – including banning abortion access, restricting gender-affirming care, and initiating mass deportations – threaten to marginalize minorities, women, and immigrants, undermining constitutional protections and social cohesion, while proposals to restrict education on systemic racism and LGBTQ+ issues in universities spark fears of ideological censorship and the suppression of academic freedom (ACLU, 2025; The New Republic, 2025; Center for American Progress, 2024).

Specifically, Project 2025's aggressive stance on universities, such as its push to eliminate DEI programs and redirect federal funding away from institutions that promote them, poses a direct threat to academic autonomy, potentially stifling diverse perspectives and exacerbating tensions on campuses already grappling with political pressures (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, pp. 319–325). Additionally, its foreign policy measures, like closing Confucius Institutes and restricting Chinese investments, could further limit universities' global engagement, reducing opportunities for cultural exchange and research collaboration while intensifying scrutiny of international students and faculty (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, p. 190).

Analyses reveal that by February 2025, 37 executive actions aligned with Project 2025's recommendations, including foreign aid suspensions and immigration crackdowns, while appointments of Heritage affiliates like Vought and Ratcliffe underscore its influence (Politico, 2025; BBC News, 2025; New York Times, 2024). Public opinion is sharply divided, with a 2025 YouGov poll showing 52% of Americans opposing its civil service reforms but 41% supporting its deregulation goals, highlighting polarized priorities (YouGov, 2025). Heritage's track record – driving Reagan's tax cuts and Trump's first-term policies – bolsters Project 2025's potential impact, with its coalition model scaling up past strategies through digital platforms and partisan media (Domenech, 2016). Yet, significant challenges remain: legal battles, such as federal union lawsuits against Schedule F citing violations of civil service protections, public protests following the 2025 aid suspension, and internal conservative factionalism between Heritage's traditionalism and populist groups like America First could hinder its implementation and exacerbate Republican disunity (Politico, 2025; The Guardian, 2025; Stein, Torbati, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

Project 2025, spearheaded by the Heritage Foundation and supported by a coalition of over 100 conservative organizations, stands as a transformative yet contentious blueprint aimed at reshaping U.S. governance, with far-reaching consequences for democratic institutions, universities, and America's role on the global stage. Its core proposals – centralizing executive power through the unitary executive theory, replacing career civil servants with loyalists via *Schedule F*, and advancing a conservative agenda on education, immigration, and social policy – threaten to undermine checks and balances, erode the neutrality of public administration, and marginalize vulnerable communities, while its foreign policy prioritizes unilateralism, withdrawal from international bodies like the World Health Organization, and a confrontational stance toward China, potentially weakening U.S. global leadership and straining alliances (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, pp. 171–173, 189–195, 263–265; ACLU, 2025; Stimson Center, 2025).

For universities, Project 2025 poses a direct challenge by advocating the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, redirecting federal funding away from institutions that support such initiatives, and reducing educational focus on systemic racism and LGBTQ+ issues, moves that critics argue threaten academic freedom, suppress diverse perspectives, and risk turning campuses into ideological battlegrounds, thereby undermining their role as centers of open inquiry and intellectual pluralism (Heritage Foundation, 2024a, pp. 319–325; Center for American Progress, 2024). Heritage's proven track record in shaping policy – from Reagan's tax cuts to Trump's first-term initiatives – underscores Project 2025's potential to drive significant change, yet its radical scope faces substantial hurdles, including legal challenges from federal unions against *Schedule F*, public protests fueled by progressive campaigns, and internal conservative factionalism between traditionalists and populists, all of which could limit its implementation and exacerbate Republican disunity (Politico, 2025; The Guardian, 2025; Stein, Torbati, 2022).

As a case study in the power of ideological advocacy, Project 2025 highlights the growing influence of think tanks in modern politics, but also the risks of prioritizing partisan agendas over broad consensus, raising critical



questions about the resilience of democratic norms and the future of higher education. Future research should explore Project 2025's feasibility amid legal and political resistance, its socioeconomic impacts on marginalized groups, its effect on conservative movement cohesion, and comparative lessons from think tank-driven reforms globally, providing deeper insights into the evolving dynamics of governance, education, and ideological influence in the U.S.

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