

# **POLITICAL HATE SITES IN SINGAPORE**

## **FLOURISHING WITHOUT REPERCUSSIONS**



---

**POLITICAL HATE SITES IN SINGAPORE:**  
Flourishing Without Repercussions

2023  
Asia Centre

---

---

Copyright © 2023 Asia Centre. All rights reserved.

Permission Statement: No part of this report in printed or electronic form may be reproduced, transmitted or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without written permission of the Asia Centre.

Copyright belongs to Asia Centre unless otherwise stated.

Civil society organisations and educational institutions may use this report without requesting permission on the strict condition that such use is not for commercial purposes.

When using or quoting this report, every reasonable attempt must be made to identify the copyright owners.

Errors or omissions will be corrected in subsequent editions.

Requests for permission should include the following information:

- The title of the document for which permission to copy material is desired.
- A description of the material for which permission to copy is desired.
- The purpose for which the copied material will be used and the manner in which it will be used.
- Your name, title, company or organisation name, telephone number, e-mail address and mailing address.

Please send all requests for permission to:

**Asia Centre**

65/168, Chamnan Phenjati Business Center Building 20th  
Floor, Rama 9 Road, Huai Kwang, Huai Kwang,  
Bangkok, 10310, Thailand  
[contact@asiacentre.org](mailto:contact@asiacentre.org)

---

# CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	V
<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	VI
<i>Executive Summary</i> .....	VII
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1a. Methodology .....	1
1b. Definition of Key Terms .....	1
1c. Background .....	2
1d. The Internet Landscape in Singapore .....	5
1e. Adherence to International Human Rights Standards .....	6
<b>2. Laws and Measures</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2a. Constitutional Provisions .....	9
2b. Defamation Laws .....	10
2c. Electoral Campaign Regulations .....	11
<i>Internet Election Advertisement</i> .....	11
<i>Cooling-off Day</i> .....	12
2d. Broadcasting Act .....	13
<i>Broadcasting Licences</i> .....	13
<i>Sanctions on Online Content</i> .....	14
<i>Regulation on Social Media Providers</i> .....	14
2e. Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act .....	15
<i>Uncoordinated Behaviour</i> .....	16
<i>Coordinated Behaviour</i> .....	17
2f. Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act .....	18
2g. Protection from Harassment Act .....	19
2h. Online Criminal Harms Act .....	20
<b>3. Impact on Internet Freedoms</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3a. Regulating Political Parties While Having Incumbent Advantage .....	21
3b. Blocking, Removing and De-legitimising Critical Content .....	22
3c. Prosecution of Content Creators and Distributors .....	24
3d. Self-Censorship .....	27
<b>4. Political Hate Sites: Ineffective Legal and Content Moderation Action</b> .....	<b>29</b>
4a. The Rise of Political Hate Sites and its Trends .....	30
4b. Hate Sites in Action .....	31
<i>Fabrications About the PAP</i> .....	31
<i>Critical Spectator</i> .....	34
<i>Singapore Matters</i> .....	35
<i>Gong Simi Singapore</i> .....	36
4c. Ineffective Tech Takedowns .....	37
4d. Online Political Hate Upturn .....	38
<b>5. Recommendations</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	43
<i>Annex</i> .....	57
<i>Annex 1: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the First Cycle (2011)</i> .....	57
<i>Annex 2: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the Second Cycle (2015)</i> .....	58
<i>Annex 3: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the Third Cycle (2021)</i> .....	59
<i>Annex 4: List of Respondents</i> .....	60

---

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Asia Centre, through its baselines studies on Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and Thailand has noticed that ultranationalist, right-wing groups and individuals are increasingly setting up hate sites and directing hate speech towards those who want to hold accountable the leaders, policies and practices of long-standing political families, cliques and ruling regimes.

In Singapore, as the internet, social media and messaging applications challenge the continuance of the city-state's one-party dominated government, hate sites and information operations by "Internet Brigades" (IBs) have emerged to target those calling for the public accountability of government officials, voice concerns over the administration of justice and question the effectiveness of specific policies. As a result, hate speech has become rampant.

But there is little awareness of political hate sites and the general view is that being subjected to hate is part and parcel of being a public person. If you label and explain why a hate site is a political hate site, the knee-jerk reaction of some is to point and frame the public accountability calls by activists, independent journalists, lawyers and opposition politicians also as hate speech. No matter how much explanation is provided about what political hate sites are and why their activities are problematic, it still remains difficult for many to comprehend this as a problem because hate speech has been normalised in Singapore's political history by the People's Action Party (PAP) and the mainstream media. In the meantime, there are no effective laws to compel enforcement agencies and technology companies to act against "political hate speech".

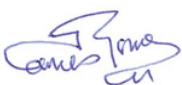
To understand the phenomenon of these hate sites and activities of the IBs, the Asia Centre team first undertook desk research to evaluate the legal framework and thereafter interviewed the subject of hate attacks - activists, bloggers, representatives of independent media outlets, and members of opposition political parties. The team at Asia Centre is grateful to the following participants for their input: Abdul Salim Harun, Ariffin Sha, Goh Meng Seng, Kirsten Han, M. Ravi, Melvin Tan, PJ Thum, Roy Ngerng, Stephan Ortmann, and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh.

Research, drafting, and editing were led by Asia Centre's Research Associate Ekmongkhon Puridej and supported by Centre Coordinator Lina Sakina binte Salim. Asia Centre's Research Manager, Dr Marc Piñol Rovira, internally reviewed this report.

We are grateful to our partner, *The Independent Singapore*, for supporting Asia Centre in bringing out this report.

*Political Hate Sites in Singapore: Flourishing Without Repercussions* is dedicated to activists, bloggers, lawyers, journalists, politicians and others who are targeted by hate sites and hate speech. Asia Centre hopes this report and its recommendations will help create an online environment where civil and fruitful dialogue is encouraged instead of harassing those who point out lapses in public service and policies.

Sincerely,



Dr James Gomez  
Regional Director  
Asia Centre

---

---

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>ELD</b>	Elections Department Singapore
<b>FICA</b>	Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act
<b>GIC</b>	Government of Singapore Investment Corporation
<b>IB</b>	Internet Brigade
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICCPR HRC</b>	Human Rights Committee of the ICCPR
<b>ICP</b>	Internet Content Provider
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IMDA</b>	Infocomm Media Development Authority
<b>ISP</b>	Internet Service Provider
<b>MCI</b>	Ministry of Communications and Information
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institution
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PAP</b>	People's Action Party
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>POFMA</b>	Protection of Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act
<b>POHA</b>	Protection from Harassment Act
<b>RSF</b>	Reporters Without Borders
<b>SDP</b>	Singapore Democratic Party
<b>SGD</b>	Singaporean Dollar
<b>TIS</b>	<i>The Independent Singapore</i>
<b>TOC</b>	<i>The Online Citizen</i>
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHRC</b>	United Nations Human Rights Council
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review

---

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Political Hate Sites in Singapore: Flourishing Without Repercussions* validates how hate sites in Singapore actively harass those who seek accountability from public officials and policies. The aim is to negate such calls for accountability through hateful ad hominem attacks. These hate sites act as a strong barrier against calls for public accountability in Singapore and prevent the institutionalisation of an independent system of checks and balances over a one-party dominated government.

These unregulated hate speech sites form what this report frames as the fourth phase of Singapore's online political history. The initial three phases centre around using laws to regulate the creation and sharing of content made illegal by a one-party-dominated legislature. In the first phase, laws and formal guidelines established how political parties and their candidates can use the internet to communicate directly with voters, especially during elections. With the rising use of the internet and portals that publish criticisms of public officials and policies, the second phase focused on laws aimed at regulating content from these information sources. Next, responding to the shift and increased use of social media platforms and messaging apps, the third phase saw laws aimed at regulating both the user-generated content of these platforms and the technology companies that own and operate them.

Cases show that these laws have been disproportionately directed at civil society activists, independent journalists, human rights lawyers, opposition party politicians, and anyone else who in one way or another wants to hold government officials, procedures and policies publicly accountable. Some of the existing laws, such as the Broadcasting Act, have also been amended to address the opportunities that new platforms provide to level such calls. As the online space, technology and remote operations evolve, new laws have been created and they have progressively narrowed the legally allowable space to voice concerns online. The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, from 2019 and the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act, from 2021, and the Online Criminal Harms Act, from 2023, are three examples of such laws.

The use of these legislation have had the following consequences: 1) the online actions of opposition political parties are tightly policed; 2) online content by individuals and portals questioning public officials and policy has been blocked, removed, or de-legitimised; and 3) those who voice demands for public accountability have been prosecuted. This has left in Singapore a very narrow legally allowable space to launch calls on matters of public accountability.

This report highlights the rise of online hate sites as a key instrument to negate efforts by actors who are willing to occupy the remaining narrow legal space to mount checks and balances. Political hate sites operating through social media platforms attack activists, bloggers, lawyers, editors, female contributors of online news portals, opposition party figures, foreign workers in Singapore, as well as foreign countries and their political leaders. Verified information about their funding sources or the people who sign in and operate these hate site accounts is rarely publicly available. There has also been no effective action from the authorities against such sites, implying a tacit approval to operate. Technology companies are also silent in their response with no transparency over their internal moderation workflow and actions. The operation of political hate sites has contributed to a harmful digital environment in the city-state. As a result, the space for checks and balances is limited, and those who try to hold public officials and policies accountable are being systematically harassed, and on occasions urging violence against them. This has mental health consequences for these actors.

Given these developments, this report recommends the international community, UN bodies, the Singaporean Parliament, political parties, technology companies, and CSOs increase their efforts to monitor, document, and call out online hate speech, as well as engage with each other to develop laws that compel enforcement agencies and technology companies to address the harm presented by hate sites and hate speech. Tech companies in particular need to play a greater role in moderating hate content on their platforms and be transparent in their actions. Equally important, the report recommends all stakeholders support the repeal and amendment of relevant existing legislation that restricts and censors criticism of public officials and policies, which serves as checks and balances. Lastly, the report calls for greater accountability for legal actions that are initiated by political office holders and members of the bureaucracy by establishing oversight mechanisms like an independent human rights body. Raising awareness of the threats of political hate sites and their mental health consequences through digital literacy and education programmes is also paramount.

The small group of individuals voicing the need to hold public officials accountable is an expression of a much broader call to have a system of independent checks and balances in a one-party-dominated state. Addressing the issue of political hate sites is one way of ensuring safety for all those who wish express their policy concerns and opinions. A safe online environment can contribute to the democratic aspirations of Singaporeans without driving opinions underground.

---

# 1. Introduction

In Singapore, internet laws have been used to monitor, regulate, and censor online calls by activists, bloggers, independent journalists, human rights lawyers, and opposition politicians to hold public officials accountable. Since 2020, online hate content and trolling of the above actors have become another way to negate such criticisms. This is the focus of this baseline study. It appraises the regulatory control of the online sphere and the increasing maligning of individuals and organisations that call out the inappropriate behaviours of public officials, missteps in the administration of justice, and policy blind spots. In this study, Singapore's laws and hate sites are analysed in relation to international standards and principles on rights and freedoms on the internet and measures that can be taken to address the content disseminated by these malicious sites.

## 1a. Methodology

Research for this baseline study was carried out between March 2022 and June 2023 and consisted of four phases. First, desk research was conducted to analyse Singapore's political and legal developments concerning the internet and online content and identify knowledge gaps so the report can elaborate on the status of internet freedoms in Singapore. In the second phase, primary and secondary data from a range of sources were used. The data set for desk research includes primary documents including legal texts, the Singaporean Constitution and international human rights covenants. It also includes secondary sources such as reports from intergovernmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, think-tanks, and media reports. The third phase of the research process consisted of producing and collecting primary data in the form of ten online, semi-structured interviews with two editors of independent news media outlets, two politicians from opposition parties, a human rights lawyer, two academics, one activist and blogger, one journalist and blogger, and one long-time observer of the internet political landscape in Singapore - see Annex 4 for a list of informants. These informants were selected because they have been targets and victims of hate speech in Singapore and long time as observers of the internet landscape. Data from these interviews were used to complement the information obtained from desk research and fill the gaps identified in the first phase. In the last phase, the report was sent to two external reviewers. Their input was evaluated and considered for amendments. The report was also internally reviewed before publication.

## 1b. Definition of Key Terms

There are three key terms used in the report which are specifically defined here to help readers to navigate the contents of this report.

**Government** - when using the term government, this report refers exclusively to the **People's Action Party (PAP)-dominated Parliament** that has ruled Singapore since 1965 with over  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the parliamentary majority.







**Accountability** – here, it refers to the **scrutiny of public officials’ behaviour, ethics, and actions**. It also refers to fairness and equity in the administration of justice, provision of public services and calling out blind spots of public policies related to immigration, public housing, social security, etc. The motivation behind these calls for accountability is to **provide independent checks and balances** in a one-party-dominated state.

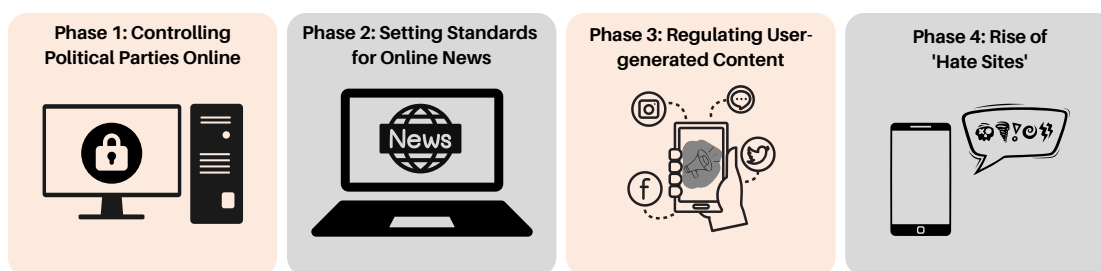
**Political Hate Sites**<sup>1</sup> – platforms on the internet and social media that **harass and attack** activists, bloggers, lawyers, editors, independent journalists, opposition party figures who call out the transgressions of public officials and policies. Sometimes, the target is foreign workers in Singapore, as well as foreign countries and their political leaders. Such sites also actively create and disseminate content that **promotes a one-sided positive view of the PAP** administration’s public officials and policies.



## 1c. Background

With the popularisation of the internet among Singaporeans in 1994 ([GovTech Singapore, 2021](#)), the government started regulating content online to censor and neutralise the emergence and dissemination of content by alternative political voices so they would not challenge the PAP’s narrative and jeopardise its political dominance. This process can be split into four phases.

### 4 Phases of Internet Regulation in Singapore



In the first phase during the start of the internet era, the government took the first steps towards creating a legal framework that limits criticism of its officials and policies. Direct communication between opposition parties and their voters was limited by the use of internet laws as opposition parties used the internet to circumvent the government’s control and influence of traditional media outlets. In the 1997 elections, the government prohibited the use of the internet for electoral campaigning referring to the Parliamentary Election Act which bans campaigning activities beyond the geographical boundary of a constituency. Although the Act was amended in 2001 to allow for online campaigning ([Koh, n.d.](#)), the amendment barred websites that did not belong to political parties from posting content that could be considered political advertising ([Kluver, 2010](#)). The same set of laws also shaped the 2006 elections. Before the election date, the government issued a “clarification” of the existing laws warning that individuals and political party-affiliated bloggers should not produce podcasts or videos containing political content ([Portmann, 2011](#)). Shortly before the 2011 elections, discussions on websites that did not belong to political parties were permitted due to public disapproval of the ban ([Portmann, 2011](#); [Koh, n.d.](#)). Nonetheless, the Class Licence Scheme (1996), Political Donations Act (2001), and Parliamentary Election Act (1954) were revised to limit

counter-narratives online. Furthermore, political party websites were required to register with authorities, while political sites that did not belong to political parties were gazetted as “political associations”. As a result, they were not permitted to receive foreign funds and non-party-affiliated websites were barred from electoral campaigning ([Koh, n.d.](#)). The government also instituted a Cooling-off Day, a one-day ban on political advertisements before polling day across all mediums. Nonetheless, mainstream traditional media outlets continued to broadcast and publish incumbent government information ([Portmann, 2011](#)).

In the second phase, starting in the late 2010s, the government took action to counter the increasing number of independent media outlets with political content critical of the government – like *The Online Citizen* and *Temasek Review* – with increased internet regulations. These news outlets provided an alternative viewpoint to the government’s political narrative and their influence is believed to have contributed to the PAP’s worst electoral results in 2011 ([ibid.](#); [BBC, 2011](#)). Post-2011, internet laws targeted political content through the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which administered the Broadcasting Act, and online media outlets were required to register as news organisations. Therefore, they had to disclose operational and financial statements and were also subject to licensing authorities ([Han, 2014](#)). The Internet Code of Conduct and the 2013 Online News Licensing Scheme mandated individual licences for all online news portals, regardless of audience size or activity level. During this period, non-internet laws like civil and criminal defamation laws, were used against bloggers, writers, and website owners who criticised public officials and policies, further eroding freedom of expression ([International Commission of Jurists, 2021](#)). Since many media outlets that challenged the government narratives faced legal summons to comply with the new regulations, from an operations perspective they were often unable to sustain their business. For example, the burden of disclosing all funding sources and adherence to government-regulated content standards meant that these outlets could not operate optimally due to the administrative pressure they faced.

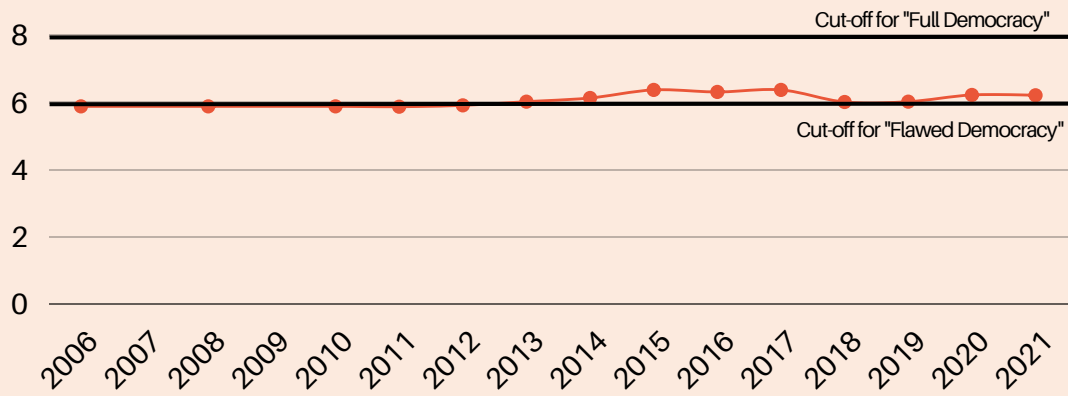
The third phase took place during the social media era when the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok spread among people. In this phase, the government enacted new internet laws to regulate user-generated online content. The enactment of the Protection from Online Falsehood and Manipulation Act (POFMA) and the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA) placed greater powers in the hands of ministers to restrict social media content. The use of these laws was justified by referring to the rising threat of misinformation and disinformation campaigns from inside and outside the country ([Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 2021](#)). In 2023, the Broadcasting Act was amended so social media platform owners and users would be made responsible for the content they post. Consequently, content, deemed false or manipulative by government officials, could be blocked and removed from the net. These new laws also allowed the implementing authorities to penalise platform providers for not removing such content posted on their platforms. Overall wide sweeping powers were accorded to the government to identify and neutralise content it seems illegal.

The implementation of internet regulations since the mid-1990s through the above three stages has allowed the government to somewhat regain “public” control over the political narrative, which had partially been lost with the popularisation of digital media.

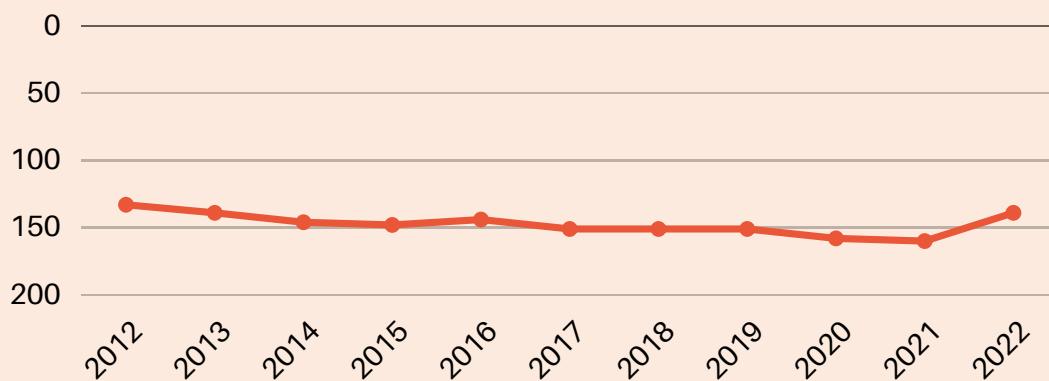
The rise of hate sites targeting individuals and organisations is a fast-rising trend to neutralise online criticism of public officials and policies. Dubbed by this report as the fourth phase - these efforts are linked to the activities of “Internet Brigades” (IBs), which are coordinated trolling campaigns aimed at silencing online voices calling for government accountability. They do so by creating an atmosphere of hatred, threatening legal consequences or making veiled threats bordering on inciting violence against those who articulate opinions for the purposes of checks and balances. IBs operate with great impunity since the government tends to turn a blind eye to these actions, which are rarely prosecuted with the laws that are in place. Apart from a few occasions (see Chapter 4), technology companies do not actively take down content that promotes hate on their platforms. In fact, IBs actively file content violation reports to ban critics from platforms or have their content removed.

Singapore government's use of legal measures comes with a political price. The fact that internet freedoms in Singapore remain under threat has been reflected in global democracy indexes.

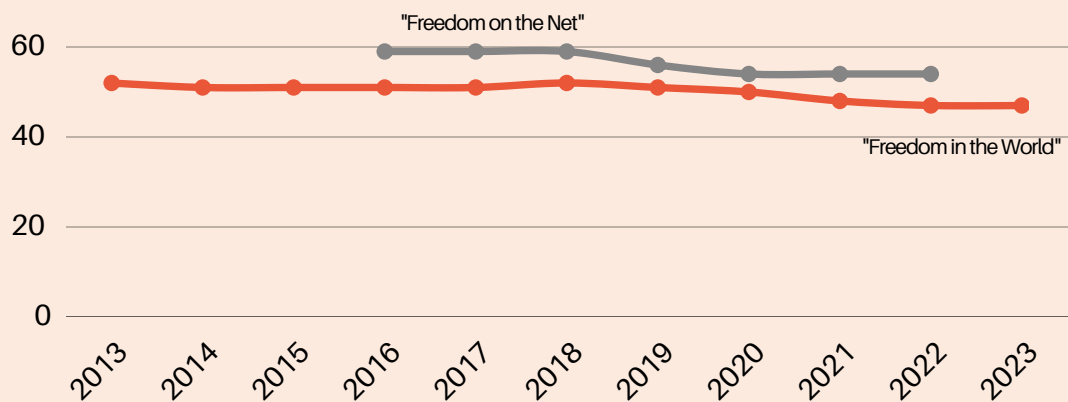
### Singapore's Democracy Index (EIU) (2008-2022)



### Singapore's Press Freedom Index (RSF) Rank (2012-2022)



### Singapore's Freedom and Internet Freedom Index (Freedom House) (2013-2023)

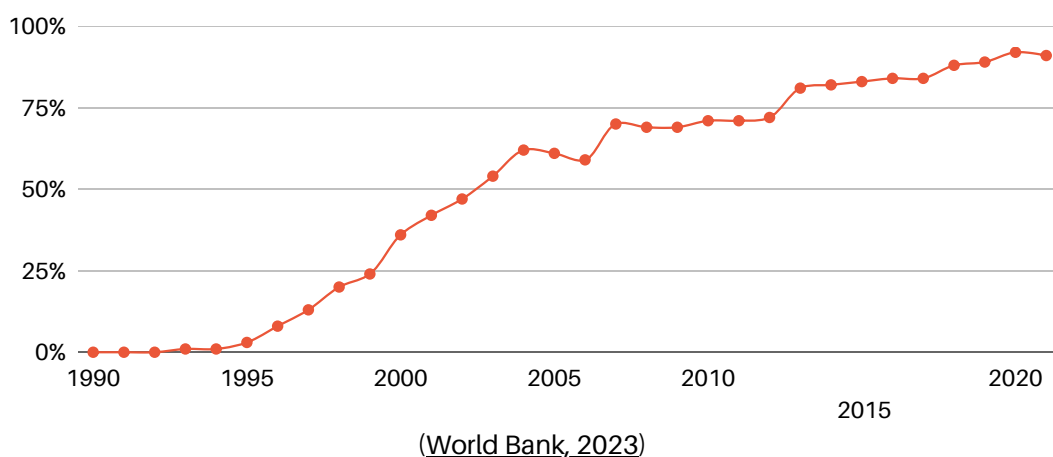


As a result of the lack of legal consequences and limited action by technology companies, IBs' hate speech activities have become increasingly rampant. Given that such inauthentic operations target and harass those critical of the government, many citizens have chosen to self-censor their political views. These developments allow the sustainability of a pro-government narrative in the online sphere. It is against this backdrop that this report examines the elements of legal control of online content in Singapore, as well as the government's and technology companies' poor response to hate sites and online harassment.

## 1d. The Internet Landscape in Singapore

Since the 1990s, Singapore's internet penetration rate has grown at around 20% per year on average to reach 92% in 2022. Singapore residents have one of the highest online engagement rates ([Chia, 2021](#)) with 93% of households having internet access ([IMDA, 2022b](#)). Furthermore, 84% of residents or 5 million users are active on social media, and the mobile connections rate reached 147% of the population in 2022 ([We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2022](#)). Singapore-based users spend an average of eight daily hours surfing the internet, revealing the pivotal role of the internet ([Ibid.](#)). Reports also highlighted the strength of Singapore's internet stability, digital governance structure ([Chia, 2021](#)), and cybersecurity systems ([International Telecommunication Union, 2021](#)).

**Figure 4: Internet Usage in Singapore (1990-2020)**



Access to the internet in Singapore is part of an effort to integrate the online sphere into the country's social and economic systems ([Banerjee & Logan, 2008](#)). However, because the government has established an objective to integrate social and economic systems online, this integration exclusively includes social and economic factors that pursue a pro-government agenda. Continuing digital development is part of a long-term plan to integrate digital technology into every aspect of the lives of Singaporeans, similar to the way the government is integrated into every aspect of a citizen's life. This attempt can be seen in the "Smart Nation Initiative" ([2018](#)), whose goal is to position the country as a "leading economy powered by digital innovation" ([Ibid.](#)).

The high access to the internet is matched by the government's control over the digital sphere and infrastructure. The three largest Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are SingTel, Starhub, and M1. Out of these three, SingTel ([MarketScreener, 2023](#)) and Starhub ([StarHub, 2020](#)) are majority-owned by the Singaporean state-holding company Temasek Holdings (as well as its subsidiaries and other ventures it invests in). Together, they accounted for 82.8% of the total broadband market in 2021 ([Singtel, 2021](#); [Yu, 2021](#)) and 75.8% of the total mobile revenue market in 2019 ([Statista, 2022](#)). All three, plus other smaller ISPs, operate under the IMDA's control, an agency in the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) that regulates the internet and media ([Ibid.](#); [Privacy International, 2015](#)).

The government's investments in public access digital infrastructure also allow it to control the digital landscape. For one, when the 2005 prepaid SIM card identification regulation came into effect, it undermined anonymous communication and "facilitate[d] the establishment of extensive databases of user information" ([Privacy International, 2015](#)). Singapore's national wireless network, Wireless@SG ([IMDA, 2022a](#)) also plays a part in this infrastructure. Wireless@SG has been active since 2006 and is managed by IMDA. There are at least 20,000 public Wireless@SG hotspots around the island ([Baharudin, 2018](#)). Users will need to register their details to gain access to this network, which provides state authorities with a mechanism through which they can collect data on Singaporeans' internet usage and activities. The Singapore Internet Exchange, which is the country's main internet gateway, is established and supervised by state authorities.

An overview of the digital landscape in Singapore reveals two key facts. First, the country has good internet infrastructure, allowing its residents to experience a stable and reliable internet connection to engage in online communications and access content. Second, there is tight control over this internet infrastructure allowing state authorities to gain access to any potentially sensitive information and neutralise alternative narratives using legal and non-legal measures.

## 1e. Adherence to International Human Rights Standards

This section examines the documents submitted for Singapore's Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) in 2011, 2016, and 2021. It has three parts. The first one reviews national reports by the Singapore government to outline the official narrative about regulations affecting the media sector and the use of the internet. These documents portray a government that works to improve human rights while considering people's responsibilities and duties. The second part analyses the comments provided by different United Nations (UN) mechanisms and civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as recommendations from member state parties. Comments by these actors offer a rebuttal to the government's narrative. They criticise the existence of oppressing legislation that does not promote human rights in the country. The third part of this section contains an analysis of the Singapore government's responses to the concerns and recommendations provided by members of the international community.

### ***National Reports by the Singapore Government***

As part of the UPR submission process, states submit national reports, which outline any relevant and significant information deemed important by the state concerning human rights. The national reports submitted for the UPR processes of 2011, 2016, and 2021 ([UNHRC, 2011a; 2015a; 2021a](#)) stressed that the city-state had continuously worked to improve the state of human rights in the country. National reports pay special attention to the balance between people's rights and responsibilities. As part of the country's "national goal", the overarching objective is to balance and sustain social cohesion in the city-state, within which the preservation of individual rights is constituted. Therefore, as the 2021 report states, the rule of law forms the basis for human rights in Singapore, taking into account the country's specific circumstances to maintain social harmony.

The official outlook on media, the internet and telecommunications technology (ICT) also reflects the importance of achieving a balance between media freedom - a right - and responsibility. The 2011 report states that media regulatory measures are necessary to prevent the press from engaging in slander or denigration of any race or religion without facing legal consequences, thus safeguarding social cohesion. The 2015 and 2021 reports recognised technology and the internet as key tools to facilitate people's public engagement. However, the government also stated that the use of the internet could result in "divisive forces". Given the central role of the internet, particularly with social media platforms, in hosting policy and political discussions, as highlighted in the 2015 report, disinformation was mainstreamed as a justification for the balance of freedoms with responsibilities and legal limits, as stated in the 2021 report.

Therefore, the government's approach stressed the country's commitment to promoting freedom of expression based on facts while keeping a high level of civility in public discussions, particularly on sensitive matters. Nonetheless, the increasing number of political hate sites, which attack those criticising government officials and policies - often making derogatory comments based on the gender, sex, race, or physical appearance of the victims - puts into question the aforementioned high level of civility (political hate sites are explained and evaluated in Chapter 4).

### **Comments by UN Bodies and Civil Society Actors**

UN bodies, as part of the UPR submission, offer a rebuttal to the positive outlook presented by the national reports, prepared by the government, and highlight several issues that place serious limitations on human rights in Singapore. These are the key points raised by these bodies ([UNHRC, 2011b](#); [2015b](#); [2021b](#)):

- The media sector remains heavily regulated (2011).
- Defamation charges are extensively utilised as criminal offences with minimal consideration for the principles of narrow legal interpretation, necessity, and proportionality (2011, 2015, 2021).
- The lack of an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in the country (2015, 2021).
- The threshold for arrest and prosecution of individuals exercising their freedom of expression is described as "extremely low" (2021).

As a result of the aforementioned human rights limitations in Singapore, these UN bodies have urged the country to increase its engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms and, more crucially, to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (2011, 2015, 2021). With a specific concern for the media sector, UN bodies have also recommended Singapore develop and implement self-regulatory mechanisms for media accountability (2011, 2021).

Civil society actors have also expressed similar concerns to those of UN bodies on the situation of human rights in Singapore ([UNHRC, 2011c](#); [2015c](#); [2021c](#)), also offering a rebuttal to the government's positive outlook. The key concerns focused on Singapore's adherence to international human rights covenants, the establishment of an independent NHRI, the excessive power of the IMDA (or its predecessor MDA) through national legislation, self-censorship in the face of the fake-news law, religious hate speech laws, and intimidation and harassment of social media users, which has deterred netizens from freely expressing themselves online.

### **Comments by Member States<sup>2</sup>**

These concerns translated into several recommendations by member states for the UPR reviews ([UNHRC, 2011d](#); [2015d](#); [2021d](#)).

- Enhancing cooperation with international human rights bodies.
- Ratify key human rights treaties such as ICCPR and implement international human rights standards into the national legal framework.
- Improve national human rights instruments, including the establishment of an NHRI.
- Protecting freedom of expression in offline and online (2015) settings by abolishing the use of laws and measures that restricts public discourse.

### **Responses by the Singaporean Government**

In response to the concerns mentioned above and recommendations made by different actors, official documents by the government ([UNHRC, 2011e](#); [2015e](#); [2021e](#)) reaffirmed the narrative presented in the

<sup>2</sup> See Annex 4 for a detailed account of recommendations made.

<sup>3</sup> "Addendums to the Reports of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review regarding the government's views on conclusions and/or recommendations"

national reports and Singaporean officials noted that the government had already been implementing many of the recommendations by the international community. Government officials also expressed that they refrained from acknowledging recommendations that were based on false data, were the result of misunderstandings, or were not suited to Singapore's national circumstances.

In reference to Singapore's ratification of the ICCPR, officials stated that the government had already been implementing several provisions from the mentioned conventions and treaties. However, it was also noted that the government opted not to sign a convention until it is confident in its ability to fully comply with all obligations. This was in response to the point that Singapore has not yet ratified the ICCPR and other key human rights treaties. Additionally, Singapore declined to adopt the individual complaint procedure for the ICCPR as outlined in the ICCPR Optional Protocol ([OHCHR, n.d.](#)).

In the response documents, the government affirmed its support for recommendations concerning freedom of expression in principle. However, the country only partially accepted, and in some cases rejected recommendations that required specific actions such as establishing, abolishing, amending, or repealing legislation. The documents reiterated the following stance:

- The administration has taken a balanced and pragmatic approach to content regulation.
- The government has to protect the credibility of public institutions and political leaders.
- There should be a good balance between individuals' freedoms and the need to preserve a harmonious society.

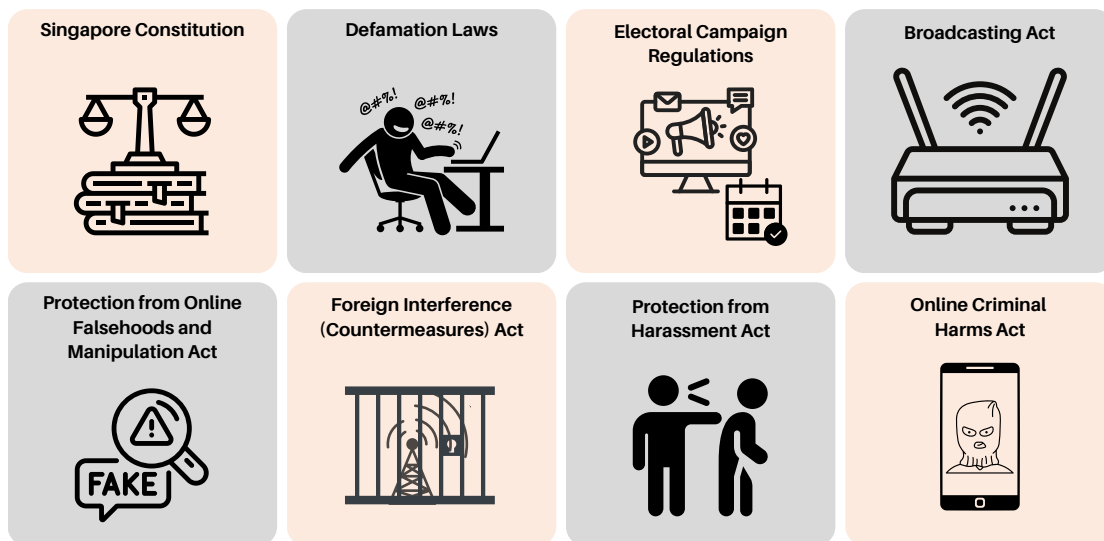
Chapter 4 will delve into the above-mentioned points in greater details, particularly through the lens of political hate sites, showing that the PAP administration benefits from the work of Internet Brigades to protect the credibility of its members and agencies at the expense of people's rights to express their political views - and criticise the government - freely. Regarding recommendations for NHRIs, Singapore officials rejected proposals to institutionalise and grant independence to such a mechanism. The Addendum document for the 3rd cycle (2021) justified this stance by asserting that the existing "interlocking legislation, institutions, and mechanisms" in the country have effectively safeguarded human rights.

Put together, this chapter has shown that Singapore's online political history has four phases where laws are used to regulate the creation and dissemination of online content: first by political parties; second by internet portals; and third by user-generated content over social media. In the fourth phase, online hate sites have emerged to target specific individuals and organisations who criticise public officials and policies. Although residents in Singapore enjoy good, fast, and reliable access to the internet, there is tight control over the use of the digital sphere, especially regarding content creation and its dissemination. Member states have flagged some of these issues at UN meetings, highlighting that international human rights standards are not met. However, Singapore government officials have disagreed and argued otherwise. To provide a deeper understanding of these issues, the next chapter analyses how the legal framework has been used to shield the one-party-dominated government in Singapore from criticism.

## 2. Laws and Measures

This chapter reviews eight sets of laws that have been amended, created and proposed to regulate online political content in Singapore, particularly with the growth of independent news sites and user-generated content. These laws include constitutional provisions, defamation laws, electoral campaign regulations, the Broadcast Act, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act, the Protection from Harassment Act and the proposed Online Criminal Harms Act. By analysing these laws, this chapter shows how, in Singapore, the legal system is used to safeguard the reputation of public officials - who are mostly from the PAP given its political hegemony since the country's independence - instead of implementing strong mechanisms for independent scrutiny and accountability.

### Key Pieces of Internet Laws and Measures



### 2a. Constitutional Provisions

Several provisions and articles of sections in the Singapore Constitution outline people's fundamental rights or, put differently, what is allowed or not allowed under the law. Although freedom of expression, assembly and association are enshrined in Article 14(a) of the Singaporean Constitution (1963), the Parliament has the power to limit these freedoms using a range of reasons to justify its decisions (Art. 14(2)). Table 1 shows under what circumstances each fundamental right can be restricted.

Standards of reasonableness and proportionality guide the interpretation of rights-restricting laws. However, the Parliament is authorised to legislate a law under the first four justifications (security, friendly relations, order, and morality) should they see that it is "necessary" or "expedient" to do so. The use of the terms "necessary" or "expedient" grants lawmakers more extensive legislative powers than those advised for state governments under international standards. The Singaporean High Court interprets this as granting the Parliament an "extremely wide discretionary power... towards achieving any of the four purposes" (Singapore High Court, 2005).

The judiciary has no power to review the law under the principles of proportionality, nor to assess whether the restriction of right(s) is related to the aim of an act. This became evident in 2005 in a case on freedom of expression, where the court noted that "there can be no questioning of whether [a piece of] legislation is reasonable", only that the Parliament has considered it "necessary or expedient" to enact the law (*Ibid.*).



Table 1: Article 14(2) of the Constitution of Singapore

	"Parliament may by law impose restrictions as it considers necessary or expedient in the interest of..."				"Parliament may by law impose restrictions..."	
	security of Singapore"	friendly relations with other countries"	public order"	morality"	to protect the privileges of Parliament"	against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence"
on the freedom of expression	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
on the right to assemble	✓		✓			
on the right to association	✓		✓	✓		

Therefore, such an interpretation of the limits to freedom of expression enables the one-party dominated government and the Parliament to issue laws that put freedom of expression in jeopardy without opposition and without rigorous checks and balances. This will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

## 2b. Defamation Laws<sup>4</sup>

Defamation laws in Singapore existed prior to the popularisation of the internet. Nonetheless, in the digital age, the laws play a vital role in prosecuting those who publish online content with a narrative that differs from the government. Since these laws tend to be vaguely worded, interpretation can be subjective, often favouring the interests of the government rather than ensuring freedom of speech or the ability to question public officials. As, PJ Thum, editor of *New Naratif*, an independent online media outlet, explained,

the PAP sees the internet as a technological tool to maintain power in Singapore and is determined to continue using it for its own purposes. One strategy the PAP uses in managing the internet is to leave no loopholes in their internet-related legislation by effectively making everything illegal. The rationale behind this is to enable the government to selectively prosecute opponents at its discretion: if everything is illegal, "criminals" cannot escape (KII1).

Criminal defamation is defined in Section 499 of the Penal Code (1871) as the act of harming a reputation of a person with the use of words, signs, or other means of visible representation. "Harming of reputation" is explained as lowering the intellectual character or merit of a person, or making others believe that that person is loathsome or generally disgraceful. The act carries a punishment of imprisonment for a term extendable to two years, a fine, or both (Sec. 500). Defamation can also give rise to a civil suit under the Defamation Act (1957). Civil defamation has a significantly lower threshold than its criminal counterpart, as it does not necessitate intent to defame, but rather sustained liability.

General Comment No. 34 of the ICCPR Human Rights Committee (ICCPR HRC) (2011) points out that the application of the defamation law "should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty". It also indicates that defamation should be applied to acts of expression that are subject to verification and that defamation without malice should not be penalised. These laws should also include the defence of truth and, with regard to public figures, should also include the defence of public interest (*ibid.*).

Therefore, such an interpretation of the limits to freedom of expression enables the one-party dominated government and the Parliament to issue laws that put freedom of expression in jeopardy without opposition and without rigorous checks and balances. This will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

- Imputing facts for the public good.
- Expressing an opinion of a public individual, that was expressed in good faith.
- Expressing an opinion, in good faith, respecting the merits of any case decided by courts, etc.

Under the (Civil) Defamation Act, a defence of justification can be invoked if it can be proven that the defamatory statement is true. One could also argue that the statement in question is fair and relates to a matter of public interest ([Singapore Law Watch, n.d.](#)).

However, in cases of political defamation, non-government offenders have never been granted the aforementioned defences ([Sim, 2011](#)). This goes against international norms to facilitate criticism of governmental officials. Defamation laws in Singapore, enacted by Parliament, restrict people's opportunities to criticise the policies and practices of the government in order to offer protection against defamation. Consequently, critics often cannot invoke the defences of "public interest" or "good faith".

The interpretation of such defences is limited by the judiciary's view of protecting the reputation of political officeholders and defending the country's stability and order. For example, a corruption case against three PAP ministers was regarded as unfair and not in the public interest. The case was also considered to be an "attack on the very core of [PAP leaders'] political credo [and] would undermine their ability to govern". It was also the opinion of a judge presiding in a defamation case concerning Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong that "[m]oral authority is the cornerstone of effective government. If this moral authority is eroded, the government cannot function" ([Ibid.](#)).

Regarding the use of defamation laws, Chapter 3 will provide more evidence showing that defamation lawsuits have frequently been initiated by political officeholders against critics, resulting in disproportionately severe punishments.

## 2c. Electoral Campaign Regulations

A variety of parameters are in place in Singapore to define the scope and conditions of electoral campaigns for candidates and political parties. These specific parameters are not a new reality and have been in place long before the rapid development of the digital sphere and the internet. Nonetheless, in the internet age, some of these regulations have been - progressively - amended to accommodate the changes brought about by the popularisation of the internet in electoral campaigns (see the four phases in Section 1b). More recently, some of these regulations have been further amended following the increasing influence of independent online media outlets and social networking sites. This section discusses two of these measures: the regulation of internet election advertisements and the regulation of established electoral cooling-off days.

### *Internet Election Advertisement*

The Parliamentary Elections (Election Advertising) Regulations ([2003](#) and subsequent revisions) issued under the Parliamentary Elections Act ([1957](#)) determine how politicians can promote themselves and their parties during election periods on the internet. Activities such as presenting poll results, making appeals for electoral donations, and publishing party political films that are intended to affect voting are barred. Parties and candidates must also submit a declaration to regulating bodies before paid or unpaid election advertisements are published on the internet during the campaign period (Sec. 4(5)).

Amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act were made in March [2023](#) and mandated that the full names of those taking part in the publication of the advertisement (design, printing out, distribution, etc.), whether paid or unpaid, must be displayed. Furthermore, actions of boosting, sharing, resharing, and reposting a piece of advertisement online are subject to the same requirements as publishing the piece. State authorities have the power to remove or block content if these requirements are not met ([Rifhan, 2023](#)). Additionally, the Parliamentary Elections Act also stipulates that the promotion of candidacies and political parties requires prior written authority signed by the running candidate (Sec. 83). Given the vague terminology used in these regulations, as well as the strict requirements on receiving prior authorisation to promote candidates, the chances that independent media outlets report freely on candidates are limited.

The Code of Practice for Transparency of Online Political Advertisement was issued under POFMA to regulate the disclosure of information about the promotion of paid political content. This code is an example of the efforts taken by the government to regulate internet election advertisements given that, from the late 2000s, the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram soared and became a new channel for political campaigning. The Code requires digital advertising companies and internet intermediaries – including Google, Meta, Twitter, WeChat, Baidu and Tiktok ([POFMA Office, 2023](#)) – to clearly identify and attribute their online advertisements, disclose funding sources, label sponsored content correctly, and maintain records for compliance ([POFMA Office, 2019](#)).

### **Cooling-off Day**

The Parliament enacted amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act and Presidential Elections Act in 2010 to introduce a “cooling-off day”, which prohibited electoral advertisements on the internet the day before an election. The official reason for the implementation of the cooling-off day is “to let voters reflect rationally on various issues raised during the election campaigning period” ([ELD, 2020](#)). The law applies to everyone in Singapore, and violating it results in a fine of up to SDG 1,000 (USD 750) or jail time of up to one year.

Regulations on the cooling-off day have evolved as a response to the increasing importance of the online sphere on electoral campaigns. Since campaigning for the 2011 General and Presidential Elections, posting new electoral advertisements that had not been previously displayed is prohibited on the Cooling-off Day ([ELD, 2011a](#); [2011b](#)). The 2015 General Election saw additional prohibitions on programmatic advertising to deliver digital ads online ([ELD, 2015](#)).

Changes to the regulations on the cooling-off day also reflect the centrality of user-generated content, primarily posted on social media networks, in political campaigns. Proof of that is the fact that the Elections Department Singapore (ELD) prohibited live streams featuring acts of electoral campaigning - in response to the popularisation of social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This measure also prohibited messaging applications, and advertising candidacies via applications like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom. The Elections Department also cautioned not to publish electoral ads online close to midnight prior to the cooling-off day ([ELD, 2020](#)).

This measure has raised concerns, particularly about the impartiality of authorities implementing these regulations as the Election Department operates under the Prime Minister's Office ([ELD, n.d.](#)), and officers overseeing the election are selected by the Prime Minister (Parliamentary Elections Act, Sec. 3).

Overall, with internet election advertisement regulations and the establishment of a cooling-off day, opposition parties are facing new challenges in reaching out to their potential voters, especially with using the internet as their main communication channel to reach out to the electorate.

## 2d. Broadcasting Act

The Broadcasting Act (1994) is a key legislation that establishes a regulatory framework for broadcasting and related media services. The act covers various aspects of broadcasting, including licensing, content standards, ownership regulations, and consumer protection. It aims to ensure fair and responsible broadcasting practices, promote local content, and safeguard public interest. The Broadcasting Act provides the legal basis for the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) – previously the Media Development Authority (MDA) – to oversee and regulate broadcasting services in Singapore (IMDA, 2016). In the digital age, IMDA, which operates under the MCI, remains a key actor in the regulation of online news and content. This section looks at three key aspects of the Broadcasting Act that pertains to the internet: broadcasting licences; sanctions on online content; and the regulation of operations of social media platforms.

### **Broadcasting Licences**

Under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification (2013), which is issued under the Broadcasting Act, Internet Content Providers (ICPs) or online content creators in the country are automatically subject to licensing and regulation (Gateway Law, n.d.). ICPs that engage in “any programme for the propagation, promotion or discussion of political or religious issues relating to Singapore” are required to register with the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) within 14 days of commencing operations. These registered ICPs face additional restrictions on their activities and are prohibited from receiving foreign funding (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Furthermore, foreign news providers involved in Singapore’s domestic politics can have their licences revoked by the Minister for Communications and Information at any time without being required to provide a reason, as stated in Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act.

Registered ICPs must also provide annual transparency on their funding sources. They are restricted to receiving revenue only from domestic sources and are prohibited from employing an anonymous subscription model as a funding method. This prohibition is based on the concern that such anonymous subscriptions could serve as a means for foreign influence (IMDA, 2021a; 2021b).

Further restrictions are imposed on influential websites posting political content and news websites. Section 3a of the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification (2013) states that online services in or from Singapore “accessed by at least 50,000 different IP addresses per month” are required to apply for individual licences rather than being incorporated under the previously mentioned Class Licence. The Notification specifies that the individual licensing regime is only targeted at services containing at least “one Singapore news programme per week on average, over the same period of 2 consecutive months”; however, it excludes programmes “produced by or on behalf of the government”.

Therefore, websites and blogs are subject to the provisions of the Broadcasting Act mentioned earlier with the “Online News Licensing Scheme” and, additionally, they are also subject to IMDA's additional policy of promptly removing content that violates broadcasting standards within 24 hours (IMDA, 2019). In this scheme, ICPs that obtain an individual licence must also post a performance bond of SGD 50,000 (USD 37,263). The Act has resulted in new and higher barriers for new media outlets to enter and operate in the market. With the IMDA registration, news outlets must oversee their activities, funding, and published content. Furthermore, the performance bond for online news further restricts the internet as a platform for citizen-led content production.

### **Sanctions on Online Content**

IMDA has the power to impose sanctions on licensees broadcasting online content and services that contravene Codes of Practice. For ICPs, key points of the 2016 revision of the Internet Code of Practice are as follows. Materials prohibited are those that are “objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony”. ISPs must deny access to websites that contain such material. ICPs, similarly, must ensure that programmes in their services do not include material that could be considered to be prohibited and deny access to any contributions that contain prohibited material.

Any broadcasting licensee and anyone responsible for the broadcasting of any programme prohibited by IMDA will be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine up to SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) or to imprisonment for a maximum two-year term or to both. Anyone who supplies any equipment or other goods for the operation of; or promotes an unlawful foreign broadcasting service (among other restrictions), is liable to a fine of up to SGD 40,000 (USD 29,812) and/or to imprisonment of up to three years (Sec. 29, 30). Furthermore, any person who receives any fund from any foreign source for the purposes of financing, directly or indirectly, any broadcasting service without the prior consent of IMDA will be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding SGD 50,000 (USD 37,263) or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both.

These powers are supported by the fact that IMDA has the discretion to label a piece of content as being against the public interest or order, national harmony or offending decency. However, vague definitions of what is considered “against the public interest or order” ([IMDA, n.d.](#)) allow the IMDA to apply its own interpretations.

### **Regulation on Social Media Providers**

On 1 February 2023, a new set of amendments for the Broadcasting Act came into effect, expanding the provision of the Act to empower the IMDA to manage online content deemed “harmful”, whether such sources of content were based in or outside Singapore. The Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill (2022) expands the scope of the Broadcasting Act to set regulatory standards for providers of “online communication services” as a separate modality of broadcasting services. The amendment targets such services as a place where information can be accessed publicly and therefore has the potential to carry “harmful” information to the Singaporean public (Art. 4). Particularly of note is the fact that “online communication service” includes service provided from in or outside the country (Art. 4). As of February 2023, only social media is listed as an “online communication service”.

Other amendments to the Act are the addition of a regulatory framework for online communication services. The amendment outlines the responsibility and liability of providers of such services. This is defined as entity/ies that have control over who can use their service, over its operations, and over content which is communicated or provided on their service. Per the amended Article 45A of the Broadcasting Act, the framework aims to ensure a “safe online environment [...] that promotes responsible online behaviour, deters objectionable online activity and prevents access to harmful content”.

The restrictive nature of these amendments lies in how such harmful content is defined. It also lies within the power afforded to IMDA officials in defining the responsibilities of online platform owners, as well as their power to take action against content that is deemed *harmful*. as well as within the definition of such content. First, in general terms, providers are to have a duty to stop and takedown “harmful” content as defined under the Act should it be “reasonable to know that the online communication service can be used to access that content”.

Second, directives can be issued for the providers to disable access to a piece of content in question which is accessed by the Singaporean public (Art. 45H(c)(i)). Failure to comply may result in a directive for ISPs to

block access to the platform. Furthermore, authorities can also designate a platform as “regulated” under the Act (Art. 45K) and issue an “Online Code of Practice” to be followed by the regulated platforms (Art. 45L; 45M). Failure to comply with this regulation may result in a penalty of up to SGD 1 million (USD 745,256) as well as a fine of an additional SGD 1 million (USD 745,256) should the platform fail to comply with a piece of the directive (Art. 45N). While Art. 45J(2) provides that liability will not be incurred if the failure is caused despite “reasonable care and good faith”, the amendment puts a burden on platform owners and content moderation teams of social media platforms in service in Singapore. Given the size of major social media platforms, a total ban on their service within the country would not be a proportionate response to the platform’s failure to remove harmful content (OHCHR, 2019).

Third, the duties set out for “providers” and the power to strike down content rely on a vague interpretation of the term “harmful”. The amendment points to a more targeted and nuanced approach to regulating content and covers contents of suicide, sexual violence, terrorism and sex crimes against children. However, there continue to be vaguely-worded terms such as a ban on content that deals with “matters of race or religion in a way that is likely to cause feelings of enmity” or that “is likely to obstruct any public health measure carried out in Singapore” (Sec. 45D(e); (f)).

With the power to issue licences, set broadcasting standards and enforce control of social media, the Broadcasting Act positions the IMDA – and by extension the PAP administration – as the arbiter of what online content is deemed appropriate to maintain public order, social harmony and national security, among other justifications. This is done with limited judicial checks & balances, as decisions made by the IMDA under this Act or its sub-regulations can only be appealed to the level of the Minister of Communications and Technology (Sec. 59). These efforts can be seen as an attempt to classify online news and opinion portals as news organisations and subject them to the same censorship as traditional news outlets.

## 2c. Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act

The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) (2019) was enacted to prevent the communication of false “statements or material [...] made available [...] in Singapore on or through the internet” (Sec. 3). With the POFMA, the government’s attempts to control how social media influences politics and elections became more evident. In such regard, Goh Meng Seng, a member of an opposition party in Singapore said in one of the interviews that,

as of today, POFMA is the main major legislation which affects freedom of expression in Singapore. Unlike the [Internal Security Act], which deals with online threats to internal security, POFMA deals with online content which does not threaten Singapore’s security but, instead, threatens PAP’s power (KII3).

The reasoning for this Act was that it serves to counter the growing threat of mis- and disinformation in the online space. It was also enacted to suppress the financing, promotion and other support of sites that repeatedly communicate falsehoods in the country, as well as enable measures to enhance the disclosure of information concerning paid content directed towards a political end (Sec. 5).

POFMA contains regulations and countermeasures against “Online Falsehoods and Manipulation” that are both uncoordinated and coordinated. Uncoordinated behaviour refers to cases of individual or small-scale creation (or sharing) of false information. On the other hand, bots, trolls and information operations fall under the category of coordinated behaviour and require a specific set of provisions. The regulations against uncoordinated and coordinated sharing of false information hand the power to government officials and bureaucratic authorities to deem what is considered false and deem what course of action to be undertaken. It is coupled with harsh penalties and a limited check & balance system in place. The rest of this section looks at uncoordinated and coordinated actions in greater detail.

**Uncoordinated Behaviour**

POFMA can be invoked to issue a fine not exceeding SGD 50,000 (USD 37,263) and/or a maximum of a five-year jail term (or if the act is committed by other non-person entities, to a fine up to SGD 500,000 (USD 372,630) for the act of knowingly spreading false information likely to cause impact to the security of Singapore on issues like public health, safety, tranquillity or finances, and Singapore's relations with other countries. Similarly, the same penalties may apply if the aim is to influence the outcome of an election or a referendum, incite feelings of enmity, hatred or ill will between different groups, or diminish public confidence in the government (Sec. 7).

**Table 2: POFMA Directions for Fake News**

Directions	Description
<b>Correction Direction</b>	For author/website owner to issue a correction notice that the subject statement contains false facts & refer to a place (website, video, etc.) that contains the truth (usually drafted by the government)
<b>Stop Communication Direction</b>	For author/website owner to stop the communication and issue a correction notice (same as above)
<b>Targeted Correction Direction</b>	For internet intermediaries (eg. social media platform, webforum owner, etc.) to communicate to end-users accessing the statement that it is false & to issue a correction notice (same as above)
<b>Disabling Direction</b>	For internet intermediaries to disable access by end-users to the false statement
<b>General Correction Direction</b>	For internet intermediaries (eg. social media platform, webforum owner, etc.) to communicate to all end-users in the platform & to issue a correction notice (same as above)

In dealing with unlawful communications by ICPs, Directions (see Table 2.3 above) can also be issued by any Minister on the basis that a false statement has been or is being communicated in Singapore (Art. 10). One such form is a Correction Direction requiring the person to issue a correction notice that the statement contains false facts and to refer to a location where factual information may be found (Sec. 11). A Stop Communication Direction can also be issued to the author to halt the communication and require the author to issue a correction notice. Once a Stop Communication Direction has been issued, authorities must also publish a notice of that fact in the Gazette, though failure to do so does not invalidate the Direction (Sec. 12). On the other hand, the failure to comply with the Directions on the citizen's part without reasonable excuse subjects one to be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of up to SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both; or in the case of non-person entities, to a fine not exceeding SGD 500,000 (USD 372,630) (Sec. 15). Directions remain in effect notwithstanding that a request to vary or cancel is being made or that the subject in question has appealed to the High Court against the Direction (Sec. 19) – until the Directions in question are ordered by the Court to terminate.

On the same grounds that any Minister finds it necessary to issue directions in dealing with a false statement or in the public interest, Directions can be issued to internet intermediaries and providers of mass media services (Sec. 20). A Targeted Correction Direction can be issued to such entities requiring them to communicate that a subject material contains a false fact and to refer to a specified location where the factual information may be found (Sec. 21). A Disabling Direction can be issued to disable access to the problematic subject material (Sec. 22). Lastly, a General Correction Direction can be issued to require the communication of a correction notice to all users (Sec. 23). Non-compliance without reasonable excuse results in a fine of up to SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both. In any other case (for non-person entities), the fine shall not exceed SGD 1 million (USD 745,260) fine. In the case of a continuing offence, the fine is stipulated at a further SGD 100,000 (USD 74,526) (maximum) per day (Sec. 27).

Furthermore, POFMA provides ministers with the ability to direct IMDA to order ISPs to disable access to the website or other forms of online communication (may it be posts, videos, comments, etc.) by users in Singapore should they not comply with Direction notices. Non-compliance results in an offence and a fine not exceeding SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) for each day that order is not fully complied with, up to a total of SGD 500,000 (USD 372,630) (Sec. 16, 28).

POFMA also allows Codes of Practice to be issued to digital advertising intermediaries or internet intermediaries to set standards for enhancing disclosure of sponsored or any paid content directed towards a political end. The Code of Practice in use (the Code of Practice for Transparency of Online Political Advertisements) subjects the following intermediaries: Google (Google Ads; Google Search; Youtube), Meta (Facebook; Facebook Audience Network; Facebook Instagram), Twitter, Singapore Press Holdings Magazines (Hardware Zone), WeChat and Baidu. The Code notes a due diligence measure to be put in place, including verifying the eligibility of advertisers, maintaining a record and setting up reporting mechanisms and government reporting channels. Failure to comply with the Code will result in a fine not exceeding SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months for individuals; otherwise a fine not exceeding SGD 1 million (USD 745,260).

Extending the power to censor online content to other PAP ministers beyond the MCI Minister administering IMDA, POFMA widens the power of the Executive to regulate content. Penalties under the Act are harsh, especially as the crimes specified in Section 7 are vague and are easily exploited by the asymmetry of information of the government and other non-governmental actors ([Mahmud & Kit, 2019](#)). The appeal process to the High Court is also burdensome for the affected litigant. The ability to appeal to the Court against the Direction at all is predicated on whether the appeal to vary or cancel a Direction or a Declaration is first applied by the Minister in question and the Minister does not refuse the application to the Court (Sec. 17, 29, 35). Ministers are also given the discretion to interpret what acts are deliberate and misleading under the law – an inherent judicial function. While the Court limits its role in overturning Directions only on the basis of the factuality of the claim ([Cheng, 2021](#); [SDP, 2022](#)). Yet, Ministers still hold the discretion as to whether the false statement affects one of the public interests enumerated in Sec. 7 of the Act ([Schuldt, 2021](#)).

### **Coordinated Behaviour**

While POFMA has gained prominence and has been used as a “fake news” law, it also includes provisions related to inauthentic online accounts and coordinated inauthentic behaviours. One purpose of the Act is to enable measures to be taken to detect, control and safeguard against coordinated inauthentic behaviour and other misuses of online accounts and bots (Section 5). The Minister is given the discretion to identify “inauthentic online accounts” or “bots”, among others, from the following factors: discrepancy between country-specific information used to create an account and the origin country claim of the account holder; a “pattern of suspicious activity”; or date of account creation (Sec. 40).



Sec. 8 of POFMA prohibits the use of bots, whether in or outside Singapore to communicate falsehoods or enable others to do so in Singapore. An individual using bots will face a fine not exceeding SGD 30,000 (USD 22,359) and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years. In any other case, a fine not exceeding SGD 500,000 (USD 372,630). The punishment is doubled should the use of the bot in such a case is likely to affect the security of the country or the public, influence the outcome of elections, incite ill-will between different groups or diminish public confidence in the government, an Organ of State or a statutory board. Sec. 40 further provides the power to require an internet intermediary to disallow the service of inauthentic online accounts or bots should they engage in spreading falsehoods or in a coordinated inauthentic behaviour, or disallow anyone from using such an account to come to interact with one. Non-compliance will incur the internet intermediary with a fine not exceeding SGD 20,000 (USD 14,906) and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months for individuals; otherwise to a fine not exceeding SGD 1 million (USD 745,260).

Nevertheless, while enacted in an effort to preserve the functioning of the government, internet regulations such as POFMA have never been used to protect the opposition party members Pro-PAP netizens are given the freedom to create and spread falsehoods about opposition party members, activists and journalists without consequence. Until June 2023, the POFMA has mainly been used to target falsehood regarding government policies, institutions and PAP ministers ([POFMA'ed, 2022](#); [POFMA Office, 2022](#)).

## 2f. Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act

Another piece of legislation that was enacted to regulate online content is the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act. Similar to the second set of provisions in POFMA against inauthentic coordinated behaviour to spread disinformation, FICA was enacted to empower the PAP administration to counter foreign interference in light of high-profile interferences in European and American politics. One stated objective of the Act is to empower the state authorities to counter Hostile Information Campaigns such as those suspected to be in play during the 2016 US election and Brexit referendums ([Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 2021](#)). The provisions against these types of hostile campaigns provide the PAP administration with another set of tools with which to take action against coordinated campaigns, this time under the justification of tackling foreign interference in the country.

Pursuant to the anti-Hostile Information Campaign objectives are provisions criminalising clandestine foreign interference by electronic communications. Section 17 of the Act provides a criminal liability to anyone undertaking "electronic communications activity" that covertly or deceptively publishes any information or material on behalf of a foreign principal, knowing (or having reason to believe) that the information or material published is likely to cause harm to the national security; to public health, safety, tranquillity, finances; incite feelings of enmity, hatred or ill will between different groups. It also includes covert communications that are directed towards a political end. This includes activities that promote the interests of a political party or a politically significant person or influence the outcome of elections or governmental decisions (Sec. 8).

Under the Act, offences by an individual will incur a fine of up to SGD 50,000 (USD 37,263) or a maximum of seven years in prison. In any other cases, the fine shall not exceed SGD 500,000 (USD 372,630). The liabilities are doubled should any action under Sec. 17 be aimed to influence others to manipulate Singapore's domestic politics without notifying the person being influenced that the action was conducted on behalf of a foreign principal (Sec. 18). The preparation or planning for crimes under Sec. 17, whether or not the offence(s) is committed, incurs a fine not exceeding SGD 30,000 (USD 22,359) or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both for the individual; non-individuals face a fine not exceeding SGD 300,000 (USD 223,578). For the planning of offences under Sec. 18, the fines are doubled and the term of imprisonment is extended to nine years.

To determine whether there are grounds for any actions such as sanctions or directives to be undertaken in relation to such communications, authorities under the law can require any person (whether in or outside Singapore) to provide documents, information or material relating to their relationship with foreigners, provision of voluntary labour or professional services by foreigners, or financial reports of activities directed towards a political end in Singapore. Failure to provide will incur a fine not exceeding SGD 5,000 (USD 3,726) and, in the case of a continuing offence, a further fine not exceeding SGD 500 (USD 373) per day.

To that end, FICA also allows for conducting “countermeasures aimed at such acts by electronic communications activity”. The vagueness of this provision risks being exploited to conduct surveillance, justifying it as to “protect the public interest by counteracting acts of foreign interference”.

With vague and overboard powers and definitions for “political end”, FICA risks creating a self-censorship regime among independent media and internet users alike from the fear that their communication will be misconstrued as foreign interference. This is especially problematic for foreign media and NGOs working with foreign or international organisations. Similar to past laws, executive discretion without judicial oversight further consolidates the power to control political narratives in the country to the government.

## 2g. Protection from Harassment Act

The Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) ([2014](#)), although almost a decade old, is particularly relevant in the digital age and, more specifically, at a time when social media platforms and user-generated content predominate in the digital sphere. POHA is designed to address cases of harassment, including online harassment and doxing and provides legal protection to individuals who have experienced harassment and offers remedies for victims.

POHA defines harassment to encompass a wide range of behaviours that cause distress, alarm, or fear in the victim. Examples of this include but are not limited to, stalking, threats, and the dissemination of personal information without consent, which is relevant to doxing cases. It also includes provisions for dealing with false statements of fact that harm a person's reputation. Specific to the use of the internet and digital media, the Act also addresses cyberbullying and provides provisions to tackle online harassment, including doxing.

From January 2020, new amendments of POHA that criminalise doxing came into force. Doxing, as defined under these laws, involves the act of intentionally disclosing personal information about a person or individuals connected to them, such as family members, friends, or colleagues, with the purpose of harassing, threatening, or inciting violence against them. Therefore, the new legal provisions were passed to address cases where people whose personal information (data that can be used to identify the targeted individual, including photographs, videos, contact details, as well as information pertaining to their employment, education, and family background) was disseminated online are being harassed ([PKWA Law, n.d.; Singapore Legal Advice, 2020](#)).

The legislation outlines three doxing categories:

- Publishing personal information with the intention to cause harassment, alarm, or distress (Section 3).
- Publishing personal information to instil fear of violence (Section 5).
- Publishing personal information to facilitate the actual use of violence (Section 5).

As cases of online hate speech have soared in Singapore ([Singh, 2021](#)), the link between hate sites and doxing has become evident, as the latter normally occurs in the former. Online hate sites promote hate speech and discriminatory content, and individuals within these communities may engage in doxing to intimidate or harm their targets. This is happening almost ten years after the introduction of the POHA and

almost four years after the specific provisions to address doxing cases in the online sphere. Therefore, the effectiveness of the law and responsiveness of law enforcement agencies and the government, in light of the emergence of online hate sites, must be questioned.

## **2h. Online Criminal Harms Act**

On 5 July 2023, the Online Criminal Harms Act (2023), was passed by the Parliament (Devaraj, 2023) to fight against online criminal activity in order to safeguard the public from online threats. The aim is to counter the increasing online criminal activity in Singapore - which includes scams, phishing attempts, sexual exploitation, and drug sales (Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 2023).

Through the legislation, the government will be able to issue directions to disrupt the activities of online services which are suspected of being involved in criminal activities. A key feature of the law is that it lowers the threshold for taking action when suspicious online activities are detected, thus allowing the government to intervene more promptly (Leck et al., 2023) and "closing the gaps left by POFMA as well as FICA" (Tang, 2023).

Offences falling within the scope of the law include terrorism, internal security, racial and religious harmony, incitement of violence, government information secrecy, illegal gambling, scams, malicious cyber activities, and sexual offenses such as the distribution of child sexual abuse material and non-consensual sharing of voyeuristic images (Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 2023). With the law comes five forms of government directions to prevent or stop online crime: stop communication directions, disabling directions, account restriction directions, access blocking directions, and app removal directions (CMS Law Now, 2023).

The Act also grants the government the authority to issue codes of practice for online service providers. These codes may include requirements for the implementation of systems and measures to prevent online crime. With these codes, the main goal is to tighten the collaboration between online services providers and the government while reducing or preventing online malicious activities. The non-compliance with these directives or breach of these directions may result in fines of up to SGD 20,000 (USD 14,800) and/or jail time of up to two years. Penalties for companies can reach SGD 500,000 (USD 370,000).

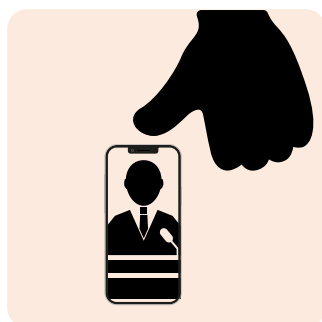
The Online Criminal Harms Act's introduction may spark concerns about its potential to further limit freedom of expression in the online sphere given the vague nature of some of the provisions. Because of that, many non-violent forms of expression may be categorized as criminal offences by the government, threatening to put into jeopardy several forms of expression that are non-violent in nature.

After reviewing these set of legal provisions concerning the regulation of online content in Singapore, the next chapter analyses the impact of the laws outlined in this chapter, particularly on those with alternative political narratives to that of the government. It also introduces the fourth phase of the government strategy to increase its control over online content, namely the lack of regulation of hate sites. Altogether, the chapter shows how this results in increased censorship and self-censorship.

## 3. Impact on Internet Freedoms

The previous chapter have shown how national legislation has been used to regulate online political content – especially content that is calls public officials out accountability. This chapter, organised into four parts, delves into the impacts of such regulations. First, it demonstrates how laws have been used to control online communications of opposition political parties. Second, the chapter shows how internet regulations are cited to block, remove and delegitimise online content that is critical of public officials and policies. The third part of this chapter explains how the law is being used as a regulatory measure that affects, specifically, creators and distributors of content that criticises government officials and policies. Finally, the fourth section looks at acute self-censorship as a means of avoiding legal and non-legal repercussions, which forces attempts to keep the government accountable underground and leads to the buildup of a political pressure point.

### 3a. Regulating Political Parties While Having Incumbent Advantage



Some of the legal measures described in Chapter 2, regulate the actions of political parties in the digital sphere. However, it is often the opposition parties who try to exploit the internet to put out their views as a means of overcoming the disadvantage of not being in government and not having access to resources and the mainstream media that run foul of these laws.

There are three key considerations to take into account when analysing the use of legal measures to exert tighter control over political parties.

First, party websites are considered internet content providers and are to be licensed under the IMDA. During the registration process, the following details are to be handed to the IMDA: the names of the website owners and its editorial teams, nature of the content, target audience, web publisher(s) and web host(s) ([IMDA, 2022c](#)). They are also subject to the same provisions as online outlets. Chiefly, an obligation to disclose its sources of funding as well as having to follow IMDA’s content standards, or risk a penalty.

Second, focusing on restricting political campaign spending, specifically through regulations on internet advertisements, fails to address the issue of incumbent government advantage over social media through self-promotion. For one, in 2019, government expenditure on self-promotion accounted for SGD 150-175 million (USD 113-132 million) ([Wake Up Singapore, 2023](#)), including the various campaigns that were run on social media ([Tham, 2022](#)). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government expenditure advertising its policies to enhance its public image increased between 30-50%. In 2018, the Ministry of Finance paid for fifty social media influencers to promote the passing of the Supply Act for that fiscal year ([Seow, 2018](#)).

There are also criticisms as some sponsored content was not explicitly divulged as being paid for by the government ([Wake Up Singapore, 2023](#)). This is in contrast to the case of Google’s decision not to accept political ads shortly prior to the 2020 General Election ([BBC, 2019](#)) given strict requirements to disclose the number of views and the amount paid for the advertisement. This limits the campaigning reach for opposition parties who were dependent on these services ([Ibid.](#)).

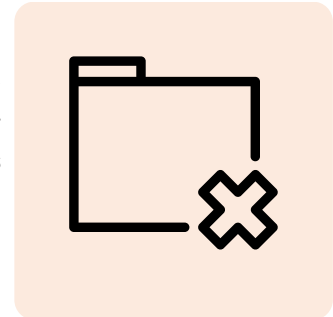
Third, both the regulations on the cooling-off day and the regulations political parties face in their operation online under the Broadcasting Act are in place not taking into account the fact that broadcast media remains a sphere in which the PAP could influence electorates. This is given the government’s influence over the two major media outlets in the country (SPH Media Trust and Media Corp) ([Temasek, n.d.](#); [Lin, 2022](#)). This is particularly the case as the General Elections in 2015 and 2020 still show the popularity of traditional media, including TV and radio during elections ([Soon, 2020](#)). On the other hand,

there continue to be criticisms against the uneven use of cooling-off day regulations as PAP candidates have been criticised for not being held to the same standards for the content they post during the cooling-off period ([The Independent, 2016a](#)).

These regulations, therefore, discriminatorily restrict the operation of non-ruling political parties, making it difficult for them to effectively operate online. On the other hand, PAP leadership could employ other avenues provided to them by government incumbency to bring out their messages, whether on or offline.

### 3b. Blocking, Removing and De-legitimising Critical Content

Through provisions in the Broadcasting Act, the government wields legislative power to control, block and remove online content through a variety of security, morality and public interest justifications. Such power was further consolidated with the enactment of POFMA in 2019, which extends the power to block and take action against online content to all government Ministers through one overarching justification of “fake news”. This section reviews how Singapore’s one-party dominated government has employed the laws and regulations in Chapter 2 to remove content critical of public officials and policy.



One justification for the removal of online content is public security. This enables the IMDA to invoke provisions of the Broadcasting Act to take actions they consider necessary. In December 2018, access to *Singapore Herald*'s website was blocked after it refused IMDA's orders to remove some of its articles from the internet. Articles in question on the Singapore-Malaysia dispute were deemed “objectionable on grounds of public interest” and contain “prohibited material under the Internet Code of Practice”, according to the IMDA ([Zaccheus, 2018](#)). The IMDA subsequently instructed ISPs to block access to the *Singapore Herald* after its failure to remove the content before the deadline ([Singapore Internet Watch, 2022](#)). Another similar case with security cited as a reason for content removal involves rapper and activist Subhas Nair. In July 2019, he released a rap video in response to a controversial advertisement featuring a Chinese actor in brownface to portray an ethnic minority character, calling out racism in the video. The IMDA issued notices to Subhas Nair and others who shared his video on social media to remove the content immediately ([Daud, 2019](#)). The IMDA cited potential racial tensions and hatred as reasons for the notices, justifying that the video contains “material that incites racial hatred, strife and intolerance”. To further discourage Subhas Nair from publishing similar content online in the near future, he was also issued a two-year conditional warning by the Police ([Lam, 2022](#)).

Meanwhile, concurrent with the rise of social media as a platform for direct political discussion amongst the Singaporean public, the government – through POFMA – is now shifting its focus towards regulating the platforms. The enactment of POFMA saw a rise in falsehoods used as a justification for delegitimising content as false. From the first use of POFMA in November 2019 to June 2023, 57 cases were reported involving the use of POFMA orders and Directions, with 1117 separate uses of POFMA powers ([POFMA'ed, 2022](#); [POFMA Office, 2022](#)).

One POFMA case revolves around the Minister of Law and Home Affairs K. Shanmugam and his interview with *Vanakkam Malaysia*. *The Independent Singapore* reported on this interview piece on 21 April 2022 with the headline “[K Shanmugam says he may step down as Singapore’s Minister of Law and Home Affairs](#)”. The article deduced from the interview piece that the Minister “may step down as a minister, but gave no specific time as to when he might do so”. However, in response, Shanmugam himself as the Minister of Law instructed the POFMA office to issue a Correction Direction, stating that the headline and claims made by *The Independent Singapore* were “clickbait” and gave a “false impression that [he] said he may be stepping down from his ministerial positions” ([Factually, 2022](#)).

In another similar case, Shanmugam instructed the POFMA office to issue a Correction Order against New Naratif and its managing director, Thum Ping Tjin, for alleged falsehoods in a video discussing POFMA (Tham, 2020). On 8 May 2020, New Naratif published an episode on POFMA. In it, Thum Ping Tjin criticised POFMA, with one argument being that “POFMA makes all criticism of the government illegal” since “every statement can be considered false in some way”. The statement was made in the context of the potential use of POFMA to prohibit access to a news piece on the account that government officials may misinterpret opinions as statements. The Singapore government, as stated on the official gov.sg website, responded by highlighting the ongoing criticism directed towards the government even after the implementation of POFMA. Notably, these criticisms have not been subject to correction or deletion under the powers granted by POFMA. (Factually, 2020).

POFMA was also employed to discredit an article published in Asia Sentinel titled ‘Singapore kills a chicken to scare the monkeys’. Issued on 26 May for the article which was published on 24 May, the initial Correction Direction by the Minister of Home Affairs was in regard to the article’s claim that the Singapore Government had threatened to end Nikkei Inc.’s business operations in Singapore (which the Minister claimed was false) as well as other facts in the article (Factually, 2023). After that, Asia Sentinel (2023) published another article, ‘Asia Sentinel answer to Singapore government demand for correction’, stating that “the Singapore government, under Section 11 of its “Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act of 2019 (POFMA), has demanded that under legal obligations imposed by the powers of POFMA, Asia Sentinel post a correction of our May 24 story titled Killing the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys. Although we have posted the government’s demand, we stand by our story.” Nonetheless, the MCI was instructed by MHA to block access to the website, by notifying the website that the correction notice was not placed at the top of the article and at the top of the website’s main page as required (Goh, 2023).

CSOs working in the human rights field and independent online news outlets are no exception to the government’s attempts to discredit them. In January 2020, a Malaysian Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) ‘Lawyers for Liberty’ released a press statement alleging that Changi Prison guards are instructed to manually carry out executions should the rope be used for hanging breaks, which the NGO called a brutal method. A Correction Direction was issued by the POFMA office, clarifying that the details of the press statement were false. However, ‘Lawyers for Liberty’ refused to comply with the Correction Direction on the grounds that POFMA cannot be applied to organisations outside Singapore and threatened another country’s guarantee of freedom of speech. In response, MCI issued an order to block access to the website of Lawyers for Liberty (Lay, 2020).

While there are no clear patterns of the IMDA taking action against opposition parties’ websites on grounds of national security or public morality since the late 2000s, there is a noticeable shift to justify actions based on the accusation of spreading false statements and deliberately misleading the population. The first clear example of this approach involves Progress Singapore Party member Brad Bowyer. On 13 November 2019, he posted on Facebook implying that the government controls the commercial decisions of Temasek and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC). Brad Bowyer complied with a Correction Direction under POFMA, where he was forced to reframe his criticism of Temasek and GIC in a follow-up Facebook post and portray his enquiry of the PAP government in a better light compared to his former post (Tham & Young, 2019).

The use of POFMA during the 2020 general election concretised this shift towards delegitimising online content published by political rivals of the PAP, (POFMA’ed, 2020). Here, it must be noted that POFMA requires that the power to issue Directions and Orders does not lie with the government during election campaign periods and rather for the Minister to appoint a public officer (POFMA Section 52). For the July 2020 General Election, POFMA powers were laid to permanent secretaries of the ministries and some offices in the Prime Minister’s Offices (Kok, 2020c).

A contentious issue of note during the 2020 campaign trail was a claim by Dr Chee Soon Juan of SDP that the government was planning to increase the Singaporean population to 10 million, which a POFA Correction Direction was subsequently issued (Lee, 2020). This was controversial as Dr Chee's statement was viewed by SDP as a deduced opinion based on an earlier statement made by the former CEO of the Housing and Development Board (HDB). However, a High Court Judge and the Attorney-General disagreed with this and classified it as a (false) fact rather than an opinion, allowing for the issue of the Correction Direction (Tham, 2022a). The SDP was then denied permission to appeal against the judgement at the Court of Appeal (Tham, 2022b).

Correction Directions were issued to the online media outlets *National University of Singapore Society*, *Channel News Asia*, *The Online Citizen* and *New Naratif*. In it, the POFA Office claimed that a citation of SDP's Paul Tambyah's statement that the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Health had signed off on an advisory that discouraged the COVID-19 testing of workers (Yun Ting, 2020) was false. Paul Tambyah criticised the Direction, saying that he had never said that the advisory was sent out by the Ministry of Health; and that the Direction was a distraction from the fact that an advisory, whoever the author, was sent out by a Minister in the government, discouraging employers from sending workers who they perceive as healthy for testing (Yusof, 2020).

Overall, through the use of these internet laws, the government is able to maintain control over the allowable narrative in the online space. Nonetheless, those who use this space for commentary against public officials and policies are likely to find themselves targets of hate attacks. Justification of public security and social cohesion have given way to the use of "fake news", among others, to block and remove content critical of public officials and public policy. The net result is that content creators and distributors are prosecuted for infringing specific laws.

### 3c. Prosecution of Content Creators and Distributors



Defamation laws, electoral regulations, the power accorded to IMDA to review content online and notify law enforcement to take action, and the enforcement of administrative compliance against online portals deemed to receive foreign funding from some of the regulatory tools applied to content creators and distributors.

As noted in Chapter 2, the interpretation of the Court in protecting the reputation of PAP leaders, rather than protecting calls for accountability, enables defamation suits to be an effective legal tool. Various reports have noted that defamation suits have been regularly used by officeholders in the PAP government to sue defendants who end up bankrupt (Human Rights Watch, 2008). However, a shift to the second phase saw the defamation strategy being applied to editors of independent online media as well as prominent online critics. Using a range of laws has proved to be an effective strategy to silence those who criticise public officials and policies as it causes anxiety among people. Kirsten Han, a Singaporean journalist, blogger, and social activist, explained that

The anxiety among Singaporeans about sharing controversial opinions and getting into trouble with the government started long before Singapore's development of a high-tech surveillance network. Singaporeans have long had the lingering belief that there is constant government monitoring, which results in fears of potential repercussions should they step out of line. This might have originated from high-profile examples of state oppression or suppression, including instances of detention without trial like Operation Coldstore in the 1960s or Operation Spectrum in 1987, when activists, volunteers or critics of the government were arrested (KI18).

For one, on 24 March 2021, the Court announced a verdict that PM Lee was to receive SGD SGD 262,327.22 (around USD 194,400) (SGD 133,000 in damages and SGD 129,327.22 in costs) (funds raised through crowdsourcing ([Kurohi, 2021b](#)) from a political blogger Leong Sze Hian who had shared an article linking Prime Minister Lee to the 1MDB Scandal. The judge in the case was of the opinion that, despite Leong not contributing to the content of the article (as he had only shared the piece), he had still recklessly shared the news with disregard for the truth of the claim. Further, since he had refused to apologise, it implies malicious intent ([Frater, 2021](#)). During the court process, PM Lee also remarked that the sharing of the article was to “cynically [draw] attention to the article to keep it fresh in the minds of people in Singapore” ([Lam, 2019](#)).

Apart from Leong, human rights lawyer M. Ravi was charged in December 2020, with criminal defamation over an allegation that lawyer Eugene Thuraisingam told him that K. Shanmugam had claimed he “wields influence over the Chief Justice” and “calls the shot and controls Sundaresh Menon [Chief Justice]” ([Alkhatib, 2020](#)). The Attorney-General’s Chamber dropped the charges upon issuing a conditional warning ([Lum, 2021a](#)). Earlier in 2014, a Singaporean activist Roy Ngerng was sued by PM Lee in response to his article on the PM’s connection to the Central Provident Fund, the country’s Monetary Authority, Temasek Holdings and GIC. The article implied that the Chairman of GIC (the Prime Minister) was “guilty of criminal misappropriation of the monies paid by Singaporeans to the CPF” ([Ng, 2014](#)). The court found that Ngerng was guilty of defamation and that he was to pay PM Lee SGD 30,000 (around USD 22,500) to cover the costs of the hearing, in addition to the SGD 150,000 (around USD 110,000) for damages ([Jaipragas, 2021](#)). Roy has since left the country for Taiwan due to the financial burden and later was able to pay the full amount through a crowdfunding campaign ([Ibid.](#)).

Election periods also see some online news outlets being targeted for their coverage of the election. For one, during the 2020 General Elections, the Election Department filed a police report against New Naratif for allegedly publishing illegally paid election advertisements ([Kurohi, 2020](#)). The contents reported, however, related to the use of restrictive laws in the country and the lack of accountability of the PAP administration ([CIVICUS, 2020](#)). A police investigation was launched, with Thum Ping Tjin interviewed and his electronic devices seized for forensic examination. In response, human rights groups (including Amnesty International, Article 19, CIVICUS and others) urged the PAP government to withdraw the police report given the use of overly broad definitions of what constitutes an advertisement ([Ibid.](#)). New Naratif was issued with a stern warning in lieu of prosecution after a year of police investigation ([Lim, 2021](#)).

Another example is the Election Department’s labelling of an article by The Independent Singapore, during the 2015 Bukit Batok by-election. The article reported on an incident where Tan Cheng Bock, a politician from the opposition Progress Singapore Party, denied his involvement with a political hate site, “Fabrications About the PAP” Facebook page, which said that he had criticise a fellow opposition politician from the SDP. Despite the lack of warning prior, a note was made by both the police that the outlet had a “blatant disregard” for the law and Election Department’s notification ([Singapore Police Force, 2016](#)). Similarly, Teo Soh Lung and Roy Ngerng, both online commentators, were also filed police charges by the Election Department – as well as had their homes being searched without a warrant and their electronic devices seized – for allegedly breaching the Cooling-Off Day regulation. Nevertheless, the notification did not provide clear reasoning as to what constituted the breach of regulations ([Kaye et al., 2016](#)), only that Ms Teo and Roy “regularly engage in the propagation, promotion and discussion of political issues” ([The Independent, 2016b](#)).

Social harmony is also used to justify the prosecution of journalists and activists. Race and religion are considered by the government as sensitive topics which can threaten Singapore’s social cohesion. In March 2016, Ai Takagi, the editor of The Real Singapore, had her licence to operate the website suspended for hosting racially insensitive and xenophobic articles. She and her husband ([Committee to Protect Journalists, n.d.](#)) were later charged with sedition. In her court verdict, the Judge confirmed the stance the IMDA had taken in finding that Takagi had intended to “provoke unwarranted hatred against foreigners in



Singapore” ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2016](#)). Another similar case involves activist and rapper Subhas Nair who produced and released a rap video which touched on racism online. Breaching a 24-month conditional warning from a prior incident where the IMDA had taken down one of his videos, a criminal case has been filed against him ([Choo, 2021](#)). As of June 2023, Subhas is under trial for charges of attempting to promote ill will between races or religions ([Lam, 2023](#)).

The IMDA also regulates media through the use of measures in the Broadcasting Act against foreign funding. The Authority claims that its restriction on foreign funding for independent news outlets is “to prevent foreign interests from influencing local politics through the Singaporean media” ([IMDA, 2019](#)). However, this regulation threatens the survivability of independent online news outlets as they depend on donations from both in and out of Singapore. New Naratif is one of the outlets affected by this regulation. It received funding from a Swiss charitable entity, the Foundation Open Society Institute, as well as the Open Society Foundations. As a result, New Naratif was refused registration by the Ministry of Finance in April 2018 due to this foreign fund ([Sin, 2018](#)). It is now operating from Malaysia ([New Naratif, n.d.](#)). On this matter, the introduction of FICA would provide a more restrictive avenue for the government to block the operation of such platforms.

The use of such laws and regulations can cause legal and financial burdens, forcing independent media to shut down their operations. One example is Terry Xu, and the website he edits: The Online Citizen (TOC). In September 2018, TOC published an open letter by Daniel De Costa Augustin claiming that there is “corruption at the highest echelons” of the ruling party and that PAP had also “tamper[ed] with the Constitution” ([Coconuts, 2018](#)). After the publication of the letter, Terry Xu was ordered by IMDA to remove the comment. Despite immediately doing so, the Singaporean police used the case as a pretext for seizing Xu’s computer (RSF, [2018](#)). IMDA later admitted that it filed the police report, stating that the article undermined the public’s confidence in the government ([Coconuts, 2018](#)). Terry Xu and Daniel were later found guilty of defamation in an adjudication in November 2021. During the trial, the prosecutor maintained that the letter was not sent and was not published in good faith. The prosecution framed De Costa as being “very aggrieved” when he wrote the article and cited Xu’s “non-existent” editorial process ([Lam, 2021](#)), to prove their case. The prosecution had also argued that “the uploading of the article by Xu was part of a broader insidious agenda of publishing articles that cast unwarranted aspersions against the Government and members of Cabinet” ([Tham, 2022c](#)).

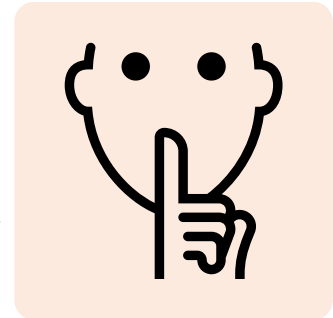
Terry Xu was again sued by PM Lee Hsien Loong, for an article posted by another individual, Rubaashini Shunmuganathan, on 15 August 2019 titled “[PM Lee’s wife, Ho Ching weirdly shares article on cutting ties with family members](#)”. The article commented on Ho Ching’s relationship with her in-laws and referenced a post by PM Lee’s sister, Dr Lee Wei Ling, who claimed that the PM had misled his father over the status of their family house ([Kurohi, 2019](#)). In the court judgement in September 2021, the court made a judgement that the article posted on TOC was defamatory in nature and affirmed that the article was posted with malicious intent that not only undermined PM Lee’s personal credibility but also called into question his fitness to govern with integrity, undermining him as a Prime Minister ([Lum, 2021b](#)).

TOC was notified by IMDA in December of 2019 that under the Broadcasting Act, the website must only receive donations (including subscriptions) from “verified local sources” – barring any anonymous and foreign funding ([Kurohi, 2021b](#)). IMDA claimed that it had concerns about TOC’s subscription model of fundraising, whereby it argued that posting subscriber-only articles “could be an avenue for foreign influence”, as a loophole could be made for foreign subscribers to pay for the TOC writing specific articles in their interest, possibly to the detriment of Singapore’s national security ([Palatino, 2021](#)). In September 2021, TOC was forced to shut down following the suspension of its licence from IMDA after it had repeatedly failed to declare the sources of its funding ([Kurohi, 2021b](#)). In September 2022, TOC announced that it was relaunching from Taiwan.

All in all, activists and journalists have been persecuted by the government through a range of laws. Such legal actions, the accompanying fines and jail sentences, serve to foster self-censorship that suppresses expression that is kept within and discussed in closed circles.

### 3d. Self-Censorship

The use of legal toolkits examined in the previous sections has created a situation, firstly, where those who have spoken out against the government are fined, jailed, no longer able to operate in Singapore and go overseas to explore livelihood or continue their work. Secondly, those who want to do so choose otherwise, given the legal risks.



This net effect is a suppression of opinions, a reduction in the volume of alternative information online and the critical discourse in the private sphere. As Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh, co-founder of the online magazine Jom, remarks,

“there is limited official information on various topics, resulting in a mixture of possibly unverifiable data” (KII7). This idea was built upon in a separate consultation with Ariffin Sha, who remarked that “affected content being produced these days are more passive in terms of the tone and topics covered” (KII10) in order to avoid being labelled as stating false information.

Asia Centre’s consultation with respondents in Singapore further revealed the anxiety felt among individuals regarding the use of these laws. As Goh Meng Seng noted, “Singaporeans question their government’s intention” on how they intend to use the enacted laws against political discussion, however, “concentration of power frightens them and confuses them, resulting in self-censorship” (KII3). In the same vein, Sudhir added “Singaporeans are generally too afraid to voice out their opinions in fear of being seen by the government as anti-PAP” and that “they worry that the PAP could respond to their criticisms or comments by affecting their housing, access to government services and jobs” (KII7).

M. Ravi, a human rights lawyer (KII4) responded to Asia Centre’s question on the issue of self-censorship as follows:

The pressure of going up against the ruling PAP and the possibility of the PAP’s retribution in other forms such as lower priority for housing may be too much for the individual defendants to handle. Apart from that, they may face financial ruination even if they win the legal case. The PAP has the resources to keep up with the expensive legal fees but not the journalists or activists. Even independent news outlets lack the resources the PAP has. The families of the defendants are also affected. They are most likely more afraid of the harsh retribution by the PAP just because they are related to the defendants.

Apart from the actual application of the law, the threat of prosecution against individuals and media outlets can also contribute to self-censorship. In May 2020, the Minister for Manpower Josephine Teo sent letters demanding that activist Jolovan Wham and another individual withdraw comments suggesting corruption on the part of her and her husband, the chief executive of Surbana Jurong, during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the Minister stated that she did not intend to pursue this issue further in court if the allegations were publicly withdrawn and apologies were given. Subsequently, both activists made their apologies to Josephine Teo and had an agreement to donate SGD 1,000 (USD 740) each to the Migrant Workers’ Assistance Fund, the charity arm of the Migrant Workers’ Centre (Kok, 2020a).

Public rebukes against prominent activists and critics also induce a sense of fear and lead to self-censorship in others. For example, in 2016, Terry Xu was publicly rebuked by the Minister of Law in the Parliament after he had questioned the police as to their conduct which led to the suicide of a 14-year-old

during police interrogation. In response to *TOC*'s questioning of the incident, the Minister claimed in a Parliament session that *TOC* was part of a "planned, orchestrated campaign, using falsehoods" to suggest that the police had been lying to Singaporeans (RSF, 2016). In 2021, in a Parliamentary session during the second reading of FICA, Shanmugam also similarly attacked *TOC*, *New Naratif* and Kirsten Han for "mounting a disinformation campaign" against the Singaporean public. The reason provided was that these individuals and platforms were serving as a conduit for maligned foreign power to exert their influence in Singapore (Han, 2021a; 2021b).







IBs online also work as a form of lateral surveillance for the PAP. Lateral surveillance is surveillance conducted by individual members of society to report suspicious activities to authorities (Andrejevic, 2002). In Singapore, this plays a prominent role (Jiow & Morales, 2015). On websites such as STOMP, Facebook and other social media platforms, ordinary Singaporeans can record and upload videos or photographs of others' actions. The fear of their actions being captured on record without them knowing causes Singaporeans to censor themselves in public and even online. For example, in September 2019, a citizen used STOMP to post a picture of two individuals participating in a rally advocating for a reform of the prison model and laws in the city-state were wearing T-shirts advocating for the abolishment of the death penalty - a highly controversial issue in Singapore given the PAP's strict views for this form of punishment (Daley, 2019) - showing the importance of lateral surveillance in the country, which creates fertile ground for IBs to exploit this online content.

The use of legal measures has resulted in narrow opportunities for opposition parties to disseminate their views; while content can be blocked, removed and delegitimised; and individuals and organisations can be prosecuted and punished. This has led to self-censorship where people and organisations are not willing to express their political views publicly and literally keep their opinions to themselves or discuss them only in private. Notwithstanding this situation, some individuals and organisations continue to use the narrow legally allowed space to express their views, especially online. This is where hate sites and the internet brigades come into play using hate to shut down these voices without any repercussions.













# 4. Political Hate Sites: Ineffective Legal and Content Moderation Action

This chapter examines how political hate sites actively seek to negate calls to keep public officials accountable in Singapore’s very narrow allowable legal space. The targets are activists, independent journalists, human rights lawyers and opposition politicians who want to serve as checks and balances by calling out behaviours of government officials, the administration of justice and policy blindspots in a one-party dominated state. This is where pro-PAP IBs flourish without repercussions both as creators and dissemination of hate content and coordinators of such hate sites. This chapter has four sections: first, the rise of political hate sites is presented; the second section provides specific examples of political hate sites in action; the third part addresses the limited positive effects of content takedowns by tech companies; and lastly, the fourth section discusses the inefficiencies of the legal framework in addressing political hate speech.

## Main Targets of Hate Sites in Singapore

<b>Activists &amp; Human Rights Defenders</b> 	<b>Journalists, Editors, Bloggers</b> 	<b>Women</b> 	<b>Opposition Party Members</b> 	<b>Foreign Workers</b> 	<b>Foreign Governments &amp; Leaders</b> 
--	--	---	--	---	---

## Traits of Hate Content

Agenda	Narratives	Tactics
 Common Goal of Protecting PAP	 Accusations of "Betraying the Nation"	 Share Fabricated or Out-of-context Remarks
 Create Illusion of Popular Support	 Accusations of "Holding Extremist Views"	 Repeat Biased Mainstream Content
 Negate/Neutralise Criticism	 Incompetency of Critics	 Nitpick on Minor Details
 Attack Credibility of Critics	 Critics Sow Discord	 Use of Sexist & Racist Remarks

## 4a. The Rise of Political Hate Sites and its Trends

One move discussed in Chapter 2 is the enactment of different laws to regulate online content that this report has identified as the first three phases of the city-state's online political history. This section explains how another move, to counter critical online commentary on the behaviour of public officials and the lapses in public policy, led to the rise of political hate sites.

The rise of political hate sites<sup>7</sup> can be linked to the efforts by the PAP's online 'counter-insurgency' against critics, as political engagement shifted to the internet. The PAP deemed these efforts necessary to assert influence in the online sphere (Xueying, 2007). Internet Brigades fuel this counter-insurgency through the instrument of their choice - hate sites. To counter political stands deemed critical of the ruling party's public officials and policies, IBs, often using inauthentic accounts, post on websites, blogs, and social media platforms. Additionally, they have set up dedicated platforms and posted on the comment sections of their sites and that of others, which often includes false information and feature narratives that sought to manipulate and "turn" genuine comments. Roy Ngerng, activist and blogger said that

IBs seeks to control political discourse via online platforms such as social media and forums. Among the older generation, their influence might be more acute due to this group not having grown up in the internet era and being less skilful at navigating the internet, while aided by decades of pro-PAP propaganda. Older forms of online media propaganda tend to be more crude but newer ones like MustShareNews and Mothership evolved in an attempt to be seen as more credible among the younger generations, but even so, the internet space is evolving rapidly, and even younger digital natives are interacting with new social media platforms in a way which may transcend the ability of the ruling party to effectively have a handle on (KII7).

With a combination of desk research and key informant interviews carried out for this report, Asia Centre identified three operating trends of online political hate sites: 1) the use of false or out-of-context content to attack and delegitimise those who criticise public officials and policies while creating a positive image of the PAP; 2) the existence of coordination behind the actions of IBs; and 3) IBs use technology companies' community guidelines violations reporting as a way of removing content and disabling accounts of those who call out public officials and policies.

The first trend is IBs generate online content that deliberately lacks context. This creates confusion, as they can distort the understanding of facts to manipulate perceptions among the public in a way that aligns with their objectives. In addition, IBs frequently disseminate false information. As a result, the public can be manipulated and groomed to develop and hold a negative view of those individuals and organisations criticising public officials and policies. Overall, with the distortion of facts and presenting only selected information, IBs can negatively affect the credibility of those who hold alternative views.

In one of the interviews conducted by Asia Centre, Hong Kong based academic, Stephan Ortmann, noted that "pro-PAP Internet Brigades work to create an illusion that the majority of Singaporeans support the PAP by creating a large amount of pro-PAP content online" (KII5). For example, in one case, a Facebook post of Brad Bowyer criticising financial policies saw over 100 comments from fake accounts that shared similar narratives and pointed to similar links that purportedly debunk his claim (Shunmuganathan, 2019). This was corroborated in another interview with Melvin Tan, a long-time observer of the internet political landscape, flagging the fact that "the pro-PAP community has increasingly been generating more positive pro-PAP content" (KII2) in the online sphere.

The second trend is coordinated actions carried out by IBs. In this case, the distinctive trait of coordinated action is the existence of a common agenda. Political hate sites often attack those with political views that differ from theirs. At the same time, in doing so, they amplify their messages. In Singapore, political hate

<sup>7</sup> The use of hate speech has been historically part of the PAP's rhetoric towards its critics which for decades has been amplified by the mainstream media. This rhetoric has now been transposed onto hate sites and is being amplified online. Hence, the rise of political hate sites corresponds with the PAP's long standing approach of using hateful rhetoric and threats to attack its critics and maintain its political influence in the country.

sites target those criticising public officials and policies, thus attempting to lift the image of the PAP. PJ Thum noted that hateful messages found on social media pages and online forums have the trait of coordinated behaviour: newly created accounts with false profile pictures repeat false and hateful talking points while avoiding meaningful engagement with other users who challenge their claims (KII1). Additionally, these comments are “nitpicking on minor details and constantly spamming messages in support of [the practice]”, as the human rights lawyer M Ravi explained (KII4).

Political hate sites, primarily fueled by IBs, generate content lacking context and spread false information to discredit critics. These tactics aim to promote a positive image of the PAP while manipulating public perception and discrediting critics of the government. The role of IBs is also crucial because they, instead of PAP party members, are responsible for creating hate content. This way, public officials are dissociated from such attacks, as Stephan Ortmann noted (KII5). This tactic is not dissimilar to Thailand ([Asia Centre, 2023b](#)) and Malaysia ([Asia Centre, 2023a](#)), where government operatives are also employing individuals and private firms for their information operations.

In addition to their direct involvement in shaping online discussions, the third trend is IBs also use community guidelines violation reporting offered by social media platforms to remove content and disable the accounts of critics. Observers and individuals interviewed noted that IBs use their capacity to create coordinated attacks to benefit from social networking sites' algorithms to report some of the posts by those who publicly criticise government officials and policies. The aim behind these coordinated attacks is to silence voices by utilising the same tools that any other user can use to report community guidelines violations. A notable example of this trend dates back to 2016 when Facebook posts made by prominent blogger Andrew Loh, activist Teo Soh Lung, and Kirsten Han were unexpectedly taken down. These posts did not violate Facebook's community standards, as they did not contain any content that warranted removal. However, the posts did contain criticism directed towards the Singapore police ([TIS, 2016](#)).

All in all, the increasing number of political hate sites and the enabling role of IBs in supporting these sites to counter online critics reflect the fourth phase in the evolution of Singapore's online political history. The use of political hate sites against those who seek regime change is set to play out more vividly in Singapore's political and electoral battles ahead. The next section outlines how selected political hate sites operate to silence critics.

### **4b. Hate Sites in Action**

This section looks at specific examples from four political hate sites - “Fabrications about the PAP”, “Critical Spectator”, “Singapore Matters” and “Gong Simi” - and discusses their pattern of operation. It demonstrates that these hate sites share a coordinated agenda of shielding the PAP against public calls for accountability on their part, on the one hand, and attacking critics who call out behavioural and policy lapses, on the other. It also discusses the various narratives that such hate sites use, primarily to engage in a one-sided positive promotion of the PAP.. Altogether, this section draws attention to the negative impact political hate sites have on meaningful political discussion and engagement online.

#### ***Fabrications About the PAP***

The Facebook page “Fabrications About the PAP”, serves as an example of a political hate site. It was created in 2011 ([SG Hard Truth, 2011](#)) by Jason Chua Chin Seng, a retired software engineer ([The Strait Times, 2016](#)). Before this page was banned by Facebook in 2020 (see section (4c), it had amassed over 250,000 likes. After being removed from the social media platform, a new Facebook page was created, also by Jason Chua Chin Seng, in June 2020. As of June 2023, the page has gained 6,000 likes and 10,000 followers.

**Hate Sites**

Name	Description	Reach
<b>Singapore Matters</b> (Facebook Page) (also has a <a href="#">website</a> )	Origins not publicly known. Engages in a lot of hate posts, attacking policy critics. It also undertakes a disproportionate promotion of PAP MPs and office holders.	93K likes (June 2023)
<b>Fabrication About the PAP</b> (Facebook Page)	Owned by Jason Chua (The Strait Times, 2016). Previous iteration of the page was shut down by Facebook due to inauthentic behaviours.	250K likes (past iteration)  6K likes 10K followers (latest iteration) (June 2023)
<b>Critical Spectator</b> (Facebook Page) (also has a <a href="#">website</a> )	Run by a Polish individual Michael Petraeus (Sholihyn, 2020)	25K likes (June 2023)
<b>Gong Simi Singapore</b> (on Tiktok)	Uploads hate videos of individuals, using their publicly available content, to ridicule and attack their policy viewpoints as well as spread hateful remarks against the individuals' (mostly opposition politicians, journalists and activists) appearances, health conditions.	270.7K likes 200+ videos (June 2023)
<b>"Cyber mercenary" accounts</b> (Facebook)	Facebook suspended around 1,500 such accounts globally in 2020. Some of these accounts undertakes online harassment of prominent journalists Kirsten Han, Terry Xu and social media commentator Julie O'Connor.	N/A

"Fabrications About the PAP" hosts content that Jason Chua describes as defending the ruling PAP government against online criticisms. He claims to have no links with any PAP groups or any other political parties, calling himself and others like him "moderates" whose "main aim is to play a part in helping the government explain and reason" (Lim, 2011). However, several examples of posts by this page show that hate speech has been systematically used to attack those who want to keep public officials accountable. Furthermore, these examples show that such attacks to discredit the victims contain false or inaccurate information.

On 23 April 2022, Fabrication About the PAP posted a meme citing an alleged statement from a Worker's Party MP:

Since waiting times for BTO [Build-to-Order flats] are exacerbated by supply chain issues and Covid19, I proposed govt during Budget 2022 to build more BTOs ahead of demand to cut short waiting times... (Fabrications about the PAP, 2022).

This post attributed the quote to Louis Chua Kheng Wee, a member of Parliament from the Workers' Party. This statement was about the government's annual review of the national budget for the Build-To-Order housing programme for Singaporeans. However, Louis Chua's Budget 2022 speech did not contain such a statement (Chua, 2022). By creating this falsehood, there was an attempt to discredit Chua's political reputation and portray him as an MP who is not capable of making constructive and intelligent contributions.

In other instances, "Fabrications About the PAP" has targeted those supporting opposition political parties by spreading information about their actions. However, posts including photos have been suspected of being manipulated in order to trigger hatred against them. On 29 October 2019, Fabrications About the PAP posted an uncensored photograph of a young boy allegedly raising his middle finger in a crowd of Worker's Party volunteers (Stolarchuk, 2019). However, "upon closer inspection of the photo, many netizens felt that the young boy could be holding up the peace sign - with his raised index finger concealed behind his middle finger due to the angle of the photo - or could have been scratching his face at the moment the photo was taken" (Ibid.).

Disclosing personal information - thus doxxing them - about those who try to keep government officials accountable, thus making them more vulnerable to being harassed and attacked, is another tactic that has been used by Fabrications About the PAP. In 2014, the Facebook page The Alternative View alerted in one of its posts that Fabrications about the PAP has publicised the address of an elderly woman - posting a picture of her house - who had spoken out at a CPF event (The Alternative View, 2014). Furthermore, the post by Fabrications About the PAP included the following text, including disrespectful language against an opposition politician and a Wake Up Singapore member:

Contrary to how poor she is made out to be by the irresponsible Opposition, this Grandma is richer than most of us.

Note: Auntie chose not to withdraw her CPF at 55: auntie has been receiving monthly payouts; auntie is well to do. Auntie has asked for some flexibility on her remaining CPF, but now used as a political tool by irresponsible opposition like Kenneth Jeyaretnam Team R and ignorant 17 year old Arrifin Sha of Wake Up Singapore (Ibid).

Fabrications About the PAP has also made several allegations against individuals accusing them of promoting foreign interference. One of these individuals is PJ Thum after he met with Malaysian former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. Using a CNA post, Fabrications About the PAP accused him of quickly "abandon[ing] his Beacon of Democracy. Just like how they abandon Amos Yee... throw away like a useless used disposable underwear." (Fabrications, 2020). In another post, Fabrications of the PAP (2022a)



further accused PJ Thum, along with Tan Wah-Piow, Jolovan Wham, and Kirsten Han, of promoting foreign interference. The post contained two photos. In the first one, from 2018, the aforementioned individuals were accused of “urging Mahathir to help bring democracy to Singapore. In the second photo, from 2022, the post said “siding with foreigners to bring pressure on SG, attach and damage SG with untruths”, along with a picture of Richard Branson and screenshots of posts made by these individuals questioning the need for the death penalty in Singapore.

### ***Critical Spectator***

Critical Spectator, also a Facebook page, is another political hate site mentioned by several of the informants who were interviewed for the elaboration of this report. The Facebook page is run by Michał Piotr Pietrusinski (also known as Michael Petraeus) ([Sholihyn, 2020](#)). He is a Polish citizen who, aside from operating Critical Spectator, is known to manage several other fake accounts ([ibid., 2020](#)). The admin account of the page was banned by Facebook in 2020 and the page was temporarily unpublished (See Section 4c). It has accumulated 25,000 likes and has 29,000 followers – as of June 2023.

Like “Fabrications About the PAP”, the Critical Spectator page also posts pro-PAP content. Yet, the examples below also show that this Facebook page makes unsubstantiated allegations with inaccurate and false information to undermine the reputation of selected individuals who try to hold public officials accountable and question the blind spots of certain policies with their posts.

For example, Terry Xu from TOC, has systematically been targeted by “Critical Spectator”. Several posts disseminated false facts about his media outlet, calling his audience “ignorant” ([Critical Spectator, 2023](#)) for relying on TOC. In a post that dates back to 2020 ([Critical Spectator, 2020](#)), Xu was described as “a guy who had for years hidden Malaysian writers behind fake names as they pretended to be Singaporeans writing about local politics is now upset that a foreigner - openly and candidly - posts fact-based content about the country that Terry loves to hate.” In 2023, Critical Spectator called TOC a “misleading propaganda tube, poorly masquerading as local “journalism”. It also accused TOC of “employing foreigners and pretending to be writing about other countries” ([Critical Spectator, 2023](#)). The accusation of hiring foreigners and masquerading them as Singaporeans raises two important points. First, it gives the impression that hiring foreigners is illegal - thus implying that TOC hires illegally. Second, TOC clarified that the accusation of pretending to hire foreign national and masquerading them as national Singaporeans is not true.

“As for the non-Singaporean writers, a website dug out the details of the writers and posted them in an article. The details were obtained from LinkedIn where they listed themselves as writing for TOC. Now, given that the writers listed their real nationality on their LinkedIn profile, listed TOC as a company that they were working in, and used their real names as the basis for their writer name on the website — for example, Rubaashini Shunmuganathan, who wrote the 2019 article, has her pen name as Rubaa. How can one say there was an intention to masquerade them as Singaporeans writing on Singapore. Not to mention that they are writing news and not opinion pieces, unlike someone like the Critical Spectator. Furthermore, being cognisant of the departure from relying on Singaporean writers and volunteers, I made the open declaration on TOC’s About Us page.” ([Xu, 2023](#))

A distinctive trait of many of the “Critical Spectator” posts is the style (short texts or narratives often written in first person), register (using more informal language), and the direct appeal to the feelings of the audience. Also about Xu’s posts, “Critical Spectator” uses people’s feelings to make them feel “evil” for reading TOC: “This is who Terry Xu is and yet he finds quite a few followers, who are either as evil as he is - or as dimwitted, lazy and ignorant to gobble up any anti-gov BS he spews.” ([Critical Spectator, 2023](#)).

Another example showing the systematic attempts by Critical Spectator to undermine the credibility of those keeping public officials accountable concerns the writer Sudhir Vadaketh. Attacks against him show, like the TOC case, the use of migration and race-related topics and ill-mannered language to appeal to the ignorance of the victim ([Critical Spectator, 2020; 2021](#)). After being systematically attacked, Sudhir posted on Facebook that

my first and only previous post about Petraeus was in May 2020 (link in comment below). I had decried his methods while pleading for civility in criticisms of him. Petraeus had complained personally to me that he had been the subject of horrid ethnic slurs and attacks, e.g. calling his mother a “whore”. ([Vadaketh, 2021](#)).

In the same post, where Sudhir explained he would block Critical Spectator, he also said that that was “Heavy, cos I have thus far accepted all comments from anybody on my personal page, with the exception of racist and hate speech, and comments from bots or fake accounts.” (Ibid). The writer expressed his concerns about divisive tactics targeting his ethnicity and family. He stated that Critical Spectator employed lies and racist remarks regarding his “Indian ethnicity and immigrant family” ([Romero, 2021](#)).

Posts against Sudhir also show how Critical Spectator tends to write long posts, written in first-person to appeal more to the audience, often mentioning readers directly to discredit the victim and trigger hatred against them: “That’s the problem with these self-righteous ignorants - they believe themselves to be preachers to the masses, the enlightened ones. They know better than you - they ARE better than you.” ([Critical Spectator, 2020](#)). Therefore, these attacks not only aim to discredit and intimidate individuals but also seek to manipulate public opinion and suppress specific political messages.

### ***Singapore Matters***

A third example of a political hate site that promotes the political views and policies of the ruling party is [Singapore Matters](#), another Facebook page. Singapore Matters, established in November 2014, has over 93,000 likes and 112,000 followers as of July 2023. Like the previous examples, some of the content published on this page fuels discontent and contributes to the creation of hatred towards those who want to hold public officials accountable. Hate sites such as Singapore Matters use hate content to curate a false impression that public sentiment is against those who raise questions of accountability.

In a post published by Singapore Matters on its Facebook page on 26 May 2022, the lawyers M Ravi and Violet Netto, were criticised for defending a Malaysian drug trafficker, Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, who was executed on 27 April 2022:

Waste of time and public resources. The two lawyers who acted for Malaysian drug trafficker Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam in a last-ditch attempt to halt his execution were ordered to pay \$20,000 in costs to the Attorney-General’s Chambers (AGC). Mr M. Ravi, who did most of the work, will bear 75 per cent of the costs, while Ms Violet Netto, who later took over as the lawyer on record, was held liable for 25 per cent ([Singapore Matters, 2022](#)).

The language used in the post – calling their effort a “waste of time and public resources” - is curated to incite hatred towards Ravi and Netto through a false impression that the popular opinion online is against them and that they do not enjoy support from the Singaporean public. Comments such as “He is called M Rubbish for a reason”, “They should pay more” and “Yes, that’s better to teach them some lessons” (Ibid.) portray both lawyers as a nuisance to Singapore society and encourage other pro-PAP netizens to harass them online. In an earlier post on the matter, the page accused M. Ravi of lying when he discerned Nagaenthran’s mental age to be below 18. It states that Ravi had only briefly met Nagaenthran, that Nagaenthran was previously a security guard, and that a psychiatrist has evaluated that he was not intellectually disabled. The comment section attracted audiences who showed support of the death

penalty and accused M. Ravi of being incapable as a lawyer or, in other comments, of using the case for his own personal fame ([Singapore Matters, 2021](#)). Such actions on the part of hate sites like Singapore Matters have the effect of discouraging other lawyers from challenging laws using the legal system. In addition, such posts become rallying points for pro-PAP and anti-opposition commentators to consolidate their online attacks against human rights activists.

Another example that shows how political hate sites act against those keeping the government accountable concerns the news editor PJ Thum. His case shows how Singapore Matters attempted to generate hatred against him by implying a fact he did not mention. Like the case of the two layers shown above, this strategy attempts to put the popular opinion against him. In 2019, the debate surrounding POFMA was active and garnered a great deal of input from experts. Several critics like “Senior Lecturer and Professor of Practice at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology [Donald Low who said that the introduction of POFMA will change the nature of public discourse and debate in Singapore](#)” ([kathleen, 2019](#)). Later, “[in an article on New Naratif co-authored by Dr Thum and freelance journalist Kristen Han](#), the duo wrote that differentiating between a statement of ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’ can be very difficult” (Ibid). Following their publication, Singapore Matters ([2019](#)) posted a photo of PJ Thum with the text: “LOL Thum finds it IMPOSSIBLE to include every fact about ANY issue”. In the photo, the text “we can conclude from his words that PJ Thum does not include every fact in his writings, and virtually everything he writes is misleading” was inserted in the photo (Ibid.), showing Singapore Matters’ efforts to generate hatred against its victims. In this case, its post states that PJ Thum’s writings are misleading because he does not include facts - something he did not say - thus trying to undermine his credibility based on a fact that is not true.

After this post was published, TOC remarked that “clearly, Singapore Matters themselves have misled their followers on what Dr Thum actually said. Their post proves Dr Thum’s point - that virtually any statement can be deemed as misleading. In this case, Singapore Matters failed to completely state what Dr Thum said which is that it is impossible to include every single fact about any issue, especially if you are writing to a word limit ([kathleen, 2019](#)).

### ***Gong Simi Singapore***

The fourth example of a political hate site is Gong Simi Singapore, a TikTok account ([@gongsimisg](#)), which translates to “what are you saying?”. This account is operative since July 2021 and, as of June 2023, it has posted over 200 videos, has over 9,100 followers, and has received nearly 271,000 likes. In terms of viewership, its videos range from a few hundred views to thousands of views. This account primarily posts short vides that target and mock the viewpoints of opposition MPs and other leaders of opposition groups. Its content often features hateful remarks and rhetoric in its messages, which is further amplified by users through their comments. Gong Simi utilises publicly available data and videos of individuals keeping PAP leaders and policies accountable to create posts presenting unrelated facts that convey the message that victims do not lead by example, thus making them look incompetent.

One of its videos ([@gongsimisg, 2023b](#)) criticises a comment by MP Leon Perera from the Workers Party [WP]. It shows Perera stating that he does not want a country with “flashy sound bites that smear our opponents that the media then viralises with big headlines. I don’t want my childer to grow in a post-truth society.” Immediately after, the video by Gong Simi says that, by saying that, Perera himself used a “flashy soundbite” to make his point, calling him a hypocrite. This tactic used by Gong Simi shows how the TikTok account uses the words of its victims against themselves to undermine their authority and delegitimise their comments. The video also shows his “boss” saying that “ownself, check ownself”. By doing this, the video accuses the victim of doing what he is complaining about and magnifies it in order to further ridicule the victim.

In another video (2023d), Gong Simi makes fun of Leong Mun Wai's (from the PSP) remark calling for a fairer parliament, saying that Singapore needs "both serious government and serious opposition". Gong Simi, however, pointed to mishaps in the parliament by Leong Mun Wai to imply that he was not a "serious" opposition. It used a song called "Happy Clown" as a background, implying that he was a joke. This attracted comments such as "LWM is act blur king" and "He's a total joke. I don't even dare to tell my overseas friend about this joker. So embarrassing." Like the previous example, this video mocks the victim by ignoring the point that the opposition politicians are making and instead choosing to use hate speech to ridicule them and also get others to join the bandwagon.

Gong Simi also produces videos attacking civil society actors. One example of this is Kirsten Han, a Singaporean journalist and a regular target of political hate sites (@gongsimisg, 2023c). The video claimed that she used flawed logic in suggesting that social background could contribute to crime, implying that she was ignorant. Another video (@gongsimisg, 2023e) attacked The Online Citizen for allegedly squandering public resources by making baseless accusations against the police. Gong Simi labelled TOC as a fake news website. This criticism stemmed from TOC's article covering an incident where police were seen reprimanding and taunting a woman for not wearing a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Gong Simi posted a video ridiculing human rights lawyer M. Ravi for his medical conditions (@gongsimisg, 2021), saying that he was Singapore's "most unsound lawyer" and pointed to his psychiatric conditions.

The aforementioned examples shed light on the operations of political hate sites in Singapore. Their actions demonstrate the existence of a coordinated agenda that aims at shielding the government from public calls for accountability. To do so, critics are attacked with tactics to suppress their voices and manipulate public opinion. The existence of these political hate sites results in a political environment that discourages free and open political discussion to express views that do not align with those of the PAP. Although tech companies have attempted to address this problem, their actions have had a limited positive impact, as the next section argues.

### **4c. Ineffective Tech Takedowns**

Given the magnitude of the problem that political hate sites represent in Singapore's political sphere, technology companies like Facebook (Meta) have taken some limited action against the IBs, trolls, and bots. Nonetheless, their actions to keep the spread of online hate content have been relatively ineffective, allowing political hate sites to keep attacking individuals and organisations who want to hold public officials accountable and call out policy blindspots.

Technology companies' responses to the threats posed by political hate sites were slow. For example, Facebook took down Fabrications of the PAP in 2020 ahead of the 2020 general election because of "inauthentic behaviour". Therefore, Facebook's actions arrived nine years after the page was created. Only after Facebook removed accounts impersonating candidates and elected officials, as well as other behaviours deemed to violate community guidelines, the news broke about the extent to which influence operations (IBs) have impacted the country's politics (Kok, 2020b). In June 2020, Facebook took down the "Fabrications About the PAP" (which by then has amassed 250,000 likes) page (Mahmud, 2020). The reasoning given was regarding "the violating behaviour of these accounts", rather than "the content posted from these pages" (Baharudin, 2020). The account of the admins of "Critical Spectator" was also removed (Daud, 2021) and the page was temporarily unpublished. Nevertheless, a newer iteration of the "Fabrications about the PAP" has been set up and continues to operate, while "Critical Spectator" returned a week after it got unpublished.

## ***Political Hate Sites: Ineffective Legal and Content Moderation Action***

In December 2021, Facebook suspended around 1,500 fake accounts as part of an effort to ban “cyber mercenaries” on the platform (Satter & Culliford, 2021). As part of this action, Facebook also informed its users who had been targeted by these groups. In Singapore, this included journalists Kirsten Han (2021b), Terry Xu, and Julie O’Connor (Berthelsen, 2022).

The reliance on tech giants to regulate their online space without the necessary legal, financial, and administrative resources is not sustainable. The aforementioned examples represent Facebook’s attempts to manage the information flow on its platform, particularly during the electoral cycles. However, Facebook has been inconsistent in its engagement with such efforts to moderate online content. In one of the interviews conducted by Asia Centre, PJ Thum believed that technology companies are hesitant to take action against the PAP’s interests due to their current partnerships and agreements with the PAP government and physical presence in Singapore (K111).

Additionally, the content moderation teams of such platforms often lack awareness of the political context and subtle messaging used in spreading hateful narratives, which hinders the effectiveness of their detection tools. Political orientation is not classified as hate speech (Meta, n.d.), which means that content attacking opposition parties, activists, and journalists is allowed on Facebook. This strategy is effective because algorithms are currently not sophisticated enough to detect hidden messages containing hate content, particularly if they are in infographics and memes (Vincent, 2020). Conversely, human moderators are often overwhelmed with more serious hate content and lack the time to check content published by pro-PAP IBs (Criddle, 2021). This creates an online environment which is conducive for pro-PAP IBs to produce hate content targeted at those who want to hold the PAP government accountable.

Governments have responded to social media platforms’ limited capacity to deal with this issue with the enactment of laws to moderate online content. The next section in this chapter provides some examples of these laws in Singapore (see Chapter 2), pointing out that state authorities can establish what content can be posted on social media with these laws.

### **4d. Online Political Hate Upturn**

The underlying problem shown in the previous sections is the lack of effective laws that compel government agencies, courts, and tech companies to address hate content and sites, including political hate content. Instead, vague laws allow the PAP-dominated government to regulate online content, particularly if it tries to hold public officials accountable. Meanwhile, in the absence of effective laws, political hate sites run rampant with minimal legal repercussions and the actions of tech companies to tackle this problem are ineffective. Hence, the sharp increase in political hate sites.

An examination of hate sites shows that their content and patterns of engagement can be subject to the laws discussed in Chapter 2. Specifically, the dissemination of hateful content that fosters irrational fear towards opposition politicians and critics, often based on race and gender, falls within the scope of the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) and the Broadcasting Act. The use of false information would warrant action and orders under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). Furthermore, the coordinated behaviour of spamming and employing online trolls violates the provisions on coordinated information operation campaigns outlined in POFMA.

An example highlighting the administration’s stance is the existence of the “Critical Spectator” page, operated by a foreign individual. This case demonstrates concerns that laws against foreign interference are not properly utilised. This is as the page, for one, is seen to comment on the 2020 General Election and use hateful rhetorics against opposition party candidates (Wong & Ang, 2020). This is considered illegal under the Paliamentary Elections Act. The lack of action against these cases emphasises the selective use of legislation when it comes to manipulating online content that aligns with their interests.

## ***Political Hate Sites: Ineffective Legal and Content Moderation Action***

---

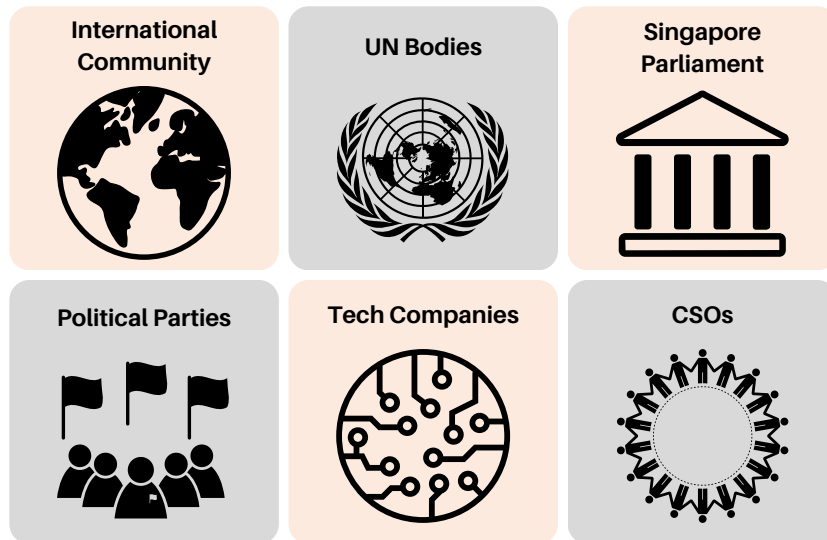
The failure to address these trends underscores the need to question the consistent application of legislation concerning the manipulation of online content. It highlights a concerning bias in favour of content that aligns with the administration's preferences, raising concerns about the preservation of freedom of expression, fairness, and impartiality in the online sphere.

In the absence of laws that compel technology companies to remove hate content and accounts, in the interim, they are failing to take action against political hate speech. Meanwhile, in the narrow allowable legal space, those who want to hold the PAP-dominated government accountable are maliciously attacked with serious impacts on their mental well-being. In addition to feeling unsafe, some informants who participated in this study flagged the mental health burden of being constantly exposed to online hate content simply because they want to hold public officials accountable and call out policy blindspots (K116; 9). These cases are especially noticeable among female journalists and activists who face gender-based harassment online. Kirsten Han (K118) noted the prominence of sexist comments against female journalists over substantial debates online. She also explained her experience of being personally harassed in one of her online posts, being called a "simple-minded girl" who just "seeks attention" (Han, 2016). Comments against her also included rape and death threats.

The rise of political hate sites in Singapore corresponds to the efforts to use the law to counter the calls online for accountability of public officials and policies by framing them via laws as illegal. Political hate sites, primarily through IBs, generate content that misleads the public or is directly false with the aim of discrediting those who ask for accountability while strengthening the image of the one-party dominated government. The absence of effective laws compelling government agencies and technology companies to address hate content, including political hate sites, aggravates the problem. Vague legal provisions allow the government to regulate online content and avoid accountability. As a result, political hate sites thrive without facing significant legal consequences. Meanwhile, the solutions provided by tech companies to fight these sites prove ineffective.

## 5. Recommendations

The lack of legal protection from hate sites and internet brigades for people to express their political views online in Singapore and the ineffective actions by technology companies is an issue that needs attention. Research for this report has shown that even in the narrow allowable legal space, dissonant voices are experiencing increasing incidents of hate speech and harassment. To address these issues, this chapter presents a set of recommendations for the international community, UN bodies, the Singapore Parliament, political parties, tech companies, CSOs and INGOs to improve internet freedoms in the country.



### The international community should:

- Increase its efforts to call out cases of hate speech in Singapore by issuing statements when appropriate.
- Utilise diplomatic channels to pass on concerns and recommendations by international and civil society stakeholders to the Singaporean government.
- Use human rights mechanisms such as the UPR, SRs and OHCHR working groups to engage with the Singapore government to persuade it to address human rights violations in the online sphere, as recommended by member states in their UPR submissions.
- Engage with technology companies to ensure their moderation policies are transparent and effective to either remove or block harmful content.

### UN bodies should:

- Engage member states, including Singapore, through various human rights mechanisms such as UPR, SRs and OHCHR working groups.
- Engage with international and civil society stakeholders to collect reports and issue statements on hate speech and calls to violence against those who express views to hold Singapore's public officials accountable.
- Dialogue with technology companies so they reveal the resources and approach taken to moderate content on their platforms.

### The Singapore Parliament should:

- Listen proactively to the recommendations and concerns of the international community and engage with relevant stakeholders to address the political hate content on the internet.
- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to ensure that a range of civil and political rights are ensured for all citizens and organisations.

- Extend a standing invitation and engage in visits by independent human rights experts and bodies such as the UHRC mandate holders to assist in the evaluation of existing norms and the creation of new ones that promote the enjoyment of human rights in the country.
- Commit itself to the people of Singapore and the international community to revise and amend rights-restricting laws on freedom of expression so they are aligned with international standards.
- Pass laws – avoiding vague language and ambiguities – on the regulation of online hate content so that relevant government agencies and technology companies are compelled to take action against the perpetrators of political hate sites.
- Pass anti-discrimination and anti-hate speech laws to regulate IBs and the perpetrators of ‘hate sites’.
- Establish an independent National Human Rights Institution that oversees allegations of harassment, prosecution and other forms of human rights violation as well as the abuse of laws.
- Develop self-regulatory mechanisms for media accountability.

### Political Parties should:

- Call out the creation and financing of online hate sites and object to politically motivated restrictions on freedom of expression.
- Articulate in their party manifesto their position on repealing and amending the legal provisions that pose limitations to freedom of expression.
- Support the use of international mechanisms, especially UN bodies, to follow international standards to address issues of hate speech and the restrictions of internet freedoms.
- Engage with technology companies to pass on their political party experiences and concerns about hate sites so that remedial actions can be taken.

### Technology Companies should:

- Adopt Asia Centre’s definition of *hate speech*, which includes *political hate speech*.
- Outline and publish policies on blocking and removal of hate content which are in line with international principles.
- Establish detection mechanisms for inauthentic and coordinated behaviour on their platform for political purposes.
- Study coordinated community guidelines violation reportings by IBs to take down content and disable accounts of valid criticisms.
- Publish detailed transparency reports enumerating all blocking and removal requests by the government authorities
- Dialogue with the international community, Singapore’s political parties, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to gather their feedback on the measures technology companies should take to address hate speech on their platforms

### CSOs and INGOs should:

- Continue to document harassment by hate sites and political prosecution by the PAP administration and report them nationally, regionally and internationally.
- Engage with social media platforms asking them to strengthen hate speech detection algorithms taking into account the local context unique to Singapore.
- Set up a digital rights working group among CSOs to engage, strategise and advocate for internet freedoms and respond to hate speech against civil society and other actors.



## 6. Conclusion

In a message during the International Day for Countering Hate Speech ([UN, 2023](#)), on 18 June 2023, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, flagged hate speech as an old and pressing problem across societies that the popularisation of the internet and, more specifically, social media platforms, have magnified.

Guterres noted that hate speech heavily relies on sparking fear and divisions to obtain political gains. In doing so, the rights of vulnerable minority groups, like gender and sexual minorities, members of ethno-religious communities, or political dissenting voices are oppressed. Misguided responses to hate speech that include blanket bans and internet shutdowns, risk silencing those best positioned to counter hateful narratives, such as human rights defenders and journalists. In this context, Guterres highlighted the importance of conducting more research to increase awareness of the problem that hate speech represents, promoting inclusion as a means to make societies more democratic, and making more joint efforts among stakeholders to identify the causes and sources of hate speech, as well as new responses to such a threat to ensure that human rights are respected for all.

In *Political Hate Sites in Singapore: Flourishing Without Repercussions*, Asia Centre shows that in Singapore, online hate speech has flourished without repercussions. What is informally known as Internet Brigades operate unregulated online hate sites that hurl hate at those who want to hold public officials accountable and question the relevance of certain policies. The motivation behind such calls for accountability is to serve as checks and balances on a government that has been dominated by one single party with a 2/3 majority for nearly 60 years. Given the limited opportunities for independent accountability in Singapore, the internet has become an important platform.

In the meantime, the actions by Internet Brigades are being met with strategic inaction against these sites, thus tacitly endorsing them. Without adequate laws that will compel relevant government agencies, internet service providers and technology companies to monitor, moderate, take down or block such hate content the online harassment continues unabated. As a result, those who call out public officials and policy lapses are left unprotected and subjected to online intimidation and harm.

Through this report, Asia Centre speaks to some of the measures pointed out by the UN's Secretary General Guterres to address hate speech. First, with the publication of this evidence-based baseline study, Asia Centre raises awareness of online political hate speech as a problem in Singapore.

Second, the findings of this study will be advantageous for a range of actors such as UN member states, UN bodies, political parties, technology companies and civil society organisations. They can use the findings to closely monitor, document, and call out cases of political hate speech and promote a safer online environment from harassment.

Third, the findings of this study validate Guterres' statement regarding the need for joint efforts in addressing political hate speech. In light of this, the Singaporean Parliament should deliberate on the laws that regulate online freedoms so they align with international standards. Likewise, technology companies should develop new strategies to combat political hate speech in their platforms.

It is only through multi-stakeholder efforts involving international, regional and national actors from different backgrounds that hate speech, also in the online sphere, can be confronted. Unless collective action is taken, the voices of those who want to hold public officials accountable and call policy blind spots for the purposes of ensuring checks and balances will be harassed, stigmatised, and suppressed into silence.

---

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alkhatib, Shaffiq (2020) 'Lawyer M. Ravi charged with criminal defamation', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/lawyer-m-ravi-charged-with-criminal-defamation>.

Andrejevic, Mark (2004) 'The Work of Watching One Another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance', *Surveillance & Society* 2 (4), DOI:10.24908/ss.v2i4.3359.

Asia Centre (2023a) *Internet Freedoms in Malaysia: Regulating Online Discourse on Race, Religion, and Royalty*, Bangkok: Asia Centre.

Asia Centre (2023b) *State-Sponsored Online Disinformation: Impact on Electoral Integrity in Thailand*, Bangkok: Asia Centre.

Asia Sentinel (2023) 'Asia Sentinel answer to Singapore government demand for correction', Asia Sentinel, at: <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/asia-sentinel-answer-to-singapore>.

Baharudin, Hariz (2018) 'More than 20,000 Wireless@SG hot spots currently in Singapore: IMDA', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-than-20000-wireless-hot-spots-now-in-singapore-imda>.

Baharudin, Hariz (2020) 'Singapore GE2020: Facebook removes another pro-PAP page for violating its policies', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/singapore-ge2020-facebook-removes-another-pro-pap-page-for-violating-its-policies>.

Banerjee, Indrajit and Stephen Logan (2008) 'Singapore' in *Asian Communication Handbook 2008* (Singapore: Asia Media Information and Communication Centre).

BBC (2011) 'Singapore opposition make "landmark" election gains', BBC, at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13313695>.

BBC (2019) 'Outcry as Google bans political advertising in Singapore as election looms', BBC, at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50668633>.

Berthelsen, John (2022) 'Australian woman's fight to prove Singapore fraud', Asia Sentinel, at: <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/australian-woman-fight-prove-singapore-fraud>.

Berthelsen, John (2023) 'Singapore kills a chicken to scare the monkeys', Asia Sentinel, at: <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/singapore-kills-chicken-scare-monkeys>.

Cheng, Ian (2021) 'Court, not minister, makes final decision under POFMA on whether statement is true or false: AGC', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/courts-determine-truth-statements-fact-pofma-minister-agc-2232666>.

Chia, Osmond (2021) 'S'pore top in broadband speed in world digital quality of life index, but slips in mobile speed', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/spore-top-in-broadband-speed-in-world-digital-quality-of-life-index-but-slips-in>.

---

Choo, Daryl (2021) 'Rapper Subhas Nair charged with 4 counts of attempting to promote ill-will between religious, racial groups', Today Online, at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/rapper-subhas-nair-charged-4-counts-attempting-promote-ill-will-between-religious-racial>.

Chua, Louis (2022) 'Budget 2022 — speech by Louis Chua', Worker's Party, at: <https://www.wp.sg/budget-2022-speech-by-louis-chua>.

CIVICUS (2020) 'Singapore: Drop police report against independent media outlet New Naratif', CIVICUS, at: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/4669-singapore-drop-police-report-against-independent-media-outlet-new-naratif>.

CMS Law-Now (2023) 'Singapore: Introduction of Online Criminal Harms Bill in Parliament', CMS Law-Now, at: <https://cms-lawnow.com/en/ealerts/2023/05/singapore-introduction-of-online-criminal-harms-bill-in-parliament>.

Coconuts Singapore (2018) 'Why The Online Citizen is being investigated for "criminal defamation"', Coconuts Singapore, at: <https://coconuts.co/singapore/news/online-citizen-investigated-criminal-defamation>.

Committee to Protect Journalists (n.d.) 'Ai Takagi', Committee to Protect Journalists, at: <https://cpj.org/data/people/ai-takagi>.

Committee to Protect Journalists (2016) 'Singapore court sentences online editor for sedition', Committee to Protect Journalists, at: <https://cpj.org/2016/03/singapore-court-sentences-online-editor-for-sediti>.

Criddle, Cristina (2021) 'Facebook moderator: "Every day was a nightmare"', BBC, at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57088382>.

Daley, Farah (2019) 'Police investigating duo who wore anti-death penalty T-shirts at Yellow Ribbon Prison Run', STOMP, at: <https://stomp.straitstimes.com/singapore-seen/police-investigating-duo-who-wore-anti-death-penalty-t-shirts-at-yellow-ribbon-prison>.

Daud, Sulaiman (2019) 'IMDA issues take-down notice to S'porean activists who re-uploaded Preetiplus-Subhas rap video', Mothership.sg, at: <https://mothership.sg/2019/08/imda-take-down-rap-video>.

Daud, Suleiman (2021) 'PAP GE 2020 candidate says people "misunderstood" why he shared unsubstantiated Fabrications About PAP post about Sarah Bagharib & WP', Mothership, at: <https://mothership.sg/2021/06/shamsul-kamar-sarah-bagharib>.

EIU (2023) Democracy Index 2022: Frontline Democracy and the Battle for Ukraine, Economist Intelligence Unit.

Elections Department Singapore (n.d.) 'Our Journey', Elections Department Singapore, at: [https://www.eld.gov.sg/our\\_journey.html](https://www.eld.gov.sg/our_journey.html).

Elections Department Singapore (2011a) 'Press Release: Cooling-Off Day and Polling Day', Elections Department Singapore, at: <https://www.eld.gov.sg/press/2011/2011-05-04%20-%20Cooling-off%20Day%20and%20Polling%20Day.pdf>.

Elections Department Singapore (2011b) 'Press Release: Cooling-Off Day and Polling Day', Elections Department Singapore, at: <https://www.eld.gov.sg/press/2011/Press%20release%20-%20Cooling%20Off%20day%20and%20Polling%20day.pdf>.

---

Elections Department Singapore (2015) 'Press Release: Cooling-Off Day and Polling Day – General Election 2015', Elections Department Singapore, at: <https://www.eld.gov.sg/press/2015/Press%20Release%20on%20Cooling-off%20Day%20and%20Polling%20Day.pdf>.

Elections Department Singapore (2020) 'Press Release: Cooling-Off Day and Polling Day – General Election 2020', Elections Department Singapore, at: [https://www.eld.gov.sg/press/2020/Press\\_Release\\_on\\_Cooling-Off\\_Day\\_and\\_Polling\\_Day\\_General\\_Election\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eld.gov.sg/press/2020/Press_Release_on_Cooling-Off_Day_and_Polling_Day_General_Election_2020.pdf).

Fabrications About the PAP (2022) Facebook Post on 23 April, at: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02T8XVYbJ52Ly9WtetH9QJMvXFceapfZ3cXVpw8X4S47baLaSxflQyorskqhtYjLgLI&id=104144511361804](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02T8XVYbJ52Ly9WtetH9QJMvXFceapfZ3cXVpw8X4S47baLaSxflQyorskqhtYjLgLI&id=104144511361804).

Factually (2020) 'Corrections and clarifications regarding falsehoods and misleading statements by Mr Thum Ping Tjin', Factually, at: <https://www.gov.sg/article/corrections-and-clarifications-regarding-falsehoods-and-misleading-statements-by-mr-thum-ping-tjin>.

Factually (2022) 'Corrections regarding article about Minister for Law and Home Affairs K Shanmugam's video interview with Vanakkam Malaysia', Factually, at: <https://www.gov.sg/article/factually220422>.

Factually (2023) 'Corrections regarding false statements of fact in Asia Sentinel's article "Singapore kills a Chicken to Scare the Monkeys" published on 24 May', Factually, at: <https://www.gov.sg/article/factually260523>.

Frater, Patrick (2021) 'Singapore Prime Minister Wins Landmark Defamation Case About Facebook Link', Variety, at: <https://variety.com/2021/digital/asia/singapore-prime-minister-wins-defamation-case-about-facebook-link-1234936993>.

Freedom House (2022) 'Freedom on the Net 2022: Singapore', at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore/freedom-net/2022>.

Gateway Law (n.d.) 'Individual Licensing of Online News Sites: The Media Development Authority's Announcement', Gateway Law, at: [https://www.gateway-law.com/newsletter/article\\_4.pdf](https://www.gateway-law.com/newsletter/article_4.pdf).

Goh Yan Han (2023) 'Pofma correction order issued to Asia Sentinel over false claims', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/asia-sentinel-issued-pofma-correction-order-over-false-claims>.

@gongsimisg (2021) TikTok post on 8 December, <https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7039143179060251906>.

@gongsimisg (2023a) TikTok post on 2 March, <https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7205788127313595655>.

@gongsimisg (2023b) TikTok post on 20 April, <https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7223938460631993602>.

@gongsimisg (2023c) TikTok post on 8 May, <https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7230716223175150850>.

@gongsimisg (2023d) TikTok post on 20 May, <https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7231330903004696817>.

---

@gongsimisg (2023e) TikTok post on 24 May,  
<https://www.tiktok.com/@gongsimisg/video/7236665948655160577>.

GovTech Singapore (2021) 'History of Internet in Singapore – From Niche Toy to Must-Have Essential', GovTech Singapore, at: <https://www.tech.gov.sg/media/technews/history-of-the-internet>.

Han, Kirsten (2014) 'Singapore: Independent media making a mark despite restrictions', Index of Censorship, at: <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/04/singapore-independent-media-internet>.

Han, Kirsten (2016) 'Putting me in my place: Sexism, misogyny and trolls', Medium, at: <https://medium.com/@kixes/putting-me-in-my-place-sexism-misogyny-and-trolls-912910cb1715>.

Han, Kirsten (2021a) 'A response to claims made about me during the FICA debate', We, The Citizens, at: <https://www.wethecitizens.net/a-response-to-claims-made-about-me-during-the-fica-debate>.

Han, Kirsten (2021b) Twitter Post on 17 December, at: <https://twitter.com/kixes/status/1471676913097707522>.

Han Shih, Toh (2022) 'K Shanmugam says he may step down as Singapore's Minister of Law and Home Affairs', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/k-shanmugam-says-he-may-step-down-as-singapores-minister-of-law-and-home-affairs>.

Human Rights Watch (2008) 'Singapore: End Efforts to Silence Opposition', Human Rights Watch, at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/10/17/singapore-end-efforts-silence-opposition>.

Human Rights Watch (2017) "'Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys": Suppression of Free Expression and Assembly in Singapore', Human Rights Watch, at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/12/kill-chicken-scare-monkeys/suppression-free-expression-and-assembly-singapore>.

ICCPR HRC (2011) 'CCPR/C/GC/34 General comment No. 34', ICCPR, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/GC34.pdf>.

IMDA (2019) 'Registration of new website to guard against foreign influence on Singapore politics', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/news-and-events/Media-Room/archived/mda/Media-Releases/2013/registration-of-new-website-to-guard-against-foreign-influence-on-singapore-politics>.

IMDA (2021a) 'IMDA Media Statement on The Online Citizen Pte Ltd', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/Content-and-News/Press-Releases-and-Speeches/Press-Releases/2021/IMDA-Media-Statement-on-The-Online-Citizen-Pte-Ltd>.

IMDA (2021b) 'Cancellation of The Online Citizen Pte Ltd Class Licence', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/Content-and-News/Press-Releases-and-Speeches/Press-Releases/2021/Cancellation-of-The-Online-Citizen-Pte-Ltd-Class-Licence>.

IMDA (2022a) 'Wireless@SG', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/programme-listing/Wireless-At-SG>.

IMDA (2022b) 'Telecommunications', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/infocomm-media-landscape/research-and-statistics/telecommunications>.

IMDA (2022c) 'Political Parties Registered in Singapore', IMDA, at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/regulations-and-licensing-listing/Political-Parties-Registered-in-Singapore>.

---

International Commission of Jurists (2021) 'Singapore: Civil defamation ruling against blogger Leong Sze Hian further shrinks the space for freedom of expression online', ICJ, at: <https://www.icj.org/singapore-civil-defamation-ruling-against-blogger-leong-sze-hian-further-shrinks-the-space-for-freedom-of-expression-online>.

International Telecommunication Union (2022) 'Global Cybersecurity Index 2020', ITU, at: [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2021-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2021-PDF-E.pdf).

Jaipragas, Bhavan (2021) 'Singapore activist Roy Ngerng crowdfunds US\$108,000 to pay defamation damages to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong', South China Morning Post, at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3129814/singapore-activist-roy-ngerng-crowdfunds-us108000-pay-defamation>.

Jiow, Hee Jhee and Sofia Morales (2015) 'Lateral Surveillance in Singapore', Surveillance & Society 13 (3/4), DOI:10.24908/ss.v13i3/4.5320.

kathleen (2019) 'FB page proves historian PJ Thum's point on criticism of fake news bill by misquoting him', The Online Citizen, at: <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2019/04/12/fb-page-proves-historian-pj-thums-point-on-criticism-of-fake-news-bill-by-misquoting-him>.

Kay, David, Michel Frost and Joseph Cannataci (2016) 'AL SGP 5/2016', OHCHR, at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=3230>.

Koh, Lay Tin (n.d.) 'Election Advertising Regulations', Singapore Infopedia, at: [https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_548\\_2004-12-18.html](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_548_2004-12-18.html).

Kok Yufeng (2020a) 'Activist Jolovan Wham apologises to Josephine Teo for false corruption claims over Covid-19 care facilities; both men issued legal letters have apologised', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/activist-jolovan-wham-apologises-to-josephine-teo-for-false-corruption-claims-both-men>.

Kok Yufeng (2020b) 'Facebook takes action against "inauthentic" accounts ahead of Singapore general election', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/facebook-takes-action-against-inauthentic-accounts-ahead-of-general-election>.

Kok Yufeng (2020c) 'Permanent secretaries appointed to exercise Pofma powers in place of ministers during election period', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/permanent-secretaries-appointed-to-exercise-pofma-powers-in-place-of-ministers-during>.

Koswanage, Niluksi and Olivia Poh (2022) 'Singapore Undecided on Succession Timeline for Heir to PM Lee', Bloomberg, at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-16/singapore-undecided-on-succession-timeline-for-heir-to-pm-lee>.

Kurohi, Rei (2019) 'PM Lee Hsien Loong sues TOC editor Terry Xu over allegedly defamatory online article and Facebook post', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pm-lee-sues-toc-editor-terry-xu-for-allegedly-defamatory-online-article>.

Kurohi, Rei (2020) 'Police investigating New Naratif for allegedly publishing illegal paid election ads on Facebook', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/police-investigating-new-naratif-for-allegedly-publishing-illegal-paid-election>.

---

Kurohi, Rei (2021) 'The Online Citizen taken offline, ahead of deadline set by IMDA after failure to declare funding', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/the-online-citizen-goes-dark-ahead-of-deadline-set-by-imda>.

Kurohi, Rei (2021) 'Blogger Leong Sze Hian pays PM Lee \$262k for defamation after crowdfunding effort', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/blogger-leong-sze-hian-pays-pm-lee-262k-for-defamation-using-crowdfunding>.

Kurohi, Rei and Dominic Low (2022) 'Social media platforms to remove harmful content, add safeguards under S'pore's proposed rules', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/tech-news/social-media-platforms-to-remove-harmful-content-add-safeguards-for-young-under-spores-internet-rules>.

Kluver, Randolph (2010) 'Political Culture and Information Technology in the 2001 Singapore General Election', Political Communication 21(4): 435-458.

Lam, Lydia (2019) 'Leong Sze Hian using defamation suit to wage public campaign to gain sympathy and support, says PM Lee', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/leong-sze-hian-using-defamation-suit-wage-public-campaign-gain-sympathy-and-support-says-pm-lee-903311>.

Lam, Lydia (2021) 'The Online Citizen's Terry Xu and writer convicted of criminal defamation over article calling Cabinet corrupt', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/online-citizen-toc-terry-xu-editor-writer-criminal-defamation-2308961>.

Lam, Lydia (2022) 'Rapper Subhas Nair set to plead guilty to attempting to promote ill will over religion, race', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/rapper-subhas-nair-set-plead-guilty-attempting-promote-ill-will-over-religion-race-2512616>.

Lam, Lydia (2023) 'Rapper Subhas Nair testifies in his trial for attempting to promote ill will among racial, religious groups', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/local-rapper-subhas-nair-takes-stand-defence-trial-ill-will-racial-religious-social-media-preetipls-3362406>.

Lay, Belmont (2020) 'S'pore govt orders blocking of M'sia-based Lawyers for Liberty's website', Mothership.sg, at: <https://mothership.sg/2020/01/lawyers-for-liberty-website-blocked-singapore>.

Lee, Vernon (2020) 'POFMA order issued to Facebook pages of SDP, PV and TOC over false 10m population statement', Yahoo! News, at: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/pofma-order-issued-to-sdp-and-pv-over-false-10-m-population-statement-on-their-facebook-pages-154241798.html>.

Lek, Andy et al. (2023) 'Singapore: Online Criminal Harms Bill introduced in Parliament', Global Compliance News, at: [https://www.globalcompliancencnews.com/2023/06/03/https-insightplus-bakermckenzie-com-bm-technology-media-telecommunications\\_1-singapore-online-criminal-harms-bill-introduced-in-parliament\\_05302023](https://www.globalcompliancencnews.com/2023/06/03/https-insightplus-bakermckenzie-com-bm-technology-media-telecommunications_1-singapore-online-criminal-harms-bill-introduced-in-parliament_05302023).

Ligabo, Ambeyi, Freimut Duve and Eduardo Bertoni (2022) 'International Mechanisms for Promoting Freedom of Expression: Joint Declaration by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression', Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/f/39838.pdf>.

Lim, Leonard (2011) 'Netizens set up Facebook page to defend PAP', The Straits Times, at: [https://news.smu.edu.sg/sites/news.smu.edu.sg/files/wwwsmu/news\\_room/smu\\_in\\_the\\_news/2011/sources/ST\\_20110916\\_3.pdf](https://news.smu.edu.sg/sites/news.smu.edu.sg/files/wwwsmu/news_room/smu_in_the_news/2011/sources/ST_20110916_3.pdf).

---

Lim, Min Zhang (2021) 'Thum Ping Tjin warned over unauthorised paid ads by New Naratif during GE2020', The Strait Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/thum-ping-tjin-warned-over-unauthorised-paid-ads-by-new-naratif-during-ge2020>.

Lin, Cheryl (2022) 'Government to provide SPH Media Trust with up to S\$900m in funding over next 5 years', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/government-funding-sph-media-trust-900m-editorial-independence-2499221>.

Lum, Selina (2021a) 'AGC drops criminal defamation charge against lawyer M. Ravi, issues conditional warning', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/agc-drops-criminal-defamation-charge-against-lawyer-m-ravi-issues-conditional>.

Lum, Selina (2021b) 'High Court awards PM Lee \$210,000 in damages in defamation suits against TOC editor Terry Xu and article author', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/high-court-awards-pm-lee-210000-in-damages-in-defamation-suits-against-toc>.

Mahmud, Aqil Haziq (2020) 'Facebook removes Fabrications About The PAP admin accounts for violating policies', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/facebook-removes-fabrications-about-the-pap-accounts-663871>.

MarketScreener (2023) 'Singapore Telecommunications Limited (Z74)', MarketScreener, at: <https://www.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/SINGAPORE-TELECOMMUNICATI-6491140>.

Mahmud, Aqil Hazid and See Kit Tang (2019) "'Very Onerous' Process to Challenge Order on Content Deemed as Online Falsehood: Sylvia Lim", Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/online-falsehoods-bill-workers-party-onerous-appeal-process11515136>.

MHA (2021) 'Summary Factsheet on the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act', Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summary-factsheet-on-fica.pdf>.

MHA (2023) 'Introduction of the Online Criminal Harms Bill', Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/introduction-of-the-online-criminal-harms-bill>.

New Naratif (n.d.) 'About', New Naratif, at: <https://newnaratif.com/about-us>.

OHCHR (n.d.) 'Ratification Status by Country: Singapore', OHCHR, at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=157&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=157&Lang=EN).

OHCHR (n.d.) 'Country visits of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council since 1998: Singapore', OHCHR, at: <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?visitType=all&country=SGP&Lang=en>.

OHCHR (2019) 'Freedom of Expression and Elections in the Digital Age', OHCHR, at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Opinion/ElectionsReportDigitalAge.pdf>.

OHCHR (2022) 'Standing Invitations', OHCHR, at: <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/Home.aspx?lang=En>.

Palatino, Mong (2021) 'Singapore's The Online Citizen news website stops operating after government suspends its license', Global Voices, at: <https://globalvoices.org/2021/09/18/singapores-the-online-citizen-news-website-stops-operating-after-government-suspends-its-license>.



---

PAPBrigade (2012) 'About', PAP Internet Brigade, at: <https://papbrigade.tumblr.com/about>.

Personal Data Protection Commission (2021) 'PDPA Overview', Personal Data Protection Commission, <https://www.pdpc.gov.sg/Overview-of-PDPA/The-Legislation/Personal-Data-Protection-Act>.

PKWA Law (n.d.) 'What is the Protection from Harassment Act [POHA]?', PKWA Law, at: <https://pkwalaw.com/protection-from-harassment-act>.

POFMA'ed (2022) 'POFMA'ed Dataset', POFMA'ed, at: <http://pofmaed.com/data>.

POFMA Office (2019) 'Code of Practice for Transparency of Online Political Advertisements', POFMA Office, at: <https://www.pofmaoffice.gov.sg/documents/Political%20Advertisements%20Code%20and%20Annex.pdf>.

POFMA Office (2022) 'POFMA Action Taken Up To 31 December 2022', POFMA Office, at: <https://www.pofmaoffice.gov.sg/files/Tabulation-of-POFMA-cases-and-actions.pdf>.

POFMA Office (2023) 'List of Prescribed Intermediaries', POFMA Office, at: <https://www.pofmaoffice.gov.sg/files/list-of-prescribed-intermediaries-7Mar2023.pdf>.

Portmann, Kai (2011) A Buzz in Cyberspace, But No Net-Revolution: The Role of the Internet in Singapore's 2011 Election (Berlin: fesmedia Asia).

Privacy International (2015) 'The Right to Privacy in Singapore: Universal Periodic Review Stakeholder Report: 24th Session, Singapore', Privacy International, at: [https://privacyinternational.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Singapore\\_UPR\\_PI\\_submission\\_FINAL.pdf](https://privacyinternational.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Singapore_UPR_PI_submission_FINAL.pdf).

Rifhan (2023) 'Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill: Postal voting, and revised election advertising law among proposed amendments', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/presidential-and-parliamentary-elections-amendment-bill-postal-voting-and-revised-election-advertising-law-among-proposed-amendments>.

Romero, Anna Maria (2021) 'Word Wars: Writer Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh blocks Critical Spectator after lies, personal attacks', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/word-wars-writer-sudhir-thomas-vadaketh-blocks-critical-spectator-after-lies-personal-attacks>.

RSF (2016) 'RSF calls for end to harassment of The Online Citizen', RSF, at: <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-calls-end-harassment-online-citizen>.

RSF (2018) 'The Online Citizen hounded by Singapore police', RSF, at: <https://rsf.org/en/online-citizen-hounded-singapore-police>.

RSF (2022) 'Index', RSF, at: <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

Satter, Raphael and Elizabeth Culliford (2021) 'Facebook exposes mercenary spy firms that targeted 50,000 people', Reuters, at: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/facebook-exposes-mercenary-spy-firms-that-targeted-48000-people-2021-12-16>.

Schuldt, Lasse (2021) 'In Singapore's war on fake news, the Constitution is not an obstacle', Verfassungsblog: On Matters Constitutional, at: <https://verfassungsblog.de/fake-news-obstacle>.

---

SDP (2022) 'SDP appeals to High Court to set aside POFMA Correction Direction on population policy', SDP, at: <https://yoursdp.org/2022/03/29/sdp-appeals-to-high-court-to-set-aside-pofma-correction-direction-on-population-policy>.

Seow, Joanna (2018) 'Ministry of Finance pays for Instagram 'influencers' to promote Budget 2018', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mof-pays-for-instagram-influencers-to-promote-budget-2018>.

Sholihyn, Ilyas (2020) 'Weeks after removal, political commentary Facebook page Critical Spectator returns', Asia One, at: <https://www.asiaone.com/digital/weeks-after-removal-political-commentary-facebook-page-critical-spectator-returns>.

Shunmuganathan, Rubaashini (2019) 'New politician on the block gets swarmed by IBs on CPF post', The Online Citizen, at: <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2019/02/27/new-politician-on-the-block-gets-swarmed-by-ibs-on-cpf-post/?amp>.

SGHardTruth (2011) 'Netizens set up Facebook page to defend PAP', SGHardTruth, at: <https://sghardtruth.wordpress.com/2011/09/16/netizens-set-up-facebook-page-to-defend-pap>.

Sim, Cameron (2011) 'The Singapore Chill: Political Defamation and the Normalization of a Statist Rule of Law', Washington International Law Journal 30(2): 319-353, <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1562&context=wilj>.

Singapore High Court (2005) 'Chee Siok Chin and Others v Minister for Home Affairs and Another [2005] SGHC 216', Commonwealth Legal Information Institute, at: <http://www.commonlii.org/sg/cases/SGHC/2005/216.pdf>.

Singapore Internet Watch (2022) 'Singapore Blocklist', GitHub, at: <https://github.com/Singapore-Internet-Watch/singapore-blocklist/blob/main/blocklist.csv>.

Singapore Law Watch (n.d.) 'Ch. 21 Economic Torts', Singapore Law Watch, at: <https://www.singaporelawwatch.sg/Headlines/ch-21-economic-torts>.

Singapore Legal Advice (2020) 'Laws and Penalties for Doxxing in Singapore', Singapore Legal Advice, at: <https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/laws-penalties-doxxing-singapore-examples>.

Singapore Matters (2019) Facebook Post on 10 April, at: [https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeMatters/photos/a.710662802353449/2128511897235192/?type=3&ref=embed\\_post](https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeMatters/photos/a.710662802353449/2128511897235192/?type=3&ref=embed_post).

Singapore Matters (2021) Facebook Post on 9 November, at: <https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeMatters/posts/pfbid0sdWidtNPacdqNVDFKyPh4s3cP2VLdConNkv rzUYWv6mVx7kGDg3MwfeRU8QS1hWL>.

Singapore Matters (2022) Facebook Post on 26 May, at: <https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeMatters/posts/pfbid02m1bX6SkamiF4AX6QoTE8GsLR86iRaBs12D6 ZG1QGaBuunv3J6GDBs9TEioLJq5ZhI>.

Singapore Police Force (2016) 'Cooling-off Day Breaches', Singapore Police Force, at: [https://www.police.gov.sg/Media-Room/News/20160601\\_COOLING-OFF-DAY-BREACHES](https://www.police.gov.sg/Media-Room/News/20160601_COOLING-OFF-DAY-BREACHES).

Singh, Gurdip (2021) 'Singapore police investigate another hate crime against Indian family', The Print, at: <https://www.theprint.in/world/singapore-police-investigate-another-hate-crime-against-indian-family/657773>.

---

Sinpeng, Aim et al. (2021) Facebook: Regulating Hate Speech in the Asia Pacific, Dept. Media and Communications, The University of Sydney and The School of Political Science and International Studies, The University of Queensland, [https://r2pasiapacific.org/files/7099/2021\\_Facebook\\_hate\\_speech\\_Asia\\_report.pdf](https://r2pasiapacific.org/files/7099/2021_Facebook_hate_speech_Asia_report.pdf).

Singtel (2021) 'Investor Factsheet March 2021', Singtel, at: <https://www.singtel.com/content/dam/singtel/investorRelations/factsheetsAndPresentation/2021/H2FY21-Factsheet.pdf>.

Smart Nation Singapore (2018) 'Launch of Digital Government Blueprint - "A Singapore Government that is Digital to the Core, and Serves with Heart"', Smart Nation Singapore, at: <https://www.smartnation.gov.sg/media-hub/press-releases/launch-of-digital-government-blueprint>.

Soon, Carol (2020) 'IPS Survey on Internet and Media Use during GE2020: Digital and Generational Divides', Institute of Policy Studies, at: [https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/presentation-by-dr-carol-soon\\_ips-online-forum-on-internet-and-media-use-in-ge2020.pdf](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/presentation-by-dr-carol-soon_ips-online-forum-on-internet-and-media-use-in-ge2020.pdf).

Starhub (2020) 'Shareholding Information', Starhub, at: [https://ir.starhub.com/newsroom/20200522\\_165342\\_CC3\\_Y7KYUQY7LC2SICY3.4.pdf](https://ir.starhub.com/newsroom/20200522_165342_CC3_Y7KYUQY7LC2SICY3.4.pdf).

Statista (2022) 'Share of the mobile revenue market in Singapore as of 2019, by operator', Statista, at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1007915/singapore-mobile-revenue-market-share>.

Stolarchuk, Jewel (2019) 'Pro-PAP fanpage slammed for exposing WP supporter's young child who allegedly raised his middle finger', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/pro-pap-fanpage-slammed-for-exposing-wp-supporters-young-child-who-allegedly-raised-his-middle-finger>.

Tang, Louisa (2023) 'Singapore to introduce Online Criminal Harms Act amid 'growing international consensus' for such laws: MHA', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-introduce-online-criminal-harms-act-amid-growing-international-consensus-such-laws-mha-3307846>.

Temasek (n.d.) 'Telecommunications, Media & Technology', Temasek, at: <https://www.temasek.com.sg/en/our-investments/our-portfolio/telecommunications-media-technology>.

Tham, Ashley (2023) 'Government mindful its advertising 'must not be towards a political end'; spending guided by impartiality: Tan Kiat How', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/government-advertising-not-towards-political-end-spending-impartial-tan-kiat-how-3312741>.

Tham, Davina (2022a) 'Judge dismisses SDP's POFMA challenge over "10 million population" article', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/sdp-pofma-appeal-10-million-population-density-hdb-2675201>.

Tham, Davina (2022b) 'Court of Appeal dismisses SDP's bid to dispute POFMA challenge decision', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/sdp-pofma-challenge-appeal-10-million-population-2834056>.

Tham, Davina (2022b) 'The Online Citizen's Terry Xu and writer get jail for criminal defamation over article calling Cabinet corrupt', Channel News Asia, at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/terry-xu-toc-online-citizen-cabinet-corrupt-defamation-daniel-de-costa-2638181>.

---

Tham, Yuen-C and Clement Yong (2019) 'Fake news law invoked for the first time over Facebook post', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pofma-office-directs-opposition-member-brad-bowyer-to-add-correction-notice-to-facebook>.

Tham, Yuen-C (2020) 'Thum Ping Tjin, New Naratif website issued correction order over video on Pofma', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/thum-ping-tjin-new-naratif-website-issued-correction-order-over-video-on-pofma>.

The Alternative View (2014), Facebook Post on 15 June, at: <https://www.facebook.com/TAVSingapore/photos/pro-pap-group-led-by-jason-chua-chin-seng-disclose-address-of-old-lady-who-spoke/718763014851700>.

The Independent (2016) 'SDP calls for fairness in implementation of Cooling-off Day regulations', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/sdp-calls-for-fairness-in-implementation-of-cooling-off-day-regulations>.

The Independent (2016) 'ELD has to explain why it singled-out Roy Ngerng and Teo Soh Lung', The Independent Singapore, at: <https://theindependent.sg/eld-has-to-explain-why-it-singled-out-roy-ngerng-and-teo-soh-lung/>.

The Online Citizen (2020) 'MHA says no foreign interference in GE2020; ELD still hasn't addressed the issue of Critical Spectator FB page', The Online Citizen, at: <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2020/08/03/mha-says-no-foreign-interference-in-ge2020-eld-still-hasnt-addressed-the-issue-of-critical-spectator-fb-page>.

UN (2023) 'International Day for Countering Hate Speech — UN Secretary-General's Message (18 June 2023)', UN, at: <https://thailand.un.org/en/235997-international-day-countering-hate-speech-%E2%80%94-un-secretary-generals-message-18-june-2023>.

UNHRC (2011a) 'A/HRC/WG.6/11/SGP/1 National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (a) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/105/40/PDF/G1110540.pdf>.

UNHRC (2011b) 'A/HRC/WG.6/11/SGP/2 Compilation prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (b) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/109/08/PDF/G1110908.pdf>.

UNHRC (2011c) 'A/HRC/WG.6/11/SGP/3: Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (c) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/108/87/PDF/G1110887.pdf>.

UNHRC (2011d) 'A/HRC/18/11 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/145/27/PDF/G1114527.pdf>.

UNHRC (2011e) 'A/HRC/18/11/Add.1 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore - Addendum: Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/144/50/PDF/G1114450.pdf>.

---

UNHRC (2015a) 'A/HRC/WG.6/24/SGP/1 National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/245/91/PDF/G1524591.pdf>.

UNHRC (2015b) 'A/HRC/WG.6/24/SGP/2 Compilation prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (b) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and paragraph 5 of the annex to Council resolution 16/21: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/265/14/PDF/G1526514.pdf>.

UNHRC (2015c) 'A/HRC/WG.6/24/SGP/3 Summary prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (c) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and paragraph 5 of the annex to Council resolution 16/21: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/252/06/PDF/G1525206.pdf>.

UNHRC (2015d) 'A/HRC/32/17 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/078/42/PDF/G1607842.pdf>.

UNHRC (2015e) 'A/HRC/32/17/Add.1 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore - Addendum: Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/117/87/PDF/G1611787.pdf>.

UNHRC (2021a) 'A/HRC/WG.6/38/SGP/1 National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/031/44/PDF/G2103144.pdf>.

UNHRC (2021b) 'A/HRC/WG.6/38/SGP/2 Compilation on Singapore: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/051/14/PDF/G2105114.pdf>.

UNHRC (2021c) 'A/HRC/WG.6/38/SGP/3 Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Singapore: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/049/56/PDF/G2104956.pdf>.

UNHRC (2015d) 'A/HRC/48/16 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/197/27/PDF/G2119727.pdf>.

UNHRC (2021e) 'A/HRC/48/16/Add.1 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore - Addendum: Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review', United Nations General Assembly, at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/248/63/PDF/G2124863.pdf>.

Vincent, James (2020) 'Facebook is now using AI to sort content for quicker moderation / A little more machine learning in the moderation mix', The Verge, at: <https://www.theverge.com/2020/11/13/21562596/facebook-ai-moderation>.

---

Wake Up Singapore (2023) 'The Singapore Government spent more than \$195M each year in advertising from FY 2020 to 2021, detailed breakdown 'cannot be released' due to 'market sensitivity', Wake Up Singapore, at: <https://wakeup.sg/mci-government-advertising>.

We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021) 'Digital 2021 Singapore', We Are Social, at: <https://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2021/01/digital-2021-singapore>.

Wong, Kayla & Matthias Ang (2020) 'Police report made against foreign commentator Critical Spectator for trying to influence GE2020', Mothership, at: <https://mothership.sg/2020/07/critical-spectator-police-report>.

World Bank (2023) 'Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Singapore', World Bank, at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=SG>.

Xu, Terry (2023) 'When the establishment repeat its lies, hoping for it to become facts', The Online Citizen, at: <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2023/01/13/when-the-establishment-repeat-its-lies-hoping-for-it-to-become-facts>.

Xueying, Lu (2007) 'PAP moves to counter criticism of party, Govt in cyberspace', The Straits Times, at: <https://bit.ly/36VmC0R>.

Yeo, Julia and Sulaiman Daud (2019) 'Ex-NMP says certain S'pore media sites vulnerable to foreign influences, warns of threat to GE', Mothership.sg, at: <https://mothership.sg/2019/09/singapore-news-foreign-influence-nicholas-fang>.

Yu, Elleen (2021) 'StarHub pushes Singapore broadband share to 40% with MyRepublic buyout', ZDNet, at: <https://www.zdnet.com/home-and-office/networking/starhub-pushes-singapore-broadband-share-to-40-with-myrepublic-buyout>.

Yun Ting, Choo (2020) 'Pofma issues correction directions to NUSS, CNA, TOC and New Naratif over Tambyah's statements on Covid-19 testing of migrant workers', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/pofma-issues-correction-directions-to-nuss-cna-toc-and-new-naratif-over-tambyahs-statements>.

Yusof, Zaihan (2020) 'Singapore GE2020: Correction notices to news portals an inappropriate use of Pofma, says SDP's Paul Tambyah', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/singapore-ge2020-correction-notices-to-news-portals-an-inappropriate-use-of-pofma-says-sdps>.

Zaccheus, Melody (2018) 'Singapore Herald website blocked for not removing objectionable articles on Singapore-Malaysia dispute', The Straits Times, at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-herald-website-blocked-for-not-removing-objectionable-articles-on-singapore>.

"Broadcasting Act" (1994), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BA1994>.

"Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification" (2020), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/BA1994-N1?DocDate=20161227>.

"Constitution of the Republic of Singapore" (1965), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963>.

"Defamation Act" (1957), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/DA1957.P11->

---

“Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act” (2021), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Acts-Supp/28-2021/Published/20211125?DocDate=20211125>.

“Info-Communications Media Development Authority Act” (2016), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/imdaa2016>.

“Online Criminal Harms Bill” (2023), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Bills-Supp/17-2023/Published/20230508?DocDate=20230508>.

“Parliamentary Elections Act (1954)”, Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PEA1954>.

“Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill (2023)”, Parliament of Singapore, at: [https://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/parliamentary-elections-\(amendment\)-bill-2-2023f1950f0261214696b788d61128cd3926.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/parliamentary-elections-(amendment)-bill-2-2023f1950f0261214696b788d61128cd3926.pdf).

“Parliamentary Elections (Election Advertising) Regulations (2003)”, Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL-Rev/PEA1954-RG3/Published?DocDate=20030131&ProvIds=P1III->.

“Penal Code” (1871), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/pc1871>.

“Protection from Harassment Act” (2020), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PHA2014?ProvIds=pr3->.

“Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act” (2019), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Acts-Supp/18-2019>.

“Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill” (2022), Singapore Statutes Online, at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Bills-Supp/28-2022/Published/20221003?DocDate=20221003&ProvIds=>.

# ANNEX

## Annex 1: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the First Cycle (2011)

Topic	Detail	Recommendations by:
Key Human Rights Treaties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> <li>• Consider ratifying</li> </ul>	Bhutan, Finland, Jordan, Lesotho, Viet Nam
ICCPR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> </ul>	Egypt, France, Ghana, Japan, Kazakhstan, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, UK
	(mention ICCPR's Optional Protocols)	Czech
Improve Human Rights Instruments	NHRI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish</li> <li>• Take steps to establish</li> <li>• Consider establishing</li> </ul>	Canada, Egypt, Moldova, Poland, South Africa, Thailand, Timor-Leste
	Develop legal & institutional human rights framework	Afghanistan, Malaysia, Jordan
	Work towards ratification of key international human rights treaties	Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia,
International Human Rights Procedures	Extend a standing invitation to UN special procedures	Czech, Slovenia (incl. to accept a request)
	Cooperate with OHCHR and other UN bodies and mechanisms	Lao
	follow up UPR	Poland, Vietnam
Restrictions on Public Discourse Through Laws and Other Practices	Anti-defamation laws	Czech, Swiss



# ANNEX

## Annex 2: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the Second Cycle (2015)

Topic	Detail	Recommendations by:
Key Human Rights Treaties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> <li>• Consider ratifying</li> </ul>	Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Pakistan
ICCPR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> </ul>	France, Ghana, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mauritius, Montenegro, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand
	(mention ICCPR's Optional Protocols)	Finland, Sweden
Improve Human Rights Instruments	improve legal human rights instruments	Bahrain, Tajikistan
	Bring into law international human rights standards Singapore has accepted & ratified	Uzbekistan
	Strengthening the role of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Human Rights	Barbados, Paraguay
	NHRI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish</li> <li>• Take steps to establish</li> <li>• Consider establishing</li> </ul>	Costa Rica, Greece, Malaysia, Nepal, Poland, South Korea, Timor-Leste
International Human Rights Procedures	Implement UPR recommendations	Barbados
	Extend an standing invitation to UN special procedures	Honduras, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia
Restrictions on Public Discourse Through Laws and Other Practices	Anti-defamation law	Canada
	Criminal defamation	Czech, France, USA,
	Media laws	Latvia
	Promotion and protection of the freedom of expression	France, Italy, Japan
	(w/ specific reference to online freedom of expression)	New Zealand

# ANNEX

## Annex 3: UPR Recommendations for Singapore in the Third Cycle (2021)

Topic	Detail	Recommendations by:
Key Human Rights Treaties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> <li>• Consider ratifying</li> </ul>	Belarus, El Salvador, Luxembourg, Namibia, Paraguay, Sudan, Ukraine, Zambia
ICCPR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratify</li> <li>• Take steps to ratify</li> </ul>	Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, Latvia, Nepal, Romania, Slovenia, South Korea, Uruguay
	(mention ICCPR's Optional Protocols)	Ghana, Italy
Improve Human Rights Instruments	NHRI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish</li> <li>• Take steps to establish</li> <li>• Consider establishing</li> </ul>	Albania, Chile, Germany, Lithuania, Malaysia, Paraguay, Qatar, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Timor-Leste, Ukraine
	Bring into law international human rights standards Singapore has accepted & ratified	Turkmenistan, DPRK
	Ensure political participation	Oman
International Human Rights Procedures	Extend a standing invitation to UN special procedures	Costa Rica, Latvia
	Cooperate with OHCHR and other UN bodies and mechanisms	Kazakhstan
	Support AICHR	Indonesia
Restrictions on Public Discourse Through Laws and Other Practices	Anti-defamation law	Canada
	Criminal defamation	Norway, USA
	Promotion and protection of the freedom of expression	Belgium, France, Italy, South Korea, Uruguay
	(specific reference to online freedom of expression)	New Zealand, Slovakia
	Eliminate or amend media and other laws that restricts the freedom of expression	Czechia, Finland, Iceland, Netherland
	POFMA	The Bahamas, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway

---

# ANNEX

## Annex 4: List of Respondents

Code	Name	Background
KII1	PJ Thum	Editor of <i>New Naratif</i>
KII2	Melvin Tan	Internet observer
KII3	Goh Meng Seng	Member of People's Power Party (opposition)
KII4	M. Ravi	Human rights lawyer
KII5	Stephan Ortmann	Academic, Hong Kong Metropolitan University
KII6	Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh	co-founder of the online magazine <i>Jom</i>
KII7	Roy Ngerng	Blogger and activist
KII8	Kirsten Han	Blogger and journalist
KII9	Abdul Salim	Member of Singapore Democratic Party (opposition)
KII10	Ariffin Sha	Editor of <i>Wake Up Singapore</i>

# RESEARCH SERVICES

*Asia Centre provides evidence-based research to bring impactful change to policies and improve human rights in Southeast Asia.*

## Key Research Areas Include:

- ▷ Freedom of Expression: Disinformation / Internet Freedoms
- ▷ Media: Press Freedoms / Media Information Literacy / Media Ethics
- ▷ Freedom of Religion and/or Belief
- ▷ Democracy & Elections
- ▷ Geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific Region
- ▷ Business and Human Rights
- ▷ International Development/Aid
- ▷ Enforced Migration
- ▷ Social Enterprise / Social Innovation

**Baseline Studies**

**Needs Assessments**

**Strategic Plans**

**Policy Reports and Briefs**

**Project Evaluations**



### Asia Centre Research Hub

65/168, Chamnan Phenjati Business Center Building, 20th Fl., Rama 9 Rd.,  
Huai Kwang, Huai Kwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand









[asiacentre.org](http://asiacentre.org)



[contact@asiacentre.org](mailto:contact@asiacentre.org)





-  [Asia Centre](#)
-  [Asia Centre](#)
-  [Asia Centre](#)
-  [@asiacentre\\_org](#)
-  [asiacentre\\_org](#)
-  [asiacentre](#)

website: [asiacentre.org](http://asiacentre.org)

email: [contact@asiacentre.org](mailto:contact@asiacentre.org)

Asia Centre is a civil society research institute that seeks to create human rights impact in the region. Asia Centre's work focuses on issues related to civil society, democracy, elections, freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief and human rights. The Centre believes that knowledge toolkits built from evidence-based research on critical human rights issues are important for designing activities for stakeholder capacity strengthening and making informed policy interventions. With this aim, Asia Centre was established in Bangkok, Thailand in 2015 and a second branch was registered in 2018 in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. On 21 May 2021, the Centre was recommended by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the UN ECOSOC for a Special Consultative Status.

To date, the Centre has been undertaking evidence-based research on key human rights issues to assemble knowledge tools such as books, reports, baseline studies, policy briefs, commentaries, infographics, videos and training programmes. These knowledge tools are often developed at the request of civil society, INGOs and parliamentarians for evidence-based research on critical rights challenges. These knowledge tools are then used to design capacity building programmes for stakeholders so that they can affect positive policy changes.