

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

ispiglobal.com · ISPIGlobal@proton.me · (808) 999-0544

COMMENTARY

Calibrating for Community

Why Behavioral Threat Assessment Frameworks Must Be Culturally Adapted for Pacific Island and Native Hawaiian Contexts

Research Pillar: Insider Threat & Workplace Security Policy

Document Type: Commentary

Author: Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director

Institution: Island Security Policy Institute — Honolulu, Hawai'i

Published: 2026

Contact: ISPIGlobal@proton.me · (808) 999-0544 · ispiglobal.com

Keywords: behavioral threat assessment Hawaii, BTAM cultural calibration, threat assessment Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian threat assessment, cultural competency security assessment, BTAM Hawaii, behavioral indicators Pacific Island culture

RESEARCH INDEPENDENCE STATEMENT

The Island Security Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization registered in the State of Hawaii. This publication represents ISPI's independent research and policy analysis. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of any funder, sponsor, or affiliated organization. ISPI maintains full editorial independence on all research outputs. Commissioning clients do not influence ISPI's research conclusions, policy recommendations, or published findings. Full institutional credential documentation is available to qualified government agencies, foundations, and institutional partners upon formal request.

A licensed mental health professional conducting a behavioral threat assessment in a Pacific Island organization identified what she described as social withdrawal and flat affect in a subject — two behavioral indicators that standard BTAM frameworks flag as potential warning signs.¹ A Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner consulting on the same case identified the same behavioral presentation as a culturally appropriate expression of deference in a formal assessment context — normal behavior for an individual from that specific community background in that specific interaction type.

The behavioral indicators that threat assessment frameworks were trained to identify were calibrated on samples drawn overwhelmingly from continental North American and European cultural contexts. In Pacific Island and Native Hawaiian organizational contexts, this miscalibration produces both false positives — identifying culturally normal behavior as threatening — and false negatives — missing threat indicators that present differently in Pacific cultural contexts.

Specific Miscalibration Patterns

ISPI's practitioner experience in Hawaii and Pacific Island organizational contexts identifies four behavioral indicator categories where standard BTAM calibration produces systematic miscalibration: direct eye contact norms (where avoidance has different cultural meanings), emotional expressiveness baselines (where restraint in professional contexts has different baseline meanings across Pacific cultures), conflict expression patterns (where indirect grievance expression is culturally normal rather than indicative of suppressed grievance), and authority interaction patterns (where deference displays have different behavioral expressions).²

ISPI Recommendations

1. Commission Pacific Island and Native Hawaiian cultural calibration research to develop group behavioral baseline norms for BTAM application in Hawaii and Pacific Island organizational contexts — research that does not currently exist.
2. Develop BTAM supplemental training modules specifically addressing cultural calibration for Pacific Island and Native Hawaiian organizational environments, for inclusion in Hawaii-based BTAM certification programs.
3. Establish consultation protocols connecting BTAM-certified assessors with Pacific Island cultural practitioners who can provide cultural context for behavioral assessments in specific community settings.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

ABOUT THE ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

Website: ispiglobal.com · Email: ISPIGlobal@proton.me · Phone: (808) 999-0544 · LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/warpul13](https://www.linkedin.com/in/warpul13)

© 2026 Island Security Policy Institute. All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced for noncommercial purposes with full attribution to ISPI.