

# Chapter 8

## The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance: A Peaceful Amalgamation of Multiple Diasporas

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### Abstract

*The strongest aspect of UAE's soft power is its culture of tolerance, as it is home to over two hundred nationalities coexisting in peace and security. From hosting the Pope in 2019, to setting up of worship spaces for other religions, the UAE has been a role model of inter-faith coexistence and cultural acceptance. From imbibing a UAE Cabinet-approved National Tolerance Programme in 2016 to proclaiming the year of 2019 as the "Year of Tolerance", the UAE has made every effort to craft values of dialogue and openness to different cultures and diasporas. The tolerant approach adopted by the UAE in various sectors, such as education, workplace, culture and media, has served as a bridge of communication between the people of multiple nations residing here, and their various cultures. The UAE's soft power strategy of anti-discrimination and anti-hate laws enables it to build trusting relationships with resilient communities of different faiths, and have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds, leading to deeper international partnerships and bilateral ties. This paper argues that while the UAE's policy of tolerance and cohesion serves as a melting pot for different nationalities and ethnicities, it also strengthens the UAE's foreign policy of soft power diplomacy, which is based on expanding trade and diplomatic partnerships to boost the country's economic interests. While the UAE's soft*

*power tools of fraternity and reconciliation help it secure an image of a cultural hub, it also assures the execution and achievement of long-term national goals of establishing strong international alliances. The geopolitics of tolerance and philanthropy help the UAE to gain a cultural understanding of their diplomatic partners and to forge strong bilateral associations.*

**Keywords:** UAE, policy of tolerance, soft power, diaspora, public diplomacy, coexistence, economic alliances

### Introduction

The UAE has often been referred to as the melting pot of tolerance, respect and acceptance of multiple diasporas. The country's policy of tolerance is directly linked to its soft power strategy, which aims to build on the UAE's strategic position by embracing both the Eastern and Western worlds and invest in cultural, economic and humanitarian diplomacy to welcome varied nationalities from across the world. The UAE's foreign policy, focusing on the framework of public diplomacy and integrated diplomatic action, consolidates its strong position as a soft power, not just in the MENA region but also globally, reflected in its ranking 10<sup>th</sup> internationally in the Global Soft Power Index of 2023.

### Evolution of the UAE's Policy of Tolerance

The Constitution of the UAE encourages equality, freedom, respect and indiscriminate since its very inception in 1971. The UAE's abundant historical anecdotes highlight tolerance as a genuine value that the residents practised even before the formation of the Emirates. In the year 1951, an Emirati delegation including HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyn, who went on to become the Founder and the First President of the UAE, traveled to Europe and learned a lot about European culture and religion while visiting the famous Vatican in Rome and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. HH Sheikh Zayed referred to "tolerance" as the very essence of Islam, and that strengthening it would remove violence and terrorism.

## *The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance*

Since the late 1950s, Sheikh Shakhbut, the then ruler of Abu Dhabi, started welcoming the first communities of Christian oil and gas workers to the Gulf, and the first Roman Catholic mass was held in Abu Dhabi in 1960 (Tolerance & Inclusion, MOFA 2020). The Abu Dhabi government, as a welcoming gesture, opened the St. Joseph's Church on the Abu Dhabi Corniche in 1965 and also donated land for the St Andrew's Anglican Church, which opened in 1968. The first Hindu temple in Dubai was also built as early as 1958. Since the unification of the Emirates in 1971, the UAE government has demonstrated its willingness to implement laws protecting religious freedom and fostering interfaith harmony. The temporary Constitution of the UAE, adopted in 1971, explicitly guaranteed freedom of religion to worshippers of all faiths; this was reaffirmed in 1996 when the Federal Supreme Council adopted the Constitution permanently. The UAE's vision for the Middle East is an alternative, future-oriented model that supports moderate Islam, embracing diversity and global engagement. The year 2019 was also proclaimed as "The Year of Tolerance" by the UAE President HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, placing emphasis on creating a tolerant society and underlining the significance of human communication (Year of Tolerance, MOEC 2019). The Emirati culture, by virtue of enhancing trade and contact with people of neighbouring regions, regardless of their ethnicity and religion, promotes the value of tolerance (Lootah, 2021).

### **The UAE's Soft Power Strategy of Tolerance**

The UAE's de facto multiculturalism and concept of tolerance and integration have roots in its soft power strategy, which is the cornerstone of UAE foreign policy. Soft power is more than the ability to move people by argument or persuasion; it is the ability to attract people, with soft power also being termed "attractive power" (Nye, 2008). In international politics, it is argued by Joseph Nye that the resources that produce soft power arise largely from the values that a

country expresses in its culture, in the way it handles its relations with other nations, and in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies (Nye, 2008). Small countries are observed to have more flexible and creative foreign policy strategy (Katzenstein, 1985). The UAE's soft power policy of tolerance, respect and co-existence of different faiths make it an attractive destination for expatriates around the world. The cultural and religious diversity that the UAE provides have made it possible for Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews and several others to call it their home. In a world of traditional power politics where governments compete to enhance their credibility of whose military or whose economy will win, the UAE's foreign policy of peace and anti-discrimination seems to be the right path for nation-building (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999).

Public diplomacy is an important tool of soft power policy, wherein nations try to attract people worldwide by drawing attention to potential resources through promoting cultural exports and arranging various cultural and art exchanges (Nye, 2008). For instance, the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017 is a portrayal of UAE's skillful strengthening of geopolitical ties with France through art and culture, as reinforced by the presence of the French President Emmanuel Macron at the inauguration ceremony. The UAE's foreign policy ties with India were solidified when during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's maiden trip to the Emirates in 2015, the UAE government allotted land for the building of the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi (Financial Express, 2015). This move by the UAE was also to please the huge Indian diaspora residing in Abu Dhabi, who would have to travel to Dubai, where the two Hindu temples of the Emirates are located, for prayers and offerings. This generous move by the UAE government was seen as a strong message that cultural and spiritual inclusiveness is the way forward for global harmony (Times of India, 2018). In February 2018, during his UAE visit, Indian Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation stone for the Abu Dhabi temple, which is now near completion. Aside from pleasing the Indians residing in the UAE, this noble gesture

also reinforces the guiding vision of tolerance and harmony of the founding fathers of the Emirates (Times of India, 2018). The monumental inauguration of the Abu Dhabi Hindu temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2024, will be instrumental in blending two cultures and two countries, in addition to appeasing the huge Indian diaspora of over three million people residing across the seven Emirates.

Joseph Nye explains that the soft power of a country depends primarily on its culture, its political values and its foreign policies. He further enunciates that culture is a set of practices that create meaning for a society and has several manifestations, like high culture, pertaining to art, literature and education and of more appeal to the elites, whereas popular culture focuses more on mass entertainment (Nye, 2008). Whether it is the presence of international campuses such as The New York University Abu Dhabi, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, American University Dubai, the hosting of the Formula One auto race at the Yas Marina Circuit, or the hosting of the Bollywood IIFA Awards in Yas Island Abu Dhabi, the UAE has perfected the art of amalgamation of both high culture and popular culture in the true sense. This makes the UAE an attractive destination for people of both Western and Asian nations, making it a multicultural hub. The UAE is also largely dominated by Western style infrastructural developments like the construction of leisure theme islands like the Warner Brothers Studio and Ferrari World in Abu Dhabi, international museums like the Guggenheim and Louvre, British and American curriculum schools and universities, coupled with international brand restaurants pointing to the intensification of relationships between the Emiratis and Westerners, making it an attractive destination for most (Chaudior, 2010).

The UAE is home to diverse nationalities, and therefore the Emirati government continues to endorse fairness and impartiality in their law and governance (Gulf News, 2015). The UAE's commitment to peaceful amalgamation of their diaspora is evident in their anti-discriminatory speech law, formalised from 2015, to shield its varied nationalities from bigotry and hate speeches. The intention behind the law was

the protection of all diasporas and minorities from all forms of defamation and violent speech made offline or online on any social media platform. Such tolerant laws highlight the central tenet of the UAE's foreign policy of cultural diplomacy to attract expatriate populations from around the world. The promotion of cultural exchanges and religious freedom is a major tenet of the UAE's public diplomacy, and several social and cultural clubs such as the Italian Club, Indian Club, Egyptian Club, Sudanese Club and Jordanian Club have been established throughout the Emirates (Hussein, 2019).

Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Minister of Presidential Affairs, said in 2019 that the UAE's soft power strategy was to increase the country's global reputation abroad by highlighting its identity, heritage, culture and contributions to the world. This highlights how the UAE's foreign policy of soft power is strongly guided by its culture and political values. He enunciated that the UAE's soft power strategy is based on four main objectives, which are to develop a unified direction for various sectors including the economy, humanities, tourism, media and science, and to promote the UAE's position as a gateway to the region (The National, 2019). Another main aim is to establish the UAE as a regional capital for culture, art and tourism, and to establish its reputation as a modern and tolerant country that welcomes all people from across the world. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the UAE's Minister of Tolerance in the year 2019, when UAE celebrated the Year of Tolerance, said that the UAE has turned to tolerance as its soft power strategy and emerged as a global model for a peaceful and prosperous nation (Sarkar, 2019). He further added that the Arabic-Islamic heritage and the UAE's founding father, Sheikh Zayed's, vision have aided the country in welcoming its diverse diasporas, engaging them in dialogue, understanding the differences and accepting the shared cultural values and reinstating them through education. Articulating the vision of the Ministry of Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan said it "promotes tolerance by working with all of the country's residents cooperatively on activities such

as volunteer programs, advocacy, education and awareness raising, public events and celebrations, while all the time undertaking research about the drivers of tolerance and the causes of intolerance as well as determining strategies and monitoring progress” (Sarkar, 2019). This view of tolerance that the UAE upholds is deeply enshrined in the framework of the UAE's public diplomacy, which entails scientific, humanitarian and academic diplomacy, cultural and media diplomacy, people diplomacy, economic diplomacy and national representatives' diplomacy. The Deputy Minister of the UAE envisions the country's soft power strategy as including the culture, technology, art, science and economic sectors to establish diplomatic relations both in the MENA region and globally (The National, 2019).

## **Public Diplomacy and Tolerance**

Public diplomacy, according to Joseph Nye, is an instrument that governments use to mobilises their resources of culture, art and literature to communicate with and attract different diasporas, rather than just maintaining diplomatic ties (Nye, 2008). The UAE has also institutionalised its policy of tolerance by establishing a Specific Ministry dedicated to Tolerance in 2016. Just as public diplomacy tries to captivate individuals by drawing attention to potential resources through broadcasting, cultural and religious exports, similarly the Ministry of Tolerance in UAE is tasked with implementing tolerance in the community, media, culture, education and workplace to attract expatriates internationally. The focal purpose is to solidify the UAE as the global capital for culture, dialogue between cultures and civilizations, and build a sophisticated and multifaceted foreign policy based on soft power and public diplomacy (Ardemagni, 2019).

Public diplomacy in the modern age is not just about communicating with expatriates, but about creating a compelling narrative that demonstrates how the proactive public diplomacy of a nation can reduce feelings of uncertainty and confusion (Manor, 2020). The greater the diplomatic

and global role a nation plays, the stronger the visibility of tolerance is in its national discourse and public diplomacy (Monier, 2023). The larger the diaspora of expatriates residing in a nation, the more important it becomes for that state to construct relations with its expatriates in way that does not undermine their legitimacy at domestic and international levels. The states must find a way to balance the needs of their expatriate population with that of their own citizens to maintain social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Monier, 2023). For the UAE, therefore, it is of the utmost importance to mobilise a strong value-based public diplomacy strategy that advances its soft power strategy to gain the support of both the Emirati citizens and its diverse diaspora. The UAE government's main emphasis is on religious tolerance and coexistence so that the large expatriate population can form a robust source for constructing soft power to influence international arenas through dialogues on interfaith matters such as the role of religion in politics (Shakman, 2012).

The constant incorporation of the tolerance discourse in the UAE's foreign policy narrative highlights how it has, with time, evolved into a wider strategy of statecraft, enhancing the attractiveness of the nation internationally to wider diasporas. However, public diplomacy should not be confused with propaganda and campaigns. Long-term cultural relationships varies with three different dimensions of public diplomacy that involve daily communication through social media and international press, strategic communication and long-standing relationships with key individuals through scholarships, exchanges, conferences and media channels (Leonard, 2002). The Emirati government promotes its peace and tolerance initiatives on social media and also on all their official government websites. The UAE has pushed back against the growing divisiveness across the world and followed a path of "moderate Islam", which promotes greater tolerance for all faiths and encourages acceptance and openness. The UAE is leading by example in the Middle East by making unique government policies, innovative partnerships and interfaith dialogues (Otaiba, 2016). The cornerstone for

the UAE government's strategic communication is the "Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies" (PEACEMS), which aims at reviving the humanistic values of all religions and the spirit of coexistence in Muslim societies and enhancing the role of the UAE in promoting peace, security and prosperity (PEACEMS, 2014). This alternative model of "moderate Islam" that the UAE encourages, alongside women's empowerment, welcomes multiple diasporas by embracing diversity, which has helped them in their national rebranding. The UAE has institutionalised tolerance domestically, while promoting the Emirati model of tolerance internationally; for instance, the National Program for Tolerance was launched in 2016 and in 2017 the International Institute for Tolerance was founded by the PM HH Shiekh al-Maktoum, the first one in the Gulf region. In 2018, the Emirati President, HH Sheikh Khalifa Al-Nahyan, announced the National Research Project on Tolerance, projecting the UAE as a global upholder of peace and soft power (Kourgiotis, 2020).

The UAE government's commitment towards protection of religious freedom, wherein the UAE Constitution guarantees freedom of worship to all, bears testament to the success of public diplomacy through strategic communication and maintaining interpersonal relationships with expatriates. A key accomplishment for the Emirati government on the public diplomacy tenet of maintaining long-standing relations with important individuals has been the landmark visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the UAE in February 2019. The Pope was warmly received by the UAE President, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and the Vice President and Prime Minister of Dubai, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum. The Pope paid tribute and shared a peace message to more than a million Catholics residing in the UAE in a special mass that was organised in honour of the Papal visit in Abu Dhabi at Zayed Sports City (Embassy of the UAE, 2019). On the occasion of Pope Francis' visit, the UAE announced its plans to create the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, which would include a church, a mosque and a synagogue, making it a place of learning, dialogue and worship, focused on

creating mutual understanding among people of all faiths and belief systems. This vision for the need of an interfaith centre emerged following the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the UAE in 2019, when the Pope joined with Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, to sign the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (Embassy of the UAE, 2019). A reflection of the values highlighted in this document, which is now present in the premises of the Abrahamic House, operational since early 2023, has served as a powerful platform for inspiring and nurturing understanding, openness and acceptance between people of all religions. The Abrahamic House, a multi-faith complex, has attracted positive global attention for its message of religious tolerance, serving UAE's public diplomacy strategy of gaining support from international media.

Education and scholarships for international students, the setting up of international universities such as NYU Abu Dhabi, Birmingham University Dubai and Canadian University Dubai, to name a few, for welcoming international diasporas in the field of higher education, has been the cornerstone of Emirati public diplomacy. The most exceptional aspect of the UAE's educational system both at school and university level is the functioning of multiple educational models to recognise and respect the diverse nationalities residing in the country (Boateng, 2021). Students of different nationalities in the country are often enrolled in different educational models engaging in varied inter-cultural exchanges, learning each other's national languages without having to move outside the country (Boateng, 2021). The numerous American and British Universities in the UAE are shaping UAE's soft power strategy of hosting thousands of international students who experience the local culture and inter-faith interactions and return to their home with a positive image of the Emirates (Masudi, 2019). Indian medical students displaced from Ukrainian universities due to the Russia-Ukraine war in early 2022 were accommodated with free seats and scholarships by the Gulf Medical University in Ajman, UAE. This initiative of the University of recognising these students as vital to the future

of healthcare delivery, ensuring that there is no gap in their education, came as a huge relief to the displaced students and also manifested UAE's remarkable public diplomacy initiative of encouraging exchange students and providing scholarships.

## **Soft Power Diplomacy and Forming International Alliances**

The compatibility between the UAE's foreign policy of soft power and public diplomacy have recently been highlighted by the historic signing of the Abraham Accords between the UAE, Israel and Bahrain, mediated by the United States, in September 2020. The peace deal with Israel has generated a synergistic effect for promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue between Israel and the Arab signatories and engaging the Jewish diaspora in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as unlocking valuable doors for economic cooperation and strategic bilateral relations (Jeong, 2021). With the normalisation of relations between the two nations, an interest among travellers of both nations has been generated; people who are anxious to investigate new destinations and also to enhance trade, alongside spreading UAE's inclusive vision of a regional community for progress. The Abraham Accords have not only enhanced the bilateral relations between the UAE and Israel but have also promoted regional security and strategic cooperation in the Middle East.

The 9/11 terror attacks brought about a massive recalibration of the Emirati foreign policy, and the UAE foreign policy became committed to the US-led war against terrorism and extremism in all forms, including the Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Houthis in Yemen, ISIS in Syria, and Al Shabab in Somalia (Gokalp, 2020). The UAE renounced Islamic fundamentalism in all forms and followed a path of moderate Islam, making liberalism and openness the cornerstones of its foreign policy, aimed at attracting investors and encouraging diplomatic alliances. The UAE has since adopted a pragmatic approach towards both its regional neighbours and international partners, both to accommodate its diverse

diaspora, and for its economic benefits. The Emirati foreign policy is committed to boosting its economy by enhancing its influence, status and relative power through partnerships with not just international economies but also by diversifying its alliances at the regional level (Al Ketbi, 2020). Although during the Arab Spring in 2011, the UAE played the role of a strong regional actor, not shying away from robust military intervention, its foreign policy has shifted towards being a softer, more peaceful player now (Barhouma, 2022). This is evident in the UAE's forging of cordial relationship with Iran, which has been on the opposite side of the civil war in Yemen. The UAE's significant economic interests in Iran have been a major driving force in bolstering relations with Iran, and accounting for 68 per cent of Iran's imports.

Apart from the Middle East, UAE foreign policy has also focused its attention in creating robust alliances in the Asian region. In the year 2022, India and the UAE became signatories to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in an effort to boost their trade and economic ties. The trade agreement has not only enhanced bilateral trade between the two nations by 14%, with the UAE being India's third-largest trading partner, but also serves as a possible gateway to Africa and the European Union (Rannou, 2023). Accounting for approximately 38 per cent of the UAE population, the Indian community residing in the UAE also serves as an incentive for UAE's economic boost, making India its second-largest trading partner; they are also key allies in defense, with the two nations conducting joint military operations in the Gulf of Oman last month. The UAE's foreign policy of tolerance, acceptance and religious freedom has helped the nation gain a cultural understanding of diplomatic partners, forge deeper alliances and build on huge economic investments. For instance, the UAE-based retail giant Lulu International imports \$80 billion worth of food and non-food products from India to supply the hypermarkets and supermarkets in the region to meet the needs of the Indian community. With enhanced trade relations with India, the Lulu Group India and the

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) signed a memorandum of understanding to further accelerate exports from India to the UAE (Kumar, 2023). The Indian diaspora in the UAE has played a significant role in enhancing the bilateral relationship between the two nations, serving as a link of connectivity, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation (Debroy, 2023). The UAE-India partnership is a driver for economic growth that creates trade and investment opportunities for over 3.8 billion people. The economic partnership contributes to the vitality of trade and investment flows in South Asia and through it towards regional and global markets.

The other major economic partner that the UAE has in Asia is China. The UAE, with its diversified economy and attractive taxation policies, has been a lucrative destination for the Chinese workforce. Additionally, the UAE's cosmopolitan culture, state-of-the-art public facilities, convenience of life, and easy access to Chinese groceries and products have made many in the community establish their roots in the country for decades (Zhang, 2023). China has tapped into the strategic location of the UAE, which serves as a gateway for Chinese products to flow into the MENA markets, bringing in more Chinese expatriates who are increasingly being recruited by several multinational corporations and retail sectors. The Emirati state-of-the-art infrastructure, family-oriented social and cultural environment and growing educational resources, such as the government-funded Chinese national curriculum school in Dubai, have encouraged Chinese expatriates to bring their families to the country (Wang, 2022). Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the exchanges between China and the UAE have further diversified, with the two nations upgrading their bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018; by 2019, China had become the UAE's largest non-oil trade partner and the fourth-largest source of tourists to Dubai. In spite of the grave challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in the last three years, China is still ranked as the UAE's largest trading partner (Wang, 2022).

## Diaspora in the MENA Region and Beyond

Pakistan is another major ally of the UAE in the Asian region, given that a massive 1.7 million Pakistani diaspora members reside in the UAE. The two nations have maintained cordial bilateral relations for over fifty years, with growing economic cooperation in the fields of trade, energy, infrastructure, petroleum and several other avenues which have been beneficial for both economies. In conjunction with trade and commerce, the UAE has been a major donor of financial aid to Pakistan's struggling economy. According to the Pakistani Ambassador in the UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, "Pakistanis consider the UAE their second home and vice versa. The close geographical proximity between the two countries gives a great opportunity to work together", adding that the Pakistani expatriates in the UAE are sending around \$ 6.11 billion remittances home (Aamir, 2023). The Ambassador further highlighted that Pakistan and the UAE can collaborate on such sectors as IT, startups, Fintech and climate change. He explained that the vibrant Pakistani diaspora has a rich Islamic heritage and strong cultural values, which they want to promote in the UAE; this was effectively depicted in the Pakistani pavillion at the Dubai Expo 2020 (Aamir, 2023). The Pakistani Business Council, Pakistani Association of Dubai, Pakistani Professional Wing, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan (ICAP)-UAE Chapter Wing and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Alumni-UAE Chapter are some of the associations and community networks established by the Pakistani diaspora in the UAE that further their social and cultural interests. These organisations also prove to be platforms for community development and support systems wherein Pakistani expatriates can embrace their language and culture (Omar, 2020). To make its vibrant Pakistani diaspora feel at home, the UAE has facilitated the opening of many Pakistani schools, providing the students with the best possible learning environment and thereby welcoming the inflow of more Pakistani expatriates, investors and businesses.

The UAE's ability to diplomatically and effectively manoeuvre relations with most nations has also garnered

several criticisms, especially from Western governments. The UAE's neutrality on the Russia–Ukraine war has been viewed as a balancing act by the Emirati government, for whom Russia is a key ally in the Middle East. The UAE, over the years, has also cultivated an image of an effective mediator of international conflicts by hosting negotiations and brokering peace between nations, as part of its soft power politics, especially to impress and attract foreign investors (Boateng, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The Emirati leadership has been successful in the creation of a global image of the UAE as the socially inclusive cultural hub of the Middle East. As originally contextualised by Joseph Nye, the use of force and military prowess for economic gain is too costly and dangerous for modern great powers, whereas soft power capabilities such as effective communication, national cohesion and universalistic culture helps nations attain “great power” status both regionally and internationally (Nye, 1990). The soft power resources of cultural attraction, social cohesion, public diplomacy and religious tolerance have provided the UAE with more opportunities and economic gains, ranking first in the Middle East and Arab regions and 20<sup>th</sup> globally in the Economic Opportunity Rankings. Such attractive rankings and the tolerant policies of the government are sure to play an instrumental role in accelerating a significant migration of global businesses and people from other popular hubs like China, India, the US, UK, Luxembourg, Switzerland, France, Italy, Singapore and Hong Kong to the Emirates (Emirates News Agency, 2023).

In the post-pandemic era, the UAE introduced more pragmatic economic reforms, such as individuals above the age of 21 no longer needing to buy a special license to purchase alcohol, and decriminalising alcohol consumption, which was a welcome move for most expatriates. Other economic reforms with more secular leanings include stricter laws against harassment of women, and lifting the ban on unmarried

couples sharing accommodation, which was a source of huge stress for many Western expatriates residing in the Emirates (Syal, 2020). The UAE government also made extensive efforts during the pandemic to achieve complete vaccination, and expedited this process so that expatriates felt safe to return to the country to work. The UAE has made several key social changes in recent years, such as adding sexual harassment to their penal code and including men to be recognised as potential victims as well. The new rules also decriminalise suicide, addressing mental health issues and bringing a glimmer of hope for many international students in the UAE who feel that they will have greater access to mental health facilities (Syal, 2020). The aim of such reforms is to boost the UAE's social and economic standing and also to depict the shift in cultural attitudes of the UAE to accommodate the increasing needs of their diverse diaspora.

With visionary strategies of multiculturalism, unmatched infrastructure, and an environment that nourishes growth, the UAE has emerged as an epicentre of tolerance and prosperity. The constant inflow of a migrant diaspora to the UAE is essential for ensuring commercial diversification of the Emirati economy, and hence, the principles of social cohesion and cultural appreciation are vital for sustaining their legitimacy in the country. The UAE's expatriate population is key to the nation's economic prosperity, and to attract high-skilled workers, many residency and visa schemes have been introduced since the pandemic in 2020. The Dubai government has even rolled out several cultural visas to attract more talented artists, creators and highly skilled expatriates. This multitude of visa initiatives forms part of the UAE's public diplomacy to retain foreign expatriates. Amongst the Emirates, while Abu Dhabi and Dubai aim to attract divergent diasporas through tolerant working and living policies, Sharjah, the other popular Emirate, brands itself as the cultural capital of UAE, regularly hosting several book fairs and other cultural activities that make expatriates feel at home.

The promotion of the tolerance narrative is imperative for building an international image that attracts diverse

people and businesses into the country, enhancing diplomatic partnerships globally. This proves Nye's concept that cultural and ideological attraction are universal, and through soft power capabilities, effective public diplomacy and communication, emerging powers such as the UAE can coexist sustainably with its predominantly non-citizen multicultural diaspora, while formulating economic alliances that augment UAE's influence internationally.

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