Project 2025: What's At Stake for Census and Data Equity

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.

Project 2025 has an entire chapter devoted to the Census Bureau, our most important agency for gathering data on who we are as a country. Its proposals would undermine the bureau's infrastructure in order to produce politicized, inaccurate, and unreliable datasets, making it impossible to understand society, enforce civil rights, advance equity agendas, or engage in evidence-based policymaking. To have a politicized and weaponized control over the federal data infrastructure is to have the ability to warp the data to tell whatever story and provide whatever justification the government wants. Here are some of its worst ideas:

- **Politicizing the Census Bureau:** Project 2025 would replace many of this important agency's data experts with political appointees who are loyal to the president rather than to the public interest.

- **Adding a Citizenship Question to the Decennial Census:** Project 2025's call for a citizenship question would result in a less accurate census that would skew representation, distort federal funding, provide a misleading depiction of our society, and lead to "pre-gerrymandered" districts.

- **Revisiting New Data Standards on Race and Ethnicity:** Project 2025 recommends that the incoming administration take control of and "thoroughly review any changes" to new improvements to data on race and ethnicity, claiming that there are "concerns among conservatives" that these new standards could be "skewed to bolster progressive political agendas." These are standards long sought by the civil rights community.

- **Weaponizing and Politicizing Data Collection:** Project 2025 would undermine numerous other efforts to collect data, simply because the data might reveal information that Project 2025's authors do not like. For example, it would prevent the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission from collecting basic data on race and ethnicity and prevent the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from collecting data on gender identity. Meanwhile, it calls for highly intrusive new forms of data collection, including requiring states to report data on abortions to the federal government.

- **Politicizing Community Input and Outreach:** Project 2025 would prioritize efforts to increase response rates in conservative areas of the country. Meanwhile, it calls for weakening efforts to improve response rates elsewhere, most specifically in our most under-represented and under-resourced communities, resulting in highly misleading data overall. Additionally, it proposes eliminating numerous advisory committees across the government, reducing opportunities for input.

- **Undermining Decennial Census and American Community Survey Questions:** Project 2025 would jeopardize which questions are asked and are used to understand our society and to evaluate the need for and effectiveness of programs, potentially weakening the usefulness and the importance of these surveys.