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Project 2025: What's At Stake for Criminal Justice Reform

What is Project 2025? It's a wish list of right-wing policies, reflecting an extreme Christian nationalist ideology, written by the Heritage Foundation and more than 100 other conservative groups as a blueprint for a potential conservative administration. It is an explicit effort to further empower the presidency, embed ideologues in nonpartisan civil service, and enable the executive branch to unravel the civil rights movement's gains over the last seven decades.

The full agenda, which is more than 900 pages long, would completely reshape our federal government in order to benefit white nationalists, the rich and powerful, and religiously motivated bigots. Here are its most problematic ideas when it comes to the criminal-legal system and law enforcement:

- **Stopping Criminal Justice Reform:** Project 2025 calls for “restoring law and order” by taking legal action against local prosecutors deemed to be ‘too soft’ on crime, increasing sentences, minimizing sentencing reductions overall, and increasing the use of the death penalty. It proposes aggressive use of RICO statutes and interstate drug prosecution, including for simple possession. And it changes the focus of the Bureau of Justice Statistics to focus on “serious crimes committed, imprisonment, time served, recidivism, and the like,” and not on any attendant statistical research.
- **Politicizing Every Component of the DOJ:** Project 2025 proposes to conduct a large review of all major FBI investigations to determine if they conform to the president's political agenda. It calls for vastly expanding the number of political appointees in every office and component of the Department of Justice (DOJ) to ensure that “bad things” don't happen and to “promote the President's agenda.” It would expand the number of employees who fall under “Schedule F” and who have to serve the president's political agenda instead of the public interest. Any such employee of the DOJ who fails to obey the direction of a political appointee, even if that direction is illegal, immoral, unethical, or unconstitutional, can be immediately replaced. And it would prohibit the FBI from proactively working to curtail or actively investigating disinformation “not tied to any plausible criminal activity.”
- **Project 2025 Is Based on False Claims About Crime:** Project 2025's authors claim that violence has increased and that the DOJ's policies are the cause. Their accusations are false, as violent crime has decreased over the past few years. The rhetoric in Project 2025 is a blatant attempt to use fear to manipulate the public and dehumanize justice-involved individuals. At a time when overincarceration and overcriminalization have led to significant harm from a bloated criminal-legal system, Project 2025 not only reinforces the failed status quo — it uses fear to argue for expanded, discriminatory enforcement.