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AI Governance and Public Safety Technology in Hawaii: An Island-Calibrated Policy Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026 Hawaii Legislature passed measures targeting AI-generated political content ahead of future campaigns — among the first state legislatures to formally address AI governance in elections. Hawaii's policy attention to AI governance reflects a broader challenge that ISPI's research has identified as particularly consequential for island communities: AI public safety tools trained on continental data may be systematically miscalibrated for Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Micronesian, and Polynesian populations — producing bias harms in communities too small for standard statistical detection methods to identify. This white paper presents ISPI's AI governance framework for island and coastal-state law enforcement and public safety technology deployment.

KEY FINDINGS

- The 2026 Hawaii Legislature passed AI governance measures targeting deceptive AI-generated political content — establishing Hawaii as an early state-level leader in AI policy but leaving the specific challenge of AI public safety tool calibration for island communities unaddressed.
- AI public safety tools — predictive policing systems, behavioral risk assessment instruments, facial recognition platforms — are trained predominantly on data from continental, primarily urban, environments where Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations are systematically underrepresented.
- Miscalibration for small populations produces harms that standard algorithmic audit methods may not detect — because the case volumes affecting Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in Hawaii are often too small to produce statistically significant bias signals in tools designed for large-population environments.
- Hawaii law enforcement agencies considering AI public safety tool deployment face a specific challenge: no current regulatory framework requires pre-deployment demographic validation for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population performance.

• The intersection of AI governance and democratic resilience — documented in ISPI's Pacific Island governance research — creates a specific Hawaii policy dimension: AI tools that misclassify Native Hawaiian political activity or community organizing may have electoral and civil liberties implications beyond individual law enforcement decisions.

Why Standard AI Audit Frameworks Fail for Island Populations

Standard algorithmic auditing methods detect bias by identifying statistically significant performance differences across demographic groups in large datasets. For this method to work, the affected population must be large enough to produce statistical signals. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations in Hawaii — and Pacific Island populations in Pacific Island nation contexts — may not meet the population thresholds that trigger standard audit detection.

This is not a theoretical concern. It is a documented limitation of algorithmic audit methodology that has been identified in academic AI bias literature and that has specific consequences for small-population island communities where AI tools might be deployed in law enforcement, child welfare, and emergency management contexts.

ISPI's AI governance framework addresses this limitation through pre-deployment validation requirements specifically designed for small-population contexts — requiring performance validation on demographically representative samples before deployment rather than post-deployment bias detection.

The Hawaii-Specific Policy Challenge

Hawaii presents a specific AI governance challenge that no other U.S. state faces in the same combination: a large, culturally distinct Native Hawaiian population; significant Pacific Islander, Micronesian, and Polynesian communities; a law enforcement environment where AI tool deployment would affect these populations; and a regulatory framework that has not yet addressed the small-population validation gap.

Predictive Policing

Predictive policing systems trained on historical arrest and crime data may encode the same biases that ISPI's research identifies in juvenile justice decision-making — where Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth receive different treatment at specific decision points. Deploying predictive policing in Hawaii without Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population validation would likely perpetuate and potentially amplify documented disparities.

Behavioral Risk Assessment

Behavioral risk assessment instruments used in juvenile justice, parole, and pretrial detention decision-making were developed and validated predominantly on continental populations. ISPI's behavioral threat assessment research identifies specific cultural communication norms in Pacific Island and Native Hawaiian contexts that standard instruments may systematically misread.

Facial Recognition

Facial recognition systems have documented performance disparities across racial and ethnic groups — with generally lower accuracy for darker-skinned populations. Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Micronesian populations have not been specifically validated in any commercially deployed facial recognition system that ISPI's research has identified.

ISPI's Island AI Governance Framework

ISPI's Island AI Governance Framework for public safety technology provides four components specifically designed for island and small-population community contexts.

Pre-deployment demographic validation requirements — requiring performance testing on demographically representative samples including Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations before any AI public safety tool is deployed in Hawaii.

Small-population bias detection protocols — audit methodologies specifically designed for small-population contexts that do not rely on the large-dataset statistical methods that fail for island communities.

Third-party independent oversight requirements — mandating external review of AI public safety tool performance for agencies without the internal technical capacity to conduct meaningful self-assessment.

Sunset and revalidation provisions — requiring periodic revalidation of AI tools against current demographic data rather than one-time pre-deployment validation that may become outdated as demographic patterns change.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Establish a Hawaii AI Public Safety Technology Governance Act requiring pre-deployment demographic validation for any AI tool used in law enforcement, juvenile justice, child welfare, or emergency management in Hawaii.
2. Include explicit Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population validation requirements in any Hawaii AI governance framework — addressing the small-population gap in standard algorithmic audit methodology.
3. Commission an independent assessment of AI tools currently in use or under consideration by Hawaii law enforcement agencies — establishing a baseline of current deployment and validation status.
4. Develop a Hawaii AI Public Safety Tool Registry requiring all law enforcement agencies to publicly disclose AI tools in use, their validation status, and their performance data for Hawaii demographic groups.
5. Engage the University of Hawaii and community organizations in developing the culturally calibrated behavioral baselines and demographic validation datasets needed for Hawaii-specific AI tool assessment.

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