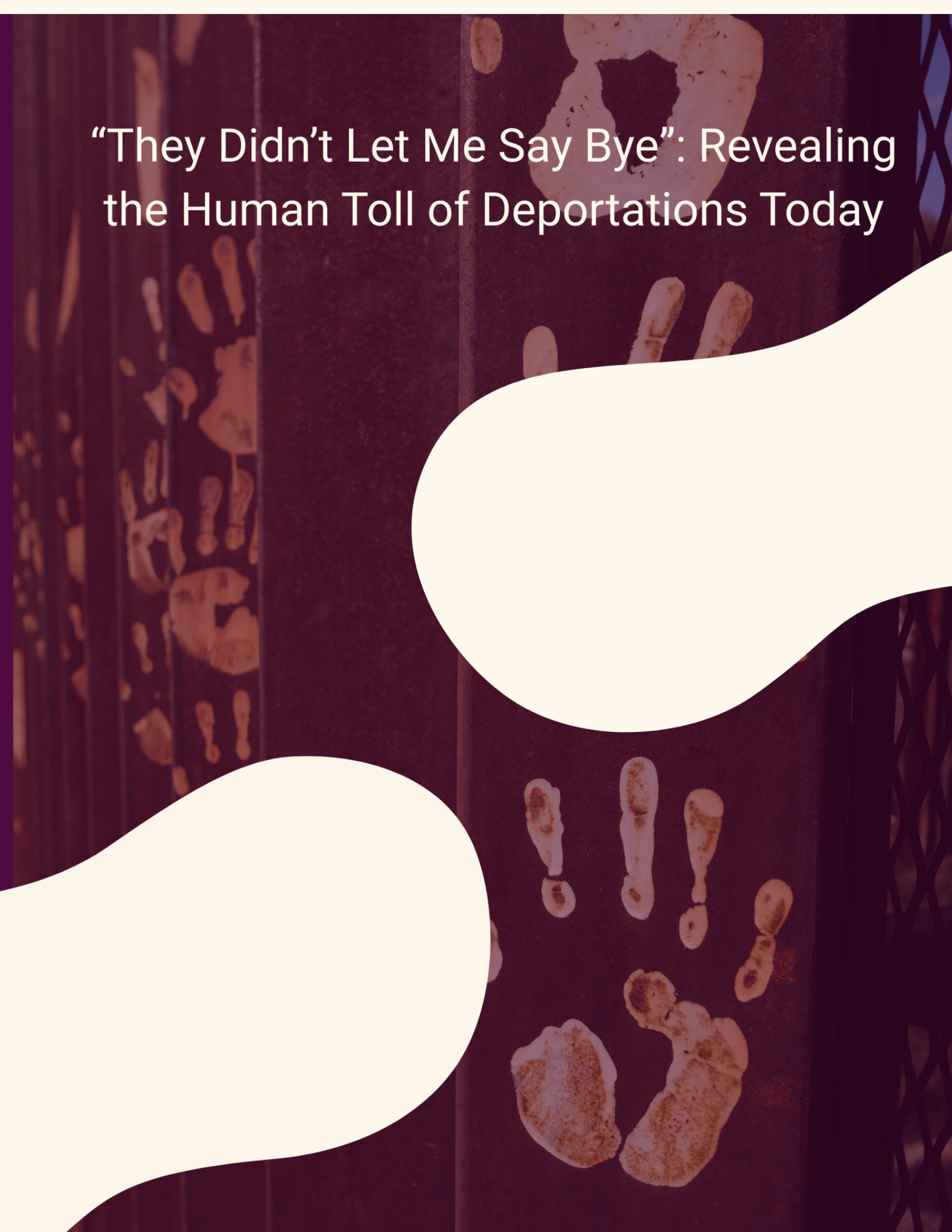


# “They Didn’t Let Me Say Bye”: Revealing the Human Toll of Deportations Today



## Executive Summary

Since May of 2025, the Kino Border Initiative (KBI) has conducted brief, anonymous, and voluntary surveys with Mexican deportees who arrived at the temporary Mexican government facility in Nogales, Sonora. The gathered information reveals who is being deported and what they experience during the deportation process. We based this report on 278 surveys conducted from May to July 2025.

## Main findings

- **Long-term residents affected:** 44.4% of people deported from within the U.S. had lived there for over 10 years, demonstrating how current policies disrupt established families and communities.
- **Frequent family separations:** 39.2% of respondents reported experiencing separation from family members, resulting in severe emotional and caregiving hardships.
- **Unsafe detention conditions:** Multiple testimonies reported dangerous conditions like medical neglect, overcrowding, exposure to toxic smoke, and significant emotional trauma in U.S. detention centers. These abuses are exacerbated by the lack of adequate oversight and the push towards prosecutions of individuals for first-time illegal entry, which leads to longer detention times.
- **Deportations are driven both by local law enforcement collaboration and public ICE operations:** 33% of deportations start with a regional or state law enforcement stop, and nearly half are from direct ICE operations, usually in public areas such as the street and courthouse.

## Key recommendations

### To Congress:

- Urge the Trump Administration to restore the essential, congressionally mandated, oversight functions of the offices of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman at the Department of Homeland Security after deep staffing cuts in March, which have led to an alarming lack of response to abuse reporting.
- [Visit their local detention center](#) to exercise oversight powers by investigating conditions such as overcrowding, access to legal calls, and medical care.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



- [Publicly amplify the cases of community members, including DACA recipients, detained by immigration authorities](#) through media interviews, public statements, and questions to administrative officials during hearings and other oversight opportunities.

#### **To Arizona legislators and local officials:**

- Meet with individuals in their districts who have been impacted by increasingly forceful and hostile immigration enforcement tactics and listen to their stories. If those individuals are open to sharing their testimonies, stand with them and amplify their voices.
- Request detailed data collection from local law enforcement agencies regarding any contact with the public that leads to a notification of or referral to federal agencies.
- Gather with colleagues to develop draft bills to present in 2026 that will protect communities from local law enforcement collaboration with ICE and other federal agencies.

#### **To allied organizations and individuals:**

- Meet with local sheriffs, mayors, and governors' staff to share this report, highlight the human cost of local collaboration with ICE, and demand local officials scale back their level of cooperation for the sake of community trust, family unity, and human dignity.
- Organize with the local community to accompany immigrants in spaces where they are especially vulnerable to detention (such as at immigration court) and conduct citizen oversight by monitoring federal law enforcement activity.
- Dialogue with neighbors, family, friends, and acquaintances about the stories contained in this report to invite them to understand the way that their community members are being affected by immigration enforcement

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## Survey Methodology and Findings

In January 2025, the Mexican federal government launched **México Te Abraza** to support Mexican nationals repatriated from the United States. At facilities along the U.S./Mexico border, and more recently also in southern Mexico, various federal agencies provide consular assistance, medical and food support, free transportation to communities of origin, and other social welfare programs.

In April 2025, the Mexican government granted the Kino Border Initiative regular access to its facility in Nogales, Sonora. The access allows KBI staff to observe broader trends, since not all repatriated individuals later use KBI's services.

KBI staff conducted brief surveys to document patterns of repatriation, testimonies, and reports of mistreatment, while also inviting individuals to receive additional support at our outreach center. Surveys were voluntary and anonymous, and did not request names, ages, or states of origin. The primary goal was to understand how and why the repatriation occurred. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

- **Total surveys conducted:** 278
- **Gender of Respondents:** 84.3% men (223 respondents disclosed their gender)
- **Location of Detention:** Data collected from survey responses regarding the location of detention, the type of apprehension, and the duration.

## Survey Questions

We asked respondents the following questions to understand their experiences better:

1. When did your repatriation occur?
2. If you were already living in the U.S., how long had you been living there?
3. In which state and city did you live?
4. How were you detained, and by whom?
5. Where did your detention take place, and for how long?
6. Were you separated from any family member during or as a result of your repatriation?

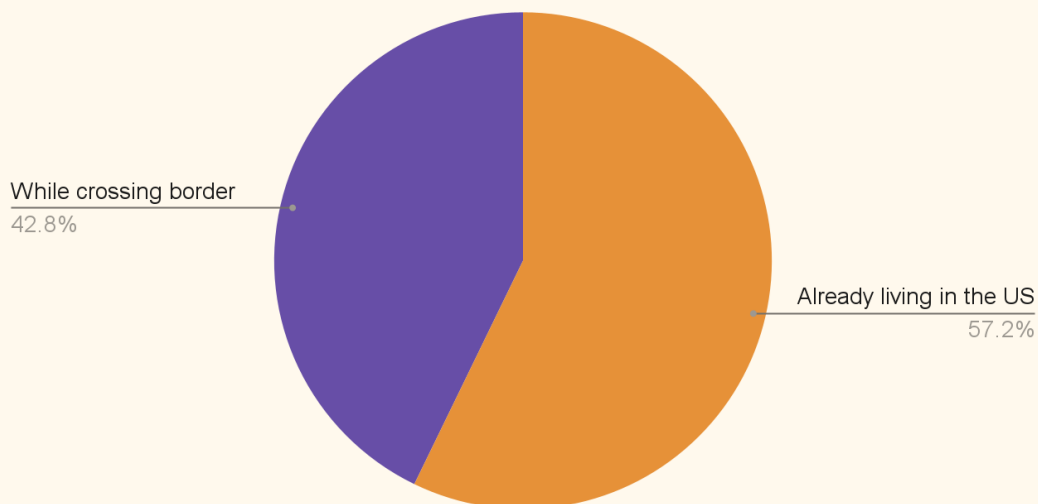
*This report was prepared primarily by **Iñigo Casares Pérez**, in collaboration with other KBI staff and supported by KBI volunteers.*

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



## Dramatic Increase in Deportations of People Living Within the US

Figure 1: Circumstances of Detention



Much attention has been paid to ICE raids and daily detention numbers, but there has been less reporting on the resulting spike in deportations and the profound impact on families. According to our survey responses, **57.2% of people deported were living in the U.S. at the time of their detention, compared to only 5% of deportees that KBI served in 2024.** Many of these individuals have deep roots in their communities, including U.S.-born children, spouses, and other dependents. This shift in the profile of deportees highlights not only a change in enforcement patterns but also the widespread separation of families, creating emotional, financial, and caregiving hardships for those left in the U.S.

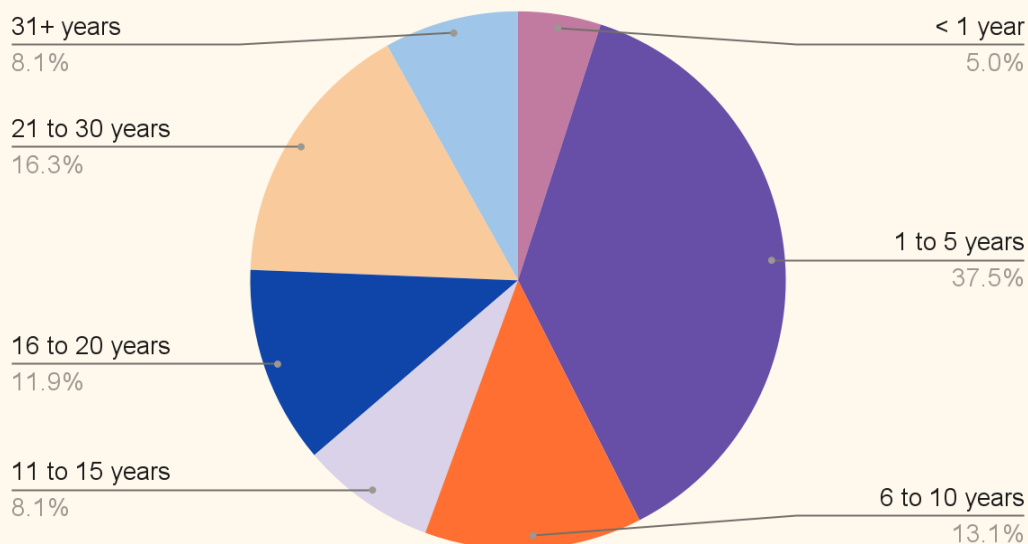
The dramatic shift in Nogales reflects an overall nationwide trend. According to the [New York Times](#), which relied on ICE reports and Freedom of Information Act requests by the [Deportation Data Project](#) at UC Berkeley, the U.S. government repatriated **1,500 people** per day by the first week of August 2025, a massive increase from the 255 people per day reported before the start of the current administration. The vast majority of these additional deportations involve individuals without a criminal record. The same data set shows that detentions of people without a criminal record have increased by almost twentyfold under this administration.

As shown in Figure 2, more than **50% of deportees have lived in the U.S. for at least six years**, reflecting long-term ties, employment, and family connections.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Figure 2: Years of Residence in the United States



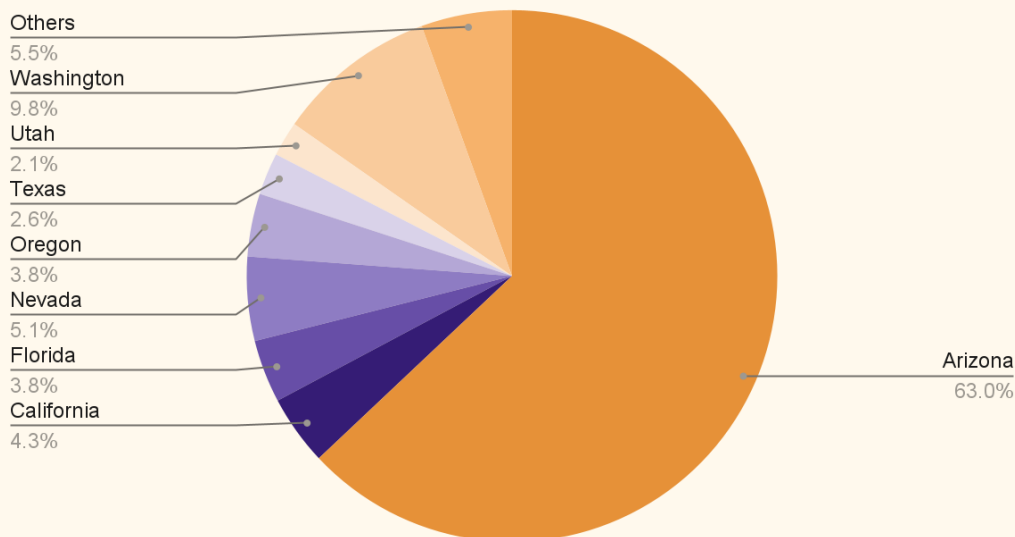
**Santiago's\*** family brought him from Mexico to the US when he was 9 years old. Over the last 29 years, he lived in California for a time before moving to Washington state, where he successfully applied for and was approved for DACA. One day this spring, as he was driving down the freeway to work, a highway patrol trooper stopped him, citing that he was driving too close to the car in front of him, although Santiago thought the vehicle was pretty far from his. The trooper said he would let Santiago off with a warning, but then called ICE. Santiago showed him the social security number he had gotten with his DACA status, but it had expired. ICE detained Santiago for several months while he tried to apply for other forms of relief, but he was denied and deported to Nogales.

It is not surprising that **63% of deportees were detained in Arizona** (as shown in Figure 3), as almost all deportations from the state have long been conducted through Nogales, and there are three detention centers in the state. What is more striking is the fact that more than a third of people deported were detained elsewhere, some as far away as Florida, and transferred to Arizona for deportation. These transfers across multiple states and several detention centers take a significant toll on individuals.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Figure 3: State of Detention



**Alvaro\*** had lived 16 years in Wyoming when he and his wife were detained outside of a fertility clinic by local police, who then called ICE to have him taken into immigration custody. He was separated from his wife and transferred multiple times: first to San Francisco, then Las Vegas, then Florence, Arizona, then Eloy, Arizona, until finally being deported to Nogales, Sonora. In total, he was transferred five times, and in each one, he was chained for more than 24 hours and often went without food for over 12 hours at a time.

These transfers don't only affect the person in detention, but their whole family and community:

**Tania\*** was detained during her immigration appointment for her family reunification visa. Her 21-year-old daughter is sponsoring her. ICE was waiting for Tania at the appointment, and they did not even give her a chance for a hearing with the judge before detaining her. ICE transported her from Washington, D.C., to New Jersey, then to Texas, and finally to Florence, AZ. During her detention in Florence, neither Tania's family nor her lawyer could locate her. They also did not allow her lawyer to go to her proceedings. While Tania was in Florence, ICE told her to sign her deportation order. She said she would not, so the ICE agent signed for her and placed their own fingerprint in her place. They said that no matter what, Tania was going to leave. They did not return her passport or her consular ID. ICE deported Tania to Nogales, separating her from her U.S. citizen children—a two-year-old, a 16-year-old, and a 21-year-old.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Her 16-year-old son fell into depression and attempted suicide a few months ago because of the situation, and she remains deeply worried about him.

### **Local Law Enforcement Collaboration with ICE Expands Dragnet, Reinforces ICE's Power to Make Public Spaces Unsafe**

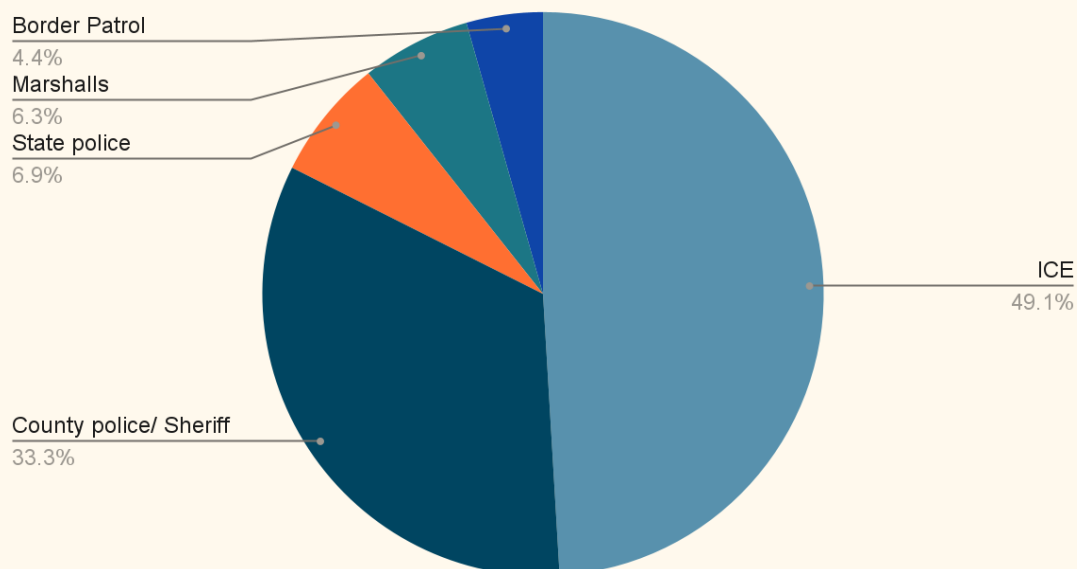
Survey data and testimonies reveal that **local law enforcement plays a significant role in facilitating ICE operations**, contributing to a broader and more pervasive reach of immigration enforcement. Of people deported who had been living in the US at the time of their arrest, **49.1% reported being apprehended by ICE, and 33.3 % were initially stopped or questioned by state or local police before ICE took custody.**

As the majority of people surveyed had been detained in Arizona, this tendency particularly reflects the policies and practices of Arizona law enforcement. Although many agencies within the state claim to limit cooperation, in practice, they regularly notify ICE or other federal authorities when they come into contact with individuals who are undocumented. Even if local agencies have not changed their practices, anecdotal information from community members and law enforcement indicates that ICE is responding more quickly to referrals. According to the [Immigrant Legal Resource Center \(ILRC\)](#), Arizona scores **2.65 out of 5 on its cooperation scale with ICE**. A higher score reflects lower cooperation. Arizona's rating is slightly below the national average of 2.70, indicating greater collaboration between local authorities and ICE.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Figure 4: Authorities Involved in Detention



These collaborations increase the perception of public spaces as unsafe, particularly for undocumented individuals, but even for those with different legal statuses. Several testimonies report **excessive use of force, arrests without proper documentation, and intimidation during apprehension**, underscoring the risk posed to community members even in routine daily activities. The testimonies of people deported strongly align with US reporting on ICE operations on the streets, in courthouses, and at workplaces.

Several testimonies highlight the **human impact of these joint operations**. These collaborations are not abstract; they have a direct effect on lives. For example, Jaime\*, who had lived in Sedona, Arizona, for 11 years, was apprehended by local police.

**Jaime\*** was walking near his home when officers approached him and told him that, as he was undocumented, they would deport him. He was immediately arrested. *“They didn’t even give me a chance to say bye to my mom. She found out later that I was detained in Florence. She was worried about me.”* Jaime\* spent five months in detention, during which he explained to officers that his mother relied entirely on him for care, but they still proceeded with his deportation. *“Now I’m thinking of staying here [at the border] because when I left [my hometown] 11 years ago, it was because of the violence in my city, so there’s no way I can go back.”* Jaime’s story reflects the emotional and practical hardships caused by family separation, especially for long-term residents with caregiving responsibilities in the U.S. This pattern demonstrates how joint

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



operations between local authorities and ICE extend enforcement beyond formal border crossings, affecting everyday life and heightening fear among families with deep roots in their communities.

**Manny\*** spoke very limited Spanish. He shared with KBI staff that he did not understand why he was in Mexico, as he was a lawful permanent resident and had never had any legal issues. He explained that he had hired a contractor to do some work at his home, and that was when both he and the worker were detained. He mentioned that his family in the United States hired an attorney to fight his case. Still, since most of the communication had been handled by his relatives, he was not aware of the details regarding why he was ultimately deported. He was highly distressed and confused about the situation.

**Ricardo\*** is a 43-year-old man who initially traveled to the US to provide financial support for his parents. *“I had a dentist appointment, and when I went out, ICE was outside waiting for me. They told me not to run or move, then handcuffed me and put me in their car. I knew I had the right to a lawyer or to see a judge, but when I asked, they told me I didn't and tried to force me to sign some documents. They insisted and said it was better if I didn't resist; otherwise, they would beat me. I didn't sign anything, and they deported me. I was in the process of renewing my work visa, which I've had since 2022. My lawyer told me that I should be fine until a judge's order arrived saying that I should leave the country, and that order never came, but anyway, I got deported”.*

This pattern highlights broader systemic issues, including heightened public fear, erosion of trust in law enforcement, and the expansion of immigration enforcement into everyday community life.

## Family Separation

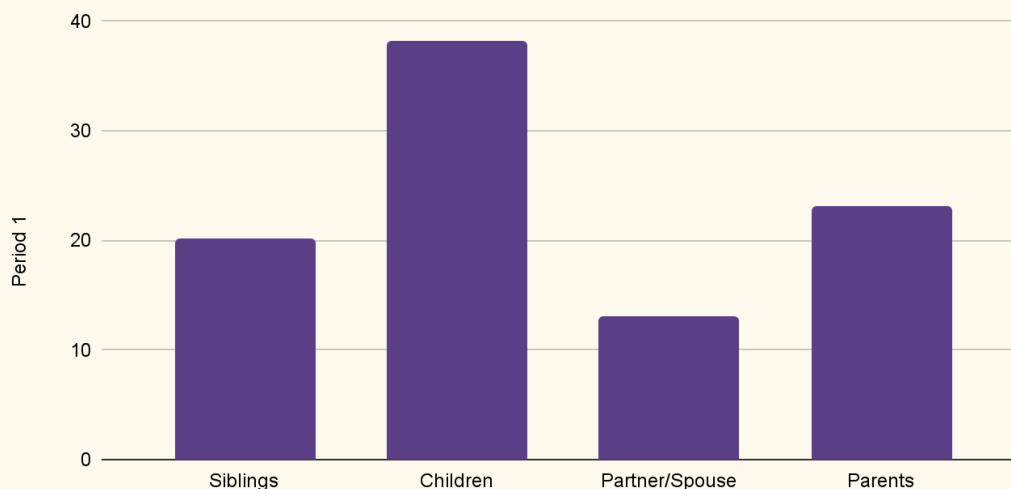
Family separation emerged as a significant and recurring consequence of deportation. Of those respondents detained who had been living in the U.S., 56.0% reported being separated from their families. Many long-term residents were forcibly removed from their homes, leaving behind children, partners, and other dependents. As shown in Figure 5, more than 70% of those who experienced family separation left behind their partners and/or children in the U.S.

This dynamic not only places families at financial risk, since many repatriated men were primary breadwinners, but also criminalizes them by making legal reunification nearly impossible. The U.S. government bars deported individuals from applying for permits or visas that would allow them to return to their families. As a result, many try to reenter without inspection to reunite with their loved ones.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Figure 5: Family Members Left Behind



**Rogelio\***, a 57-year-old Mexican father, had lived in Tempe, Arizona, for 38 years. Thanks to the immigration amnesty in place at the time, he was initially able to travel freely in and out of the country. However, on May 11th, while cleaning his truck in the parking lot of his residence, ICE agents arrived and arrested him without warning. During the arrest, agents used excessive force, slamming him to the ground and causing serious injuries to his forehead, eye, and knee.

Authorities deported Rogelio without ever showing him any documentation confirming a deportation order. This event demonstrates a failure to follow due process. Now, his entire family, including his son and siblings, remains in the U.S., while Rogelio has no opportunity to reunite with them.

**Roger\*** was attempting to enter the US to reunite with his family when Border Patrol detained him. Border Patrol charged him with illegal entry, and he was held for 75 days at the Florence Detention Center, during which authorities never allowed him to make a phone call to his family to let them know he was okay. He decided to request deportation because he felt his mental health was at risk due to the terrible conditions in the detention center.

**Arturo\***, who lived in the United States for 21 years, was taken there by his family when he was only five years old. He built his entire life in the U.S.—his wife, children, and extended family are all there. His deportation began when local police asked him to come in and sign a form confirming that he did not own weapons. Trusting the process, Arturo complied, but when he arrived at the station, the police called ICE, who immediately detained him. *“They didn’t let me talk to my lawyer,”* he recalled. Miguel’s case shows how local law enforcement collaboration

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



with ICE transforms ordinary administrative requests into opportunities for detention and deportation, catching people off guard and tearing families apart in the process.

Family separation is not an isolated consequence but a systemic outcome of current enforcement practices, with enduring repercussions for children, households, and community cohesion. The cases above highlight the emotional, financial, and social consequences of family separation. They affect caregiving arrangements, disrupt household stability, and leave lasting psychological impacts on both children and adults. Long-term residents, like Arturo\* and Rogelio\*, illustrate how enforcement policies extend beyond immediate border control, **fracturing families and destabilizing communities.**

### Detention Conditions

Survey respondents consistently reported unsafe and harmful conditions in detention facilities, whether authorities detained them within the U.S. or while they were crossing the border. Many reported **overcrowding, medical neglect, and exposure to hazardous environments**, underscoring the risks to both physical and mental health. Among them, Maribel's story exemplifies the risks faced in these facilities.

**Maribel\***, a mother and ex-police officer from Jalisco, fled threats from organized crime and requested asylum at a border crossing in Arizona in December 2024. She was detained for more than five months in Eloy, AZ, before being deported on May 22, 2025. She was exposed to toxic smoke after microwave fires in the detention unit.

*"On one occasion, the microwave in our unit caught fire during the night, while we were locked in our rooms. Smoke and chemical fumes filled all the rooms. We all pressed the emergency button because we were suffocating, but no one came to open the doors. I had to wet a shirt and use it to cover my nose and mouth to avoid inhaling the chemicals. The next morning, I woke up with dizziness, nausea, vomiting, a sore throat, and irritation in my throat and eyes. I attempted to file a report, but the staff ignored me. More recently, another microwave caught fire in the adjacent unit. The situation became chaotic. The officers didn't know how to evacuate us properly. Instead of using the emergency exit in our unit, they led us through the unit filled with smoke, further exposing us to toxic inhalation. The officers panicked and began verbally assaulting us and threatening us with pepper spray. During the evacuation, one woman collapsed in the yard. I witnessed how staff performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, CPR, and used oxygen. Her pulse did not return until they used defibrillator paddles to administer an electric shock to her chest. That is what brought*

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



*her back to life. More people were lying on the ground, unable to breathe due to smoke inhalation. At least three people fainted, and no one was attending to them.”*

**Julia\***, a young Mexican woman, fell off a cliff while running from Border Patrol. She was in excruciating pain, but the agent who detained her accused her of faking. At a Tucson hospital, medical staff sedated her **without explaining her diagnosis or treatment**. In her words: *“They never told me that my foot was fractured... nobody paid attention to me or gave me any paperwork.”* When repatriated to Nogales, Julia received no discharge documents, diagnosis, or X-rays — in direct violation of protocols outlined in the [Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Hospital Discharge Memo](#). Her case reflects a pattern reported by multiple respondents of **injuries during apprehension and inadequate medical follow-up**.

**Sergio\***, originally from Michoacán, shared the poor conditions he experienced in detention and their impact on his mental health. *“I had been living in the United States for nearly four years. I was working on a roofing project at a house when ICE agents arrived and detained me...I was held in Florence for one month, and the conditions there were extremely poor. The food was terrible, and the officers were highly negligent when someone felt unwell. For example, I reported severe tooth pain, and I was told it was not a priority and that if I was lucky, I might be seen within three months. I fell into a deep depression. I didn’t want to go outside or even eat. I spent most of my time lying down, and I believe that experience had a profound emotional impact on me. The authorities never returned my belongings. I had everything in a backpack, but only my clothes were returned; that was all.”*

**Andrea\***, a 30-year-old woman from Oaxaca, was repatriated last month after Border Patrol detained her crossing into the U.S. through Naco the previous summer. She had previously lived in the U.S. since 2000 and is the mother of two U.S. citizen children, ages 15 and 14. After Border Patrol detained Andrea, she was initially held for 30 days in Florence, AZ, **sharing a room with 16 other women** and experiencing **sexual harassment**. When authorities attempted to deport her, Andrea expressed fear about returning to Mexico, which led to her transfer to Eloy Detention Center. Authorities did not **return her personal belongings**, and her phone and passport are still missing. Andrea is also a survivor of gender-based violence perpetrated by her ex-husband. She fears what will happen to her now that she is back in Mexico, with no certainty that her ex-husband will not seek her or her children.

Far from isolated incidents, these testimonies reveal systemic deficiencies in U.S. enforcement and detention practices. Addressing their needs requires urgent policy reform to safeguard the dignity, health, and family unity of all repatriates. These testimonies highlight how detention functions not only as a tool of enforcement but also as a system of punishment that deepens

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trauma. These testimonies collectively reveal a **systemic pattern of neglect, abuse, and trauma** affecting deportees. From physical injuries left untreated to mental health deterioration, prolonged detention in unsafe and overcrowded facilities, and loss of personal property, these cases highlight that the impact extends far beyond the immediate moment of deportation. Women, families, and long-term residents are particularly vulnerable, often facing compounded risks such as sexual harassment, family separation, and the impossibility of returning to safety.

The gutting of oversight agencies enables these worsening conditions. In March 2025, the current administration directed employees from the [DHS oversight offices](#) to cease performing their duties. Since that announcement, KBI has filed six complaints on behalf of migrants, which included abuses like medical neglect, dangerous detention conditions, and verbal abuse.

KBI has received no response from the last five complaints filed on behalf of migrants in May and June with the office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, four of which were copied to the Detention Ombudsman (OIDO) because they related to abuses experienced in immigration detention. We have not even received the typical automatic acknowledgement of receipt that was standard in the past.

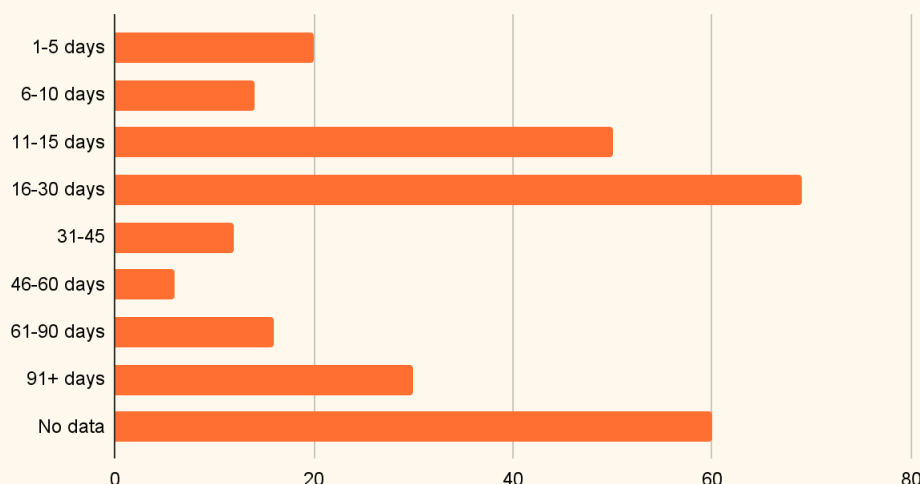
Although KBI has filed eight complaints with the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on behalf of migrants over the last 6 months and 16 over the past year, the previous time KBI received a substantive update on a complaint from an oversight office was February 11, 2025. Nine of the sixteen complaints KBI filed in the last twelve months still have not received a response about any follow-up or steps taken to investigate the complaint.

## Harsh Punishment and Conditions for People Detained While Crossing the Border

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



Figure 6: Length of Detention Prior to Repatriation



As Figure 6 illustrates, very few respondents spent fewer than 10 days in detention, even though 42% were detained while crossing the border, cases that in past years often resulted in swift deportations. The extended length of time in detention is likely a consequence of a significant increase in criminal prosecutions of individuals attempting to cross the border.

According to [Arizona Public Media](#), although border apprehensions have decreased dramatically, prosecutions have risen by 25%. In the second quarter alone, the U.S. Attorney in Arizona prosecuted more than 2,600 migrants for illegal entry. Even people crossing the border for the very first time are being held for weeks in jail.

At the Tucson Federal Courthouse, participants in our educational programs have observed how dozens of migrants are processed at once for illegal entry, with the judge calling groups of 5–8 to the stand together. Many rely on the answers of others before them because they do not understand the legal system or the rapid-fire questioning that follows. For Indigenous people who do not speak Spanish, the barriers are even greater, as they must depend on unstable internet connections to access interpretation in their native languages.

The **punitive turn toward criminal prosecution** exposes thousands of people to lasting harm—extended detention, trauma, separation from their families, and permanent consequences for their futures.

**Albertina\***, a 20-year-old woman from Guerrero, suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband, with whom she has two children, aged 4 and 6. Her husband began verbally and

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



physically abusing her, calling her degrading names and assaulting her. She fled, and he followed her to Mexico City while the children remained in the care of her parents. From there, Antonia traveled to Hermosillo and then to Nogales, where she attempted to cross into the US but was apprehended. US officials detained Albertina for one month at the Florence Detention Center. She's scared of going back to her town and wants to stay close to the border, hoping that later on she might find a way to access protection in the US.

**Joel\***, a young man crossing the border for the first time, was arrested by Border Patrol in the desert. He had been abandoned and was so weak that he passed out, only regaining consciousness two days later in a hospital. Despite his fragile medical condition, he was charged with illegal entry and spent thirty days in jail. Then, Joel was deported without any of his belongings.

**Maria\*** was detained by Border Patrol near Nogales, Arizona, and separated from her husband. She was detained for 12 days, primarily in Florence, Arizona, and she suffered poor detention conditions during that time. At one point, she went 14 hours without eating, and she was also not allowed to shower.

Together, these stories reveal how criminal prosecutions at the border transform what should be administrative migration cases into harsh punishments with lifelong consequences. Authorities subject people fleeing violence, families seeking safety, and even first-time crossers to prolonged detention, medical neglect, and legal processes they cannot fully understand. This approach not only strips individuals of dignity but also deepens cycles of trauma, family separation, and vulnerability on both sides of the border.

\*Names changed to protect privacy.



## Recommendations

### To Congress:

- Urge the Trump Administration to restore the essential, congressionally mandated oversight functions of the Offices of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman at the Department of Homeland Security, after deep staffing cuts in March that have led to an alarming lack of response to abuse reporting.
- [Visit their local detention center](#) to exercise oversight powers by investigating conditions such as overcrowding, access to legal calls, and medical care.
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### To Arizona legislators and local officials:

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