SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE S	OPREME COURT OF	THE UNITED STA	7.T.F.S
SYLVIA GONZALEZ	,)	
	Petitioner,)	
v.) No. 22-1	025
EDWARD TREVINO,	II, ET AL.,)	
	Respondents.)	

Pages: 1 through 96

Place: Washington, D.C.

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UN	NITED STATES
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3	SYLVIA GONZALEZ,)
4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 22-1025
6	EDWARD TREVINO, II, ET AL.,)
7	Respondents.)
8		
9		
LO	Washington, D.	C.
L1	Wednesday, March 2	0, 2024
L2		
L3	The above-entitled matter	came on for
L4	oral argument before the Supreme	e Court of the
L5	United States at 10:04 a.m.	
L6		
L7	APPEARANCES:	
L8	ANYA A. BIDWELL, ESQUIRE, Arling	gton, Virginia; on
L9	behalf of the Petitioner.	
20	NICOLE F. REAVES, Assistant to t	the Solicitor General,
21	Department of Justice, Washi	ngton, D.C.; for the
22	United States, as amicus cur	riae, supporting
23	neither party.	
24	LISA S. BLATT, ESQUIRE, Washingt	con, D.C.; on behalf of
25	the Respondents.	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 22-1025,
5	Gonzalez versus Trevino.
6	Ms. Bidwell.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ANYA A. BIDWELL
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MS. BIDWELL: Mr. Chief Justice, and
LO	may it please the Court:
L1	Respondents try to over-read Nieves in
L2	two ways. They need to win on both attempts.
L3	Each is wrong and would lead to results this
L4	Court could not have intended.
L5	First, Respondents say Nieves's rule,
L6	designed for a representative case of
L7	in-the-field law enforcement, now insulates all
L8	government officials. Picture the thin-skinned
L9	bureaucrat scouring for a crime to pin on his
20	critics. According to Respondents, Section 1983
21	has nothing to say about that.
22	Second, Respondents parse Nieves like
23	a statute to say that it limits plaintiffs to a
24	particular type of comparative example. To be
25	sure. Nieves did recognize that evidence of

- 1 subjective motive alone would not get a 2 plaintiff an inference that this motive caused the adverse action. But Nieves does not blind 3 courts to all but one type of objective evidence 4 of causation. 5 Respondents' position extends Nieves 6 7 beyond its moorings. If the mayor in this case got in front of TV cameras and announced that he 8 was going to have Ms. Gonzalez arrested because 9 10 she challenged his authority, the existence of 11 probable cause would make this evidence legally 12 irrelevant. 13 Respondents' position would also toss 14 out of court a critic arrested for jaywalking on 15 a remote country road, even if his town had 16 never arrested anyone for jaywalking before, simply because he couldn't find a non-critic who 17 18 jaywalked on the same spot.
- Nieves balanced important First

 Amendment concerns to protect the on-the-street

 first responder making a "now or never" decision

 to arrest a suspect in his grasp. It did not so

 loosely dispense with the First Amendment

 interests as to give government armchair

 quarterbacks a free hand at the time of their

- 1 choosing to punish their critics.
- 2 I welcome this Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: In Nieves, we dealt
- 4 with an arrest, and is it different here because
- 5 you have a warrant process, you have an
- 6 investigation? Does that break the causal link,
- 7 that we would have a case just where a police
- 8 officer arrests the plaintiff?
- 9 MS. BIDWELL: No, Your Honor, it
- 10 doesn't. In fact, the fact that warrant exists
- 11 here helps us for two reasons. Number one, we
- 12 have an analogue at common law, abuse of
- 13 process, because warrant is a classic legal
- 14 process, but, number two, when it comes to
- but-for causation, magistrates are required to
- 16 look at the arrest affidavit in order to issue a
- 17 warrant. So the arrest affidavit, which we say
- 18 would not have been issued had it not been for
- 19 retaliatory animus, is something that
- 20 magistrates have to take into account, and it is
- 21 a but-for causation.
- 22 And as this Court explained in Bostock
- and just this term in Murray, there could be
- 24 many but-for causations. Our burden is to show
- 25 that, had it not been for animus, that the

- 1 arrest would not have occurred. That's just one
- but -- but-for causation, one but-for cause, and
- 3 we meet that requirement here.
- 4 JUSTICE THOMAS: You say that you use
- 5 abuse of process as the analogue. Have we ever
- 6 used that in -- in -- in these retaliation
- 7 cases?
- 8 MS. BIDWELL: You didn't, but that was
- 9 because there was no process. So, in Lozman,
- 10 you had an on-the-spot arrest. In Reichle, you
- 11 had an on-the-spot arrest. In Nieves, you had
- 12 an on-the-spot arrest. So this is the first
- time that this Court actually sees a case with a
- 14 warrant coming before it.
- And just as at common law, a plaintiff
- 16 could bring a claim even if there was a warrant.
- 17 For example, in Jackson versus American
- 18 Telephone Company, there was a warrant for a
- 19 serious offense. It was a warrant for assault
- with a deadly weapon, and it was properly
- 21 issued. But a plaintiff still had a cause of
- 22 action because that warrant was used as a
- 23 pretext for private purposes, inconsistent with
- 24 the exigencies of the writ in the words of
- 25 common law.

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Your answer is
2	quite interesting and and I think informative
3	because, as you say, if the warrant never should
4	have been sought, it's a different kind of
5	but-for.
6	But also, in many jurisdictions,
7	Florida and California, judges don't make
8	probable cause determinations, correct, when
9	they issue warrants, so
10	MS. BIDWELL: According to
11	Respondents, there are some jurisdictions where
12	there is a discretion to not issue a warrant.
13	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Right. And,
14	secondly and some warrants are false? There
15	are material falsehoods in a warrant?
16	MS. BIDWELL: Yes, Your Honor.
17	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you can't say
18	as a matter of law that that is can break the
19	causation, correct?
20	MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, yes, but
21	when we're we were talking here about not a
22	discretion not to issue a warrant.
23	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Right.
24	MS. BIDWELL: The point here is that
25	magistrates are required under the Fourth

- 1 Amendment to look at two things, whether there
- 2 is probable cause under a warrant and look at
- 3 the oath and affirmation. They have no choice
- 4 but to look at the oath and affirmation. And we
- 5 know that this is oath -- oath and affirmation
- 6 here is the affidavit. And magistrate had no
- 7 choice but to look at that affidavit. And we're
- 8 saying that the affidavit would not have been
- 9 obtained had it not been for animus.
- 10 It's very different from retaliatory
- 11 prosecutions and Hartman because, there, a
- 12 prosecutor can look at many different things in
- order to make a determination of whether to
- 14 pursue the prosecution. An affidavit for a
- 15 warrant can be one of those things, but it
- doesn't have to be that thing.
- 17 So that was the problem in Hartman,
- where you couldn't even get enough evidence of a
- 19 but-for cause without looking into the head of
- 20 the prosecutor.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: Well --
- MS. BIDWELL: Here, you don't have to
- look.
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You're saying that
- 25 Nieves doesn't apply to anything but

- on-the-spot. I dissented in Nieves, so I
- 2 probably on -- on a clean slate would likely
- 3 agree with you, but what do I do with the line
- 4 in Nieves that says that "plaintiff pressing a
- 5 retaliatory arrest claim must plead and prove
- 6 the absence of probable cause for the arrest"?
- 7 Sort of --
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes. So, in Nieves,
- 9 we're talking about the holding not extending
- 10 beyond its reasoning. And the reasoning in
- 11 Nieves is colored by this representative case,
- 12 which, as -- as the government argued in Nieves,
- is the vast bulk of cases which are on-the-spot
- 14 arrest cases.
- 15 And we're talking about in Nieves
- 16 having to evaluate police officers under
- 17 objective standard of reasonableness at the time
- when they have to take speech into account while
- 19 making a determination whether to arrest a
- 20 suspect or not.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I -- I didn't
- 22 dissent in Nieves.
- 23 (Laughter.)
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And the
- 25 Court's opinion in that case went out of its way

- 1 to emphasize the narrowness of the exception.
- MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, that's
- 3 because Nieves talks about a vast bulk of
- 4 retaliatory arrest cases. The -- the typical
- 5 retaliatory arrest case is when a police
- 6 officer, like in Nieves, is patrolling the
- 7 streets, having to, not on his own time but on a
- 8 suspect's time, having to respond to dangerous
- 9 situations. The last thing we want is for
- 10 police officer worrying about communicating with
- 11 a suspect.
- 12 So that's why, even under the
- 13 objective evidence carveout, statements and
- 14 motivations of a particular arresting officer
- 15 are irrelevant at that point.
- 16 Nieves covers all these cases that are
- important, and there is a very particular
- 18 causation complexity in Nieves in that it is
- impossible to untangle what a police officer is
- 20 thinking at the time. As Justice O'Connor
- 21 explained in her -- in Quarles, police officers,
- 22 when they're making on-the-spot decisions, have
- 23 -- themselves don't have a fully formed
- understanding of why they're doing what they're
- 25 doing.

1	So it's a very particular causal
2	complexity that's present in a lot of cases, but
3	it is not present in a case like this one, where
4	you have two months to issue a warrant based on
5	no new information. All information that was
6	developed developed at the time when
7	Ms. Gonzalez took this piece of paper from one
8	
9	JUSTICE ALITO: But doesn't the
LO	doesn't the causal complexity concern the causal
L1	complexity that face that would face courts
L2	if the rule were otherwise, not causal
L3	complexity that is limited to the situation
L4	where there is what you call an on-the-spot
L5	arrest?
L6	MS. BIDWELL: It concerns courts,
L7	right, because you don't want judges
L8	second-guessing what police officers are doing
L9	when they're making very difficult decisions
20	whether to arrest a suspect, whether to remove
21	the suspect from the streets. And they also
22	have to communicate to the suspect.
23	JUSTICE ALITO: But that exists
24	whether or not it's an on-the-spot arrest. The
25	causal complexity exists in in all of the

- 1 class of cases that Nieves was talking about.
- 2 And when the Court was stating what it
- 3 held, I don't see a reference to split-second
- 4 decisions. The Court says that Nieves and
- 5 Weight argue that the same -- that no probable
- 6 cause -- that there should be a no probable
- 7 cause requirement. Their primary contention is
- 8 that retaliatory arrest claims involve causal
- 9 complexities akin to those identified in
- 10 Hartman. As a general matter, we agree.
- 11 Then later, when it's stating the
- 12 holding, because there was probable cause to
- 13 arrest Bartlett, his retaliatory arrest claim
- 14 fails as a matter of law. I don't see a
- 15 reference to split-second decisions.
- MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, on page
- 17 1725, you make reference to split-second
- decisions when you're explaining a particular
- 19 type of causal complexity here where an officer
- 20 has to make a decision whether to arrest and in
- 21 that moment has to determine -- take speech into
- 22 account to determine whether suspect is ready to
- 23 cooperate.
- 24 And that very example also appears in
- 25 Reichle. That very example also appears in

- 1 Lozman. This is the causal complexity that is
- 2 particularly difficult to untangle.
- 3 Other causal complexities -- and
- 4 with -- of course, with prosecutors, you have
- 5 your own separate problem where you need to
- 6 actually talk to a prosecutor to determine what
- 7 the prosecutor was thinking, and that
- 8 second-guessing those decisions is also
- 9 difficult.
- 10 But the kind of causal complexity
- 11 that's present here is very similar to the
- 12 causal complexity in Mt. Healthy. Mt. Healthy
- created the burden-shifting framework to ensure
- 14 that we can disentangle proper considerations of
- speech from improper considerations of speech.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, do you have a --
- 17 JUSTICE JACKSON: I think --
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: -- do you have a -- a
- 19 reason -- I assume you do have a reason -- for
- 20 stressing this argument rather than your other
- 21 argument that the Fifth Circuit understood what
- 22 was needed to prove that the case fell within
- the exception too narrowly?
- MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, we would be
- 25 happy with the objective evidence carveout as

- 1 well if it were -- if -- if this Court
- 2 allowed objective evidence of causation to come
- 3 in other than what the Fifth Circuit is talking
- 4 about, which is a very specific comparator of
- 5 non-arrests.
- 6 But our position is that Nieves
- 7 covered the vast bulk of cases, and those cases
- 8 involve on-the-spot police officers having to
- 9 make very difficult decisions.
- 10 On the other -- on the one hand, you
- only have mere allegations of state of mind. On
- 12 the other hand, you have probable cause. And
- this Court said that in those types of
- 14 situations, we're not going to put police
- officers in this very uncomfortable position.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: But are you making
- this argument because you have bigger fish to
- 18 fry or because you think this is the argument
- 19 that's most likely to succeed in this case and
- 20 serve the interests of your client?
- 21 MS. BIDWELL: This -- we're making
- this argument because Ms. Gonzalez's case
- 23 clearly is not the kind of case that the Court
- 24 was concerned with in Nieves. This case is much
- 25 more similar to Lozman on the facts, and in that

- 1 case, you said that Mt. Healthy rules should
- 2 apply.
- 3 That said, Your Honor, there is a way
- 4 to -- we would be happy with the Fifth Circuit
- 5 reversal on either one of the questions
- 6 presented.
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: On -- on the argument
- 8 that you have been making, I -- I -- I agree
- 9 with you that the split-second arrest seems to
- 10 be a key part of the Court's reasoning, maybe
- 11 not all of the Court's reasoning but some
- 12 critical part of it.
- But I -- I guess I wonder whether
- 14 dividing the world into split-second arrest
- cases versus other cases is going to be a very
- 16 difficult thing to do. I mean, presumably, if
- 17 we look at the world of cases in which
- 18 retaliatory arrest is charged, they're going to
- 19 fall on a spectrum with the most split-second
- 20 arrest case over here and something that looks
- 21 extremely different over there and a lot of
- 22 stuff in the middle.
- 23 And it seems hard to me to draw that
- line in a way that would prove administrable,
- 25 predictable, so I was wondering -- yeah, respond

- 1 to that.
- 2 MS. BIDWELL: Yes, Your Honor. Our
- 3 position on Question Presented 2 is that the
- 4 line to be drawn is at the well-known Fourth
- 5 Amendment standards to the police officers about
- 6 initial lawful encounter. As long as probable
- 7 cause and arrest within -- arise within that
- 8 same initial lawful encounter, it doesn't have
- 9 to be split second, Your Honor. It can be -- it
- 10 can last for a while. But, as long as it's
- 11 within this initial lawful encounter, then
- 12 police arrests go under Nieves. But, when that
- 13 encounter ends, no.
- 14 And I'd like to also emphasize that
- 15 within that initial lawful encounter, you can
- 16 obtain a warrant, an emergency warrant, for
- example, or if you encounter a suspect and then
- 18 you pulled up information on him and all of a
- 19 sudden you see, oh, there is a warrant for
- 20 previous arrest, then you could use -- when you
- 21 learn of the warrant, as long as you arrest
- 22 within the same initial encounter, then you fall
- 23 within Nieves. And those are traditional Fourth
- 24 Amendment concepts that police officers are
- 25 trained on.

```
1
                That said, Your Honor, I understand
      that another way to go about this, as I
 2
 3
      indicated in my opening, is to put all arrests
      on the same spectrum, and in that case, we
 4
      absolutely agree with the United States
 5
 6
      Government that objective evidence of causation
7
      should be allowed irrespective of its form.
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: To that --
 8
 9
               JUSTICE BARRETT: Counsel -- go ahead.
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: To that second
10
     question or to the first question presented --
11
12
               MS. BIDWELL: Yes.
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- in your brief,
13
14
     you mentioned that there was probable cause that
15
     Respondent Mayor Trevino violated the same
16
      statute by taking the petition home and keeping
17
      it overnight. I had no idea where that came
18
      from because you didn't have a cite in the
19
     record to that, and I don't know if it was -- I
     don't think it was in the complaint.
20
21
               MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor -- sorry.
2.2
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Where was that
23
      from?
               MS. BIDWELL: Yeah, it is in the
24
25
      complaint. It's on page 110A of the complaint.
```

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I was reading the 2 complaint too fast. So thank you.
- 3 All right. Why wouldn't that be
- 4 sufficient comparative evidence that someone
- 5 else took this by mistake for overnight and kept
- 6 it?
- 7 MS. BIDWELL: That's exactly the
- 8 problem with the Fifth Circuit rule, is that it
- 9 wouldn't allow this kind of a comparator because
- 10 the Fifth Circuit is parsing the rule so
- 11 hypertechnically with such a high degree of
- 12 specificity that somebody like a mayor would not
- 13 be similarly situated to somebody like
- 14 Ms. Gonzalez. But --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Why is that? I
- 16 don't understand that.
- 17 MS. BIDWELL: Under the Fifth Circuit
- 18 --
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Even accepting
- their rule, if some other government official
- 21 did the same thing, that would seem to be -- be
- 22 useful evidence.
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes, Your Honor, but the
- 24 way that the Fifth Circuit is describing that
- 25 rule, just the fact that Ms. Gonzalez is a

- 1 council member and Mayor Trevino is a mayor and
- 2 they're serving different functions makes the
- 3 Mayor not similarly situated to Ms. Gonzalez.
- 4 And it is important to not just limit
- 5 the objective evidence to comparators because,
- 6 unlike equal protection cases, you could have
- 7 situations with First Amendment violations where
- 8 you can't point to a direct comparator.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: Counsel, can I ask
- 10 --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why not --
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: This is a very --
- 13 go ahead.
- 14 JUSTICE BARRETT: Finish.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I was just
- 16 going to say -- I'll -- I'll go ahead.
- 17 You -- when you refer to it as a
- 18 comparator, are you referring to it in the terms
- 19 of the Nieves exception?
- 20 MS. BIDWELL: Yes, we're talking about
- 21 Nieves exception.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I mean,
- in Nieves, the whole point is -- we were talking
- about jaywalking, and the point is nobody's ever
- 25 arrested for jaywalking unless there's something

- 1 fishy going on on. And to sort of pick one
- 2 person and say, well, that's an adequate
- 3 comparator, I think, really misses the whole
- 4 point of Nieves.
- 5 MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, if we are
- 6 limiting Nieves only to endemic crimes like
- 7 jaywalking, then -- and mayors go on to this
- 8 Nieves all-arrests rule, then the only people
- 9 who could ever be sued for violations of First
- 10 Amendment rights under the objective evidence
- 11 carveout would be the police officers who are
- making those types of jaywalking decisions, and
- mayors and police chiefs who are not making
- 14 those kind of difficult decisions on the spot
- 15 would be exempt from it.
- So it is important --
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but, I
- mean, that's expanding the whole inquiry, right?
- 19 I mean, you're -- the part about the comparators
- in Nieves is sort of like a page and a half at
- 21 the end. There's a lot more that goes before us
- 22 that explains why you do not normally allow this
- 23 kind of inquiry.
- 24 MS. BIDWELL: Yes. And you normally
- don't allow this kind of inquiry because police

2.1

- 1 officers have to make decisions where they have
- 2 to take speech into account very quickly, so --
- 3 but I understand that now I'm talking about
- 4 Question Presented 2 again.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah.
- 6 MS. BIDWELL: But, with Question
- 7 Presented 1, we agree with the United States
- 8 Government that there could be other evidence of
- 9 causation that -- that courts shouldn't be
- 10 blinding themselves to. Even the Fifth
- 11 Circuit's majority opinion said that we
- 12 sympathize with Ms. Gonzalez, but we feel like
- 13 Nieves obligates us to blind ourselves to
- 14 evidence of causation, like the fact that two
- 15 police officers looked into Ms. Gonzalez and
- thought there was nothing warranting an arrest,
- that a prosecutor dismissed the charges, that a
- 18 special detective walked a warrant under an
- 19 emergency procedure designed for fleeing
- 20 suspects to put away a lady --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, is it --
- MS. BIDWELL: -- in her 70s.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Counsel -- oh,
- 24 sorry. Go ahead.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You go ahead.

1	JUSTICE BARRETT: I was just going to
2	ask you whether, on that point of looking at
3	other evidence, would it be consistent with the
4	Nieves exception to look at things other than
5	comparators? Let's let's say that I agree
6	with you that the Fifth Circuit required too
7	much of the comparator, too much specificity,
8	maybe too much, you know, statistical evidence.
9	But isn't the other kinds of evidence
10	that you're looking at aren't those isn't
11	that the kind of Mt. Healthy evidence that
12	doesn't necessarily go to the probable cause
13	inquiry?
14	MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, that goes to
15	the definition of objective evidence in Nieves,
16	and what we know from Nieves, on page 1722, the
17	Court specifically explains that in Mt. Healthy,
18	often motive alone is going to get you an
19	inference of causation.
20	And in cases like Nieves, motive alone
21	is not going to get you an inference of
22	causation. It has to be something beyond
23	subjective motive. So, for example, here, if we
24	were just to allege in our complaint that Mayor
25	Travino digliked Mg Conzalez hegauge she

- 1 supported his opponent, that kind of evidence of
- 2 motive under Nieves is not going to qualify as
- 3 objective evidence.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: What if she made the
- 5 kind of mistake on her state tax forms that
- 6 would have been prosecutable, you know, under
- 7 the law, but you had all the same objective
- 8 evidence, but, you know, this was -- and forget
- 9 about the differences between local and county
- 10 and state for these purposes -- but the crime is
- 11 different? This is kind of a random crime, you
- 12 know, that she's charged with here.
- But you're saying that all of this
- 14 evidence of retaliatory conduct can come in,
- which is the Mt. Healthy kind of evidence. It's
- not so uncommon for people to be prosecuted for
- 17 cheating on their taxes. Would we be able to
- 18 consider all -- doesn't that swallow the Nieves
- 19 exception?
- 20 MS. BIDWELL: It doesn't, Your Honor,
- 21 because you -- it has to be evidence beyond
- 22 subjective motive, so like the government
- argues, for example, the evidence of irregular
- 24 procedure, walking the warrant -- yes.
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah, I'm -- I'm

2.4

- 1 positing -- everything else that you have --
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- is there except
- 4 the crime changes and it's not kind of this
- 5 random crime, you know, in random circumstances,
- 6 but --
- 7 MS. BIDWELL: Right.
- 8 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- she has the same
- 9 long-running disputes, the same kind of other
- 10 evidence, but the crime is more substantial.
- 11 Your position is the same?
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes. Our position is
- 13 that the Court must be allowed to look at that
- 14 evidence. It doesn't mean that the Court is
- going to say, oh, you know what, it neutralizes
- 16 probable cause and the plaintiff should be able
- 17 to proceed.
- 18 Our position is that the court should
- 19 be allowed to look at it and then say, okay,
- 20 maybe that's enough or maybe that's not enough.
- 21 But the problem with the Fifth Circuit's rule is
- 22 that it says you can't even look at any of that
- 23 evidence and weigh it. And --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: So reckless driving,
- 25 they follow her on her way home and she's going

- 1 -- you know, what is the standard -- 15 miles
- 2 over the speed limit, she's -- she's speeding
- late at night on a country road where there's no
- 4 one there. Same -- same rule? The crime
- 5 doesn't matter?
- 6 MS. BIDWELL: It -- it's not an
- 7 offense-by-offense standard. It's a standard of
- 8 what did she do and then -- versus what kind of
- 9 evidence she can provide and whether probable
- 10 cause, given that context, tends to show that
- 11 the arrest would not have happened had it not
- 12 been for speech.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- Justice Thomas, anything further?
- 16 Justice Alito?
- 17 Justice Sotomayor?
- 18 Justice Kagan?
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The -- the crime's
- 20 prosecuted on occasion, correct? It's just the
- 21 fact pattern here that is unusual, is that --
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And I guess, on
- 24 the fact pattern here, how are you going to have
- 25 evidence that goes one way or the other? I

- 1 mean, the fact that no one's been prosecuted who
- 2 stole a doc -- allegedly stole a document from
- 3 the next person at the city council meetings, so
- 4 I'm just curious what you think -- how this is
- 5 going to proceed? I mean, you look at the
- 6 video, which I have, and, you know, you could
- 7 come to one conclusion about this.
- 8 MS. BIDWELL: It's -- in -- in
- 9 -- in that sense, it's similar to other statutes
- 10 like child endangerment, for example, where you
- 11 do have a serious crime, but you could have
- 12 somebody like, I let my 13-year-old kid drive
- around the neighborhood on a bicycle, right, and
- if somebody is arresting me under the child
- endangerment statute, then it raises red flags.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But, if -- if --
- 17 if the conclusion is that someone intentionally
- 18 -- the evidence suggests probable cause that
- someone intentionally stole a document that's a
- 20 government document and did it with a motive
- 21 because concerns have been raised about her role
- in getting the signatures on the petition the
- day before, so she had motive, and you have the
- video, and we know that stealing a government
- document is, in fact, a crime that's prosecuted,

- 1 I guess --
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes, Your Honor, two
- 3 things for that. Number one is that the statute
- 4 is a general intent statute, so you don't need
- 5 to be looking at her motives, why would she take
- 6 a piece of paper from one side of the dais and
- 7 put it on the other side of the dais.
- 8 But even if --
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But I -- keep
- 10 going. I'm sorry.
- MS. BIDWELL: But, no, you're right,
- 12 Your Honor. Even if you were to say that this
- is a crime, you know, on the one hand, you have
- 14 probable cause for a serious crime, and on the
- other hand, you have evidence of a retaliatory
- 16 motive, that courts should be allowed to at
- 17 least look at it.
- The problem with the Fifth Circuit's
- 19 rule --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I guess --
- MS. BIDWELL: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I guess the
- 23 concern I have here is the crime is a -- the
- offense is a serious offense, the offense
- 25 itself. The question's really whether the --

- 1 the facts of this case meet it.
- 2 But, if you concluded that it met it,
- 3 other people would be prosecuted for that too.
- 4 The fact that there hasn't been someone else
- 5 prosecuted just shows that, I suppose, you know,
- 6 no one else in these circumstances has been
- 7 accused of that or -- or they haven't found
- 8 anyone.
- 9 MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But, if you -- if
- 11 you intentionally stole a government document at
- 12 a government proceeding, you know, that's --
- MS. BIDWELL: Justice Kavanaugh, we --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- that's not --
- 15 that's not nothing.
- MS. BIDWELL: We -- we disagree with
- 17 that characterization. Our position in the
- 18 complaint --
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I -- I understand
- 20 that.
- MS. BIDWELL: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's the -- but,
- in terms of concluding that it's retaliatory, I
- 24 think you have to show some evidence that she
- 25 was singled out for -- under Nieves, singled

- 1 out. I mean, Nieves is very specific about
- 2 saying you need to identify similarly situated
- 3 individuals not engaged in the same sort of
- 4 protected speech had not been -- had not been
- 5 arrested.
- 6 MS. BIDWELL: And under the Seventh
- 7 Circuit's rule, we would be able to point to the
- 8 Mayor, and he would be a similarly situated
- 9 individual. And also under the Seventh Circuit
- 10 rule, we would be able to point to the fact that
- 11 two police officers independently looked into
- 12 Ms. Gonzalez and decided there was nothing
- there, that the prosecutor looked into
- 14 Ms. Gonzalez and decided not to pursue charges.
- 15 And it also gets to this idea of how
- 16 many crimes we have on the books today. It
- 17 would be one thing if you had 70 crimes. It's
- another thing when you have 70 million crimes,
- 19 and they are written in a broad manner.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. But
- 21 stealing something intentionally, if that's what
- 22 happened, that's -- you know.
- MS. BIDWELL: There is probable cause
- 24 to say that she concealed a government record
- 25 because she took a -- a piece of paper from one

- 1 side of the dais and moved it to another side of
- 2 the dais. As Judge Oldham explains in his
- 3 dissent, this kind of a crime is akin to my
- 4 letting my kid ride a bicycle around the
- 5 neighborhood but being charged under or being
- 6 arrested for child endangerment.
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. Thank you.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 9 Barrett?
- 10 Justice Jackson?
- 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: So I guess I'm
- wondering whether you're asking for what seems
- to be a reasonable extension of the Nieves
- 14 exception because, as I read it, I mean, the
- 15 Fifth Circuit is not sort of coming out of
- 16 nowhere. It does say objective evidence that he
- was arrested when otherwise similarly situated
- individuals not engaged in the same sort of
- 19 protected speech had not been. And I get that
- 20 that would capture your mayor scenario, that --
- 21 that evidence.
- I'm not sure that applying that in the
- 23 way that it seems to be articulated here would
- 24 capture the evidence of the two other
- 25 prosecutors deciding not to prosecute, et

- 1 cetera, et cetera.
- 2 So are you asking for sort of an
- 3 extension of the Nieves exception to cover that
- 4 kind of evidence as well?
- 5 MS. BIDWELL: Your Honor, we don't --
- 6 we're not asking for an extension because we
- 7 think that Nieves specifically articulates what
- 8 the exception is concerned with. And it's a
- 9 situation where probable cause will not tend to
- show that the arrest would not have happened had
- 11 it not been for speech.
- 12 And in that sense, objective
- evidence -- as the government argues, objective
- evidence of causation, irrespective of its form,
- 15 should be allowed to come in. And that's also
- 16 the Seventh Circuit's point.
- 17 JUSTICE JACKSON: View of it, all
- 18 right. So, if we -- if we take your view of it
- 19 that we don't limit it to just that language,
- 20 but we're looking at what was Nieves really
- about with respect to the exception and,
- therefore, allow all the kinds of evidence
- 23 you're talking about, many -- many of the
- 24 Respondents' arguments suggest that this is
- 25 going to be opening the floodgates to all sorts

Т	of vexatious litigation. So maybe you can
2	explain why that wouldn't be the case.
3	MS. BIDWELL: Well, one of the reasons
4	it wouldn't be the case is because of Chief
5	Justice Rehnquist's dissent in Crawford-El,
6	where, for him, one way to limit the floodgates
7	was to introduce this very requirement of
8	objective, that objective evidence of causation
9	is something that makes it very difficult for
10	plaintiff to be able to meet that standard.
11	So, when you have probable cause on
12	one side of the ledger, when you have warrant on
13	one side of the ledger, then the kind of
14	objective evidence of causation that you would
15	have to present would have to be strong enough
16	that a court would say that evidence of
17	causation is a better explainer of what happened
18	here than evidence of probable cause.
19	JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
20	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
21	counsel.
22	MS. BIDWELL: Thank you.
23	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Reaves.
24	
25	

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF NICOLE F. REAVES
2	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
3	SUPPORTING NEITHER PARTY
4	MS. REAVES: Mr. Chief Justice, and
5	may it please the Court:
6	The first question presented is
7	narrow, asking only what types of evidence can
8	be used to satisfy the Nieves exception. The
9	Court need only address that discrete question
10	and it should hold that the exception can be
11	satisfied by various types of evidence that
12	support the ultimate inference Nieves required,
13	that similarly situated persons who did not
14	engage in First Amendment activity would not
15	have been arrested.
16	Regardless of its form, evidence that
17	supports that inference does what Nieves
18	requires. It addresses Hartman's causal concern
19	by helping to establish that non-retaliatory
20	grounds were, in fact, insufficient to provoke
21	the adverse consequences.
22	The Fifth Circuit, therefore, applied
23	the wrong legal standard by effectively
24	requiring Petitioner to show direct evidence of
25	comparators or empirical statistics

1	Respondents would eliminate the Nieves
2	exception altogether for arrests involving
3	warrants. That unpreserved argument does not
4	appear to have been accepted by any court of
5	appeals and would draw unwarranted distinctions.
6	On the flip side, Petitioner's
7	approach to both questions presented would
8	require the Court to essentially overrule Nieves
9	and would draw lines between different
LO	categories of arrests that have no basis in the
L1	concerns that motivated the general cause no
L2	probable cause rule.
L3	I welcome the Court's questions.
L4	JUSTICE THOMAS: What would that
L5	evidence look like?
L6	MS. REAVES: The evidence that we
L7	think should come in?
L8	JUSTICE THOMAS: Yeah.
L9	MS. REAVES: So we think that it's any
20	objective evidence that supports the ultimate
21	inference that the Court required to satisfy the
22	Nieves exception.
23	JUSTICE THOMAS: What is that?
24	MS. REAVES: So I think it can be a
25	variety of different types of evidence in

- different situations. So, for example, it could
- 2 be a pattern of arrests for a behavior far
- 3 afield of a plaintiff's. It could be
- 4 common-sense propositions or inferences, like
- 5 jaywalking never happens. It could be officers'
- 6 employment of an unusual, irregular, or
- 7 unnecessarily onerous arrest procedure, timing
- 8 and events leading up to arrest and that an
- 9 arrest was falsely documented.
- 10 But I do think it's important that we
- don't think any of that evidence is necessarily
- 12 sufficient in any particular case because the
- 13 ultimate inference the evidence needs to support
- is that there would have been similarly situated
- people who were not, in fact, arrested.
- 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: What would that look
- 17 like in this case?
- MS. REAVES: So we haven't taken a
- 19 position on the ultimate question in this case
- 20 because we do think the Court just granted a
- 21 question -- the question about the form of
- 22 evidence, not whether the quantum of evidence
- 23 here satisfies that or what the quantum of
- 24 evidence is generally.
- 25 That being said, some types of

- 1 evidence that are relevant in this case I do
- 2 think are Petitioner's evidence that arrests for
- 3 her -- for behavior -- her behavior -- for
- 4 behavior under the statute were for behavior far
- 5 afield of hers.
- The nature of the crime itself, it's a
- 7 low-level misdemeanor crime that can be
- 8 satisfied just by the general intent of moving
- 9 the document.
- 10 I think the irregular arrest
- 11 procedures here are relevant as well.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: In Nieves, we
- 13 -- the Court went through a long list of reasons
- 14 why probable cause should generally, as we put
- it, defeat a retaliation claim, and we described
- 16 the qualification there as -- as a narrow one.
- You had a long list of the type of
- 18 evidence that should come in to defeat the
- 19 retaliation claim. It seems to me to be
- 20 inconsistent with the notion of a very strong
- 21 general rule that had been well-established and
- 22 a very narrow exception.
- MS. REAVES: I respectfully disagree
- 24 because I think that evidence still has to
- 25 ultimately go to show that a similarly situated

- 1 person wouldn't have been arrested.
- 2 And I don't think the form of
- 3 evidence, as long as it's objective, whether
- 4 that's direct statistical comparators or other
- 5 evidence that supports an inference that others
- 6 wouldn't have been arrested, changes kind of the
- 7 concerns that this Court identified in Nieves
- 8 when it --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah, but, I
- 10 mean, the -- the --
- MS. REAVES: -- crafted the general no
- 12 probable cause rule.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It seemed to
- me that your -- your -- your list suggests that
- this is a normal, typical question. There's a
- debate about it. We're going to have evidence
- on both sides of all sorts of different types
- 18 and then figure it out.
- 19 And that doesn't seem to me to take
- 20 into account the reasons that we have the
- 21 general rule that probable cause is enough. It
- 22 just seems to take it in the same area as any --
- 23 any disputed issue of fact in general.
- MS. REAVES: I don't think that --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Like, what

- 1 sort of stuff would not be admissible as
- 2 evidence if you think the probable cause
- 3 requirement should be defeated?
- 4 MS. REAVES: Well, again, I think,
- 5 because the ultimate inference is the similarly
- 6 situated inquiry, which is a way I think we
- 7 actually differ from Petitioners on the first
- 8 question presented, I think that the -- this
- 9 sort of evidence, it -- it's going to depend on
- 10 the case whether it supports that inference.
- 11 Just a standalone allegation that I was arrested
- 12 and it --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah, yeah,
- 14 but I'm trying to get out of it, you seem to say
- 15 you're not expanding the exception and you have
- 16 -- but give me the type of evidence that would
- 17 not -- would be pertinent on the question, but
- you would say, oh, that doesn't come in because
- we're concerned about maintaining the general
- 20 rule.
- MS. REAVES: So I think some of the
- 22 evidence Petitioner has relied on here, so
- evidence about other council members who aren't
- 24 defendants here and using that evidence when
- it's not part of a Monell pattern or practice

- 1 claim doesn't either support the similarly
- 2 situated inference and it -- you know, it -- but
- 3 it might be able to come in if you were just
- 4 doing some sort of Mt. Healthy analysis like
- 5 Petitioner is requesting as part of the second
- 6 question presented.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Can I ask you about
- 8 the other question presented? You have a
- 9 footnote, Footnote 6, about abuse of process.
- 10 And I'm struggling to understand why abuse of
- 11 process wouldn't relevantly inform our
- 12 understanding of Section 1983 if one believes
- that abuse of process was a recognized tort at
- 14 the time of the statute's adoption, which I
- 15 think the evidence tends to support.
- 16 So I understand in Nieves that that
- 17 may not have been relevant, in part because it
- 18 was a warrantless arrest, so there was no
- 19 process involved, and also in part because,
- 20 frankly, Mr. Nieves's complaint didn't allege an
- 21 ulterior motive that might satisfy an abuse of
- 22 process claim, right? It didn't -- it didn't
- have an allegation that he was being extorted in
- the way that we have that kind of allegation
- 25 here.

- 1 Why should the Court turn a blind eye
- 2 to abuse of process as a common law tort
- analogue, which we usually look to common law
- 4 tort analogues when interpreting 1983?
- 5 MS. REAVES: So three points on that,
- 6 Justice Gorsuch. First is I do think that
- 7 Petitioner chose to plead her claim here as a
- 8 retaliatory arrest claim, and this Court did
- 9 hold in Nieves that --
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yes. But, when we
- 11 look at whether it's retaliation in violation of
- 12 the First Amendment or any other amendment, we
- 13 -- we look to the common law analogues, and here
- is an obvious one.
- 15 MS. REAVES: Well, I think that Nieves
- 16 largely foreclosed that because --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, that's what
- 18 I'm asking you. Do you think it really
- 19 foreclosed it? Because it didn't mention it.
- 20 And, again, it wasn't pled. And there was no
- 21 process. And there wasn't the kind of extortion
- 22 that's alleged here. So there are lots of
- 23 reasons why Nieves didn't grapple with this
- 24 question.
- MS. REAVES: So --

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But here we are. MS. REAVES: -- let me start with 2 3 Nieves and then kind of turn to the merits of that question. 4 The reason why we think the Nieves 5 6 Court was aware of this is because the Court in 7 Hartman discussed abuse of process, declined to 8 rely on it. The government in its Nieves brief, page 10, Footnote 2, discussed abuse of process 9 10 and explained why it wasn't most relevant. 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Again, agree with 12 you, it wasn't relevant in Hartman and wasn't relevant in Nieves. But why isn't it relevant 13 14 here? 15 MS. REAVES: So a couple of points on 16 that. First of all, I think, if you look at an 17 abuse of process claim, the kind of prototypical claim was use of process to extort money or 18 19 property. Here --20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Or -- or any other kind of favor or -- or thing. And -- and -- and 21 22 why -- why -- it doesn't -- it wasn't limited to 23 property and money. Often it was, you're right.

But I've actually litigated abuse of process

claims, and the -- the point is the process,

24

- 1 yes, it was supported and it was properly done.
- 2 The magistrate here signed off on it, but it was
- 3 being done for an ulterior purpose. And I think
- 4 that's the allegation here.
- 5 MS. REAVES: I think, though, that
- 6 kind of the ordering of the claim doesn't fit on
- 7 as well as a malicious prosecution or false
- 8 arrest claim. So, here, the retaliation was in
- 9 -- the retaliatory arrest was in retaliation for
- 10 her prior First Amendment conduct.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well --
- MS. REAVES: And that's what you have
- 13 to plead to plead a retaliatory arrest claim.
- 14 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- a -- a false
- 15 arrest or a malicious prosecution claim says
- 16 there's no probable cause. That -- that's at
- the heart of it, okay, that the arrest couldn't
- 18 lawfully be made.
- 19 Here, she's saying, yeah, the arrest
- 20 could be lawfully made, but it wasn't being made
- 21 for the right -- it wasn't being made for the
- 22 true reasons that the writ was designed for or
- 23 what the law was designed for. It was being
- done for an ulterior purpose, to push me out of
- 25 the political process and silence me.

1 MS. REAVES: To be fair, she pleaded a 2 retaliatory arrest claim, so that's arrest and 3 retaliation for her prior conduct. She brought in allegations that there was also future 4 intent, but that's not part of the claim itself. 5 And, second, I think it would be odd 6 7 for the Court --JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, if I read it 8 9 differently, then what? MS. REAVES: So I think, just stepping 10 11 back a little bit, I think it would be 12 irregular, in light of the rationales this Court has identified, to carve off the three sets of 13 claims in different ways that I think are at 14 15 issue here. 16 So, first, there's retaliatory 17 prosecution. The general no probable cause bar applies. There's also a split-second arrest. 18 Petitioner agrees the general no probable cause 19 20 rule applies there. 21 In the middle, the Court would look to a different analogy, and I don't think that 22 23 analogy is justified by the rationales this

Court has articulated for the no probable cause

rule, which are that probable cause will always

24

1 be relevant and readily available and evidence of it or lack thereof, and, second, that there may be causal difficulties caused by multiple 3 actors or the propriety of considering speech in 4 certain situations. 5 6 And this category of more deliberative 7 arrests that Petitioner is carving out isn't different on those kind of key issues that 8 motivated the exception. So that's why I think 9 the Court should continue to look to malicious 10 11 prosecution and false arrest. 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 13 counsel. 14 Justice Thomas? 15 Justice Alito? 16 JUSTICE ALITO: What would you say in 17 response to the questions that Justice Kavanaugh was asking about the situation where there are 18 19 plenty of arrests under a particular provision, 20 but in the case at hand, the factual 21 circumstances are quite unusual and there is no 2.2 evidence that anybody has been arrested for 23 committing the crime in that particular way?

How do you think a court should deal with that?

MS. REAVES: So that evidence,

24

- 1 standing alone, is not going to be enough to
- 2 demonstrate that there were similarly situated
- 3 people who engaged in the same sort of activity
- 4 who were not arrested.
- 5 So I think that evidence could
- 6 potentially be relevant if there are other
- 7 reasons to infer that there were, in fact,
- 8 similarly situated people and they were not
- 9 arrested, but the novelty of a crime alone is
- 10 not enough to make the similarly situated
- 11 showing.
- 12 I think there are a lot of good
- 13 reasons for that. We articulate some in our
- 14 brief, but that includes the fact that just
- because someone figures out a new way to engage
- in criminal activity doesn't suggest there's
- anything nefarious by a government prosecuting
- 18 that.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 20 Sotomayor?
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If I'm
- 22 understanding you right, on the first question
- 23 presented, your position is that the Fifth
- 24 Circuit is the only circuit that's demanding a
- 25 specific kind of comparison-based evidence,

- 1 correct?
- MS. REAVES: That's correct. We think
- 3 the Fifth Circuit applied too strict a form of
- 4 evidence requirement.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And if I remember
- 6 correctly, the Fifth Circuit blamed it on the
- 7 language in Nieves and said that Nieves
- 8 compelled this conclusion but that they were
- 9 sympathetic, that Judge Oldham's view of it
- being a little wider than they're applying it is
- 11 consistent with the Ninth and Seventh Circuit,
- 12 correct?
- MS. REAVES: That's correct, yes. I
- 14 -- I'm not sure that we agree with the Fifth
- 15 Circuit. We don't take our position to be any
- 16 expansion on Nieves, just --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Exactly. But
- 18 --but the Ninth and Fifth -- the Ninth and --
- 19 and Seventh Circuit view it consistently with
- 20 your view today, correct?
- MS. REAVES: That's correct, yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Have you seen an
- 23 explosion of litigation with retaliatory --
- 24 Lozman-type retaliatory arrest exceptions?
- MS. REAVES: We haven't done a

- 1 statistical analysis on that. Obviously, Nieves
- 2 did not -- was not decided very long ago. You
- 3 know, that being said, I think, if you look at
- 4 the decisions in the Seventh and Ninth Circuits,
- 5 such as the Ballentine decision in the Ninth
- 6 Circuit, they very carefully looked at the types
- 7 of evidence we've discussed but ultimately
- 8 looked at that inference of whether that
- 9 suggests that similarly situated persons would
- 10 not have been arrested.
- 11 So I do think that they struck the
- 12 balance between applying the Nieves rule but
- just allowing a broader range of evidence to
- 14 satisfy it than the Fifth Circuit did below.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: So if I could talk
- 18 about this question of what kind of evidence
- 19 should come in under the Nieves exception, and
- 20 let's sort of think about three sets of
- 21 evidence. So, one, I think nobody would say,
- 22 right, that an allegation of a subjective state
- of mind on the police officer is going to get
- 24 you past the probable cause bar. Is that
- 25 correct?

1 MS. REAVES: That's correct. 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: That's -- that's --3 that's an obvious implication of -- I mean not just an implication. Nieves makes that quite 4 5 clear. Now, on the other side of the 6 7 spectrum, you have this quite obviously comparative evidence. The Fifth Circuit seemed 8 9 to have a very narrow view of what that was, 10 like you have to point to a particular person 11 who wasn't arrested. 12 But let's expand that a little bit 13 more and say, well, that would be a little bit 14 nutty. I mean, if you come in and you say 15 nobody's ever been arrested for that, I can't 16 point to a particular person, but, look, 17 nobody's ever been arrested for that, that 18 should count too, right? So -- so -- so, you 19 know, that's all, like, very comparative stuff, 20 right? 21 So in the middle -- and I guess this 2.2 is where I thought your brief was interesting --23 is objective evidence that you might take to support an inference as to comparisons with 24 25 other people but that is not on its face very

- 1 comparative in nature.
- 2 And I'll just read you some of what
- 3 you said in your brief. The timing of and
- 4 events leading up to a plaintiff's arrest, the
- 5 history of the defendant's interactions with the
- 6 plaintiffs, the fact that officers falsely
- 7 documented the arrest. Maybe the most
- 8 comparative of these is the employment of an
- 9 unusual, irregular, or unnecessarily onerous
- 10 arrest procedure.
- 11 So all of these, you can understand
- 12 how somebody could argue from them to a
- 13 comparative statement that another person who
- 14 didn't make these kinds -- who didn't engage in
- this kind of speech activity wouldn't have been
- treated the same way, but it is a little bit of
- 17 an inferential jump.
- 18 And so I guess my long-winded question
- is, why do you put those sorts of statements in
- the bucket that should be able to come in to get
- 21 past the probable cause bar rather than lump
- them with allegations of subjective intent on
- 23 the part of the police officer?
- MS. REAVES: Well, I think there are
- 25 four of -- it makes sense to put them in the

- 1 bucket of things that courts can consider, first
- of all, because courts generally aren't limited
- 3 in the form of evidence they can rely on to
- 4 consider inferences. And I think, in particular
- 5 here, any objective evidence is going to go to
- 6 addressing Hartman's causal concerns by helping
- 7 to establish that non-retaliatory grounds were,
- 8 in fact, insufficient to provoke adverse
- 9 consequences.
- 10 So, if, for example, the method of
- 11 arrest is entirely unique, let's say it's the
- 12 facts of this case and we also know that no one
- has ever been arrested and sat in jail for
- 14 having -- for engaging in a misdemeanor, that
- does support the inference that not only
- similarly situated people were not arrested but
- 17 also that this person was really treated
- 18 differently from similarly situated persons
- 19 across the board.
- Now, again, that evidence alone isn't
- 21 enough, but it can help tell the whole story of
- 22 a particular arrest and help support the
- 23 conclusion that the Nieves exception is
- 24 satisfied.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
2	Gorsuch?
3	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Just to be clear,
4	we're not talking about the causation standard
5	under the First Amendment itself, right? We're
6	talking about this Court's gloss on what the
7	causation requirement is statutorily under 1983,
8	right?
9	MS. REAVES: That's correct. We read
10	Nieves and Hartman to be elements of the causes
11	of action, not elements of the First Amendment
12	itself.
13	JUSTICE GORSUCH: So the First
14	Amendment may well be broader than this. It's
15	just that this Court has said, for purposes of a
16	statute, we're going to require more specific
17	kinds of evidence, right?
18	MS. REAVES: That's absolutely
19	correct, and that's why we argued in our brief
20	that the Court should actually make that clear
21	at some point in one of these cases.
22	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And causation,
23	normally, a plaintiff can point to any evidence
24	to to support an inference of causation,
25	right?

1 MS. REAVES: That's correct. Any 2 relevant evidence that's otherwise admissible, 3 yes. 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. And so it's 5 this gloss that we're dealing with that we 6 created. And then, at the end of the day, in 7 terms of the parade of horribles, there's always qualified immunity, which we haven't even 8 9 addressed, that -- that's layered on top of all 10 of this, that -- that a government official 11 could invoke? 12 MS. REAVES: That's correct. Obviously, qualified immunity isn't directly at 13 issue in this case before this Court. That --14 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, we haven't -- we 16 haven't gotten to that yet, right? 17 MS. REAVES: Right. 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: You have to jump 19 through this hoop before you get to that hoop, 20 right? 21 MS. REAVES: That's correct, but I 22 actually have an asterisk on that --

this requirement is a part of the cause of

JUSTICE GORSUCH:

Okay.

MS. REAVES: -- Justice Gorsuch.

23

24

- 1 action, not a part of the First Amendment
- 2 requirement, as a general matter, an official is
- 3 not going to be entitled to qualified immunity
- 4 based on a mistake about the scope of the cause
- 5 of action.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, you've got
- 7 clearly established law, though, you know, and
- 8 you've got to be able to point to something,
- 9 right?
- 10 MS. REAVES: So I think, if the Court
- 11 were to -- that's a reason we think --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: We've got the second
- 13 part --
- MS. REAVES: -- the Court should
- 15 potentially clarify this.
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- of qualified
- immunity still to deal with.
- MS. REAVES: Yes, Justice Gorsuch.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 20 Kavanaugh?
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think what
- 22 you're looking for, right, is evidence that
- 23 suggests that other people who did what this
- 24 person is alleged to have done wouldn't have
- 25 been arrested and that this person was arrested

- 1 because of her political viewpoint or particular
- 2 speech or political expressive activities.
- 3 Does that sound right so far?
- 4 MS. REAVES: That's correct. I think
- 5 the second part would come in more under the Mt.
- 6 Healthy inquiry after you get through the
- 7 similarly situated inquiry, but yes, that's
- 8 correct, Justice.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And I guess --
- sorry to focus on the facts here, but this is an
- 11 unusual case to be analyzing this in the
- 12 abstract, it seems to me, because, if someone
- unintentionally ended up with documents that
- 14 were not theirs and were prosecuted for some --
- some crime that was never prosecuted and was
- like, yeah, you did it by accident, but we're
- 17 going to prosecute you anyway, okay, that sounds
- 18 highly unusual and you can't find other people
- 19 who would have done that.
- 20 But just thinking about inferences --
- 21 you used the word "inferences" a lot -- if you
- 22 have probable cause -- and I'm not saying it
- 23 exists here or not -- if you have probable cause
- that someone intentionally stole government
- 25 documents, intentionally, knowingly,

- 1 intentionally, to impair a government
- investigation or proceeding, I mean, that's
- 3 going to be prosecuted all the time, right?
- 4 MS. REAVES: I agree with that,
- 5 Justice Kavanaugh. I think --
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Exactly.
- 7 MS. REAVES: -- the distinction here,
- 8 though, is we agree with Petitioner that the
- 9 only intent required is general intent. So the
- only intent she -- the government had to prove
- 11 here was that she picked up the document and
- 12 intentionally moved it.
- So I think, because of that, that's
- 14 why this was prosecuted as a misdemeanor. And
- if you want evidence for why it is just general
- intent, you can look at Texas Penal Code 6.03.
- 17 You can look at the treatise that Petitioner
- 18 cites in her reply. And so I do think that's
- 19 why this particular case does fit within the
- 20 heartland of the Nieves exception.
- That being said, the government isn't
- 22 opposed if the Court were to draw a
- 23 serious/non-serious crime distinction which
- 24 probably would be along a misdemeanor/felony
- 25 line. It just seems that this case clearly

- 1 falls in the misdemeanor bucket.
- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And are you
- 3 looking at the -- I mean, now we're going back
- 4 to the law in question rather than the facts,
- 5 but I think the idea was someone who committed
- 6 these facts -- who engaged in these activities
- 7 would not be prosecuted but for their speech.
- 8 And if they could -- they're
- 9 prosecuted under the general intent, but if
- 10 their activities, if the police officer believes
- 11 this was done to prevent inquiries into which
- 12 names were on the petition because there were
- allegations the day before that she had coerced
- or misled people into signing the petition --
- again, I'm not taking a position on any of that.
- 16 I mean, I don't know that you wouldn't
- 17 be -- the inference would be you would be
- 18 prosecuted under some statute, even if it is "a
- 19 general intent" statute, isn't that right?
- 20 MS. REAVES: So I think -- and, again,
- 21 I think this is counterfactual here potentially,
- 22 but I agree that if the facts are more serious
- 23 than the potential charge, the relevant
- 24 comparator would be other similarly situated
- 25 persons and whether there was probable cause.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Who engaged in
2	those facts?
3	MS. REAVES: Who engaged in the same
4	activity, yes. I do think that's the relevant
5	inquiry. Just because someone is charged with a
6	lower crime or arrested for a lower crime, you
7	know, doesn't kind of change the analysis as far
8	as similarly situated goes.
9	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. And the
LO	whole case here yeah. Okay. Thank you.
L1	JUSTICE BARRETT: I'd like to pick up
L2	there. So how important is the seriousness of
L3	the crime?
L4	I said before, and I think Justice
L5	Kavanaugh is right to be more precise about
L6	this, so this is kind of a random crime, but
L7	it's random because of the facts of the case and
L8	it was a misdemeanor.
L9	So, you know, jaywalking, the example
20	in Nieves for the exception, I mean, jaywalking,
21	I think everybody agrees that absent some
22	circumstance, you know, where you endangered
23	someone or darted in front of a car, jaywalking
24	is not serious.

25

Does it matter at all? I mean, do we

- 1 look at the facts? Do we look at the crime?
- 2 And before we even get into the Nieves exception
- and looking at the kind of evidence that you're
- 4 proposing, do we do some sort of threshold
- 5 analysis about whether the facts or the crime or
- 6 both are actually serious?
- 7 MS. REAVES: So I think, under the
- 8 Nieves exception, I do think it's similarly
- 9 situated persons would have been arrested. I
- 10 don't think it necessarily matters what crime or
- 11 what level of seriousness of crime was listed on
- the warrant or was listed on, you know, the
- officer's notes. So I do think it's a
- 14 conduct-based comparison.
- I don't think the Court needs to
- 16 address the seriousness question here
- 17 necessarily because this is a misdemeanor crime,
- 18 but we would have no objection to the Court
- 19 drawing a felony/misdemeanor distinction and
- just saying that Nieves doesn't apply outside of
- 21 that, and I think that's because -- and that
- 22 could be appropriate because Nieves did seem to
- 23 be concerned about endemic crimes that are
- infrequently prosecuted, where there's a large
- 25 amount of discretion.

1	And from the federal government's
2	perspective, where we see the most types of
3	problematic and potentially retaliatory arrests
4	are in situations like unlawful assembly,
5	blocking a sidewalk, disorderly conduct,
6	trespassing on government property, and those
7	things tend to be low-level endemic offenses
8	where there's a lot of discretion.
9	JUSTICE BARRETT: That's true,
10	although the line between misdemeanor and felony
11	is drawn in different places in different
12	jurisdictions, and it would be pretty hard, I
13	think, to to hold that as a consistent line.
14	So, when you say similarly situated,
15	you're saying that you look both at conduct and
16	at crime, but the federal government doesn't
17	have a position about whether we look at the
18	seriousness of the crime?
19	MS. REAVES: So, as far as the
20	seriousness of the crime goes, even if you don't
21	
22	JUSTICE BARRETT: Felony versus
23	MS. REAVES: So I think, if you
24	JUSTICE BARRETT: misdemeanor or
25	whatever.

1 MS. REAVES: Yeah, I don't -- I think, 2 if you decide not to draw some sort of strong 3 line between those two, I think how that would generally play out is, when you have a felony or 4 a more serious crime, there's going to be a 5 6 presumption that people are regularly prosecuted 7 for that, and it's going to be very easy to find 8 examples of people who engaged in the same conduct and were, in fact, prosecuted but didn't 9 10 have the same speech. 11 JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you. 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: 13 Jackson? 14 JUSTICE JACKSON: So I guess I'm going 15 back to Justice Kagan's helpful dynamic in terms 16 of figuring out the types of evidence, and I'm still a little bit confused about the 17 government's position that, really, what is at 18 19 issue here is a determination of the treatment 20 of similarly situated persons, that that provides, I think you say in your brief, the 21 2.2 compelling objective basis for inferring that 23 the arrest was retaliatory. 24 But then you seem to accept numbers or 25 different kinds of forms of evidence that don't

- in my view necessarily go directly to
- 2 determining that a similarly situated person was
- 3 treated differently.
- 4 So how -- I guess Justice Kagan put it
- 5 that there are sort of several inferences to get
- 6 you from certain kinds of evidence to a
- 7 similarly situated person.
- 8 So can you say more about why, for
- 9 example, the government wouldn't be insisting
- 10 that the plaintiff in this case at least say
- 11 something about this having happened before,
- 12 that there are similarly situated people?
- I mean, I find it difficult -- and I'm
- 14 not saying you're wrong. I'm just trying to
- 15 puzzle it out. You say, you know, evidence that
- an arrest has never happened before. I mean,
- 17 surely that's common sense. But I guess I'm
- 18 trying to understand how, unless we have
- 19 evidence that this same kind of thing happened
- 20 before, we can take that evidence and say that's
- 21 an inference that -- of the kind that you're
- 22 trying to draw.
- MS. REAVES: So I think you're either
- 24 going to need to have evidence or you're going
- 25 to need to have an inference that similarly

1 situated people engaged in the same sort of 2 activity and were not arrested. We just don't 3 think there needs to be direct evidence of that. And I think, for example --4 JUSTICE JACKSON: If your only 5 6 evidence was that this never happened before, 7 would you also require a plaintiff to show -- I 8 mean, the arrest, excuse me, never happened 9 before, no one was arrested for this conduct, 10 would you also require the plaintiff to show 11 that other people had engaged in this conduct? 12 MS. REAVES: So the plaintiff would 13 either need to show that or would need to 14 show -- you know, not directly show that, not 15 direct -- have direct evidence of that, but a 16 plaintiff could have evidence that supports that 17 inference or there could be a common-sense 18 inference. 19 And I think maybe the jaywalking 20 example is helpful. There might be a situation 21 in which you have evidence no one's ever been 2.2 arrested for jaywalking before. You don't have 23 direct evidence that anyone has jaywalked out this corner in front of the -- a police officer, 24 25 but that might be something that there could be

- 1 an inference for in these sort of low-level
- 2 endemic crimes.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Thank
- 4 you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 6 counsel.
- 7 Ms. Blatt.
- 8 ORAL ARGUMENT OF LISA S. BLATT
- 9 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- 10 MS. BLATT: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 11 Justice, and may it please the Court:
- 12 Throughout history, probable cause has
- 13 foreclosed retaliatory arrest suits. Nieves
- 14 created one narrow exception for warrantless
- arrests, where officers typically look away or
- 16 give warnings or tickets. This Court should not
- 17 blow up that exception.
- 18 First, this case involves a warrant.
- 19 Warrants do not entail the boundless officer
- 20 discretion that justified the Nieves exception
- in the first place. Warrants also deter abuse
- 22 by inviting judicial scrutiny, and warrants add
- 23 intervening actors that make it even less likely
- that animus caused the arrest. At a minimum,
- 25 warrants are the last place to widen the Nieves

- 1 exception.
- 2 Second, this case involves theft. For
- 3 crimes such as theft, where officers typically
- 4 arrest, the justification for the Nieves
- 5 exception just doesn't exist. It is only where
- 6 officers rarely arrest that probable cause loses
- 7 its probative force. Extending the exception to
- 8 everything from theft to terrorism just invites
- 9 questions about why police arrested some people
- 10 and not others.
- 11 Third, Petitioner never alleged
- 12 comparators, i.e., others who engaged in similar
- 13 conduct but were not arrested. Only comparators
- 14 rule out the probative value of probable cause.
- 15 Petitioner and the government would allow anyone
- to sue with objective evidence of animus or
- 17 using so-called negative evidence, the absence
- 18 of arrest for similar conduct.
- 19 But then every arrest invites a
- 20 lawsuit. Every case gets past a motion to
- 21 dismiss and on to discovery and before a jury.
- 22 Plaintiffs will always contest the police
- version of events and then point to the -- the
- 24 lack of arrest records for their reframed
- 25 conduct. Take this case: The complaint alleges

- 1 Petitioner accidentally misplaced papers and
- denies that Petitioner acted intentionally, but
- 3 the warrant application recounts a case of
- 4 serious intentional theft.
- Now Petitioner was free to challenge
- 6 probable cause, but, instead, she admitted it.
- 7 And if you accept Petitioner's gamesmanship,
- 8 those arrested for domestic violence will claim
- 9 the victim just slipped, those arrested for
- 10 threats will claim they were just joking, and
- those arrested for embezzlement will claim they
- just accidentally misplaced the funds.
- I welcome questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: I, of course, agreed
- with you in Nieves, with what you just said, but
- 16 we've crossed that bridge. And you've heard a
- 17 discussion of what kind of evidence would be
- 18 necessary to counter the causal connection or to
- 19 -- to change it, to overcome probable cause
- 20 determination or the warrant.
- 21 What would be some of your responses
- 22 to some of the arguments that you have heard for
- 23 the type of evidence? For -- what I'm
- 24 concerned -- interested in, for example, is --
- and there are rare cases where crimes are rarely

- 1 punished and that you could have the exact same
- 2 argument. What kind of evidence would you use
- 3 in a case like that to counter the probable
- 4 cause?
- 5 MS. BLATT: Yeah, I think if -- the
- 6 way I read Nieves, as the narrow exception that
- 7 the Court said it was, it should be easy to
- 8 plead the exception because it's talking about
- 9 cases where people actually engage in the
- 10 conduct but officers give a ticket or a citation
- or a warning or they look away.
- 12 And you just don't have that kind of
- 13 case. The Court was talking about jaywalking,
- dog off a leash, eating on the subway, not
- 15 wearing a seatbelt, not cases where the
- 16 assumption is, when there is probable cause if
- 17 officers typically arrest, and I just think that
- that is per se true with theft, and it's the
- opposite presumption is true with crimes where
- 20 you can get a ticket. No one gets a ticket for
- 21 murder. No one gets a ticket for assault. No
- 22 one gets a ticket or a citation for theft.
- 23 That's not a thing.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, I think the --
- 25 I -- well, I'm not going to say I have agreed

- 1 with you again, but that's not where we are now,
- 2 and what I'm trying to get you to engage with is
- 3 some of the back and forth we've had so far.
- 4 MS. BLATT: Okay. So, if we're going
- 5 to take it to any crime goes and misdemeanors in
- 6 Texas are punishable by up to a year in jail,
- 7 you will have every case where the plaintiff,
- 8 like in this case, says you have to accept my
- 9 allegations as true, which I did nothing wrong.
- 10 And then the officers -- thank God we
- 11 here had a warrant, but if there wasn't a
- warrant, you will not hear the officers' version
- of events. The only reason you heard the
- officers' side of the story, as in Nieves, was
- 15 you had a summary judgment record. That
- 16 complaint alleges a bone-chilling case of police
- 17 brutality that made me not want to ever step
- 18 foot in Alaska. You never even heard the
- officer's side until he was deposed, you had
- 20 massive discovery, you had sensitive police
- 21 documents. And every case -- very few people
- get arrested and think, oh, well, yeah, I was
- 23 caught and I still think there was retaliation.
- 24 Every drug case, wasn't my drugs. Every --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counselor, you're

- 1 characterizing this as a theft, as -- and the
- 2 assumption of Justice Kavanaugh was the same.
- 3 But the government's pointing out, and I think
- 4 rightly, that this wasn't charged as a theft
- 5 because theft would have a defense of there was
- 6 no intention to permanently deprive someone.
- 7 There's a whole series of things.
- 8 The crime that was charged here was a
- 9 crime of moving a document, and all it required
- 10 was a general intent to move it. The defense
- 11 was, I didn't -- I did it accidentally. She may
- 12 have been defeated in that or not.
- But the point is that there are
- 14 charges brought for stealing government
- documents and there are charges that are brought
- 16 for moving government documents. And that's
- 17 never happened in a situation like this.
- MS. BLATT: So --
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So my point is
- you're building it up on the facts of the case
- 21 to characterize it as something that wasn't the
- 22 charge. And I think what the government is
- 23 saying is, for this kind of misdemeanor that was
- charged, it doesn't happen when there's a
- 25 dispute about whether something was moved

- 1 intentionally or not.
- 2 I'd go a step further having been a
- 3 former prosecutor. Even if it was intentional,
- 4 we probably wouldn't have brought the charges
- because no harm, no foul, no harm.
- 6 MS. BLATT: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And, in fact, two
- 8 police officers wouldn't charge it, one public
- 9 prosecutor didn't charge it. In the end, even
- 10 with a warrant, the charges were dropped. This
- is just not the kind of situation like in the
- 12 jaywalking example --
- MS. BLATT: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- with -- when
- there's a dispute about things like this, people
- 16 are not arrested in this way.
- MS. BLATT: So --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's exactly
- 19 what I think their claim is.
- MS. BLATT: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You're -- you're
- 22 characterizing it differently, but that's the
- 23 bottom line of this claim.
- MS. BLATT: So -- so at least four
- 25 responses. One, there was no charge here.

- 1 There was an arrest, and the arrest warrant
- 2 three times says the opposite of what you just
- 3 said. It said the video clearly shows Gonzalez
- 4 intentionally concealing and removing a petition
- 5 from custody. Page 49, there's no mistake
- 6 Gonzalez knows what she's holding. She's
- 7 holding the petition. At warrant page 53, I'm
- 8 charging her for meeting the elements of the
- 9 statute because she had a desire to
- intentionally remove and impair the availability
- of this document from city custody.
- Now, on the statute, I'm shocked by
- the government because the government has its
- own parallel, 18 U.S.C. 2071, that is the same
- 15 tampering statute. All states have a tampering
- 16 statute, and they all read the same way with
- 17 intent. Now they cite the treatise, but the
- 18 treatise she didn't cite was the section on
- intent and it said you have to have a conscious
- 20 desire to remove the documents from the
- 21 government.
- 22 If you look at all six provisions of
- 23 that statute, it's wrongdoing, all of it. It is
- inconceivable that a statute called tampering
- and that has all bad acts, this one little act

- 1 was, oh, here, I just committed theft because I
- just moved something for the other, it's just
- 3 not credible.
- But, if you -- if you agree with her
- 5 and the government that I am wrong, then this
- 6 should have been an easy case for her to allege
- 7 a comparator, but she didn't even allege Mayor
- 8 Trevino was a comparator because she alleged no
- 9 comparators.
- Now there's been talk about the Fifth
- 11 Circuit, and I just want to defend --
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What do you do
- with the fact that it's in her complaint? She
- 14 gave us a page cite.
- MS. BLATT: She gave you a page cite
- 16 that mentioned the Mayor had the document
- 17 between one night and the next. There's no --
- the comparator allegation is at 117 and it's an
- 19 absence of one. And that's what the district
- 20 court relied on. It's what the Fifth Circuit
- 21 reversed. That her complaint alleges -- again,
- 22 it's 117A -- that no one has been ever arrested
- for trying to take a non-binding and expressive
- 24 document.
- Now, when you get it to that level of

- 1 specificity that no one took, you know, the
- 2 feathers from the Smithsonian, then the Fifth
- 3 Circuit said naturally, well, who steals
- 4 feathers from the Smithsonian? And the -- the
- 5 Fifth Circuit said on pages 29 and 30, you have
- 6 to have some comparative evidence.
- But she could have, but we know why
- 8 she didn't. We know why she didn't allege
- 9 comparators, because it would have been
- 10 preposterous to say, yeah, public officials
- 11 secret away government documents to avoid, you
- 12 know, checking on things like forgery and lying,
- but no one ever gets arrested.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But isn't --
- MS. BLATT: She didn't allege that.
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- isn't -- isn't
- our goal here to try to assess whether or not
- she should have had to allege that? So I see
- 19 you talking about this at a certain level of
- 20 specificity, and I'm trying to understand what
- 21 your view is of what she should have said in
- 22 order to satisfy the rule and whether the rule
- 23 should be as the Fifth Circuit lays it out.
- 24 MS. BLATT: So -- so the plaintiff has
- 25 two choices, and she could have had two choices

- 1 here. She could have at least said I'll allege
- 2 a comparator. This statute -- I'm not going to
- 3 challenge probable cause or this statute, but it
- 4 covers completely innocent conduct. And I'm
- 5 going to allege people always engage in innocent
- 6 conduct and don't get arrested.
- 7 And then you and I or we would have
- 8 been having a fight with, well, can you look at
- 9 the comparators from the complaint or shouldn't
- 10 you look at the comparators?
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So, for you, it's
- 12 not enough to say no one has ever been arrested
- 13 the for this kind -- doing this kind of thing
- 14 before?
- MS. BLATT: No, because it's that --
- it's so much easier to say, and people do it.
- 17 Here are the reasons why the government said
- this, but they forgot what they said on page 20
- 19 of their brief, which --
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, hold on. Hold
- 21 on. I -- I -- I just want to pin -- put a pin
- in that if I might. So you're saying that an
- allegation that the statute's never been
- 24 enforced against anyone but it was against me --
- MS. BLATT: Mm-hmm.

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- because of my 2 First Amendment expression is not enough to 3 state a claim? MS. BLATT: Absolutely not. And the 4 reason is why the government says this on page 5 20 of their brief. 6 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: How many -- how many statutes are there on the books these days, many 8 of which are hardly ever enforced? Last I read, 9 there were over 300,000 federal crimes --10 11 MS. BLATT: Mm-hmm. 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- counting statutes 13 and regulations. I can't imagine how many there 14 are at the state and local level. 15 And you're saying they can all sit there unused, except for one person who alleges 16 17 that I was the only person in America who's ever 18 been prosecuted for this because I -- I dared 19 express a view protected by the First Amendment 20 and that's not actionable? 21 MS. BLATT: Well, I'm going to -- if -- if -- I'm going to try to convince you 2.2 23 otherwise, but I have to try to do that. JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. I'd like --24

I'd like -- good luck.

1 (Laughter.) MS. BLATT: Okay. So it's -- well, 2 3 let me just try this, Justice Gorsuch. If it's never been enforced, then just say, people do 4 If there's a statute that makes it illegal 5 to commit adultery, it's not that hard to say I 6 7 -- I've committed adultery or my neighbors committed adultery. 8 If the statute -- let's just put it --9 10 and, again, the government tells you on page 20 of its brief the fact that the statute has never 11 12 been enforced could prove little or nothing. 13 And here are four reasons why. Maybe 14 no one commits the crime. Maybe you don't see 15 carjacking in Amish country. Maybe you don't 16 see people stealing boats in Death Valley. 17 Maybe people -- the crime itself is unusual. 18 Maybe it's incest or cannibalism. Maybe it's 19 something like government --JUSTICE GORSUCH: All of which the 20 Court could take into consideration in doing a 21 2.2 but-for causation analysis. If -- if -- if you 23 really think that there's a case in Amish country and there's no carjacking, the Court can 24 25 say that evidence is not enough.

- 1 But you're saying that -- that a court
- 2 can't even look at that evidence, the fact that
- a crime has never been prosecuted, ever, except
- 4 for against a person who alleges a First
- 5 Amendment violation, I have to turn a blind eye
- 6 to that.
- 7 MS. BLATT: No, you --
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I can't even look at
- 9 it is your --
- 10 MS. BLATT: You --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's your
- 12 argument.
- MS. BLATT: No. My argument is it's
- 14 alone insufficient. Of course, you can look at
- it, and, of course, it's highly relevant.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, you -- hold on.
- 17 You can look at it and it is highly relevant?
- 18 MS. BLATT: If -- if you have a simple
- 19 allegation that there is a person on the planet
- 20 who has done that conduct.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: A named person on the
- 22 planet?
- MS. BLATT: No.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Just a -- a person on
- 25 the planet?

MS. BLATT: I think you can have news

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2 articles that people jaywalk, you can have news 3 articles that people eat on the subway, you can have -- I mean, generally, I thought -- again, I 4 didn't write Nieves, but I thought Nieves was 5 6 talking about crimes where people were not 7 embarrassed to admit that they did them and it wouldn't be that hard to say I can't believe I 8 9 was arrested for, you know, crossing an 10 intersection. And, no, you do not have to say 11 the same intersection. 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: The -- the Fifth 13 Circuit understood this rule to say you have to 14 show a person within this jurisdiction who has 15 engaged in this conduct before and was not 16 arrested. 17 And I think what Justice Gorsuch is 18 saying is that that has got to be wrong. 19 Whatever else you want to put into this bucket, 20 you should be able to say they've never charged somebody with this kind of crime before and I 21 2.2 don't have to go find a person who has engaged 23 in the same conduct. MS. BLATT: And -- and, again, we're 24 25 going to get into a dispute about, if you accept

- 1 the warrant -- if you accept the plaintiff
- 2 complaint, the -- the -- the officer will
- 3 always lose and the officer can never arrest and
- 4 the officer doesn't -- literally can never
- 5 arrest without worrying about getting sued and
- 6 --
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: Except I thought
- 8 that was the point of qualified immunity. This
- 9 was the other characterization that I was going
- 10 to ask you about, which is you say every case
- goes forward, we never hear the officer's side
- of the story. But, I mean, isn't that what
- 13 qualified immunity does?
- MS. BLATT: It was denied here. It
- was already denied because the court said, the
- 16 district court said, Nieves created an exception
- 17 and you adequately pled the exception. So it
- 18 was actually denied. And Judge Oldham said --
- 19 the -- the Fifth Circuit reversed on the First
- 20 Amendment issue. Judge Oldham said he's not so
- 21 sure how he would rule on qualified immunity.
- But we're happy to win on qualified
- 23 immunity, but we actually lost it here. And the
- 24 Court in Nieves could have done the same thing.
- 25 Generally, you want to keep it so officers

- 1 aren't afraid of being sued.
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All we do is
- 3 vacate and remand and let them -- and let them
- 4 --
- 5 MS. BLATT: Well, I hope you vote for
- 6 some qualified immunity. That would be nutty
- 7 just to vacate and remand because you just want
- 8 us to lose? I mean --
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: But you -- but you
- 10 still have to satisfy -- kind of to go to
- 11 Justice Jackson's point, you know, it's -- I
- don't think it would be the case that anybody
- who was arrested could make this charge and then
- 14 get on to discovery because then you'd still
- 15 have to survive a motion to dismiss on the Mt.
- 16 Healthy inferences, right?
- I mean, she has -- if you put aside
- 18 the probable cause, the no probable cause
- 19 requirement, if you put that aside, I mean, she
- 20 has all of this evidence for retaliation. Not
- 21 everybody who's arrested is going to have the
- 22 kind of evidence she has on that score.
- MS. BLATT: Well --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: And that will knock
- out cases, right?

1 MS. BLATT: -- I disagree, especially 2 given the type of evidence she alleges. I mean, 3 the stuff she's alleging doesn't have any 4 citation. It just says she showed up and she -somehow the DA would have entered a warrant into 5 6 a satellite booking process. I have no idea 7 what she's talking about, that you had to get a -- the Fifth Circuit asked her specifically was 8 9 there any requirement that the police officer 10 have to go to a DA and she says no, but she 11 says, well, it's the normal procedure, without a 12 citation in the record. 13 But I think the whole point of Nieves 14 was we weren't going to go down this road. 15 lost on a motion to dismiss --16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I -- can I ask 17 about --18 MS. BLATT: -- already. 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- Justice 20 Gorsuch's question because I think that's 21 important. And maybe I'm looking at it the 2.2 wrong way, but I assume people who intentionally 23 engage in this conduct are prosecuted all the 24 time, generally speaking, namely, intentionally 25 stealing government documents, intentionally

- 1 removing government documents, et cetera.
- 2 MS. BLATT: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Intentionally
- 4 obstructing government proceedings. People who
- 5 accidentally take a document are -- are never
- 6 prosecuted presumably, put aside what crimes. I
- 7 think the government said look at the conduct,
- 8 not the crime.
- 9 MS. BLATT: We agree.
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So how do we
- assess that at this stage when they're alleging
- they did it unintentionally and they would have
- a good case if that were, in fact, true, but the
- 14 police officer said there's probable cause that
- she did it intentionally. She intentionally
- 16 stole. How do we assess that?
- MS. BLATT: Well, you wanted --
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Because I think
- 19 Justice Gorsuch's question goes -- is correct if
- it's unintentional, but I don't think it's
- 21 correct if it's intentional.
- MS. BLATT: So the in the weeds is
- that's why you need comparators, but at a higher
- level, it is why we're making the argument that
- 25 this will happen in every case if you extend it

- 1 beyond cases where police don't typically arrest
- 2 because every assault case will be I was -- you
- 3 know, every looting case will be I didn't -- I
- 4 took a toothbrush or I -- you know, I don't know
- 5 how that -- that ring got in my bag, or I left
- 6 the party as soon as the cocaine came, and the
- 7 officer will say, you know, no, I saw you with
- 8 it.
- And we'll be debating, I don't know, I
- 10 think half of you will say that should go to a
- jury and half of you think this is not a good
- idea for officers. How can they kind of enforce
- the law in this type of environment?
- I would say, if you're going to do
- comparators, you have to look at the comparators
- that's alleged in the warrant application. The
- 17 problem is you might not have a warrant
- 18 application in all kinds of cases. If it's a
- warrantless arrest, all you're going to have is
- the complaint, and the complaint says, I'm
- 21 innocent.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: What about the kind
- of crimes the government was talking about, like
- 24 unlawful assembly and those kinds of crimes,
- 25 where, you know --

```
1
               MS. BLATT: Have at it.
 2
                JUSTICE BARRETT: -- hey, you
 3
      intentional -- you intentionally do it, you
      intentionally gathered, you intentionally
 4
     blocked a street.
 5
 6
               MS. BLATT: Yeah. Have at it.
                                                That.
 7
      is Nieves. That is the hard core of that should
     be easy to allege, and we agree with a lot of
8
 9
      the government's examples about comparators.
10
      You can use yourself as a comparator on a
11
     previous occasion. If you're the only
12
      journalist arrested for assembly, that kind of
13
     stuff, I thought that was the point of Nieves.
14
     That should -- should go.
15
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The, like, protest
16
      cases?
17
               MS. BLATT: Protest cases.
               JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Yeah. Or --
18
19
               MS. BLATT: Not theft cases, not
     assault cases, not insider trading or tax fraud
20
21
      or political corruption. I mean, I really would
22
      advise every criminal to put a, you know,
23
     political bumper sticker on their car and --
24
                (Laughter.)
25
                JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess I was -- I
```

- 1 thought that the part -- I thought that the
- 2 point of Nieves was, if you have solid objective
- 3 evidence that you're in a world in which you
- 4 were arrested for something that somebody who
- 5 hadn't engaged in your speech activities would
- 6 not be arrested for, that you should be able to
- 7 present that evidence to get over the probable
- 8 cause bar.
- 9 So here's a -- a -- a hypothetical.
- 10 Suppose that there were two videos in this case.
- MS. BLATT: Two videos.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: The second video is of
- a meeting with all the relevant officials and
- they're all talking about how they can get back
- at Ms. Gonzalez, and they say: Hey, why don't
- we do this investigation, we'll go arrest her,
- 17 we'll go, you know, because she moved this piece
- of paper, and -- and that's -- and they all
- 19 agree to that.
- 20 Are you saying that that can't come in
- 21 to get over the probable cause bar in Nieves?
- MS. BLATT: No, that -- that's a
- 23 Lozman claim, and there is a Lozman claim
- 24 pending against the city.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it's not a

- 1 Lozman claim against the city. It's the same
- 2 defendants here.
- 3 MS. BLATT: Oh, it's just -- just
- 4 officers agreeing?
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: It's just -- yeah,
- 6 it's the same defendants, but there they all are
- 7 on videotape agreeing how they're going to
- 8 retaliate against Ms. Gonzalez.
- 9 MS. BLATT: That was the Nieves
- 10 complaint is Officers Weight and Bartlett -- I
- 11 hope I have their names right -- or Nieves and
- 12 -- and Weight were conspiring to get this
- 13 person, and so you just didn't have them on
- 14 videotape.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah. Well, now you
- 16 have them on videotape. That seems like pretty
- good objective evidence to get you over the
- 18 probable cause bar.
- 19 MS. BLATT: This -- this --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, I guess what
- 21 I'm suggesting is that the point -- look, the
- 22 point of this probable cause bar is we don't
- want every old allegation of, like, you know,
- they had a bad intent and they were trying to
- look at -- but, if you have solid objective

- 1 evidence that you were being treated differently
- 2 from another person in your situation, that that
- 3 solid objective evidence should -- and part of
- 4 that might be comparative in the way that you're
- 5 suggesting, but -- but there might be other
- 6 things too.
- 7 MS. BLATT: I mean, the problem is
- 8 this is a poster child. There is absolutely
- 9 nothing in the complaint that suggests that
- 10 either the chief of police or this police
- officer had any reason to even know who this
- woman was or her speech.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: You're -- you're
- 14 fighting the facts and -- and -- and --
- MS. BLATT: Well, but that's what this
- 16 case is going to govern.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Justice Kagan's
- 18 asking you a hypothetical question. I'd be
- 19 grateful if you'd answer it.
- 20 MS. BLATT: Sure. The problem with
- 21 this anything goes --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: It's good I have an
- 23 enforcer.
- MS. BLATT: Yes.
- 25 (Laughter.)

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Anytime. 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: Because I can let you 3 get carried away doing all this other stuff. 4 MS. BLATT: And -- and your 5 question --6 JUSTICE KAGAN: But I had a 7 hypothetical --8 MS. BLATT: -- was excellent. 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and it was a good 10 one. 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It was. 12 (Laughter.) 13 MS. BLATT: Because you're a good 14 advocate, and every advocate is going to hire 15 you or somebody like you who's going to say my 16 evidence is really good, look how these people 17 were out to get me, I'm an unpopular figure, 18 this is a small town, I didn't like the road 19 construction. 20 JUSTICE KAGAN: No, now you're still fighting it because --21 2.2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- because --24 MS. BLATT: Sorry. Okay. On -- on 25 your other hypo --

- 1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: You don't need an 2 enforcer.
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 MS. BLATT: Any hypothetical, it is
- 5 going to be: I was picked on, and I'm going to
- 6 be able to cite any evidence that's anything
- 7 but, I guess, an officer's subjective statement.
- 8 Yeah, because that's the only thing you
- 9 specifically ruled out. And the Court, I think,
- 10 said very clearly only comparator evidence.
- Once you have a similarly situated person who's
- 12 not engaged in speech --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, look, you don't
- 14 have to -- from my videotape, you do not have to
- make a very long leap of inference to say: Oh,
- 16 that's comparative. You know, this videotape is
- 17 like let's go get Ms. Gonzalez. You don't have
- 18 to say: And we wouldn't have gotten everybody
- 19 else.
- MS. BLATT: Right.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: It's obvious on its
- face that this is treating Ms. Gonzalez
- 23 differently.
- 24 MS. BLATT: And what I'm concerned
- about is the next hypothetical, where the

- 1 plaintiff, like in Nieves, says that officer
- 2 said to me: You know, I was out to get you, or
- 3 I'm so glad -- you know, it's time to arrest
- 4 you. I've been waiting.
- I mean, the -- the -- we all know that
- 6 the government --
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, now you're
- 8 just -- you're going to the statements that
- 9 obviously are not coming in under Nieves because
- 10 they're just statements that the officer made --
- MS. BLATT: But you have them on
- 12 videotape, right?
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- reflecting his
- 14 state of mind at that time. So --
- MS. BLATT: Isn't the only -- I'm
- 16 sorry. Maybe I misunderstood your hypo. Isn't
- it only because there's a videotape of the
- 18 officer's statements?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it's -- it's --
- it's -- it's pretty clear, objective evidence
- 21 that a judge can look at, which makes it clear
- 22 that Ms. Gonzalez was picked on because she was
- doing what the First Amendment allows her to do.
- MS. BLATT: I worry that if you write
- an opinion that says only that evidence is okay

- if you've got the officer on videotape, that's
- fine. I worry where you're going is anything
- 3 that I as a judge think is pretty relevant that
- 4 she was picked on. That's what scares me, and
- 5 that's what scares me representing police
- 6 officers, who literally, you know, are trying to
- 7 work to get the community to trust them and do
- 8 their job and don't, you know, have smear
- 9 campaigns every time they're sued. It's -- it's
- 10 --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: The presence or
- 12 absence of the videotape would be important if
- the case actually goes to trial, but prior to
- 14 that, I really don't see why that changes the
- 15 situation. So, whether you have a videotape
- 16 that shows that they really were conspiring to
- get a particular person or all you have is an
- 18 allegation by the person who was arrested that
- 19 the arresting officer said the only reason why
- 20 I'm arresting you is because the mayor told me
- 21 to do it, that's -- for purposes of a motion to
- 22 dismiss or summary judgment, it seems to me they
- 23 count -- it counts just as much as the
- 24 videotape. It's just not as persuasive perhaps
- in the end. Am I not --

```
1
                MS. BLATT: Now you're my enforcer, I
 2
      think.
 3
                (Laughter.)
                JUSTICE ALITO: No, I'm not being --
 4
      I'm not trying to be your enforcer by any means.
 5
 6
                MS. BLATT: But it sounds like a very
 7
     helpful question.
                JUSTICE ALITO: You don't need one by
 8
 9
      any means.
10
                (Laughter.)
11
                MS. BLATT: I think you're saying
12
     that's helpful, that every complaint can allege,
     you know, the officer said something or, you
13
14
     know -- I mean, I hate to -- but Mayor Barry
15
      said -- you know, he showed up at that Vista
16
     Hotel to meet his girlfriend for sex, not the
17
     drugs, and the FBI was clearly out to get him,
18
      and you didn't know that he did anything wrong
19
     until you watched the videotape.
                JUSTICE ALITO: Now what about these
20
      two situations? So there's a protest and one of
21
     the protesters is 6 foot 5 and weighs 250 pounds
22
23
      and used to be a -- a linebacker in college and
24
      gets into an argument with a police officer
```

about something and pushes the police officer.

- 1 The police officer arrests him, charges him with
- 2 assault, which is a felony, all right? That's
- 3 -- well, I'll continue --
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, go ahead.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Then the
- 6 -- at -- at another protest, the protester is a
- 7 frail, elderly person who weighs 90 pounds and
- 8 is arrested for assaulting the officer because
- 9 this person pushed the officer with whatever
- 10 strength that arrestee has, I mean, in -- in the
- 11 latter situation and is charged with assault.
- 12 Is -- what would be the comparator in
- 13 that situation? You have to find another
- 14 situation where there's a -- a person of similar
- 15 statute --
- MS. BLATT: No.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: -- stature who --
- MS. BLATT: No, I would loosen --
- 19 literally, our comparator in this case, had she
- 20 pled it, could have been anyone who
- 21 intentionally takes government documents.
- 22 Didn't have to be even a city official, didn't
- 23 have to be what kind of document.
- So, in your -- again, I would never
- 25 put this on assault because every case will be:

1 I just elbowed, everyone else was punching, and 2 I was the only one arrested. But assuming it's 3 going to do assault, it's easy to allege a 4 comparator: Everyone at the bar was throwing 5 punches, and I was the only one wearing my 6 T-shirt that said "I hate the police." You meet 7 the comparator requirement easily. 8 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Thank you. 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you. Justice Thomas? 10 11 Anything further, Justice Alito? 12 Anything, Justice Gorsuch? 13 Justice Kavanaugh? 14 Oh, I'm sorry. Justice Barrett? 15 Justice Jackson? 16 MS. BLATT: Oh, thank goodness. 17 (Laughter.) 18 MS. BLATT: Thank you. 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 20 counsel. 21 Rebuttal, Ms. Bidwell? 2.2 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ANYA A. BIDWELL 23 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

MS. BIDWELL: I have four points to

24

25

make.

1	So first point is I think it's very
2	important to look at the two questions presented
3	in context of each other. So, if you are saying
4	that Nieves covers the vast bulk of cases, which
5	are the cases where police officers are making
6	on-the-spot arrests, for example, during
7	protests, during art event festivals, when they
8	are responding to domestic violence calls,
9	that's the vast bulk of police cases.
LO	If you say that Nieves only covers
L1	that, then when you talk about objective
L2	evidence carveout, the the exact example of a
L3	comparator might actually make sense because
L4	then you can have a comparator, for example, on
L5	during a protest.
L6	But, if you are including mayors into
L7	the general Nieves police arrest framework, that
L8	it is very important that objective evidence
L9	carveout is not just limited to examples of
20	non-arrest, especially, as Respondent argues,
21	they say we should have irrebuttable presumption
22	with warrants. So then mayors get an
23	irrebuttable presumption with warrants, and the
24	only people who are going to be sued for First
25	Amendment retaliation will be police officers

- 1 protesting events under the endemic crime
- 2 similarly situated exception.
- 3 So it's important to keep those two
- 4 perspectives in terms of Question Presented 1
- 5 and Question Presented 2.
- 6 And, Justice Sotomayor, on the -- your
- 7 question about data, National Police
- 8 Accountability Project, on page 24 of their
- 9 amicus, talk about how there is no floodgates
- 10 after the Seventh Circuit and the Ninth
- 11 Circuit's interpretation of the carveout. They
- 12 say that there were only 178 cases overall
- analyzed, and only 17 cases out of those 178
- 14 proceeded to -- past motion to dismiss or motion
- 15 for summary judgment.
- 16 And, finally, I'd just like to mention
- that political retaliation is dangerous. First
- 18 Amendment has to mean something. Mayors should
- 19 not be allowed to launder animus through
- 20 warrants. Common law understood that. And we
- 21 respectfully ask that this Court understand that
- 22 too. Thank you.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 24 counsel.
- The case is submitted.

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