

**The Social Vulnerability Index:
A County-Level Assessment of Communities
and Implications for Preparedness Planning**

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Abstract

What makes people and places vulnerable to environmental hazards and extreme events and how can we develop comparative metrics that permit us to compare vulnerability over time and across space? Vulnerability science involves the intersection of natural systems, social systems, and the built environment. The spatial social sciences play a critical role in advancing vulnerability science through improvements in geospatial data, basic science, and application. While considerable research has focused on threat awareness and assessment from both natural hazards and terrorist attacks, there is less awareness of the differential susceptibility of populations to hazards. This paper describes the social vulnerability index (SoVI)—a tool that enables comparative assessments of social vulnerability and illustrates its application to preparedness planning and disaster recovery.