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Dimensions of Tolerance in Arab Civilizations

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ABSTRACT

Tolerance is frequently invoked as a defining virtue of the contemporary Arab world, yet it is rarely examined as a multidimensional construct with deep civilizational roots. This paper offers a conceptual and integrative analysis of the dimensions of tolerance in Arab civilizations, tracing the idea across theological, historical, ethical, social, institutional, economic, and epistemological registers. Drawing on an integrative review of primary source traditions, classical historiography, and recent peer-reviewed scholarship, the study argues that tolerance in the Arab context cannot be reduced to a single meaning. It functions simultaneously as a scriptural and jurisprudential principle, a lived historical practice of coexistence among religious and ethnic communities, a philosophical disposition toward difference, a set of social customs governing hospitality and neighbourliness, a modern institutional and legal architecture, an economic asset that shapes investment and mobility, and an epistemic humility that resists the certitude underpinning intolerance. The analysis maps these seven dimensions onto both the heritage of the classical Islamic and Arab world and the deliberate, state-led tolerance frameworks of the present, using the United Arab Emirates as an illustrative contemporary case. The paper contends that the durability of tolerance depends on the alignment of these dimensions: scriptural values require institutional embodiment, institutional design requires economic incentive and social internalisation, and all of them require an epistemological posture that treats certitude with suspicion. The study concludes with implications for policy, education, and future empirical research, proposing that a dimensional model provides a more analytically useful account of tolerance than the diffuse rhetorical usage that

currently dominates public discourse.

Keywords: *tolerance; Arab civilizations; coexistence; pluralism; Islamic thought; convivencia; institutional tolerance; interfaith dialogue.*

1. Introduction

Few words carry as heavy a normative charge in contemporary Arab public life as tolerance. It appears in national visions and constitutional preambles, in ministerial titles, in school curricula, and in the branding of cities and states. The United Arab Emirates declared 2019 a national Year of Tolerance and established a dedicated ministry to institutionalise the value; other Arab states have adopted comparable initiatives. Yet the very ubiquity of the term is also its analytical weakness. When a concept is asked to do so much rhetorical work, it risks becoming a slogan rather than an object of rigorous study, invoked to signal virtue without clarifying what precisely is being claimed.

This paper begins from the premise that tolerance in Arab civilizations is not one thing but many. It is at once a theological doctrine, a historical practice, an ethical disposition, a social custom, a legal and institutional order, an economic asset, and an epistemological stance. These are not merely different ways of talking about the same phenomenon; they are analytically distinct dimensions, each with its own logic, its own sources, and its own failure modes. A theological affirmation of tolerance may coexist with weak institutional protections; robust institutions may be undermined by an intolerant social culture; and even the most elaborate framework can be hollowed out if the underlying epistemic posture remains one of absolute certitude. Understanding tolerance therefore requires disaggregating it into its constituent dimensions and asking how they relate.

The Arab world is an especially instructive setting for such an inquiry. It is the cradle of a civilization that, at its height, governed one of the most religiously and ethnically plural spaces in the pre-modern world, developing sophisticated legal and social mechanisms for managing difference. It is also a region whose modern history has been marked by episodes of conflict and exclusion, which makes uncritical celebration of an unbroken tradition of tolerance both historically inaccurate and politically unhelpful. A

serious account must hold these together: neither a romantic myth of a golden age of perfect harmony, nor a cynical dismissal of tolerance as mere propaganda, but a differentiated analysis of how tolerance has actually operated, and how it is being deliberately reconstructed today.

The objectives of this paper are threefold. First, to propose a dimensional framework that distinguishes the principal registers in which tolerance operates in Arab civilizations. Second, to trace each dimension across both the classical heritage and the contemporary moment, using the deliberate, state-led tolerance frameworks of the Gulf, and the United Arab Emirates in particular, as an illustrative case of institutional design. Third, to argue that the durability of tolerance depends on the alignment of these dimensions, and to draw out the implications of this claim for policy, education, and research. The paper does not offer new empirical data; it is a conceptual and integrative contribution intended to sharpen how tolerance is theorised and, in turn, how it might be more effectively cultivated.

The significance of this undertaking extends beyond academic taxonomy. In a region where tolerance has become a stated priority of national policy and a theme of international engagement, the conceptual clarity with which the value is understood has practical consequences for how it is promoted, measured, and sustained. A diffuse, one-dimensional understanding invites diffuse, one-dimensional interventions, a ministry here, a campaign there, whose coherence is difficult to assess. A dimensional understanding, by contrast, allows policymakers, educators, and researchers to ask sharper questions: which dimensions of tolerance are strong in a given society, which are weak, and how might they be brought into better alignment? The framework advanced here is intended to serve that practical purpose as well as the scholarly one, offering a vocabulary in which the successes and shortfalls of tolerance can be discussed with greater precision.

2. Conceptual Clarification: What Is Tolerance?

Before mapping its dimensions, the concept itself requires clarification, because tolerance is contested even at the level of definition. In the classical liberal tradition, tolerance names the deliberate restraint of a power one possesses: to tolerate is to refrain from suppressing a belief or practice of which one disapproves but which one has the capacity to prohibit. On this reading, tolerance presupposes both disapproval and power, and is distinguished from indifference, which involves no disapproval, and from endorsement, which involves no disapproval to overcome. The UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995) broadens this into a positive ideal, defining tolerance as respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of human cultures, and insisting that it is an active attitude prompted by recognition of universal human rights, not mere concession or condescension.

These two senses, the restraint sense and the respect sense, sit in productive tension throughout this paper. The restraint sense captures the minimal, realistic core of tolerance: the willingness to permit what one does not embrace. The respect sense captures its aspirational horizon: the transformation of mere permission into genuine appreciation of difference. Arab civilizational sources contain both. Classical juristic frameworks for the treatment of non-Muslim communities were, in part, frameworks of regulated restraint; the Qur'anic affirmation that there is to be no compulsion in matters of faith gestures toward something closer to principled respect. A dimensional analysis must be able to accommodate the whole span from grudging coexistence to celebratory pluralism, because real societies occupy the entire range.

It is equally important to specify the limits of tolerance, which is not the same as relativism or moral indifference. As theorists from Locke onward have observed, a coherent doctrine of tolerance must draw boundaries: a tolerance that extends to the intolerant, to those who would use freedom to destroy the freedom of others, becomes self-

defeating. The relevant question is never whether to tolerate everything, but where and how to draw the line, and on what authority. Arab civilizational practice, like every other, has always operated with such limits; the analytically interesting matter is the shifting location and justification of those limits across the dimensions examined below.

3. Literature Review

Scholarship bearing on tolerance in Arab civilizations spans several literatures that rarely speak to one another. A first body of work is historical, examining coexistence in specific times and places. Studies of the status of Jewish and Christian communities under Islamic rule have challenged both the polemical narrative of relentless persecution and the equally simplistic narrative of untroubled harmony, arguing instead for a differentiated picture in which minority communities generally enjoyed a level of security and communal autonomy that compared favourably with contemporaneous Christian Europe, even as they lived under legal disabilities. The Andalusian experience, in particular, has become a touchstone in this literature, celebrated as an ornament of coexistence among Muslims, Jews, and Christians while also being scrutinised for its internal tensions and eventual collapse.

A second body of work is philosophical and theological, concerned with the normative sources of tolerance within Islamic and Arab thought: the interpretation of key scriptural passages, the juristic elaboration of principles governing relations with non-Muslims, and the recovery of an ethics of moderation, or *wasatiyyah*, as a resource for contemporary pluralism. A third, more recent literature is institutional and policy-oriented, analysing the deliberate construction of tolerance frameworks by contemporary Arab states, especially in the Gulf, and asking what such frameworks are for, how they function, and how their motives should be assessed.

This most recent literature is where the present study is most directly situated, and where the International Journal of Civilizations Studies & Tolerance Sciences has made distinctive contributions. Brankovic (2024),

in an exploratory qualitative study of the United Arab Emirates, identifies the foundational elements of what she terms a tolerance ecosystem, arguing that a functioning tolerance regime rests on three interlocking categories: policies and strategic planning, promotional and educational content, and the collaboration of partners and stakeholders. Her central claim, that tolerance is not a spontaneous social outcome but an orchestrated institutional achievement requiring deliberate coordination across government, education, and civil society, directly informs the institutional dimension developed later in this paper.

Bochner (2025), writing in the same journal, examines the moral and economic advantages of the Emirati religious-tolerance policy and demonstrates, through a mixed-methods analysis of policy and socio-economic data, that institutionalised tolerance operates simultaneously as an ethical commitment and a pragmatic economic mechanism. He shows that a credible tolerance regime enhances interfaith dialogue and minority protection while also improving a society's attractiveness to international investment and tourism, thereby reinforcing economic diversification. This finding underpins the economic dimension analysed below and supports the paper's broader argument that the dimensions of tolerance are mutually reinforcing rather than independent.

A third contribution from the journal approaches tolerance from the opposite, epistemological end. Warnick (2024) argues that the path to tolerance begins with the elimination of certitude, contending that the psychological root of intolerance lies in the illusion of absolute certainty about contested matters, and that a disciplined awareness of the limits of one's own knowledge is a precondition for genuinely tolerating others. This insight anchors the epistemological dimension of the framework and connects the institutional and historical registers to the interior, cognitive conditions on which they ultimately depend. Together, these three studies exemplify the analytic move this paper generalises: tolerance is best understood not as a single virtue but

as a layered construct whose registers must be examined separately and then related.

What the existing literature lacks, and what this paper seeks to provide, is an integrative framework that brings these separate registers into a single analytical schema. Historical studies rarely connect their findings to contemporary institutional design; policy studies rarely ground their analyses in the deep civilizational heritage; and epistemological reflections rarely engage the concrete machinery of states and markets. A dimensional model is offered here as a means of holding these conversations together.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, integrative literature review combined with conceptual analysis. An integrative review is appropriate when the aim is not to aggregate homogeneous empirical findings but to synthesise diverse bodies of knowledge, including theoretical, historical, and empirical sources, into a coherent framework that reframes an existing concept. Given that tolerance in Arab civilizations is addressed across theology, history, philosophy, law, economics, and policy studies, no single-method empirical design could capture the phenomenon in its full breadth; a conceptual synthesis is the fitting instrument.

Sources were identified in three tiers. The first tier comprises primary civilizational sources and foundational documents, including scriptural references, the early Constitution of Medina, and contemporary charters such as the Document on Human Fraternity signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019. The second tier comprises peer-reviewed scholarship, with particular attention to studies published in the *International Journal of Civilizations Studies & Tolerance Sciences*, supplemented by established works in the history and philosophy of tolerance. The third tier comprises authoritative reference and policy materials that document contemporary institutional arrangements. Sources were selected for relevance to at least one identified dimension of tolerance, for scholarly credibility, and for their capacity to illuminate the relationship between dimensions.

The analytical procedure followed three steps. First, an inductive reading of the assembled sources generated candidate dimensions, the distinct registers in which tolerance was observed to operate. Second, these were consolidated into a seven-dimension framework through iterative comparison, collapsing overlapping categories and retaining those that were analytically distinct. Third, each dimension was elaborated by tracing it across both the classical heritage and the contemporary moment, with the United Arab Emirates serving as an illustrative case for the institutional and economic dimensions because of the density of documentation and recent scholarship available for that setting. The framework is offered as an interpretive contribution; its limitations, including the absence of primary empirical data and the illustrative rather than representative use of a single national case, are addressed in the discussion.

5. The Dimensions of Tolerance in Arab Civilizations

The analysis identifies seven dimensions along which tolerance operates in Arab civilizations. They are presented in a sequence that moves from the foundational and historical toward the institutional and interior, but the ordering does not imply a hierarchy; the central argument of the paper is precisely that the dimensions are interdependent.

5.1 The Theological and Religious Dimension

The deepest layer of tolerance in Arab civilizations is theological. Within the Islamic tradition that shaped the classical Arab world, the normative foundation for tolerance is grounded in scriptural affirmations of human diversity as divinely intended and of freedom from compulsion in matters of faith. The Qur'anic statement that there shall be no compulsion in religion has been read across centuries as a principled limit on coercion in belief, while the declaration that humanity was created as peoples and tribes so that they might come to know one another frames diversity not as a problem to be managed but as a purposeful feature of creation. These sources

establish tolerance as a religious value rather than a merely prudential accommodation.

At the same time, the theological dimension is internally complex. The same tradition developed detailed juristic frameworks governing the status of non-Muslim monotheist communities, the *ahl al-dhimma*, that combined communal protection and autonomy with legal differentiation. To modern sensibilities these frameworks appear as regulated inequality; in their own historical context they constituted a recognised, contractual status that secured life, property, and the freedom to worship and to be governed by one's own communal law. The theological dimension therefore encompasses both the expansive affirmations of non-compulsion and the more circumscribed juristic order, and any honest account must present the tension rather than resolve it by selective quotation. Contemporary reform-minded scholarship has sought to recover the expansive strand, re-reading the sources through the lens of moderation and common humanity, a move exemplified by the Document on Human Fraternity, which grounds coexistence in a shared theological affirmation of the dignity of every person.

The theological dimension is also generative rather than static, because scriptural principles are perpetually re-interpreted in the light of changing circumstances. The contemporary re-reading of the tradition through the vocabulary of common human fraternity, dignity, and moderation is itself a theological act, one that mobilises authentic resources within the tradition to meet the demands of religiously plural, globally connected societies. This is why the theological dimension cannot be treated as a fixed inheritance to be simply invoked; it is a living argument in which competing interpretations contend, and the interpretive victory of the expansive, non-coercive reading is neither automatic nor guaranteed. The theological foundation of tolerance, in other words, must be continually re-secured through scholarship, preaching, and public argument rather than assumed as a settled deposit.

5.2 The Historical and Civilizational Dimension

Tolerance is not only a doctrine to be affirmed but a practice to be observed in the historical record, and here the Arab and Islamic past offers unusually rich material. The classical Islamic world governed an extraordinarily plural space, encompassing Muslims, Jews, Christians of many denominations, Zoroastrians, and others, and it developed working arrangements that allowed these communities to coexist over long periods. Comparative historical scholarship has argued that, judged against the standards of its own age rather than those of the present, this order afforded minority communities a degree of security, communal self-governance, and economic participation that was often superior to what comparable minorities experienced elsewhere.

An instructive early instance of this dimension is the document commonly known as the Constitution of Medina, an agreement attributed to the earliest Muslim community that bound together the diverse groups of that city, including its Jewish tribes, into a single political community with mutual obligations of defence and dispute resolution while preserving each group's religious and communal autonomy. Whatever the debates over its precise text and dating, the document is significant as an early articulation of a plural political order in which distinct religious communities were treated as constituent parties to a shared compact rather than as subordinated outsiders. It prefigures, in embryonic form, the modern intuition that diverse communities can be integrated into a common civic framework without the erasure of their distinct identities, and it stands as a foundational reference point for contemporary Arab discourses of coexistence.

The Andalusian experience has become the emblematic case. In medieval Iberia, for substantial stretches, Muslims, Jews, and Christians participated in a shared culture of learning, commerce, and translation that later scholars have described as an ornament of coexistence, in which philosophy, poetry, medicine, and mathematics flourished across confessional lines. This *convivencia* was neither continuous nor idyllic; it was punctuated by periods of

tension and eventually undone. But precisely because it was real and imperfect, it is instructive: it demonstrates that sustained coexistence among religious communities is historically possible under certain conditions, while also warning that such achievements are fragile and reversible. The historical dimension thus supplies both an inheritance to be claimed and a cautionary lesson to be heeded, and it resists both mythologising and dismissal.

5.3 The Ethical and Philosophical Dimension

Beyond scripture and history lies an ethical dimension: tolerance as a cultivated disposition of character and a philosophical stance toward difference. The Arab intellectual tradition developed an ethics of moderation, balance, and the avoidance of extremes, often expressed through the concept of *wasatiyyah*, the middle way, which counsels against both rigid absolutism and unmoored permissiveness. This ethical middle is not indifference; it is a disciplined orientation that takes one's own commitments seriously while refusing to translate conviction into the domination of others.

Philosophically, this dimension connects the Arab heritage to the wider human conversation about the grounds of tolerance. The classical liberal argument, that tolerance is the deliberate restraint of a power one holds, and the deeper argument that tolerance flows from recognising the fallibility of human judgement, both find analogues in the ethics of moderation. To occupy the middle way is, in effect, to acknowledge that one's own grasp of contested truths is partial, and that this partiality imposes a duty of restraint toward those who see differently. The ethical dimension therefore functions as a bridge: it links the theological affirmations of the first dimension and the interior, epistemological posture of the seventh, translating abstract principle into a livable disposition.

The ethical dimension is also where tolerance is distinguished from its counterfeits. A disposition of moderation must be carefully separated, on one side, from cowardice or opportunism that avoids conflict merely to escape cost, and, on the other, from a relativism that tolerates everything because it

believes in nothing. Authentic ethical tolerance holds genuine convictions and is willing to defend them, yet chooses restraint toward those who hold different convictions out of respect for their equal standing as moral agents. This is a demanding disposition, not a slack one; it requires the character to maintain one's own commitments without the will to impose them. The classical ethics of the middle way captures exactly this demand, positioning virtue not as the absence of conviction but as its disciplined, non-coercive exercise, and it is this demanding conception, rather than a lazy live-and-let-live, that the ethical dimension of tolerance properly names.

5.4 The Social and Cultural Dimension

Tolerance also lives in the ordinary textures of social life: in custom, hospitality, and the norms that govern relations among neighbours and strangers. Arab social culture places a high value on hospitality toward the guest and the stranger, on the protection of those under one's care, and on the obligations of neighbourliness. These customary norms constitute a dimension of tolerance that is neither doctrinal nor institutional but practical and habitual, transmitted through family, community, and everyday interaction rather than through texts or laws.

The social dimension matters because it is where tolerance is either internalised or hollowed out. Institutions can mandate non-discrimination and scripture can affirm human dignity, but if the surrounding social culture treats difference with suspicion, formal tolerance remains brittle. Conversely, where customs of hospitality and neighbourliness extend readily across lines of religion, origin, and language, they supply tolerance with a resilient social foundation that survives changes of policy and leadership. The cultural task, in this dimension, is to ensure that inherited norms of hospitality are consciously extended to the full diversity of contemporary plural societies, including the large expatriate and migrant populations that characterise the modern Gulf, rather than confined to a narrow in-group. Educational and intercultural initiatives that build competence in engaging across cultures are, in effect, interventions in this dimension,

cultivating the social habits on which the other dimensions depend.

5.5 The Institutional and Political Dimension

In the contemporary Arab world, tolerance has increasingly become a matter of deliberate institutional and political design. This dimension concerns the laws, ministries, strategies, and organisations through which states seek to guarantee, promote, and manage coexistence. It represents a significant historical shift: whereas classical tolerance emerged from a combination of scriptural principle, juristic order, and social custom, contemporary tolerance is, to a striking degree, engineered, the product of intentional policy rather than spontaneous evolution.

The United Arab Emirates offers the most fully articulated contemporary example. Its designation of a national Year of Tolerance, its establishment of a dedicated ministry, its national tolerance programme, and its hosting of the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity together constitute a comprehensive institutional apparatus. Brankovic (2024) analyses precisely this apparatus, arguing that a functioning tolerance regime rests on a tolerance ecosystem comprising three interlocking elements: coherent policies and strategic planning, sustained promotional and educational content, and active collaboration among governmental and non-governmental partners. Her key insight, that tolerance at this scale is an orchestrated institutional achievement rather than a spontaneous social outcome, captures what is distinctive about the institutional dimension: it must be built, resourced, and maintained.

The institutional dimension raises questions that the other dimensions do not. Because state-led tolerance is a deliberate project, it invites scrutiny of its motives and its limits, and critics have asked whether official tolerance can become selective, extending warmly toward some forms of difference while remaining constrained toward others. A mature analysis neither dismisses institutional tolerance as mere image-management nor accepts it uncritically; it recognises

that institutions are indispensable, that they deliver real protections, and that their credibility depends on the consistency between proclaimed principle and administrative practice. The institutional dimension, in short, is where tolerance becomes concrete and enforceable, and therefore also where it becomes accountable.

5.6 The Economic Dimension

Tolerance is not only a moral and political good; it is also an economic asset, and this constitutes a distinct dimension with its own logic. A society credibly committed to protecting diverse communities and beliefs lowers the perceived risk for international investors, professionals, and visitors from varied backgrounds, and thereby enhances its attractiveness as a destination for capital, talent, and tourism. Where the classical economy of the plural Islamic world benefited from the commercial participation of its varied communities and from its position astride major trade routes, the contemporary economy of tolerance operates through global flows of investment, skilled migration, and cross-cultural exchange.

Bochner (2025) provides direct evidence for this dimension in the Emirati case. His mixed-methods analysis demonstrates that the institutionalised commitment to religious tolerance functions simultaneously as an ethical imperative and a pragmatic economic mechanism: by promoting interfaith harmony, minority protection, and social stability, it enhances the society's appeal to international investors and tourists, contributing to increased foreign direct investment and tourism revenue and thereby supporting diversification away from dependence on hydrocarbon income. The economic dimension is thus tightly coupled to the institutional one: credible institutions generate the confidence on which economic returns depend, and economic returns in turn supply a powerful incentive to sustain the institutions.

This coupling has an important implication. Because tolerance yields tangible economic benefits, it acquires a constituency of interest beyond the purely

normative, aligning material self-interest with ethical commitment. This alignment is a source of durability, but it also introduces a risk: if tolerance is valued chiefly for its economic returns, it may be sustained only so long as those returns persist, and may be applied selectively where they are greatest. The economic dimension therefore strengthens tolerance while also revealing why tolerance cannot rest on economic logic alone, and why it must remain anchored in the theological, ethical, and epistemological dimensions that value coexistence for its own sake.

The economic dimension has deep historical antecedents that lend it civilizational continuity. The commercial vitality of the classical Islamic world depended in significant part on the participation of its diverse religious communities in trade, finance, crafts, and the professions, and on the networks of trust that spanned confessional and geographic boundaries across the medieval Mediterranean and Indian Ocean economies. Merchants of different faiths cooperated in long-distance commerce, shared instruments of credit and partnership, and relied on the relative security that a plural legal order afforded to persons and property. The contemporary economy of tolerance is thus not an entirely novel invention but a modern re-expression of a long-standing civilizational pattern in which openness to difference and commercial prosperity have reinforced one another. Recognising this continuity guards against the misconception that the economic value of tolerance is merely a recent public-relations discovery; it is, rather, a recurring feature of the Arab and Islamic economic experience.

5.7 The Epistemological and Psychological Dimension

The final dimension is the most interior: tolerance as a cognitive and psychological posture, rooted in how individuals hold their own beliefs. Warnick (2024) makes this dimension explicit in his argument that the path to tolerance begins with the elimination of certitude. On this view, the psychological engine of intolerance is the illusion of absolute certainty, the

conviction that one possesses complete and unassailable truth about contested matters, which licenses the suppression of those who believe otherwise. Tolerance, correspondingly, begins with a disciplined humility about the reach of one's own knowledge: a recognition that many of our deepest convictions are shaped by formative circumstance and are held more firmly than the evidence warrants.

This epistemological dimension underlies all the others. Scriptural affirmations of non-compulsion, historical practices of coexistence, ethical dispositions of moderation, social customs of hospitality, institutional protections, and economic incentives can all be undermined by an interior posture of certitude, which finds ways to justify exceptions, hierarchies, and exclusions. Conversely, an epistemic humility that treats one's own certainties with appropriate suspicion supplies the psychological precondition on which every other dimension depends for its sincerity. The ethics of the middle way, examined earlier, connects here: to occupy the middle is to have internalised the fallibility that Warnick places at the root of tolerance. The epistemological dimension is thus not one register among seven but, in a sense, the soil in which the others must be planted; a tolerance that is institutionally elaborate but epistemically absolutist is a structure without a foundation.

5.8 Interrelations Among the Dimensions

Having distinguished the seven dimensions, it is essential to specify how they relate, because their analytical separation should not obscure their practical entanglement. The dimensions can be arranged along a rough gradient from the interior and foundational to the exterior and instrumental. At one pole stands the epistemological dimension, the interior posture of the individual; at the other stand the institutional and economic dimensions, the exterior machinery of states and markets. Between them lie the theological, ethical, social, and historical dimensions, which mediate between inner disposition and outer structure. Tolerance is healthiest when influence flows in both directions along this gradient: when interior humility informs institutional design, and when institutions in turn cultivate the social and psychological conditions from which humility grows.

The following table summarises the seven dimensions, identifying for each its principal source, its characteristic expression in Arab civilizations, and its characteristic failure mode, that is, the specific way in which tolerance breaks down when that dimension is weak or contradicted.

Table 1. The seven dimensions of tolerance in Arab civilizations.

Dimension	Principal source	Characteristic expression	Failure mode
Theological / religious	Scripture and jurisprudence	Non-compulsion in faith; regulated communal status	Selective or coercive interpretation
Historical / civilizational	Lived practice and the historical record	Convivencia; plural civic compacts	Mythologising or dismissing the past
Ethical / philosophical	Moral tradition and reason	The middle way; disciplined moderation	Absolutism or unmoored permissiveness
Social / cultural	Custom and everyday practice	Hospitality; neighbourliness; intercultural competence	In-group confinement; social suspicion
Institutional / political	Law, policy, organisation	Ministries, strategies, tolerance ecosystems	Gap between proclaimed and practised
Economic	Markets and mobility	Attraction of investment, talent, tourism	Instrumentalisation; conditional application

Epistemological / psychological	Cognition and character	Humility about the limits of one's knowledge	Certitude and the illusion of certainty
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Source: Author's synthesis, drawing on Brankovic (2024), Bochner (2025), and Warnick (2024).

6. Discussion

The central argument that emerges from this dimensional analysis is that tolerance in Arab civilizations is durable only to the extent that its dimensions are aligned and mutually reinforcing. Each dimension, taken alone, is insufficient. Theological affirmation without institutional embodiment remains aspirational; institutions without social internalisation remain brittle; social custom without economic incentive lacks a material constituency; and every dimension is compromised by an epistemological posture of certitude. The dimensions are not alternative accounts of the same thing but interlocking components of a single system, and the health of the whole depends on the coherence among the parts.

This claim is supported by the convergence of the three journal studies on which the analysis draws. Brankovic (2024) shows that institutional tolerance is an orchestrated ecosystem rather than a spontaneous outcome, establishing the institutional dimension. Bochner (2025) shows that this institutional commitment generates economic returns, coupling the institutional and economic dimensions and demonstrating their mutual reinforcement. Warnick (2024) shows that the whole edifice ultimately rests on an interior disposition, the elimination of certitude, that no institution can mandate. Read together, these studies trace a chain from the interior posture of individuals, through social custom and ethical disposition, to institutional design and economic outcome, and back again, precisely the interdependence the dimensional model predicts.

The framework also clarifies why celebratory and dismissive accounts of Arab tolerance both mislead. Celebratory accounts typically foreground a single dimension, usually the theological or the historical, and treat an affirmation or a golden-age narrative as

if it settled the matter, ignoring the institutional, social, and epistemological work on which tolerance actually depends. Dismissive accounts typically foreground the institutional dimension in isolation, reading state-led tolerance as mere image-management while ignoring its real protections, its economic logic, and its roots in genuine civilizational resources. The dimensional model corrects both errors by insisting that no single dimension is decisive and that the interesting questions concern the relationships among them.

The contemporary Gulf experience, and the Emirati case in particular, is significant precisely because it represents a deliberate attempt to align the dimensions. The institutional apparatus is explicitly designed to embody scriptural and ethical values, to shape social culture through education and promotion, and to capture economic returns, an attempt, in the terms of this paper, to engineer coherence across dimensions that in the classical period emerged more organically. Whether such engineered coherence proves as durable as organically evolved coexistence is an open empirical question, and one that the dimensional framework is well suited to investigate. The framework predicts that the sustainability of the model will depend on the extent to which the institutional and economic dimensions are matched by genuine social internalisation and by the cultivation of the epistemic humility that Warnick identifies as tolerance's ultimate foundation.

The failure-mode column of Table 1 carries particular diagnostic value. Because each dimension has a characteristic way of breaking down, the framework can be used not only to describe tolerance but to diagnose its weaknesses in a given society. A regime may exhibit robust institutions yet suffer a widening gap between proclaimed and practised commitments; another may possess a rich theological heritage that is being narrowed by selective interpretation; a third may have internalised tolerance socially while lacking

the institutional protections that would make it enforceable. Locating the specific dimension in which a society is faltering is more analytically useful than a global verdict that it is either tolerant or intolerant, and it points toward correspondingly specific remedies, doctrinal, educational, institutional, economic, or psychological, rather than undifferentiated exhortation.

6.1 Limitations

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the study is conceptual and integrative rather than empirical; it proposes a framework and illustrates it with existing scholarship, but it does not test the framework against new primary data. Second, the contemporary case is drawn predominantly from the United Arab Emirates, chosen for the density of available documentation and scholarship, and the Emirati experience should be treated as illustrative rather than representative of the Arab world as a whole, whose national contexts vary widely. Third, the seven-dimension schema is one defensible way of partitioning a complex phenomenon; other partitions are possible, and the boundaries between dimensions, particularly the ethical and the epistemological, are analytical conveniences rather than sharp divisions. These limitations point toward, rather than undermine, the value of the framework, which is offered as a structure for further inquiry.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Tolerance in Arab civilizations is best understood not as a single virtue but as a multidimensional construct operating simultaneously across theological, historical, ethical, social, institutional, economic, and epistemological registers. Each dimension draws on distinct sources and follows a distinct logic, and the durability of tolerance depends on the alignment among them. The classical heritage supplied a largely organic coherence rooted in scripture, juristic order, and social custom; the contemporary Gulf, and the United Arab Emirates in particular, represents a deliberate effort to engineer such coherence through institutional design, economic incentive, and educational promotion, an effort whose long-term

sustainability the dimensional framework is well positioned to assess.

From this analysis several recommendations follow. For policy, the implication is that tolerance frameworks should be evaluated across all dimensions rather than measured by institutional output alone; a ministry, a strategy, and a set of economic returns are necessary but not sufficient, and their credibility depends on genuine social internalisation. For education, the priority is the cultivation of the epistemological dimension, the disciplined humility that Warnick identifies as tolerance's foundation, alongside the intercultural competence that extends inherited customs of hospitality to the full diversity of contemporary plural societies. For scholarship, the recommendation is to move beyond both celebration and dismissal toward differentiated empirical study of how the dimensions actually interact in particular settings.

Future research should test the dimensional framework empirically, examining whether societies in which the dimensions are well aligned in fact sustain tolerance more durably than those in which particular dimensions are weak or contradictory. Comparative work across Arab national contexts would clarify how far the Emirati model generalises, and longitudinal work would illuminate whether engineered coherence proves as resilient as organically evolved coexistence. The enduring lesson of the Arab civilizational experience, from the convivencia of medieval Iberia to the tolerance ministries of the contemporary Gulf, is that coexistence among diverse communities is both genuinely achievable and permanently fragile, an accomplishment that must be renewed across every dimension in each generation rather than assumed as a settled inheritance.

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