

**Migration as Soft Power:
Exploring India-UAE Relations in the GCC**

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Summary:

This paper examines how and why the Indian state utilizes migration as soft power in foreign policy while simultaneously asserting its sovereign legitimacy and influence abroad. Using the India-UAE relation as a case study, we explore the Indian state's national interests, constraints, and challenges, as well as the implications of soft power on the Indian state legitimacy both in the short and long run. The study is particularly relevant because it offers empirical and conceptual insights on the political and economic dynamics of migration and foreign policy behaviors of emigration states like India, and how they have increasingly employed soft power as a strategic tool to expand their regional economic interests and influence in broader Middle East region.

While the emigration states' use of migration as soft power has increased in recent decades, these state-led strategies have often had become vital for countries in the Global South, specifically the India-UAE migration corridor. As global migration intensifies, emigration states' interdependence and transnational sovereign responsibilities become crucial in maintaining and expanding its absolute control over its nationals abroad. In the case of India, the state's use of migration as a soft power strategy has enabled them to assert their economic interests through its strong diaspora presence and reinforced their strong historical diplomatic presence and ties in the UAE, GCC, and broader Middle East. However, such an approach is also intricately linked

with complex, dynamic, and multiple constraints and approaches that are often conditional and vulnerable to other external factors. These economic elements pose also strategic constraints and opportunities for the Indian state to rethink about its strategic approach in order to enhance their capacity to develop stronger institutional and governance approaches to protect their nationals abroad. While the economic benefits of migration as a soft power strategy have mixed effects both on the short and long-term, the Indian state still needs to create long-term sustainable employment and opportunities for its nationals in order to enhance its sovereignty, image, and reputation in the long run.