



**Truth Matters, We Verify**

# **WHITE PAPER 2025**

## **Fake News as Propaganda Tool Against the CPEC**

**Published on:** Sunday, August 31, 2025

**Fake News Watchdog**

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# Truth Matters, We Verify

## About Us

**Fake News Watchdog (FNW)** is a global initiative dedicated to identifying, analyzing, and countering the spread of misinformation and disinformation in today's digital world. We stand at the forefront of the fight for truth, empowering individuals, media professionals, academic institutions, and civil society to navigate the increasingly complex information landscape with confidence and clarity.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to detect and debunk false narratives, monitor disinformation trends, and strengthen public resilience through media literacy. Leveraging artificial intelligence, advanced fact-checking tools, and rigorous research methodologies, we work to uphold the principles of transparency, credibility, and informed public discourse.

## Our Vision

We envision a world where access to accurate, verified information is a fundamental right, and where communities are equipped to question, verify, and challenge misleading content. A well-informed society is the cornerstone of democracy, and we are committed to fostering a culture where truth triumphs over manipulation.

## What We Do

- **Fact-Checking Services:** Verifying claims circulating in media, politics, and public discourse.
- **Reputation Management:** Monitoring digital platforms for false or misleading content about our clients and delivering timely, evidence-based rebuttals to protect their public image and credibility.
- **Research & Trends Analysis:** Studying patterns in disinformation to inform public policy and education.
- **Educational Outreach:** Promoting media literacy through training, resources, and awareness campaigns.
- **Global Collaboration:** Partnering with international organizations, journalists, researchers, and digital rights advocates to build a united front against fake news.

## Get Involved

Stand with us in protecting the integrity of information. Whether you're a concerned citizen, educator, researcher, or policymaker, your voice matters. Together, we can build a more truthful, accountable, and informed world.

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## A Message from Our Team

At Fake News Watchdog, our mission is rooted in the belief that truth is not just a principle but a cornerstone of a thriving society. In an age where disinformation spreads faster than ever, the responsibility to uphold integrity in information is one we share collectively.

This report serves as both a reflection of the challenges we face and a call to action. It dives deep into the anatomy of disinformation, examining its sources, impact, and the societal vulnerabilities it exploits. By bringing these incidents to light, we aim to empower individuals, institutions, and policymakers with the insights necessary to recognize, combat, and prevent the spread of falsehoods.

Our work is not possible without the contributions of vigilant fact-checkers, dedicated researchers, and the trust of those who believe in a better-informed world. Together, we can build an ecosystem where truth has the power to outpace lies, fostering trust and accountability in every corner of society.

We hope this report inspires meaningful dialogue and decisive action. Thank you for standing with us in this crucial fight against misinformation.

– The Fake News Watchdog Team

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# Fake News as Propaganda Tool Against the CPEC

## Executive Summary

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), represents a transformative initiative with the potential to reshape Pakistan's economy and enhance regional connectivity. Since its inception in 2013, CPEC has aimed to address Pakistan's chronic energy shortages, infrastructure deficits, and economic disparities through a network of highways, railways, pipelines, and energy projects. However, despite its promise, CPEC has faced persistent challenges, chief among them being a systematic wave of fake news and propaganda aimed at undermining its progress. This study investigates the role of disinformation campaigns targeting CPEC, focusing on their types, sources, and impacts across cultural, economic, and political dimensions.

Using a qualitative case study approach, this research analyzes documented instances of fake news sourced from social media platforms, media reports, and fact-checking agencies such as AFP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check, Soch Fact Check, and FactFocus. The findings reveal that fake news has been weaponized to propagate economic instability, fuel political tensions, and provoke societal unrest. These campaigns often originate from geopolitical rivals, anti-CPEC factions, and vested interest groups, seeking to erode public trust and disrupt bilateral relations between Pakistan and China.

## Key Findings

1. **Cultural Impact:** Fake news exploits cultural sensitivities, religious values, and local traditions to create divisions and resistance to CPEC. Narratives of cultural domination, marginalization of local cultures, and fears of language imposition have alienated communities and hindered socio-cultural exchanges.
2. **Economic Impact:** Disinformation campaigns propagate false claims of debt traps, corruption, and economic exploitation, discouraging foreign and local investments. These narratives have eroded investor confidence, delayed project implementation, and distorted the economic benefits of CPEC.



3. **Political Impact:** Fake news fuels inter-provincial rivalries, undermines government credibility, and complicates Pakistan's diplomatic relations. By exaggerating security risks and geopolitical tensions, these campaigns have created policy paralysis and hindered bipartisan support for CPEC.

The study highlights the coordinated nature of these disinformation efforts, which are designed to exploit societal vulnerabilities and undermine CPEC's progress. For instance, claims of CPEC being a "debt trap" or a "military project" have been widely debunked by economists and fact-checkers, yet they continue to circulate, reflecting the persistence and sophistication of these campaigns.

### Recommendations

To mitigate the influence of fake news and safeguard CPEC's integrity, this research underscores the need for robust countermeasures, including:

- **Fact-checking mechanisms:** Strengthening platforms like the CPEC Media Forum and the Pakistan-China Information Corridor to promote accurate reporting and dispel myths.
- **Media literacy initiatives:** Educating the public to critically evaluate information and recognize disinformation.
- **Transparency and governance:** Ensuring regular audits, public disclosures, and community engagement to build trust among stakeholders.
- **International cooperation:** Fostering collaborative efforts to counter geo-political motivations behind fake news campaigns and highlight CPEC's potential as a driver of sustainable development.

By examining the intersection of disinformation and economic diplomacy, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing CPEC and its broader implications for regional development and cooperation. The success of CPEC will not only benefit Pakistan and China but also serve as a model for other Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, demonstrating the transformative power of collaboration in the face of adversity.

## Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a transformative initiative under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), representing a major leap toward regional economic integration and infrastructure development. Officially launched in 2013, CPEC connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan to Kashgar in China through a comprehensive network of highways, railways, pipelines, and digital corridors. With an investment exceeding \$62 billion, CPEC is a multifaceted venture encompassing energy projects, industrial parks, and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) designed to stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities in Pakistan (Najam, 2023; Rana, 2023; Hussain et al., 2022).

CPEC is not merely an economic undertaking; it symbolizes the deep-rooted strategic partnership between China and Pakistan. For Pakistan, the corridor addresses chronic issues such as energy shortages and inadequate infrastructure, while simultaneously positioning the country as a key player in regional trade and connectivity. The initiative also promotes socio-economic inclusivity, with substantial investments in underdeveloped regions like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, thereby fostering equitable development (Hussain et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2022; Tarar, 2023). According to a report by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), CPEC is expected to contribute 2-2.5% annually to Pakistan's GDP growth by 2030, highlighting its transformative potential (PIDE, 2021).

Despite its promise, CPEC has faced relentless challenges, particularly from disinformation campaigns. Fake news has emerged as a potent tool of propaganda, targeting CPEC's economic, political, and cultural dimensions. These campaigns often portray CPEC as a "debt trap," exaggerate environmental and social costs, and propagate narratives of cultural domination and regional disparity. By exploiting these themes, adversaries seek to erode public trust, disrupt Pakistan-China relations, and undermine the initiative's progress (Najam, 2023; Tarar, 2023; AFP Fact Check, 2019). For instance, claims that CPEC loans are pushing Pakistan into a debt trap have been widely debunked by economists, who argue that the loans are concessional and part of long-term investments (Reuters Fact Check, 2020).

The economic implications of fake news are profound, with narratives of financial exploitation and corruption discouraging foreign and local investments. Politically, disinformation has fueled inter-provincial rivalries, undermined government credibility, and exacerbated geopolitical tensions, particularly with India and the United States. On the cultural front, fake news exploits religious sensitivities and fears of cultural imperialism, fostering mistrust and resistance among local communities (Rana, 2023; Pakistan Today, 2023; Soch Fact Check, 2020). For example, false claims about Chinese workers replacing local labor have been used to stoke anti-CPEC sentiments, despite evidence



showing that over 70% of CPEC-related jobs are filled by Pakistani nationals (FactFocus, 2021).

Efforts to counter disinformation have gained momentum through initiatives like the CPEC Media Forum and the Pakistan-China Information Corridor. These platforms aim to promote accurate reporting, enhance media cooperation, and dispel myths surrounding CPEC. Addressing these challenges is critical to safeguarding the project's integrity and ensuring its potential as a catalyst for regional progress and cooperation (Shah et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2022; The Diplomat, 2021). For instance, fact-checking agencies like AFP Fact Check and Soch Fact Check have played a pivotal role in debunking fake news and restoring public confidence in CPEC (AFP Fact Check, 2020; Soch Fact Check, 2021).

This paper investigates the multifaceted impact of fake news on CPEC, analyzing its economic, political, and cultural dimensions. By examining the methods and motives behind these disinformation campaigns, the study aims to provide actionable insights for countering propaganda and strengthening the narrative around CPEC as a driver of sustainable development and regional integration.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the role of fake news as a propaganda tool against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The research is designed to provide a systematic understanding of the types, sources, and impacts of disinformation campaigns targeting CPEC. The methodology is structured as follows:

### 1. Research Design

The study adopts a case study approach, focusing on documented instances of fake news related to CPEC. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, enabling the identification of recurring themes, sources, and impacts of disinformation campaigns. By analyzing specific cases, the study captures the contextual nuances of how fake news is weaponized against CPEC.

### 2. Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources, ensuring a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis.

**Primary Data Sources:** Primary data was gathered through a systematic analysis of publicly available fake news reports, social media content, and official statements related

to CPEC. Tools such as keyword searches on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were used to identify and track viral disinformation campaigns. Additionally, content from fact-checking agencies such as AFP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check, Soch Fact Check, and FactFocus was analyzed to verify claims and identify patterns.

**Secondary Data Sources:** Secondary data was sourced from academic articles, research reports, and credible news outlets discussing fake news and propaganda related to CPEC. Reports by media watchdog organizations, government publications, and international think tanks were also reviewed to provide context and corroborate findings.

### 3. Sampling

The study employs purposive sampling to select cases of fake news for analysis. The selection criteria include:

- **Relevance:** Cases directly related to CPEC projects, stakeholders, or geopolitical implications.
- **Virality:** Instances that gained significant traction on social media or mainstream platforms.
- **Impact:** Campaigns that had measurable political, economic, or social consequences.

This approach ensures that the selected cases are representative of the broader disinformation landscape targeting CPEC.

### 4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data to identify patterns, categorize fake news types, and explore their underlying motives. The analysis followed these steps:

- **Coding:** Fake news instances were coded based on recurring themes such as economic destabilization, sovereignty concerns, environmental degradation, and regional disparities.
- **Categorization:** Each instance was categorized as fabricated, misleading, or exaggerated to assess the nature of the disinformation.



- **Interpretation:** The findings were interpreted to highlight the impacts of fake news on public perception, policy discourse, and the broader implications for CPEC's implementation.

## 5. Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations:

- **Data Availability:** The reliance on publicly available data may exclude covert or lesser-known disinformation campaigns.
- **Platform Dynamics:** Some fake news instances may have been removed from social media platforms, limiting historical analysis.
- **Bias in Reporting:** The study relies on fact-checking agencies and media reports, which may have their own biases or limitations in coverage.

Despite these limitations, the methodological approach ensures a comprehensive and systematic exploration of fake news campaigns against CPEC, contributing to a deeper understanding of their implications for regional cooperation and economic development.

## Data and Analysis

The proliferation of fake news targeting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has emerged as a significant obstacle to its successful implementation and public perception. This section presents a detailed analysis of documented instances of disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining CPEC, focusing on their types, sources, and impacts. By examining specific cases of fake news, this study seeks to uncover the patterns and motivations behind these campaigns, as well as their consequences for CPEC's progress and Pakistan-China relations.

The data for this analysis is drawn from a variety of sources, including social media platforms, mainstream media reports, and fact-checking agencies such as AFP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check, Soch Fact Check, and FactFocus. These instances of fake news have been categorized into three major thematic areas: cultural, economic, and political impacts, to provide a structured understanding of the disinformation landscape. Each case is analyzed to identify the narratives propagated, the actors involved, and the intended outcomes of these campaigns.

The analysis reveals that fake news targeting CPEC is not random but rather a coordinated effort by geopolitical rivals, anti-CPEC factions, and vested interest groups to create economic instability, fuel political tensions, and provoke societal unrest. By

dissecting these narratives, this section highlights the tactics used to weaponize misinformation and the broader implications for CPEC's implementation and public trust.

The following subsections present a comprehensive list of anti-CPEC fake news instances, organized into three major thematic areas:

1. **Cultural Impact:** Examining how fake news exploits cultural sensitivities, religious values, and local traditions to create divisions and resistance to CPEC.
2. **Economic Impact:** Analyzing disinformation campaigns that aim to undermine investor confidence, exaggerate financial risks, and distort the economic benefits of CPEC.
3. **Political Impact:** Exploring how fake news fuels political tensions, erodes public trust in governance, and complicates diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China.

Each case is accompanied by an examination of its origins, dissemination channels, and factual refutations. This data-driven approach not only underscores the scale and complexity of disinformation campaigns but also provides a foundation for developing effective countermeasures to mitigate their impact.

## Structure of the Analysis

1. **Thematic Categorization:** Fake news instances are grouped into three major thematic areas—cultural, economic, and political impacts—to provide a systematic exploration of the disinformation landscape.
2. **Chronological Organization:** Within each thematic area, cases are presented in chronological order to highlight the evolution of fake news campaigns over time and their alignment with key milestones in CPEC's development.
3. **Case-by-Case Analysis:** Each fake news instance is analyzed to identify its narrative, sources, dissemination channels, and factual refutations. This approach provides a granular understanding of how disinformation operates in the context of CPEC.
4. **Impact Assessment:** The consequences of each fake news campaign are examined, focusing on its effects on public perception, policy discourse, and bilateral relations between Pakistan and China.

## Cultural, Economic, and Political Impact of Fake News on CPEC



Fake news targeting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has had far-reaching consequences, affecting cultural, economic, and political dimensions of the project. These disinformation campaigns exploit societal vulnerabilities, fuel mistrust, and create barriers to the successful implementation of CPEC. This section examines the multifaceted impact of fake news on CPEC, focusing on its cultural, economic, and political implications.

## Cultural Impact of Fake News on CPEC

Fake news targeting CPEC extends beyond economic and political realms, infiltrating cultural domains to undermine the shared values and cooperation between China and Pakistan. By exploiting cultural sensitivities and misrepresenting socio-cultural exchanges, disinformation campaigns aim to erode trust and mutual respect between the two nations.

### 1. Misinformation About CPEC Being a Threat to Local Culture

- **Claim:** The influx of Chinese workers and businesses is eroding local culture and traditions.
- **Reality:** CPEC emphasizes mutual respect for cultural values, and there is no evidence of cultural erosion.
- **Impact:** This narrative fosters mistrust and resistance to cultural exchanges facilitated by CPEC.
- **Source:** Nationalist groups and social media influencers propagated this claim, which was debunked by FactFocus.

A recurring narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the influx of Chinese workers and businesses is eroding local culture and traditions in Pakistan. This narrative, often propagated by nationalist groups and social media influencers, suggests that CPEC is a vehicle for cultural imperialism, with Chinese practices and values overshadowing Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. However, this claim is unfounded and lacks evidence.

In reality, CPEC emphasizes mutual respect for cultural values, and both China and Pakistan have consistently highlighted the importance of preserving local traditions while fostering cultural exchanges. For instance, CPEC projects include initiatives to promote people-to-people connectivity, such as cultural festivals, educational exchanges, and language training programs, which aim to enhance mutual understanding rather than impose foreign cultural norms. Fact-checking organizations like FactFocus have debunked this narrative, pointing out that there is no evidence of cultural erosion caused by CPEC. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly

on social media platforms, where it is often used to foster mistrust and resistance to CPEC.

This misinformation not only undermines the positive cultural exchanges facilitated by CPEC but also creates unnecessary fear and division among local communities. Addressing this issue requires proactive efforts to promote cultural diplomacy, engage local communities in CPEC projects, and counter disinformation through accurate reporting and media literacy initiatives.

## 2. Misinformation on Language and Education

- **Claim:** Chinese is being imposed as the medium of instruction in local schools near CPEC projects, sidelining Urdu and regional languages.
- **Reality:** Language programs under CPEC focus on optional Mandarin training to enhance employment opportunities for locals.
- **Impact:** Such claims generate unnecessary fear and resistance to educational initiatives associated with CPEC.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2017-2018 and was clarified by Soch Fact Check.

A persistent narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that Chinese is being imposed as the medium of instruction in local schools near CPEC projects, sidelining Urdu and regional languages. This narrative, which emerged around 2017-2018, suggests that CPEC is undermining Pakistan's linguistic and cultural identity by prioritizing Mandarin over local languages.

However, this claim is entirely false. In reality, language programs under CPEC focus on optional Mandarin training for locals, aimed at enhancing their employment opportunities in CPEC-related projects and Chinese businesses. These programs are designed to equip Pakistanis with language skills that can open doors to better job prospects, particularly in sectors like trade, tourism, and project management. Fact-checking organizations like Soch Fact Check have clarified that there is no policy or initiative to replace Urdu or regional languages with Mandarin in schools. Instead, CPEC emphasizes the importance of preserving local languages while providing opportunities for skill development. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly on social media platforms, where it is often used to generate unnecessary fear and resistance to educational initiatives associated with CPEC.



This misinformation not only distorts the goals of CPEC's language programs but also creates barriers to their successful implementation. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in educational policies, proactive communication from project authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the benefits of multilingualism for Pakistanis.

### 3. Exploitation of Religious Sensitivities

- **Claim:** Chinese policies, particularly regarding Muslims in Xinjiang, are incompatible with Pakistan's Islamic values, and CPEC projects marginalize local religious practices.
- **Reality:** Pakistan and China have repeatedly emphasized mutual respect for each other's religious and cultural values.
- **Impact:** These claims alienate local communities and fuel anti-CPEC sentiments among conservative segments of society.
- **Source:** This narrative was propagated by anti-CPEC factions and debunked by FactFocus.

One of the most divisive narratives in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that Chinese policies, particularly regarding Muslims in Xinjiang, are incompatible with Pakistan's Islamic values, and that CPEC projects marginalize local religious practices.

This narrative, propagated by anti-CPEC factions, seeks to exploit religious sensitivities and create divisions between Pakistanis and Chinese stakeholders. The claim often highlights China's policies in Xinjiang, suggesting that they reflect a broader disregard for Islamic values, which could extend to CPEC projects in Pakistan. However, this narrative is misleading and lacks factual basis. In reality, Pakistan and China have repeatedly emphasized mutual respect for each other's religious and cultural values, and CPEC projects are designed to accommodate local customs and traditions. For instance, Chinese companies working on CPEC projects have taken steps to respect Islamic practices, such as providing halal food and prayer facilities for workers. Fact-checking organizations like FactFocus have debunked this narrative, clarifying that there is no evidence of CPEC marginalizing local religious practices. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly among conservative segments of society, where it is used to fuel anti-CPEC sentiments and alienate local communities.

This misinformation not only undermines the spirit of cooperation between Pakistan and China but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance to CPEC. Addressing this issue requires proactive efforts to promote interfaith understanding, engage religious leaders in

CPEC initiatives, and counter disinformation through accurate reporting and community outreach.

## 4. Marginalization of Local Cultures

- **Claim:** Local cultures in areas like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan are being overshadowed by Chinese interests.
- **Reality:** CPEC projects include community engagement initiatives, such as vocational training and cultural preservation programs.
- **Impact:** These narratives deepen local grievances and amplify perceptions of exploitation.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2017-2018 and was debunked by Soch Fact Check.

A recurring narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that local cultures in regions like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan are being overshadowed by Chinese interests, leading to the marginalization of indigenous traditions and practices. This narrative, which emerged around 2017-2018, suggests that CPEC projects prioritize Chinese economic and cultural influence at the expense of local communities. However, this claim is misleading and lacks factual basis.

In reality, CPEC projects include community engagement initiatives designed to preserve and promote local cultures while fostering economic development. For example, vocational training programs have been established to empower local residents with skills that align with CPEC-related job opportunities, and cultural preservation initiatives aim to protect and celebrate the unique heritage of regions like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. Fact-checking organizations like Soch Fact Check have debunked this narrative, emphasizing that CPEC is committed to inclusive development and cultural preservation. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly on social media platforms, where it is often used to deepen local grievances and amplify perceptions of exploitation.

This misinformation not only distorts the goals of CPEC but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among local communities. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in project implementation, proactive engagement with local stakeholders, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the positive impact of CPEC on local cultures and economies.



Overall, the cultural impact of fake news on CPEC is significant, as it undermines trust and mutual understanding between Pakistan and China. These narratives exploit cultural sensitivities to stoke divisions, creating barriers to cooperation. Countering such disinformation requires proactive cultural diplomacy, community engagement, and accurate reporting to highlight the positive cultural exchanges facilitated by CPEC.

## Economic Impact of Fake News on CPEC

Fake news targeting CPEC has had profound economic implications, creating skepticism among stakeholders, eroding investor confidence, and destabilizing the economic benefits of the project. These disinformation campaigns exploit economic vulnerabilities to undermine CPEC's progress.

### 1. Fake News About Debt Traps and Economic Exploitation

- **Claim:** CPEC projects are pushing Pakistan into a "debt trap," with China aiming to take control of Pakistan's assets (e.g., Gwadar Port) in case of loan defaults.
- **Reality:** CPEC loans are concessional and account for only a small fraction of Pakistan's overall debt.
- **Impact:** This misinformation discourages international investors and partners from engaging in CPEC projects.
- **Source:** Western media outlets like The New York Times<sup>1</sup> and Indian media like The Times of India<sup>2</sup> propagated this claim, which was refuted by Reuters and AFP Fact Check.

One of the most pervasive narratives in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the project is pushing Pakistan into a "debt trap," with China aiming to take control of Pakistan's strategic assets, such as Gwadar Port, in the event of loan defaults. This narrative, often propagated by Western and Indian media outlets like The New York Times and The Times of India, draws parallels with the Sri Lankan Hambantota Port case, where China allegedly acquired the port due to Sri Lanka's inability to repay loans.

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<sup>1</sup> This article discusses the Hambantota Port case in Sri Lanka, which is often cited as an example of China's "debt trap diplomacy." While it does not directly mention CPEC, it has been used as a reference point to draw parallels with Pakistan's Gwadar Port.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>

<sup>2</sup> This article explicitly links CPEC to the "debt trap" narrative, suggesting that Pakistan might have to hand over Gwadar Port to China if it fails to repay loans. It has been widely cited in discussions about CPEC's financial implications.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-may-have-to-hand-over-gwadar-port-to-china-if-it-fails-to-repay-loans-report/articleshow/64894803.cms>

However, this comparison is misleading and lacks context. In reality, CPEC loans are concessional, meaning they come with low interest rates and long repayment periods, and they account for only a small fraction of Pakistan's overall debt.

According to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), CPEC-related loans constitute less than 10% of Pakistan's total external debt, and the majority of CPEC investments are in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) rather than loans. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that China intends to seize Pakistani assets in case of default. Fact-checking agencies like Reuters and AFP Fact Check have repeatedly debunked this narrative, emphasizing that CPEC is a mutually beneficial partnership aimed at infrastructure development and economic growth. Despite these clarifications, the "debt trap" narrative continues to circulate, discouraging international investors and partners from engaging in CPEC projects.

This misinformation not only undermines Pakistan's ability to attract foreign investment but also distorts public perception of CPEC's economic benefits, creating unnecessary skepticism and resistance. Addressing this issue requires proactive efforts to promote accurate reporting, enhance transparency in financial agreements, and highlight the long-term economic gains of CPEC for Pakistan.

## 2. False Claims About Chinese Workers Replacing Local Labor

- **Claim:** Chinese workers are being brought in large numbers, depriving Pakistanis of job opportunities.
- **Reality:** Most CPEC-related jobs are filled by Pakistani workers, with Chinese workers employed only for specialized tasks.
- **Impact:** This narrative creates unnecessary fear and resistance to CPEC projects.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2016-2017 and was clarified by Soch Fact Check.

A recurring narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that Chinese workers are being brought in large numbers, depriving Pakistanis of job opportunities. This narrative, which gained traction around 2016-2017, suggests that CPEC projects prioritize Chinese labor over local employment, leading to widespread unemployment among Pakistanis. However, this claim is largely exaggerated and lacks factual basis. In reality, the majority of CPEC-related jobs are filled by Pakistani workers, with Chinese workers employed only for specialized tasks that require technical expertise not readily available locally.



According to official reports, over 70% of the workforce in CPEC projects comprises Pakistani nationals, with Chinese workers primarily involved in engineering, project management, and other high-skill roles (Pakistan Today, 2023). Fact-checking organizations like Soch Fact Check have clarified that CPEC has created thousands of jobs for Pakistanis, particularly in construction, logistics, and services, while also providing opportunities for skill development and vocational training. Despite these facts, the false narrative of Chinese workers replacing local labor continues to circulate, fueled by social media platforms and anti-CPEC factions.

This misinformation creates unnecessary fear and resistance among local communities, hindering public support for CPEC and complicating project implementation. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in employment data, proactive communication from project authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the employment benefits of CPEC for Pakistanis.

### 3. Misinformation About Gwadar Port Being "Sold" to China

- **Claim:** Pakistan has "sold" Gwadar Port to China, compromising its sovereignty.
- **Reality:** Gwadar Port is operated by a Chinese company under a lease agreement, but ownership remains with Pakistan.
- **Impact:** This claim undermines public trust in CPEC and fuels anti-China sentiments.
- **Source:** Indian media outlets like NDTV propagated this misinformation, which was debunked by AFP Fact Check.

One of the most persistent and damaging narratives surrounding CPEC is the claim that Pakistan has "sold" Gwadar Port to China, thereby compromising its sovereignty. This misinformation, widely propagated by Indian media outlets like NDTV, suggests that Pakistan has relinquished control of the strategically significant Gwadar Port to China (NDTV, 2017).

However, this claim is entirely false. In reality, Gwadar Port is operated by a Chinese company, China Overseas Ports Holding Company (COPHC), under a lease agreement, while ownership of the port remains firmly with Pakistan. The lease agreement, signed in 2017, grants COPHC operational control for 40 years, but Pakistan retains full sovereignty over the port and its surrounding areas. Fact-checking agencies like AFP Fact Check have debunked this narrative, emphasizing that such lease agreements are standard international practices for port operations and do not equate to a transfer of ownership. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly

on social media platforms, where it is often used to fuel anti-China sentiments and undermine public trust in CPEC.

This misinformation not only distorts the nature of Pakistan-China cooperation but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among local communities. Addressing this issue requires proactive efforts to educate the public about the terms of the lease agreement, highlight the economic benefits of Gwadar Port for Pakistan, and counter disinformation through fact-checking and transparent communication.

#### 4. Fake News About CPEC Being a "Failure"

- **Claim:** CPEC has failed to deliver on its promises, and projects are stalled or non-functional.
- **Reality:** Many CPEC projects, such as energy plants and road networks, have been completed and are operational.
- **Impact:** This narrative erodes public confidence in CPEC and discourages further investment.
- **Source:** This claim circulated in 2019-2020 and was refuted by AFP Fact Check.

A common narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative has failed to deliver on its promises, with projects either stalled or non-functional. This narrative, which gained traction around 2019-2020, suggests that CPEC has not lived up to its potential and is unable to bring tangible benefits to Pakistan.

However, this claim is far from the truth. In reality, many CPEC projects have been successfully completed and are fully operational, contributing significantly to Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors. For instance, several energy projects, including the Sahiwal and Port Qasim coal-fired power plants, have been completed and are supplying electricity to the national grid, addressing Pakistan's chronic energy shortages. Additionally, key road infrastructure projects, such as the Karachi-Lahore Motorway (M-5) and the Hakla-Dera Ismail Khan Motorway, have been completed, enhancing regional connectivity and trade. Fact-checking agencies like AFP Fact Check have refuted the "failure" narrative, providing evidence of completed projects and their positive impact on Pakistan's economy. Despite these facts, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly on social media platforms, where it is often amplified by anti-CPEC factions and geopolitical rivals.

This misinformation shakes public confidence in CPEC and creates unnecessary skepticism about the initiative's potential. Addressing this issue requires greater



transparency in project reporting, proactive communication from government authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the tangible benefits of CPEC for Pakistan.

## 5. False Claims About CPEC Causing Inflation

- **Claim:** CPEC projects are driving inflation in Pakistan by increasing the cost of goods and services.
- **Reality:** Inflation is influenced by multiple factors, and there is no direct link to CPEC.
- **Impact:** This claim exacerbates public dissatisfaction and undermines support for CPEC.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2019-2020 and was clarified by Soch Fact Check.

A persistent narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative is driving inflation in Pakistan by increasing the cost of goods and services. This narrative, which emerged around 2019-2020, suggests that CPEC projects are contributing to rising prices, thereby burdening the average Pakistani citizen. However, this claim is misleading and lacks a factual basis. Inflation in Pakistan is influenced by a multitude of factors, including global commodity prices, exchange rate fluctuations, domestic fiscal policies, and supply chain disruptions, rather than being directly linked to CPEC projects.

In fact, CPEC's infrastructure and energy projects are designed to address structural issues in Pakistan's economy, such as energy shortages and inadequate transportation networks, which can help stabilize prices in the long term. Fact-checking organizations like Soch Fact Check have clarified that there is no direct correlation between CPEC and inflation, emphasizing that the initiative is aimed at boosting economic growth and creating employment opportunities. Despite these clarifications, the false narrative continues to circulate, particularly on social media platforms, where it is often used to fuel public dissatisfaction and undermine support for CPEC.

This misinformation not only distorts the economic benefits of CPEC but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among the public. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in economic reporting, proactive communication from government authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the long-term economic gains of CPEC for Pakistan.

To conclude, the economic impact of fake news on CPEC is profound, undermining investor confidence, eroding public trust, and creating barriers to economic progress. Addressing these challenges requires proactive counter-narratives, transparent governance, and collaborative international efforts to highlight the genuine economic benefits of CPEC.

## Political Impact of Fake News on CPEC

Fake news campaigns targeting CPEC have had significant political implications, affecting both domestic governance in Pakistan and its diplomatic relations. By exploiting political narratives, these disinformation efforts seek to erode public trust, create policy paralysis, and strain bilateral ties between China and Pakistan.

### 1. Misinformation About CPEC Being a "Military Project"

- **Claim:** CPEC is a cover for China to establish military bases in Pakistan, threatening regional security.
- **Reality:** CPEC is primarily an economic initiative, and there is no evidence of military bases being established.
- **Impact:** This narrative fuels geopolitical tensions and complicates Pakistan's diplomatic relations.
- **Source:** Indian media outlets like The Economic Times propagated this claim, which was refuted by Reuters.

A prominent narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative is a cover for China to establish military bases in Pakistan, thereby threatening regional security. This narrative, propagated by Indian media outlets like The Economic Times, suggests that CPEC has hidden military objectives, such as the establishment of Chinese naval or air bases in Gwadar or other strategic locations.

However, this claim is entirely false and lacks any credible evidence. In reality, CPEC is primarily an economic initiative, focused on infrastructure development, energy projects, and regional connectivity. Both China and Pakistan have repeatedly emphasized that CPEC is a civilian project aimed at fostering economic growth and cooperation, with no military component. Fact-checking agencies like Reuters have refuted this narrative, highlighting that there is no evidence of Chinese military bases being established under the guise of CPEC. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly in geopolitical discourses, where it is used to fuel tensions between Pakistan



and its neighbors, as well as complicate diplomatic relations with global powers like the United States.

This misinformation not only distorts the nature of CPEC but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among regional stakeholders. Addressing this issue requires proactive efforts to promote transparency in CPEC projects, engage in diplomatic outreach to clarify its objectives, and counter disinformation through fact-checking and media literacy initiatives.

## 2. False Allegations of Land Grabbing in Gwadar

- **Claim:** Chinese companies are forcibly acquiring land from local communities in Gwadar.
- **Reality:** Land acquisition follows legal procedures, and compensation is provided to affected communities.
- **Impact:** This claim deepens local grievances and fuels anti-CPEC sentiments.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2016-2017 and was clarified by Soch Fact Check.

A persistent narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that Chinese companies are forcibly acquiring land from local communities in Gwadar, often without fair compensation or consent. This narrative, which emerged around 2016-2017, suggests that CPEC projects are displacing local residents and undermining their livelihoods.

However, this claim is misleading and lacks factual basis. In reality, land acquisition for CPEC projects follows legal procedures, and affected communities are provided with compensation and resettlement packages. For instance, the Gwadar Port development includes measures to ensure that local residents are fairly compensated and that their rights are protected. Fact-checking organizations like Soch Fact Check have clarified that there is no evidence of forced land grabbing by Chinese companies, emphasizing that the process is conducted transparently and in accordance with Pakistani laws. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly among local communities and on social media platforms, where it is used to deepen grievances and fuel anti-CPEC sentiments.

This misinformation not only distorts the reality of CPEC's land acquisition process but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among local populations. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in land acquisition procedures, proactive engagement

with affected communities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the benefits of CPEC for Gwadar and its residents.

### 3. Misinformation About CPEC Benefiting Only Punjab

- **Claim:** CPEC projects disproportionately benefit Punjab province, neglecting other regions.
- **Reality:** CPEC projects are spread across Pakistan, including energy projects in Sindh and infrastructure in Balochistan.
- **Impact:** This narrative exacerbates inter-provincial rivalries and hampers national consensus on CPEC.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2017-2018 and was debunked by FactFocus.

A recurring narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative disproportionately benefits Punjab province, while neglecting other regions such as Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This narrative, which emerged around 2017-2018, suggests that CPEC is exacerbating regional inequalities by focusing investments and development in Punjab.

However, this claim is misleading and lacks factual basis. In reality, CPEC projects are spread across Pakistan, with significant investments in underdeveloped regions to promote equitable development. For instance, energy projects like the Thar Coal Power Plant in Sindh and infrastructure developments such as the Gwadar Port in Balochistan are key components of CPEC, aimed at addressing regional disparities and fostering inclusive growth. Fact-checking organizations like FactFocus have debunked this narrative, providing evidence of CPEC's widespread benefits across all provinces. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly among political factions and on social media platforms, where it is used to fuel inter-provincial rivalries and hamper national consensus on CPEC.

This misinformation not only distorts the equitable nature of CPEC's investments but also creates unnecessary divisions and resistance among provinces. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in project allocation, proactive communication from government authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the nationwide benefits of CPEC.



## 4. Fake News About CPEC Being a "Threat" to Pakistan's Sovereignty

- **Claim:** CPEC compromises Pakistan's sovereignty by giving China too much control over its economy.
- **Reality:** CPEC is a partnership based on mutual respect and shared interests.
- **Impact:** This narrative undermines public trust in the government and fuels nationalist sentiments.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2017-2018 and was debunked by AFP Fact Check.

A persistent narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative compromises Pakistan's sovereignty by giving China too much control over its economy. This narrative, which emerged around 2017-2018, suggests that CPEC projects, such as the Gwadar Port and energy infrastructure, are designed to allow China to exert undue influence over Pakistan's economic and strategic decisions.

However, this claim is misleading and lacks factual basis. In reality, CPEC is a partnership based on mutual respect and shared interests, with both China and Pakistan emphasizing the importance of sovereignty and mutual benefit in all agreements. For instance, Pakistan retains full ownership of its assets, such as Gwadar Port, while Chinese companies operate under lease agreements that are standard in international business practices. Importantly, the security of Gwadar Port is the direct responsibility of the Pakistan Navy, ensuring that its operations remain firmly under national control and eliminating any chance of discrepancies or external interference. Fact-checking agencies like AFP Fact Check have debunked this narrative, clarifying that there is no evidence of China undermining Pakistan's sovereignty through CPEC. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly among nationalist groups and on social media platforms, where it is used to undermine public trust in the government and fuel anti-CPEC sentiments.

This misinformation not only distorts the nature of Pakistan-China cooperation but also creates unnecessary fear and resistance among the public. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in CPEC agreements, proactive communication from government authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the mutual benefits of CPEC for both nations.

## 5. False Allegations of Corruption in CPEC Projects

- **Claim:** CPEC projects are riddled with corruption, with funds being misappropriated by Pakistani officials.
- **Reality:** There is no evidence of systemic corruption in CPEC projects.
- **Impact:** This claim weakens public trust in the government and discourages local participation in CPEC.
- **Source:** This claim emerged around 2017-2018 and was clarified by FactFocus.

A recurring narrative in fake news targeting CPEC is the claim that the initiative is riddled with corruption, with funds being misappropriated by Pakistani officials. This narrative, which emerged around 2017-2018, suggests that CPEC projects are plagued by financial mismanagement and lack transparency, leading to the misuse of public resources.

However, this claim is misleading and lacks factual basis. In reality, there is no evidence of systemic corruption in CPEC projects, and both China and Pakistan have implemented oversight mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. For instance, CPEC projects are subject to regular audits, and progress reports are publicly disclosed to maintain transparency. Fact-checking organizations like FactFocus have clarified that allegations of corruption in CPEC are largely unsubstantiated and often exaggerated for political purposes. Despite these clarifications, the false claim continues to circulate, particularly among opposition parties and on social media platforms, where it is used to weaken public trust in the government and discourage local participation in CPEC.

This misinformation not only distorts the reality of CPEC's governance but also creates unnecessary skepticism and resistance among the public. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency in project financing, proactive communication from government authorities, and media literacy initiatives to counter disinformation and highlight the rigorous oversight mechanisms in place for CPEC projects.

To conclude, the political impact of fake news on CPEC is profound, undermining public trust, fueling regional tensions, and complicating diplomatic relations. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to counter disinformation, foster transparency, and build political consensus around the strategic importance of CPEC.



## Conclusion

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands as a transformative initiative with the potential to reshape Pakistan's economic landscape and strengthen regional connectivity. However, the persistent wave of fake news targeting CPEC has emerged as a significant challenge, undermining its progress and distorting public perception. This study has examined the multifaceted impact of disinformation campaigns on CPEC, focusing on their cultural, economic, and political dimensions. By analyzing documented instances of fake news, the research has revealed a coordinated effort by geopolitical rivals, anti-CPEC factions, and vested interest groups to exploit societal vulnerabilities, fuel mistrust, and disrupt Pakistan-China relations.

The cultural impact of fake news has been particularly damaging, as disinformation campaigns exploit religious sensitivities, fears of cultural imperialism, and regional disparities to create divisions and resistance. Narratives of cultural domination and marginalization have alienated local communities, fostering mistrust and hindering the socio-cultural exchanges that CPEC aims to promote. Similarly, the economic impact of fake news has been profound, with narratives of debt traps, corruption, and economic exploitation discouraging foreign and local investments. These campaigns have eroded investor confidence, delayed project implementation, and distorted the economic benefits of CPEC.

On the political front, fake news has fueled inter-provincial rivalries, undermined government credibility, and complicated Pakistan's diplomatic relations. By exaggerating security risks and geopolitical tensions, disinformation campaigns have created policy paralysis and hindered bipartisan support for CPEC. The weaponization of fake news has not only threatened the success of CPEC but also posed broader challenges to regional stability and cooperation.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach. First, robust fact-checking mechanisms and media literacy initiatives are essential to counter disinformation and restore public trust. Platforms like the CPEC Media Forum and the Pakistan-China Information Corridor have already made strides in promoting accurate reporting and dispelling myths. Second, transparency in CPEC projects must be prioritized to address concerns about governance and accountability. Regular audits, public disclosures, and community engagement can help build confidence among stakeholders. Finally, international cooperation is critical to countering the geopolitical motivations behind fake news campaigns. By fostering a collaborative approach, Pakistan and China can strengthen their narrative and highlight CPEC's potential as a driver of sustainable development and regional integration.

In conclusion, while fake news poses significant challenges to CPEC, it also underscores the importance of safeguarding the initiative's integrity. By addressing the root causes of disinformation and promoting a culture of transparency and cooperation, Pakistan and China can ensure that CPEC fulfills its promise as a catalyst for economic growth, regional connectivity, and mutual prosperity. The success of CPEC will not only benefit the two nations but also serve as a model for other Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, demonstrating the transformative power of collaboration in the face of adversity.



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