

**ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE**

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**COMMENTARY**

# The Blue Highway

## *Drug Trafficking Networks in the Pacific and Their Community-Level Law Enforcement Implications*

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**RESEARCH INDEPENDENCE STATEMENT**

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Methamphetamine — known locally as ice — is the dominant illicit substance driving violent crime, property crime, and family disruption in Hawaii and Pacific Island communities.<sup>1</sup> DEA data consistently identifies Hawaii as among the highest per-capita methamphetamine consumption markets in the United States. Unlike mainland drug markets with multiple supply routes, Hawaii's drug market is supplied through a small number of maritime and air routes that, if effectively interdicted, could meaningfully disrupt supply. The interdiction has not been effective enough.

**ISPI's analysis of drug trafficking network structures in the Pacific region identifies the community-level public safety implications that interdiction-focused policy consistently underanalyzes: the corrupting influence on local institutions, the recruitment of island youth into distribution roles through existing social networks, and the community safety dynamics that drug network presence creates in small island communities where network actors are known community members.**

## Youth Recruitment in Island Communities

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Drug trafficking networks in small island communities recruit youth through the same social networks that community institutions operate within.<sup>2</sup> A teenager recruited into a distribution role is recruited by someone they know, through social relationships that already exist. The recruitment process in island communities is often invisible to conventional anti-recruitment frameworks designed for more anonymous urban drug market environments.

## ISPI Recommendations

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1. Develop community-level drug trafficking impact assessment frameworks for Hawaii and Pacific Island communities identifying institutional corruption risks, youth recruitment pathways, and community safety dynamics.
2. Commission research on youth recruitment into drug distribution roles in Pacific Island and Hawaii communities to inform targeted prevention programming grounded in small island community social dynamics.
3. Establish community safety metrics for Hawaii and Pacific Island communities tracking drug trafficking's community-level impacts alongside the supply and consumption metrics that currently dominate drug policy measurement.

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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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.

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