

Allegations of civil and human rights violations in detention facilities are numerous

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Credit: University of Southern California

Immigration detention facilities that are privately operated or located in remote areas of the country garnered more grievances and held detainees significantly longer than in publicly run facilities, according to a study by USC Gould School of Law Professor Emily Ryo.

Drawing on government and other records relating to all individuals who were detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in [fiscal year](#) 2015, Ryo found that many complaints were related to lack of access to counsel or lack of basic case information.

"Allegations of civil and [human rights violations](#) in detention facilities are numerous and longstanding," said Ryo, associate professor at USC Gould. "Our research highlights key aspects of immigration detention—issues that are likely to be exacerbated if the government further expands detention use."

Other grievances centered on difficulties maintaining contacts with family, problems related to [asylum](#) application process, health or [medical care](#), and allegations of misconduct or abuse by ICE officers or by facility officials, according to the report, "[The Landscape of Immigration Detention in the United States](#)," co-written with Ian Peacock of UCLA. The [policy report](#) was published by the American Immigration Council. A total of 47,145 complaints were reported to the federal government for 305 sites.

Individuals held an average of 87 days in privately operated detention

Detainees also spent a longer time in detention in privately operated facilities and in remotely located facilities before they were either deported, temporarily released or received the relief they sought, according to the report released by the American Immigration Council.

"Our findings raise important questions about whether certain structural conditions in privately operated facilities and in remotely located facilities may produce longer detention lengths," said Ryo.

Individuals who were granted relief were held an average of 87 days in privately operated detention facilities compared to 33 days in publicly run facilities, said Ryo, adding that those who were temporarily released spent an average of 65 days in privately operated facilities compared to 21 days in publicly run facilities.

The report, adapted from a study forthcoming in Southern California Law Review, draws on government and other records for the 355,729 individuals detained by ICE in fiscal year 2015, the year with the most recent publicly available data.

The majority were transferred at least once

Other findings include:

- ICE relied on 638 sites scattered throughout the United States to detain individuals, often moving them from one facility to another.
- About 67 percent of detained [individuals](#) were held in privately operated facilities, and 64 percent were confined in a remotely located facility.
- More than 48,800 detention facility-related grievances were reported by detainees and [community members](#).
- Nearly half of detainees—48 percent—were confined at least once in a facility that was located more than 60 miles away from the nearest immigration attorney providing low- or no-cost removal defense services.
- The majority—60 percent- of adults who were detained were transferred at least once during their detention, leading to

confinement in multiple locations.

Ryo's research focuses on immigration, criminal justice, legal attitudes and legal noncompliance, and procedural justice. She approaches issues through innovative interdisciplinary lenses, using diverse quantitative and qualitative methods. As an empirical legal scholar, she has published widely in both leading sociology and law journals. She has been awarded the 2017 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship to support her scholarship.

Provided by University of Southern California

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