

Blog Title: What TSA Complaints Reveal About U.S. Airports — And What Needs Fixing Fast

If you’ve flown in the past decade, chances are you’ve run into long security lines, confusing processes, or frustrating interactions at TSA checkpoints. But beyond personal stories, what does the actual data say about airport security experiences in the U.S.?

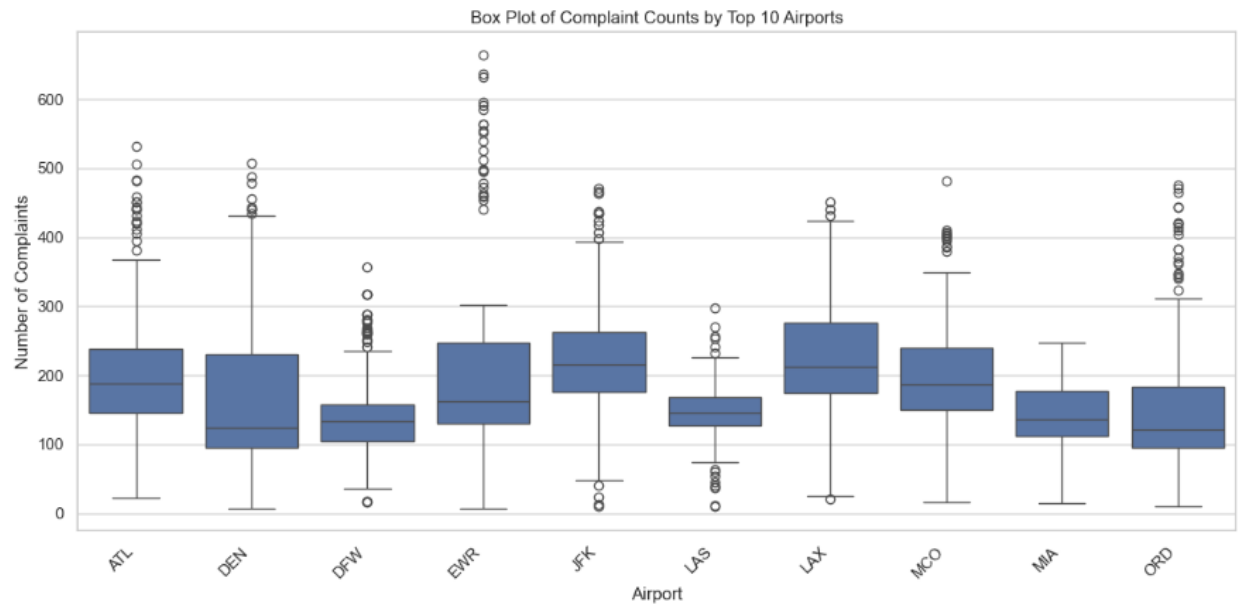
We analyzed TSA complaint data from **2015 to 2024** to uncover patterns behind the frustration: when complaints spike, which airports see the most issues, and what types of problems travelers report most often. Understanding these trends is a crucial step toward building a smoother and fairer travel experience for everyone.

Complaints Over Time: A Pandemic Pause — Then a Surge



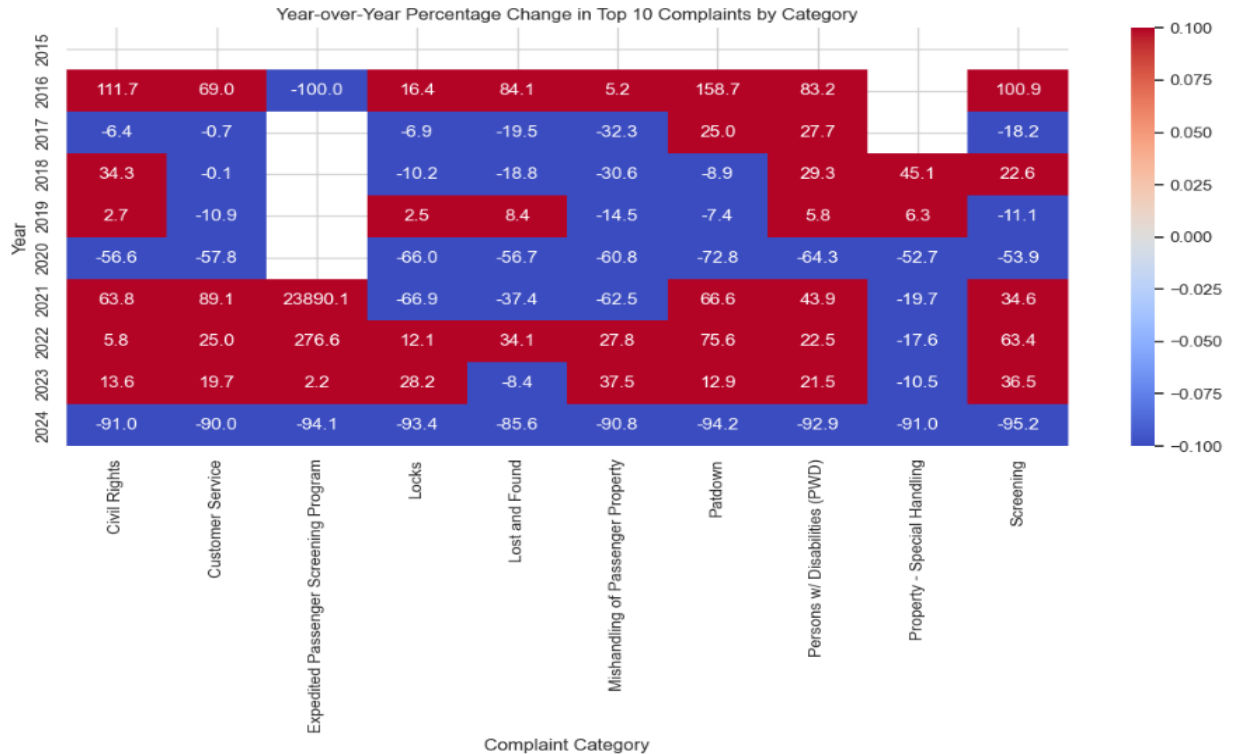
Between 2015 and early 2020, complaint volumes stayed fairly steady, with some seasonal fluctuations. Then came COVID: mid-2020 saw a dramatic dip as air travel came to a halt. But starting in **late 2021**, complaints not only returned—they **spiked above pre-pandemic levels**. This surge signals growing traveler dissatisfaction as demand came roaring back.

Which Airports Get the Most Complaints? Newark Tops the List



Among the busiest U.S. airports, **Newark Liberty (EWR)** has the highest median complaint volume and the widest variability, suggesting persistent and widespread issues. In contrast, airports like **Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW)** see fewer, more consistent complaint levels. Occasional spikes at **Chicago O’Hare** and **Atlanta** hint at bottlenecks during peak seasons or events.

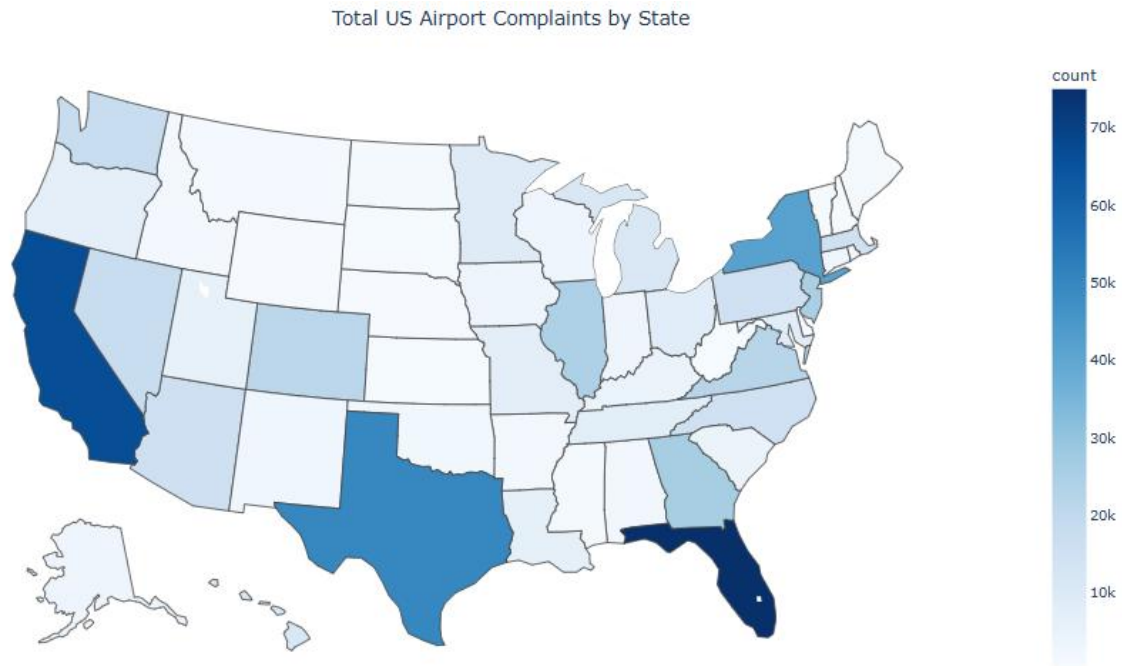
Yearly Shifts in Complaint Types Tell a Bigger Story



What passengers complain about changes drastically over time. For example, complaints about the **Expedited Passenger Screening Program (PreCheck)** exploded in 2021—likely due to

operational hiccups during travel recovery—then dropped just as sharply. Other categories like **Civil Rights**, **Patdowns**, and **Customer Service** shift from year to year, showing the need for **agile policy responses** and **continuous improvement**.

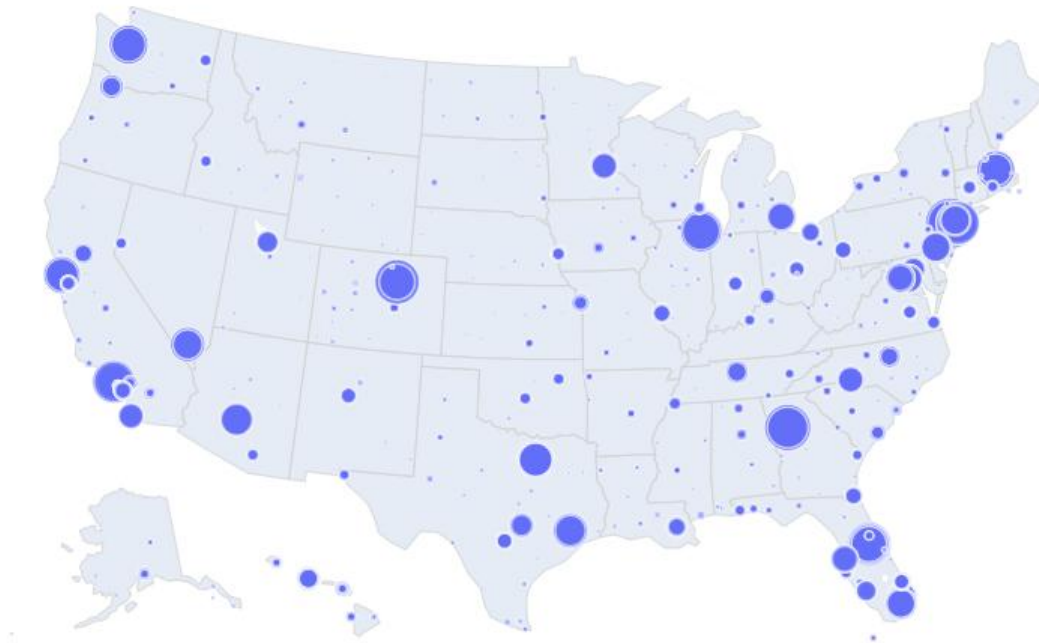
State-Level Trends: California, Texas, and Florida Lead



Unsurprisingly, **California, Texas, and Florida** top the list in complaint volume—home to many of the country’s largest and busiest airports. But the map also shows that **complaints aren’t evenly distributed**. Travelers in some states report far fewer issues, raising questions about regional staffing, training, or passenger volume.

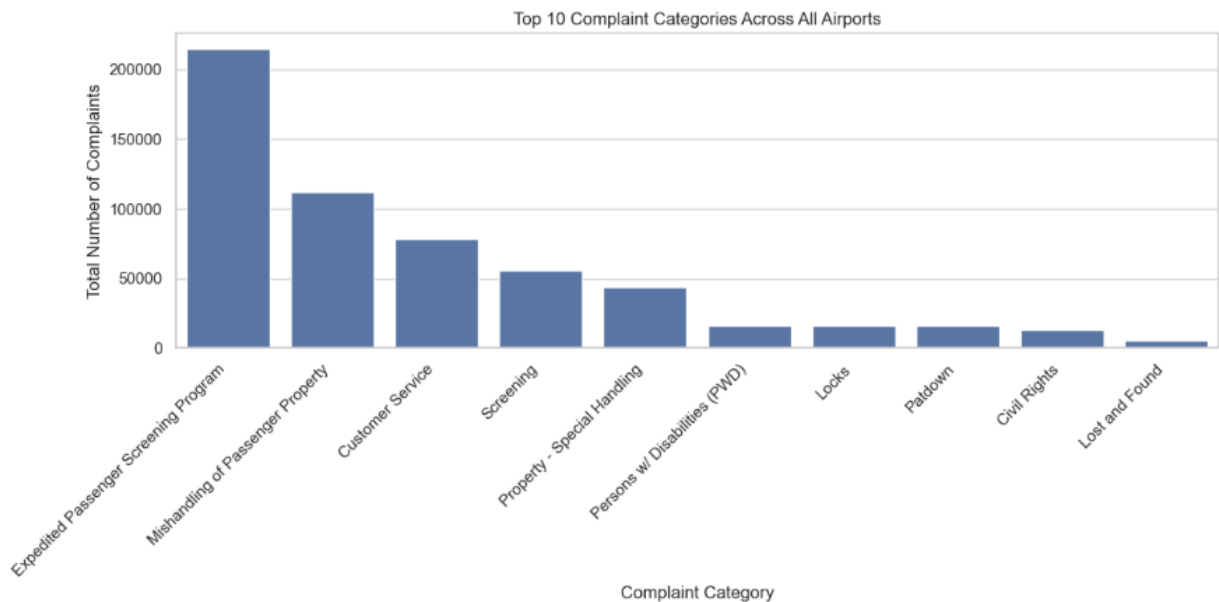
Where Complaints Piled Up in the Peak Year

US Airport Complaints in 2023 (Year with Max Complaints)



During the peak year for complaints, major hubs on the **East and West coasts**, along with **Texas and Florida**, experienced the highest complaint volumes. Smaller airports fared better, with fewer complaints—possibly due to lower traffic or more streamlined screening. These findings help pinpoint where **fixes would have the biggest impact**.

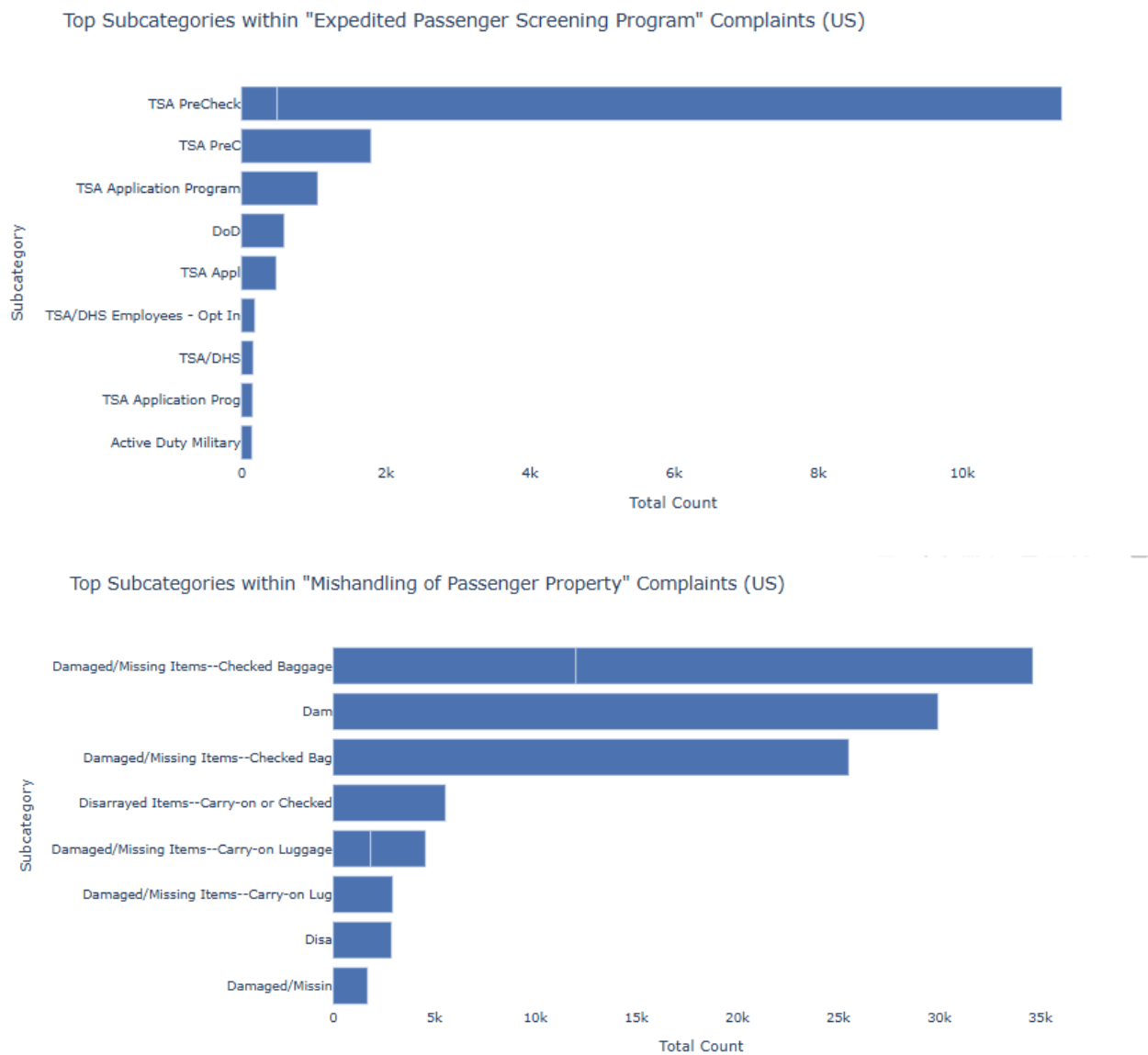
What Passengers Complain About Most

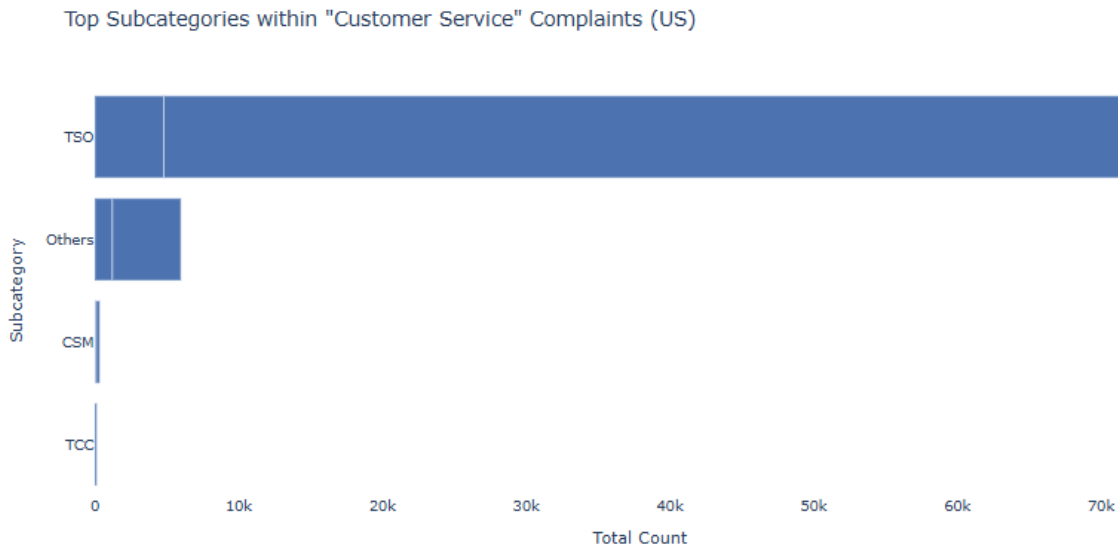


The leading source of frustration? **Expedited Passenger Screening (PreCheck)**, followed by issues with **passenger property** and **TSA customer service**. Categories like **Screening**,

Disability accommodations, and **Civil Rights** complaints, while lower in volume, are still deeply important and highlight where equity and accessibility need attention.

Inside the Complaint Categories: Specific Frustrations





A deeper dive reveals what's driving dissatisfaction:

- **PreCheck complaints** often stem from confusion about eligibility or process breakdowns.
- **Mishandled property** complaints cite broken, lost, or improperly searched baggage.
- **Customer service** issues focus mostly on **TSA officer behavior**, including perceived rudeness, inconsistency, or poor communication.

What This Data Tells Us

These trends point to clear areas for improvement:

- Improve PreCheck reliability and communication.
- Train TSOs for more consistent and respectful interactions.
- Enhance baggage handling transparency.
- Fix complaint data quality to allow for better insights.

With better systems and smarter strategies, TSA and airports can turn complaint data into a blueprint for better passenger experiences.

What's Next? Let's Make Airports Work Better

Speak Up as a Traveler

If you've had a poor airport experience—especially with TSA screening, baggage handling, or customer service—consider submitting formal feedback. These complaints help highlight systemic issues that need attention.

Use Public Data to Drive Change

This analysis shows how open government data can reveal patterns and improve transparency. Data enthusiasts, journalists, and advocates can continue exploring this and similar datasets to hold agencies accountable.

Improve Service with Targeted Action

Airport and TSA leadership should prioritize high-complaint areas—like Newark and PreCheck issues—for operational review and training. Human-centered service improvements can make a measurable difference.

Final Thoughts

TSA complaints are more than just angry messages—they're signals of what needs fixing in our nation's airports. By listening to this data, we can create a more reliable, respectful, and responsive travel experience for everyone.