

A Report You Need to Read

Robert Reich - March 24, 2026

The Wall Street Journal — hardly an outpost of left-wing propaganda — [reported yesterday](#) on the results of an investigation conducted by the *Journal's* Hannah Critchfield and her team.

I'm summarizing it below because it deserves your attention.

Critchfield and her team found that 279 people have been accused online by the Trump administration of assaulting federal ICE and Border Patrol agents, and more than half of these people — 64 percent — are American citizens.

Of the 181 American citizens that the Trump administration has accused of attacking federal ICE and Border Patrol officers, close to half have never been charged, and none have been convicted at trial. But the public charges alone have caused them significant harm.

The investigation

The *Journal's* team analyzed more than 200 videos associated with allegations of assault against ICE and Border Patrol agents, using both police body camera footage and bystander recordings from social media. Many of the videos cast doubt on the federal government's claims that agents were assaulted.

The *Journal* also reviewed more than 100,000 posts on X, posts made in the last year by accounts linked to government agencies and senior government officials.

Each time the government identified a person on a post, the *Journal* tracked that case through the legal system to see what charges were brought, under what statute, whether the charges were later modified, and what happened to the person in the case.

One of the cases they investigated was that of Sydney Lori Reid, a 44-year-old veterinary assistant in D.C. and a U.S. citizen.

In July, Reid went to a jail to witness an immigration enforcement action. Federal officers had gone there to arrest two migrant men, and Reid said she felt a duty to document it.

As Reid began videotaping, an agent grabbed her and pinned her to a wall. Reid was then surrounded by several federal law enforcement officials. One of them was an FBI agent wearing a face covering and an FBI vest. Two others were ICE officers, dressed in plain clothes, plaid shirts, and khaki pants.

Reid was handcuffed and told she was being arrested for interfering with their operation. Videos reviewed by Critchfield and her team cast doubt on the agents' claims.

Reid was then placed in a government vehicle and transferred to federal custody. Like many American citizens who wind up in the crosshairs of DHS, she was accused of assault.

The government alleges she assaulted an FBI agent on the basis of scrapes on the agent's hands, but the scrapes occurred in the process of putting handcuffs on Reid.

The government later charged Reid with felony assault of a federal official, a charge punishable with up to 20 years in prison — a serious federal charge that's being applied far more broadly now than at any time in recent history.

When Reid was being arrested, she dropped her phone, but the phone was still recording. An agent picked up the phone and put it into the same vehicle that she was riding in on her way to detention.

One officer says: "We're at the D.C. jail. We're at the D.C. jail. We have an agitator in custody for ..."

Reid was handcuffed in the backseat. You can hear agents going back and forth about exactly how Reid had assaulted them. First, it was a raised knee, then an elbow.

Another officer: “Yeah, it appeared that there was an elbow that was ... When she was resisting, but she definitely interfered. So we have interfering and I’m going to get ...”

One of the ICE agents called her a stupid female as he was talking to a colleague: “Hey brother, are you good? I have to return to 1D and process this stupid female now that I fucking don’t want to process her.”

Reid was held by federal authorities for roughly two days. She wasn’t allowed to make a phone call during that time.

In the aftermath of her arrest, prosecutors tried to indict her, but that needed to be done through a grand jury, and the grand jury declined to indict her. They tried again before another grand jury, which also declined to indict her. Then they went back to a third grand jury, which declined to indict her.

This is almost unheard of. It showed both the resistance from the public to charge her based on the evidence and the government’s determination to bring charges in this case.

Prosecutors ultimately charged Reid with misdemeanor assault of an officer, a lesser offense that doesn’t require going through a grand jury. Reid was acquitted of that misdemeanor charge at trial.

The Trump Administration’s Strategy

Critchfield and her *Journal* team found that the push to charge more people for assaulting federal officers — as happened to Reid — is an administration-wide strategy.

Attorney General Pam Bondi and her Department of Justice have pledged to prosecute these cases aggressively. From the very beginning of Bondi’s tenure, starting on her first day in office, she issued a flurry of memos, including one that encouraged

prosecutors to aggressively investigate any instances of violence against law enforcement or obstruction of law enforcement.

Gregory Bovino, then the head of Border Patrol, directed his agents to arrest anyone who touched them. “Arrest as many people that touch you as you want to. Those are the general orders all the way to the top, everybody fucking gets it if they touch you. You hear what I’m saying?”

In addition to an increasing number of prosecutions, the Department of Homeland Security has been using social media to exaggerate these alleged attacks, often with a warning to the public: “Don’t be like this person. If you behave in this way, we will come for you.” And they have posted people’s pictures and their full names, seeking to make an example out of these people even before they’re convicted of a crime.

This happened to Reid. A week after she was arrested, her mug shot and name went up on the official ICE account on X, along with the fact that she’s based in Washington, D.C., and a post that said, “Assault an officer or agent get arrested. It’s not rocket science.”

ICE also publicly alleged that Reid assaulted federal agents on behalf of two alleged international gang members.

The Purpose of This Strategy

The *Journal’s* investigation makes clear that the purpose of this strategy has been to intimidate and silence Americans who might otherwise protest what ICE and Border Patrol are doing.

ICE publicly describes many of these protesters as rioters, agitators, thugs, and terrorists.

Here’s Vice President JD Vance speaking of Renee Good’s death:

“I can believe that her death is a tragedy while also recognizing that it’s a tragedy of her own making and a tragedy of the far left who has marshaled an entire movement, a lunatic fringe against our law enforcement officers.”

And here’s then-DHS Secretary Kristi Noem on the death of Alex Pretti:

“This individual who came with weapons and ammunition to stop a law enforcement operation of federal law enforcement officers committed an act of domestic terrorism, that’s the facts.”

Renee Good was in her car when she was killed. Critchfield and her team found that federal government officials have accused 32 U.S. citizens of intentionally using their vehicles as weapons. DHS considers a vehicle to be a deadly weapon, justifying the use of force. Of those 32 drivers, only one pleaded guilty to an assault charge. Three had their cases dismissed; the rest were never charged.

The *Journal* investigation found that in most cases where citizens were accused by the government, the outcome was similar to Reid’s.

181 citizens were accused by the government on X of attacking federal officers, but close to half of them were never even charged at all. When people were charged, more often than not, the cases fell apart. Either they were acquitted or found not guilty at trial.

Fifteen people mentioned in government posts pleaded guilty before going to trial. Ten of whom pleaded guilty for lesser offenses than what the government initially charged them with.

Videos have often played major roles in contradicting the government’s case. Critchfield and her team viewed videos that repeatedly cast doubt on the government’s allegations. Protesters were often called violent rioters or professional agitators and accused of making physical contact in some way with agents, but video footage often showed immigration agents being the first to lay their hands on demonstrators.

The *Journal* found that most of the government's assault allegations against American protesters posted on X were unsubstantiated. Even federal prosecutors themselves acknowledged that in some cases, the evidence to back up these charges wasn't there.

Federal prosecutors across the nation told Critchfield and her team that they are facing intense pressure to charge demonstrators and bystanders with crimes even when video evidence contradicts what officers initially claimed about what occurred, or in situations where they wouldn't normally pursue federal charges.

The costs to those who are arrested are substantial. Even in cases where the person is exonerated, they must still deal with posting bail, securing defense attorneys, and taking days off from work to appear in court. In more extreme cases, people are doxed online and face death threats.

Reid says she's been more hesitant about engaging in political speech, even though, as she put it, "Those are our rights as U.S. citizens and they're being stifled."

Conclusions

The *Journal's* investigation concluded that:

"U.S. citizens are caught in the crosshairs of an aggressive government campaign to detain and demonize detractors, including by calling them terrorists, rioters, and agitators. The Department of Homeland Security, which was created in 2002 to protect Americans, has turned its force against U.S. citizens."

By putting a public bull's-eye on Americans whom the government accuses of assault, the *Journal* also found that the Trump administration is chilling First Amendment expression:

"People who had been accused publicly by the federal government of assaulting federal officers ... are less likely to participate in protests and less likely to put themselves in situations where their name might be tracked.... There is a real pressure to crack down and send a message to people who the government views as

perceived dissenters, even if the video contradicts what agents have initially claimed happened.”

Again, let me remind you that this comes from *The Wall Street Journal*.