

# Framework for Evaluating County Evacuation Plans in Florida

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## Abstract

Florida has been one of the most frequently impacted states to be directly hit by hurricanes in the United States. This research measures several components found in the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) Plans, and emergency management websites from the 67 counties in the State of Florida. The analysis is based on how easily and readily accessible the county emergency evacuation information is available to the public to guide and lead them prior to a hurricane landing in any Florida county. This study categorized the available plans and created an Evacuation Preparedness Rating System, which includes six components, identified as best practices in evacuation planning for carless, vulnerable and special needs populations. The dimensions examined each plan with regard to:

1. Special needs registries
2. Specialized transportation plans for individuals with specific needs
3. Pick-up location plan
4. Multi-hazard evacuation plan
5. Plan for Pet Evacuation
6. Provision of Evacuation Maps

The findings were reported for each county within each component and the integrated findings for each county. The majority of the counties in the State of Florida have a strong level of preparedness related to their evacuation processes. Lessons learned from Hurricane Michael in 2018 showed that counties in northern Florida were less prepared but suffered the greatest impacts of the storm. The hurricane exposed that there is a need for localities to get serious about disaster planning, even if they are located inland and away from the coast. However, it is also important to consider that financial and operational resources in counties differ greatly even in a state like Florida. There is a need for state and federal agencies to incorporate avenues to support and assist less resourced municipalities to establish stronger emergency preparedness plans. Some oversight is needed at state and federal levels to ensure plans are established to safely provide evacuation measures to all residents, including the most vulnerable and the carless populations.

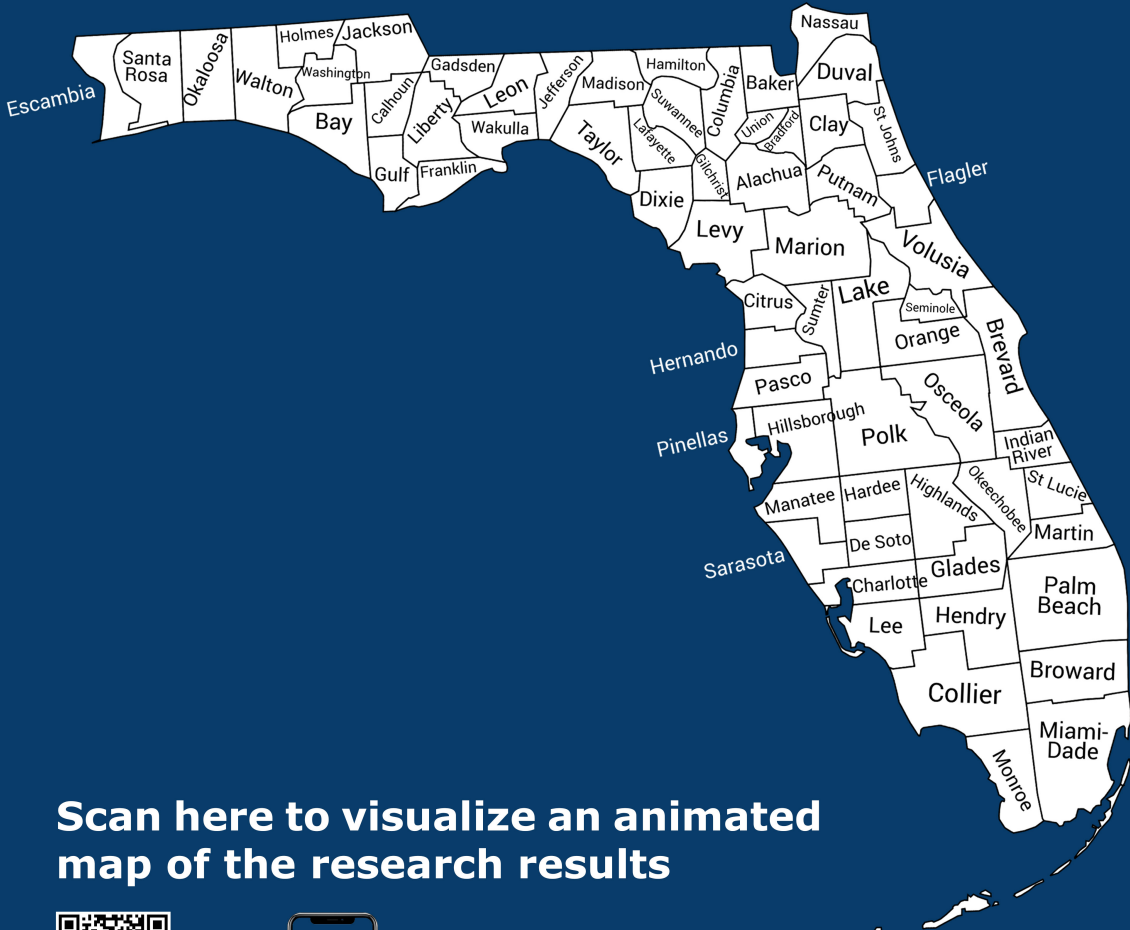
## Methodology

The State of Florida is composed of 67 counties. Each county's evacuation plan and accessibility to its evacuation preparedness was analyzed by assessing the plan for each county. The plans were categorized and rated according to six different components that addressed evacuation preparedness for the community in a multidimensional way. Information was obtained from the county's emergency services management websites, the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans (CEMP), Local Mitigation Strategies (LMS), and other links provided by the local governments.

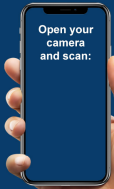
## Acknowledgments

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# Evacuating Carless and Vulnerable Populations: How prepared are Florida counties?



Scan here to visualize an animated map of the research results



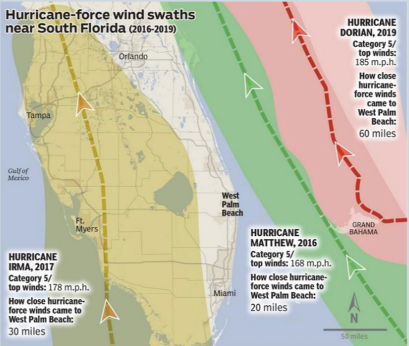
## Findings

Of the 67 counties, 41 had strong readily accessible plans online for the public, 16 had moderate access to evacuation plans, and 10 had weak or very limited access to evacuation information. It was observed that the clusters of moderate and weak or limited access to evacuation preparedness information were in the northwestern part of the State of Florida, also known as the Florida Panhandle. The 10 counties with weak accessibility previously mentioned include Holmes, Gulf, Liberty, Jefferson, Madison, Lafayette, Suwannee, Baker, Union and Bradford.



Southbound lanes of I-95 are empty as northbound lanes are packed as people evacuate ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Irma. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

## Florida has been impacted by four major hurricanes since 2016



Source: Brian McNoldy, University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Atmospheric Science, maps4news.com/©HERE



The elevated house that the owners call the Sand Palace, on 36th Street in Mexico Beach, Fla., came through Hurricane Michael almost unscathed. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

## For further information

Find more information on this and related projects at  
<http://cues.fau.edu/research/evacuation/>  
Scan the QR code for the website:

