RAND Gulf States Policy Institute
Committed to strengthening the well-being of the U.S. Gulf States through research and analysis
Our research and analysis helps improve policy and decisionmaking to improve the lives of people in the U.S. Gulf States.
The U.S. Gulf States—Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, in particular—face critical challenges that require fact-based, rigorous analysis to support long-term policy decisions. How can we better protect our coast from severe weather, coastal erosion, and such events as oil spills? How can our school districts improve performance within limited budgets? What steps can be taken to ensure that the region’s workforce has the right skills? How can we better prevent crime and reduce record incarceration rates to result in productive communities?

The RAND Gulf States Policy Institute, as a nonprofit and nonpartisan resource, is uniquely positioned to provide analysis to answer these questions. Through our presence in the region, the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute brings together the finest researchers in the world and utilizes the very best analytical tools and methods to develop objective policy solutions.

Our goal is to make our Gulf States communities safer, more resilient, and more prosperous today and in the long term.
Coastal Protection and Disaster Preparedness

Storm events take lives, threaten livelihoods, and cost billions of dollars in damage. RAND researchers assess vulnerabilities and devise strategies to help protect people, property, and the environment.

Natural hazards, such as hurricanes and floods » RAND played an integral role in the formulation of Louisiana’s long-range Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast. RAND researchers developed a new hurricane flood risk model to assess effects of projects designed to reduce damage from flooding, as well as a planning framework and decision-support tool to develop and compare different coast-wide groupings of risk-reduction and restoration projects. The Louisiana legislature unanimously approved the Master Plan in May 2012, and today, these modeling efforts stand at the forefront of work on the topic of coastal restoration and sustainability. RAND continued to support Louisiana through its work on the approved 2017 Master Plan.

**Confronting coastal erosion** The wearing away of land and removal of coastal sediment threatens our coast. RAND and Louisiana State University partnered to examine how coastal erosion affects the region’s coastal and inland economic well-being. The two-year study used spatial analysis that layered future land-loss and storm-surge scenarios from the 2012 Coastal Master Plan onto today’s economy. It demonstrated how projected land loss could affect businesses and economic activity, as well as flows of goods, services, and people to, from, and through coastal Louisiana. The damage would be felt directly in the region but would also reverberate across the nation and the world. The findings from this study demonstrated a need for Coastal Master Plan project expenditures that can save billions of dollars during future storm events.

Community Resilience

The U.S. Gulf region has deep experience in disaster preparation and recovery, but the concept of resilience is just now taking root. RAND is working with partners in the region to understand how we can better withstand both natural and human-caused disasters by pooling resources, adapting to change, organizing action, and learning from experience.

Oil-spill response and recovery » Since 2015, RAND has led the Consortium for Resilient Gulf Communities in partnership with researchers from Tulane University, Louisiana State University, the University of South Alabama, and the Louisiana Public Health Institute. The consortium is dedicated to working closely with coastal communities on solutions to build social, economic, and public health resilience related to catastrophic oil spills. Consortium activities include conducting use-inspired science that integrates knowledge and methods across multiple disciplines, regional oil-spill impact assessment, data-informed planning and capacity-building, and training for communities and students.

To view work by the Consortium for Resilient Gulf Communities, visit the consortium page “About the Consortium for Resilient Gulf Communities” at www.resilientgulf.org/about-us/.
Community resilience tool kits » Community resilience is the ability to withstand and recover from disasters, to learn from past disasters, and to strengthen future response and recovery efforts. RAND’s web-based, easy-to-use training application distills the extensive body of research on resilience-building into simple steps that communities and organizations in the region can take to strengthen themselves against all kinds of disasters. Other RAND community resilience tool kits cover partnership-building, public education, high school youth active learning, and nongovernmental-organization engagement.

To access this tool kit, visit Building Resilient Communities: An Online Training by Anita Chandra and Joie Acosta (2013) at www.rand.org/t/TL109. For more information on RAND’s community resilience research, visit “Community Resilience” at www.rand.org/resilience.
Health

As the region confronts health challenges and a changing health care system, policymakers need meaningful, unbiased, and rigorous analysis to inform their decisions. RAND’s health researchers work extensively on population health and its ties to health care, as well as the scientific bases for improving service delivery, health system performance, and organizational effectiveness.

Suicide prevention » Approximately 40,000 people in the United States took their own lives in 2014, and recent studies suggest that that annual number is growing. Better prevention methods are needed to protect individuals, families, and communities from this public health crisis. RAND researchers set out to perform “psychological autopsies” in New Orleans: interviews with families and friends of those who have taken their own lives. These interviews offer direct insight into the days and hours immediately before the deceased’s death. The findings from this study are being used to help validate the known warning signs of suicide and to determine new ones to help ensure that suicide-prevention campaigns are increasingly effective and grounded in scientific evidence.

To view the study, see “Opportunities to Intervene: ‘Warning Signs’ for Suicide in the Days Before Dying” by Rajeev Ramchand, Enchanté Franklin, Elizabeth Thornton, Sarah Deland, and Jeffrey Rouse in Death Studies (2017) at www.rand.org/t/EP67027. To see other RAND research in this area, visit “Suicide” at www.rand.org/topics/suicide.
Community health programs » Community health is more than access to medical care; it also requires access to healthy food and opportunities to be physically fit and prevent disease. In 2013, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation embarked on the development of a national Culture of Health that enables everyone to lead healthier lives. By interviewing stakeholders in U.S. cities, such as New Orleans, with unique health goals and programs, RAND experts designed a framework of action areas needed to make this goal a reality.

To view reporting from this study, visit Building a National Culture of Health: Background, Action Framework, Measures, and Next Steps by Anita Chandra, Joie Acosta, Katherine Grace Carman, Tamara Dubowitz, Laura Leviton, Laurie T. Martin, et al. (2016) at www.rand.org/t/RR1199. For more information on RAND’s health and health policy research, visit www.rand.org/health.
Education and Workforce Development

The region is in need of an appropriately balanced workforce that attracts business and promotes economic development. Yet the region continues to face significant challenges in education and training. For more than three decades, RAND’s education and workforce experts have helped schools and districts find solutions through research and best practices.

State and local education standards » Education standards constantly evolve, and teachers receive mixed messages as to how to help students meet them. Data from the RAND American Teacher Panel shows that the Louisiana Department of Education might be doing work that is helping districts, schools, and teachers to make smart local decisions about how to effectively teach students to state standards. In particular, RAND’s study in Louisiana shows that Louisiana teachers have a good understanding of their state standards and are using materials that are well-aligned with their standards.

Career access and options » The wage gap between high- and low-skilled workers is growing, and workers with few or obsolete skills face a shrinking pool of job opportunities. With a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, RAND is evaluating the New Orleans Office of Workforce Development’s Career Pathways, a training program designed to transition low-skilled, unemployed, and underemployed young adults into medium-skilled jobs in advanced manufacturing, electrical, and information technology.

For a full description of this work, visit “Summer Career Pathways Evaluation” at www.rand.org/labor/projects/career-pathways. For more information on RAND’s labor and population research, visit “Welcome to RAND Labor and Population” at www.rand.org/labor.
Safety and Justice

An efficient, effective, accountable, and fair justice process for all is key to the region’s social well-being. Similarly, providing safe communities is an important public service. RAND researchers have expertise in providing insights and solutions to public- and private-sector decisionmakers for criminal and civil justice, public safety, insurance and compensation policy, and homeland security.

Police methods » Predictive policing—police using various technologies and evidence-based intervention models to reduce crime and improve public safety—has garnered increasing interest across the nation. Yet there are few studies to determine whether it is effective. RAND experts assessed predictive policing efforts in Shreveport, Louisiana, to understand whether the method reduces crime and improves police and community relations. The researchers found that some prevention measures improved relations and reduced costs but not necessarily crime. However, different products and methods might improve outcomes in this area.

For a full description of this work, visit Evaluation of the Shreveport Predictive Policing Experiment by Priscillia Hunt, Jessica Saunders, and John S. Hollywood (2014) at www.rand.org/t/RR531. For more information on RAND’s police–neighborhood relations research, visit “Police–Neighborhood Relations” at www.rand.org/topics/police-neighborhood-relations.
Police recruitment and retention » After Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Police Department force decreased, and the department went more than a year without recruiting enough candidates to justify a police academy training course. RAND researchers offered practical recommendations to improve recruiting and retention in New Orleans through compensation, promotion, and morale improvement.

“We’re not here for the short term. This is a region that before the hurricane had a lot of policy challenges. Those have been multiplied by this tragedy. We feel it’s important to the country as a whole that this region recover.”

James A. Thomson, President Emeritus, RAND Corporation
in *The Advocate–Baton Rouge*, December 22, 2005
The RAND Corporation, a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis, founded the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina to inform policies for long-term recovery and economic development in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

In the months following the storm, RAND contributed its services and tackled such issues as housing and health care, as well as other needs of families and communities affected by the storm. We continue to support the region with objective research and analysis that is independent of political and financial conflicts of interest.
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- Political sciences (6%)
- Social sciences (12%)
- Other (less than 1%)

For more information about the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute, contact

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