



Gregory Bovino: The Border Patrol's Most Controversial Commander

Research compiled: January 12, 2026. Sources reviewed: 35+ including electoral candidacy analysis. Gregory Bovino has emerged as the most visible, and polarizing, figure in the Trump administration's second-term immigration enforcement apparatus. The 55-year-old Border Patrol veteran now serves as "Commander at Large," an unprecedented title with no statutory basis, reporting directly to DHS Secretary Kristi Noem.

Executive Summary: Key Findings

Federal Judge Found He Lied

U.S. District Judge Sara Ellis found that Bovino admitted he lied about circumstances justifying use of force, specifically regarding whether a rock hit him before he deployed tear gas in Little Village. According to [WTTW News](#), the judge stated from the bench: "Defendant Bovino admitted that he lied about whether a rock hit him before he deployed tear gas."

Unprecedented Title Without Legal Basis

Bovino holds the title "Commander at Large" — a rank with no statutory basis in federal law. Following Trump's inauguration in January 2025, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem created this unprecedented title specifically for Bovino, establishing direct reporting outside normal Border Patrol command structure.

Highest Use-of-Force Ratio

[POGO analysis](#) found El Centro Sector under his command had the highest use-of-force ratio of any Border Patrol sector: 3.6:1, compared to a national average of 2:1. In 2025, El Centro agents reported 410 force incidents per 100,000 apprehensions, the highest rate anywhere along the border.

Family Immigration History

His grandfather immigrated from Italy via chain migration in 1927, according to [Chicago Sun-Times](#) investigative reporting. Joseph Sciorra, director of the Calandra Italian American Institute, called it "astonishing" to see "a person whose grandfather was an immigrant engaging in such abhorrent and violent treatment of contemporary migrants."

Targeting Non-Criminals

Only 3% of those detained in Chicago had convictions for violent crimes. In Kern County raids, 77 of 78 arrested had no prior criminal record known to agents, according to [CalMatters](#). This directly contradicted Bovino's public claim that agents targeted a "predetermined list" with criminal records.

Father's Fatal DUI

His father killed a woman in a drunk-driving crash in 1981 when Gregory was approximately 11 to 14 years old. This biographical detail has proven significant given Bovino's later emphasis on targeting undocumented immigrants with DUI records, a contradiction noted by multiple journalists covering his enforcement operations.

Early Life and Family Tragedy

Italian-American Immigrant Roots

Gregory Bovino was born in 1969 or 1970 and grew up in the "High Country" of northwestern North Carolina, near the tourist town of Blowing Rock and the college town of Boone. His family history is marked by both immigrant origins and tragedy.

According to [Chicago Sun-Times investigative reporting](#), the Bovino family traces its American origins to Calabria, in southern Italy. Bovino's great-grandparents, Michele and Luigia Bovino, emigrated from the Aprigliano region of Calabria to Pennsylvania in 1909, where Michele worked as a coal miner. Michele filed for citizenship in May 1924, the same month the U.S. Border Patrol was created, and became a naturalized citizen in 1927.

Gregory's grandfather, Vincenzo Bovino, arrived in the United States at age 12 in 1927 aboard the S.S. Giuseppe Verdi through a process now commonly called "chain migration." He received derivative citizenship through his father's naturalization. This family history has drawn pointed criticism from immigration scholars. Joseph Sciorra, director of the Calandra Italian American Institute at the City University of New York, told the Sun-Times he found it "astonishing" to see "a person whose grandfather was an immigrant engaging in such abhorrent and violent treatment of contemporary migrants."

Father's Fatal DUI Crash

Bovino's childhood was shaped by family trauma. His mother, Betty Hartley Bovino, came from a family with deep North Carolina roots and served as a founding member of the charitable Women's Club and secretary of the Blowing Rock chamber of commerce. His father, Michael "Mike" Bovino, owned a bar called "The Library Club" in Blowing Rock.

In June 1981, when Gregory was approximately 11 to 14 years old, his father killed a 26-year-old woman named Janie Mae Mitchell in a drunk-driving crash in Blowing Rock. According to court records reviewed by the [Chicago Sun-Times](#), Mike Bovino had a prior DUI conviction seven years earlier. He pleaded guilty to misdemeanor "death by motor vehicle" and was sentenced to 18 months in prison, though records indicate he served approximately four months in a state facility for alcoholism treatment. Gregory's parents divorced soon after the incident.

This biographical detail has proven significant given Bovino's later emphasis on targeting undocumented immigrants with DUI records, a contradiction noted by multiple journalists covering his enforcement operations.

Education and Path to Border Patrol

Bovino graduated from Watauga High School in Boone, North Carolina, in 1988. He was a member of the wrestling team and received the "most improved" award during his senior year. His high school wrestling coach, Lee Stroupe, described him to the Sun-Times as a "solid-rock student-athlete" who was "not bashful" and "liked to tell stories, funny stories."

He attended Western Carolina University, appearing on the Dean's List in 1991 according to the [Asheville Times](#). That same year, he began the Leader Development and Assessment Course (LDAC) at Fort Lewis, Washington, as reported by the [Hickory Daily Record](#). He graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor's degree magna cum laude in Natural Resources Management and Forestry.



Bachelor's degree, magna cum laude

Western Carolina University (1993)



Master's degree in Public Administration

Appalachian State University



Master's degree in National Security Strategy

National War College



CBP Leadership Institute

2012



DHS Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program

2016

Before joining the Border Patrol, Bovino worked briefly for the Boone Police Department. He has stated in interviews that he was inspired to join the Border Patrol after watching the 1982 Jack Nicholson film "The Border" at age 11. In a 2021 podcast, he said he "couldn't believe the Border Patrol agents in the movie were the bad guys" and was moved to join in 1996 "to show he was the opposite—a good border cop."

Career Timeline: From Agent to Commander

Gregory Bovino joined the U.S. Border Patrol on November 17, 1996, as a member of Class 325 at the Border Patrol Academy, according to official CBP records.

1996-2008: Early Career and Tactical Specialization

Bovino's first duty assignment was at the El Centro Station in California's El Centro Sector.

(Note: Wikipedia initially stated his first assignment was El Paso, Texas, but official CBP press releases confirm El Centro.) He was promoted to Senior Patrol Agent in 1999 and to Supervisory Border Patrol Agent in May 2002.

During his early career, Bovino served in BORTAC (Border Patrol Tactical Unit) as Acting Field Operations Supervisor and helped develop the Marksman Observer training program. He deployed internationally to Honduras, Egypt, and other parts of Africa. In May 2004, he was promoted to Assistant Chief of the Special Operations Division at USBP Headquarters in Washington, D.C., where he spearheaded Operation Stonegarden and coordinated disaster response for Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Wilma, and Gustav.

2020-2023: El Centro Leadership and Biden-Era Removal

In April 2020, Bovino assumed command as Chief Patrol Agent of the El Centro Sector in California. Under his leadership, the sector ranked first nationally in methamphetamine seizures. However, his tenure was also marked by disproportionate use-of-force incidents.

In August 2023, Bovino was relieved of his position at El Centro and encouraged to retire.

According to [WTTW reporting](#), this followed critical congressional testimony about Biden administration border conditions, concerns about his social media presence, and an online profile photo showing him posing with an assault rifle. Republican congressmen intervened, and Bovino was reinstated shortly thereafter.

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2008-2020: Sector Leadership

In October 2008, Bovino was promoted to Patrol Agent in Charge (PAIC) of the Blythe Border Patrol Station in the Yuma Sector, as reported by the [El Paso Times](#). He oversaw operations at two permanent traffic checkpoints covering interior areas of Arizona, California, and Nevada.

In 2010, Bovino led a controversial three-day operation to raid airports and bus stations in Las Vegas. The operation was halted after its first hour following criticism from Senator Harry Reid. This early incident foreshadowed later controversies over enforcement tactics in interior cities.

From 2012 to 2016, Bovino served as Patrol Agent in Charge of the Imperial Beach Border Patrol Station in the San Diego Sector, overseeing 417 agents along six miles of land border and 66 miles of coastline. In April 2016, he was promoted to Associate Chief of Policy at USBP Headquarters, his first Senior Executive Service position.

On July 9, 2018, Bovino became Chief Patrol Agent of the New Orleans Sector, managing 694 miles of coastal border across seven states. He served on the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Gulf Coast High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area executive board.

2025-Present: Commander at Large Under Trump

Following Trump's inauguration in January 2025, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem created the unprecedented title "Commander at Large" specifically for Bovino, establishing direct reporting outside normal Border Patrol command structure. According to [NBC News](#), he has since led the administration's highest-profile operations in Los Angeles, Chicago, Charlotte, New Orleans, and Minneapolis.

Controversies and Legal Issues Prior to 2025

Biden Administration Reprimand

During the Biden administration, Bovino received an official reprimand for referring to undocumented immigrants as "scum, filth and trash." According to [CNN reporting on his deposition](#), Bovino claimed he was referring only to a specific individual, not immigrants generally.

Disproportionate Use of Force Data

Analysis by the [Project On Government Oversight \(POGO\)](#) using CBP's own use-of-force reporting system found that the El Centro Sector under Bovino's leadership had the highest use-of-force to assault ratio of any Border Patrol sector in the nation: **3.6:1**, compared to a national average of 2:1. In 2025, El Centro agents reported 410 force incidents per 100,000 apprehensions, the highest rate anywhere along the border.

Adam Isacson of the Washington Office on Latin America stated: "If there's an outsized number of use-of-force incidents being reported in a sleepy sector, that probably tells us a lot about the reigning organizational culture in that sector."

Operation Return to Sender: Kern County Raids

On January 7, 2025, the day after Congress certified Trump's election victory, Bovino led "Operation Return to Sender," sending 65 agents more than 300 miles north to Kern County, California, for interior immigration raids.

- **Key Finding:** [CalMatters' investigation](#) revealed that Border Patrol had no prior knowledge of criminal or immigration history for **77 of the 78 people arrested**, directly contradicting Bovino's public claim that agents targeted a "predetermined list" with criminal records.

U.S. District Judge Jennifer Thurston's 88-page ruling found likely Fourth and Fifth Amendment violations, including stops "without reasonable suspicion" and arrests "without probable cause." The preliminary injunction requires 90-day constitutional training for all 900 El Centro Sector agents.

Operation Midway Blitz: Chicago's 64-Day Siege

Operation Midway Blitz launched on September 8–9, 2025, covering the entire state of Illinois plus Lake County, Indiana. According to [Chicago Sun-Times reporting](#), the operation was named in honor of Katie Abraham, a Chicago woman killed by an undocumented driver in Urbana earlier in 2025. Hundreds of DHS agents used Naval Station Great Lakes as a staging area.



Documented Incidents

- Silverio Villegas-Gonzalez killed on September 12, 2025, in Franklin Park—the operation's first fatality
- A woman shot five times on October 4, 2025, in Brighton Park
- Alderwoman Jessie Fuentes, a Puerto Rican U.S. citizen, handcuffed in an emergency room
- A 1-year-old child pepper sprayed with parents at a Sam's Club parking lot
- A children's Halloween parade disrupted and canceled in Old Irving Park
- A WGN-TV employee detained for 7 hours for filming agents
- Chicago police officers tear-gassed by federal agents on multiple occasions
- Black Hawk helicopters used to rappel agents onto residential buildings

Lori Lightfoot Confrontation

Former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot became Bovino's most prominent critic. According to [Fox News](#), Lightfoot wrote on X: "Glory hound Greg Bovino cannot resist acting a fool in the third largest media market. The actions of the CBP militia under his command have been unconstitutional [sic] and shameful. Hey, Greg, your day of reckoning is fast approaching."

Lightfoot launched the "ICE Accountability Project," an independent initiative to collect and verify reports of alleged criminal and abusive conduct by federal immigration agents.

Federal Court Findings: A Judge Finds Bovino Lied Under Oath

Gregory Bovino gave sworn deposition testimony over three days, October 30, November 3, and November 4, 2025, in the case of Chicago Headline Club v. Noem, a federal lawsuit filed by journalists, clergy, and protesters against DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, Bovino, and other officials.

The Tear Gas Admission

The most significant admission came regarding Bovino's use of tear gas in Little Village on October 23, 2025. Bovino initially testified he was hit by a rock before deploying tear gas. According to [WTTW News](#), he later corrected this testimony:

"That white rock was – was thrown at me, but that was after – that was after I deployed less lethal means in chemical munitions. I was mixed up with several other objects in a very chaotic environment and other objects were thrown at me. And I confused that white rock with other objects like water bottles, and fireworks, and many other things that were happening at the time. So I want to correct that."

U.S. District Judge Sara Ellis stated from the bench on November 6, 2025: "**Defendant Bovino admitted that he lied about whether a rock hit him before he deployed tear gas in Little Village.**"

Judge Ellis's Credibility Findings

In a 233-page written opinion, Judge Ellis found Bovino's testimony deeply problematic. According to [CBS News Chicago](#):

"Bovino appeared evasive over the three days of his deposition, either providing 'cute' responses to Plaintiffs' counsel's questions or outright lying."

"I find the government's evidence to be simply not credible."

"The use of force shocks the conscience. This conduct shows no sign of stopping."

Ellis found that despite watching video of himself tackling a man at the Broadview ICE facility, Bovino testified he "never used force" against that person. She wrote that in Brighton Park on October 4, video showed "Defendant Bovino obviously attacks and tackles" a person, despite his denial.

Court Orders and Injunctions

- October 9, 2025: Temporary restraining order prohibiting tear gas on peaceful protesters without warnings
- October 28, 2025: Ordered Bovino to appear in court and wear a body camera
- November 6, 2025: Preliminary injunction requiring two audible warnings before deploying riot control weapons, conspicuous agent identification, body camera activation, and prohibiting standing or kneeling on detainees

The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals stayed portions of Ellis's orders, calling them "overbroad" encroachment on executive powers.

Tennessee Gag Order Violation

According to the [Chicago Sun-Times](#), Bovino is at the center of a pending sanctions request in Nashville federal court. In mid-December 2025, Bovino appeared on FOX News and NewsMax discussing the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, an El Salvador national facing human trafficking charges, despite a gag order issued on October 27, 2025.

Without naming Abrego, he called him "an alien smuggler," "a wife beater," "an MS-13 member," and someone who "wants to leech off the United States." He called judges in the case "extremist" and "activist." The sanction request remains pending.

Minneapolis Operations and Fatal Shooting

Bovino arrived in Minneapolis on January 7, 2026, the same day federal agents killed a U.S. citizen during an enforcement operation. According to [NewsNation](#), Bovino "declined to comment on an ICE officer's use of deadly force."

Fatal Shooting of Renee Nicole Good

On January 7, 2026, ICE Agent Jonathan Ross shot and killed Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old U.S. citizen, mother of three, writer, and poet. The shooting occurred approximately one mile from where George Floyd was killed in 2020.

DHS Secretary Noem described the incident as "an act of domestic terrorism," claiming Good "attempted to run them over and rammed them with her vehicle." However, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, after viewing video evidence, publicly stated: "[Having seen the video myself, I wanna tell everybody directly, that is bullshit.](#)"

Roosevelt High School Incident

Hours after the Good shooting, Border Patrol agents pursued a vehicle that ended in the school zone of Roosevelt High School during student dismissal. According to [Sahan Journal](#), "armed U.S. Border Patrol officers came onto school property during dismissal... and began tackling people; they handcuffed two staff members and released chemical weapons on bystanders."

A special education assistant, described as an African American U.S. citizen, was detained and taken to the Whipple Federal Building before being released that night. Minneapolis Public Schools closed for two days.

Target Store Confrontation

On January 11, 2026, according to [Daily Kos reporting on viral video](#), video showed protesters confronting Bovino and a caravan of agents at a Target store in St. Paul after they stopped for a bathroom break. Bovino quickly exited the men's restroom surrounded by CBP agents as shoppers shouted "Get out! Nobody wants you here!" and "You're a f---- coward."

Somali-American Community Targeting

According to [The Intercept](#), Border Patrol agents detained Ahmed Bin Hassan, a 38-year-old Somali American U.S. citizen, at Minneapolis Airport. When Hassan pointed out he was an Uber driver, the agent responded: "If you were from this country, you would know I'm an immigration agent... I can hear you don't have the same accent as me."

Hassan told The Intercept: "They couldn't hear my voice when they knocked on my window, but they could see my color. I knew what he meant, and I wanted to let him say his racism all out."