

FAQs on countering foreign interference by hostile information campaigns

1. What is FICA?

The Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (**FICA**) introduces countermeasures to prevent, detect and disrupt foreign interference in our domestic politics conducted through (i) hostile information campaigns (**HICs**) and (ii) local proxies. This FAQ list provides more information on the countermeasures for countering hostile information campaigns.

2. What is a hostile information campaign?

The Internet has created a powerful new medium for foreign interference. Hostile Information Campaigns (HIC) involve the use of sophisticated online tools and tactics in a coordinated manner to advance a foreign country's interests, such as by influencing its domestic political discourse, seeking to polarise the society of the targeted country, and undermining its political sovereignty.

3. What are examples of threats Singapore has faced in the past?

Singapore has been subjected to attacks in the past. During a period of tension with another country between 2016 and 2017, we experienced a coordinated HIC that attempted to undermine our foreign policy position. Online commentaries and videos were uploaded by social media accounts which had lain dormant for many years. Many of these were in Mandarin and targeted our Chinese-speaking population. These contents were also widely circulated via chat apps and aimed to influence sentiments among Singaporeans.

In another case, during a period of bilateral tension with a country in 2018, we saw a large spike in online comments critical of Singapore, and many came from anonymous accounts. They sought to give an artificial impression of widespread objection to Singapore's position.

4. What are FICA directions?

A competent authority may, with the Minister for Home Affairs' authorisation, give directions to various entities such as social media services, relevant electronic services, internet access services, as well as persons who own or run websites, blogs or social media pages, to help the authorities investigate and counter hostile information campaigns.

The various types of FICA directions and the persons to whom they may be given can be found at Section 29 of FICA.

5. What should a recipient do if he/she receives a direction?

The recipient is required to comply with the requirements as indicated in the direction within the specified time.

6. If the recipient wishes to appeal the direction, what can he/she do?

The recipient must first apply to the Minister for Home Affairs for a variation or cancellation of the direction no later than 30 days after the direction was given. If the application is refused, he can then file an appeal with the Reviewing Tribunal. The recipient is still required to comply with the Direction even while his application to the Minister or appeal to the Reviewing Tribunal is pending.

7. What will happen if someone shares content that is part of a hostile information campaign?

If someone unknowingly shares content that is part of a HIC, they may be issued with a direction if there is public interest to do so. Recipients of directions are required to comply with the requirements indicated in the direction, within the specified time. Failure to comply with a direction is an offence under FICA.

Malicious actors who engage in clandestine foreign interference by covertly and knowingly acting against Singapore's public interest on behalf of a foreign principal may be liable for an offence.

8. What are Proscribed Online Locations?

An online location with a Singapore link can be declared as a Proscribed Online Location (POL) if it has been subject to a FICA direction, other than the Technical Assistance Direction. Once proscribed, it is an offence to operate the POL, provide support to it or have advertising dealings with it. The proprietor of the POL may be required to put up a notice about its proscribed status under a "must carry direction".