



When and Where Global meets Local: A multilevel analysis of determinants of social trust in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi

Guang Yang¹ | Masood Badri^{1,2} | Muna Al Bahar^{1,2} | Asma Al Rashdi¹

¹Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

²United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

Correspondence

Guang Yang, Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development, P.O. Box 30039, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
Email: guang.yang@addcd.gov.ae

Abstract

Abu Dhabi's transformation to a modern society in recent decades provides an ideal context to explore the interplay of tradition, transition, and modernization at various levels, which shapes the trajectory of the development of social trust. This study offers multilevel analyses of the effects of social, psychological, and ethnical factors on social trust by using data from Abu Dhabi General Social Survey conducted in 2018. The results sustain the validity of both social capital and social network theories in explaining social trust. Contrary to the findings in other Middle East countries, in Abu Dhabi, the full-time employed and people who are more satisfied with their household income tend to show a higher level of trust. A negative but insignificant relationship is found between community ethnic fragmentation and social trust.

KEYWORDS

Abu Dhabi, ethnic diversity, multilevel analysis, social network, social trust

1 | INTRODUCTION

Social trust is essential for creating and maintaining a strong and cohesive society both socially and economically (Bjørnskov, 2012; Francois, 2003; Putnam, 2000). With trust, people are more likely to appreciate and tolerate different views and preferences of others and to have confidence in building interpersonal relationships (Francois, 2003), and thus, a more social capital rich society is likely to emerge. Traditionally, Arab and the Middle Eastern countries are known for their strong tribe-based loyalty, intensive familial ties, and strong religious bond (Samin, 2015). The level of social trust in the Arab world, nevertheless, is evidently lower than in many other parts of the world (Spierings, 2019).

This research explores social trust or generalized trust from a sociological perspective in the empirical context of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Emirate of Abu Dhabi offers an ideal case to study the impact of traditional, social, and ethnical forces on trust given its rapid and ongoing economic and social transition, which may shed light on what have caused the relatively low level of social trust in Arab countries.

Evolved from some scattered small tribal settlements, Abu Dhabi has embarked on a journey of rapid economic and social development since the 1970s to become a regional and international trade, transportation, tourism, and financial hub today, thanks to its massive oil and gas reserves and economic diversification policies. Change and diversity are the defining features of Abu Dhabi's modernization process, where a fast pace of socioeconomic transformation has been witnessed. While family remains the anchoring force in the social milieu, family dynamics have seen declining internal cohesion in the time of globalization, as the young generations seek to devote more time to immediate family and friends rather than the extended family and communication technologies have given people alternative means of connection and sources of information and entertainment (Sabban & Mohamad, 2014). The role and ambition of women in society has changed (Al-Jenaibi, 2015; Al-Sayegh, 2001; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). Also importantly, migrant workers from around the world constitute the majority of Abu Dhabi's labor force, making Abu Dhabi a highly ethnically heterogeneous society. According to Abu Dhabi's 2016 population estimates (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, 2020), Emiratis accounted for only 19.0% of the total population. These changing forces would affect how individuals

form their trust networks and the extent to which they are willing to trust generalized others in the face of changing familiarity and incentives (Lubell, 2007).

Despite its importance, to date there appear to be very limited attempts to empirically test various theories of the effect of emotion, social relationships and networks, and ethnic diversity on social trust in the UAE and in the wider Middle East region. Except for Jamal (2007) and Spierings (2019), most of the extant research on social trust was conducted in the Western contexts. While the UAE differs substantially from Western countries in terms of social and cultural values, population demographics, and immigration policies, all societies bear the same implications of trust on social cohesion (Van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014). In the UAE, the year 2019 was declared the Year of Tolerance, during which national tolerance initiatives were launched to promote awareness of coexistence, pluralism, and acceptance of diversity. Identifying and understanding factors that contribute to or influence trust thus has policy significance.

The objective of this research is to examine the extent to which various individual, psychological, ethnical, and social factors affect the level of social trust in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, using data from the first Abu Dhabi General Social Survey, a large-scale cross-sectional study conducted in 2018. The central proposition is that trust as a normative and ethical belief is influenced by economic, social, and institutional changes.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

A concept as complex as trust requires theoretical approaches that reflect its many facets and dimensions (Dinesen and Sønderskov, 2018; Jong et al., 2017). Extant research on trust has been characterized by a substantial diversity in disciplinary background and methodologies. Research in psychology typically shows that individuals' trust propensities result from their early childhood and experiences in life (Cook, 2001) and there are several genetic and psychological traits that support the development of social trust (Oskarsson et al., 2012; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019), whereas in organizational studies trust is seen as a success element to business, professional and employment relations (Kramer & Cook, 2004). Sociologists and political scientists, on the other hand, often conduct research at the neighborhood level, focusing on social relations and civil engagement (Putnam, 2000; Stolle et al., 2008).

Among the definitions of trust, confident expectations and a willingness to be vulnerable are often included as the essential components (Li, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998). For example, Fukuyama (1995) defines trust as the mutually supportive expectation that arises in a community on the part of its members and is based on commonly shared norms. Likewise, risk is one of the essential conditions in psychological, sociological, and economic conceptualizations of trust (Li, 2007; Williamson, 1993).

From a sociological perspective, trust, while includes emotional and cognitive dimensions, is a property of collective units and functions as a deep assumption underpinning social order (Singh, 2012; Sztompka, 1999). Durkheim (1933) offers an early explanatory framework in which the formal processes associated with social solidarity are more important for social trust to develop in large and pluralistic communities, while social trust mainly results from interpersonal interactions in small and homogenous communities. Such a dichotomous framework can be used to explain the differences of how social trust forms and develops in traditional and modern societies. Fukuyama (1995) posits that in low trust societies, social relations are primarily conducted within the family and that people in these societies are less trusting of institutions outside of the family. According to Luhmann (1979), trust is needed to reduce social complexity by going beyond available information and generalized expectations of behavior. Luhmann (1979) stresses that trust is the solution for risks and it requires familiarity as a precondition for it to emerge. Giddens (1990) places trust in the context of the modernization and explains the contours of late modernity as consisting of ambivalence and existential anxiety, characterized by the distanciation of time and space and the disembedding of social relations, where individuals need trust to be part of their everyday routines of social interaction in order to cope with increasing risks, anxiety, and uncertainty. Similarly, in Beck's (1992:22) assessment, the proliferation of risks in late modernity gives rise to an acute awareness of monumental uncertainties and anxieties, as "the unknown and unintended consequences (of modern industrial production) come to be a dominant force in history and society."

Two popular sociological approaches toward trust—the social capital theory and the social network theory—anchor trust in the context of social and political institutions that encourage the development of trusting attitudes and behavior. Social capital is widely regarded as a necessary condition of social integration, economic efficiency, and democratic stability (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). The importance of participation in civil associations is particularly highlighted, through which trust is built by providing opportunities for collective action (Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Empirically, while some studies have shown that social participation leads to interpersonal trust (Nickerson, 2008; Putnam, 2000), others report insignificant relationships between participation in civil associations and social trust (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Nannestad, 2008).

Social network theorists believe that social ties and types of network structure play more critical roles in the process of producing trust (Burt, 2000). They argue that structural social capital may be characterized by the size and the structure of an individual's networks of relationships (Burt, 2000). Therefore, instead of looking at the activities of voluntary associations, the examination of trust should be better conducted in social networks of daily life, including the informal relations of friends and family in the community and the neighborhood, and participation in social relations at workplaces (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1993).

As ethnic diversity is a defining feature of modern societies in the context of globalization and migration and integration top the policy agenda of countries across the Atlantic Ocean, there has been an increase of research interest in the relationship between ethnic diversity and trust (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Dincer, 2011; Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2015; Gijssberts et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2009; Laurence, 2011; Leigh, 2006). Following trust theories on familiarity and social contact, analysts posit that trust is more likely to develop in ethnically homogeneous contexts due to ease of communication and social norm enforcement (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005). Competition over scarce resources and conflict, on the other hand, is more likely when exposed to outgroups with different ethnic backgrounds, resulting in outgroup prejudice (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Literature review shows that many empirical studies generally support these theories with findings of a moderate negative relationship between ethnic diversity and trust (Dinesen and Sønderskov, 2018).

However, disagreements on the strength of the relationships between ethnic diversity and trust, as well as debates on measurement and methodological issues persist (Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2015, 2018; Gundelach & Freitag, 2014), as a number of studies show that structural elements such as inequality, ethnic polarization, economic, and cultural forces matter more than ethnic heterogeneity for social trust (Abascal & Baldassarri, 2015; Bjørnskov, 2008; Ziller, 2015). In the UK, Bécares et al. (2011) found increased levels of social cohesion in areas of greater ethnic residential heterogeneity and showed that it is area deprivation that erodes social cohesion. Also using UK's survey data, Demireva and Heath (2014) identified deprivation at the neighborhood level as a much stronger predictor of deterioration of the civic spirit than diversity and found that bridging contacts had a strong positive association with cohesion outcomes.

The empirical literature has identified some individual and contextual factors that influence trust. While research evidence on gender is rather mixed, various studies have found that younger cohorts are less trustful than older cohorts (Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011; Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Schwadel & Stout, 2012). Researchers have also generally found a positive association between education and trust (Glaeser et al., 2000; Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011; Tolsma & van der Meer, 2017; Uslaner, 2002). Having said these, Dinesen and Sønderskov (2015) did not find significant evidence for the moderating role by education and age. A positive association between the level of trust and income is also confirmed (Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011; Putnam, 2000). Economic inequality may have a direct negative effect on social trust (Graafland & Lous, 2019; Ivarsflaten & Strømsnes, 2013), and a rise in mean income could be expected to be associated with increased trust (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002). In the context of South Africa, for example, race differences in trust of neighbors are reduced when personal and neighborhood income is controlled for (Posel & Hinks, 2012). Several other studies, however, have not found any statistically significant evidence for the moderating role of income (Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2015). Through his experiments, Dinesen (2013) also suggests that the institutional quality of the destination country is significantly related to a migrant's generalized trust.

Taken together, theories and empirical research on trust suggest that people living in larger, more modern and heterogeneous communities would feel less close to each other than would people in smaller and more traditional homogenous communities, where trust is fostered by familiarity and similarities among residents in terms of ethnicity, religious preferences, and economic status and is generated through participation in community activities and interactions in social networks. In line with these theories and empirical research findings, the following hypotheses are proposed.

- H1: The bigger the size of an individual's social networks, the more trusting the individual is.
- H2: The more frequent an individual interacts with his social contacts, the more trusting the individual is.
- H3: The larger the extent of involvement in social groups of an individual, the more trusting the individual is.
- H4: The more frequent an individual participates in volunteer and community work, the more trusting the individual is.
- H5: The more frequent an individual feels isolated from his social contacts, the less trusting the individual is.
- H6: The more satisfied an individual feels about his life, the more trusting the individual is.
- H7: Employed individuals have higher social trust than unemployed individuals.
- H8: Community ethnic pluralism is negatively associated with social trust, that is, the higher the level of ethnic diversity within a community, the lower the level of trust.
- H9: The impact of economic gains on social trust is greater among communities with higher levels of ethnic diversity.

3 | METHODOLOGY

In 2018, the Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development conducted the first Abu Dhabi General Social Survey in cooperation with Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, the Department of Education and Knowledge, and other government departments and agencies. It was a questionnaire-based survey, which aimed to describe and analyze how various life factors affect the quality of life of Abu Dhabi citizens and residents aged 15 and above. Designed to reflect major factors of social and economic life of residents, the survey instrument consulted internationally comparable measures of well-being including the OECD's Better Life Index, the Gallup Global Well-being Index, the United Nation's Human Development Report, and the World Happiness Report. The instrument was initially developed in English and was translated into Arabic and five other languages commonly spoken by some main segments of the residents of Abu Dhabi. The survey instrument had



been reviewed by a team of research and policy experts. The survey had also been piloted with 50 participants. The feedback from the expert review and the pilot had been incorporated into the survey instrument.

The Abu Dhabi General Social Survey was administered online in order to reach a large sample of individuals, using a convenience sampling methodology that combined the databases available in various government agencies, semi-public, and private institutions in Abu Dhabi. Several measures were taken to avoid duplications and to prevent ballot box stuffing. Quality control procedures were implemented during the data collection process to guarantee that designated members of the sample were reached.

The survey asked the respondent to identify the location of his/her residence at both region and district levels. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi is divided into three municipal regions: Abu Dhabi region, Al Ain (Eastern) region, and Al Dhafra (Western) region. Abu Dhabi region embraces more urban environment, whereas Al Ain region has relatively more rural settings. Al Dhafra region, on the other hand, occupies a large land mass where residential settlements are scattered and residents are employed primarily in oil and gas, and agricultural industries. Each region is further divided into small administrative districts. There are varying degrees of ethnic residential concentration across regions and districts. Within Abu Dhabi region, for example, some districts are known for the residential concentration of expatriates of certain ethnic groups.

A total of 51,413 people of 172 nationalities residing in over 60 districts across the three regions of Abu Dhabi Emirate responded to the survey. Emiratis were over-represented in the sample (38.9%). Other sample statistics such as gender, age, and distribution by region are largely comparable with the population estimates. To meet the requirements of this present research, only the districts that recorded 200 or more participants were included in the analysis. As a result, this research was based on a sample of 19,535 respondents distributed in 32 residential districts. The results of Little's MCAR test indicated that the missing values in the survey appeared to be missing completely at random. Missing values were imputed.

3.1 | Measures and variables

From the survey, several variables were obtained and are summarized in Table 1. Some of them are indices, which were tested for reliability using Cronbach alpha. The dependent variable "social trust" was derived from responses to the question "Generally speaking, do you agree that most people can be trusted?", measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

"Feeling loneliness," "life satisfaction," and "feeling safe and secure" were selected to represent the emotional and psychological dimensions. "Feeling safe and secure" was the sum of responses to 4 items including "in Abu Dhabi, I feel protected and safe" and "in Abu Dhabi, I feel safe when walking alone at night." The scores range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and this index has a Cronbach alpha of .791.

"Involvement in social groups," "social network size," "frequency of social contact," "satisfaction with social contact," "community participation," "role within community," and "institutional trust" were introduced to constitute the social elements that shape the development of social trust. "Involvement in social groups" refers to the extent of involving in social groups such as sports, physical recreation, arts, heritage, and religious or spiritual groups. This index has a Cronbach alpha of .832. The index of "institutional trust" was created based on respondents' report of their opinions on the extent that the health system, the police, the education system, the courts, and the media in Abu Dhabi can be trusted. This index has a Cronbach alpha of .847.

Measures of ethnic pluralism typically include indicators of community population, density, and share of people by ethnic background (Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2018; Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011). Consistent with the literature (Connelly et al., 2016; Leigh, 2006), ethnic diversity measures employed at the district level included "concentration of non-Arab expatriates"—the share of non-Arab expatriates in a district, and "ethnic fragmentation" adopting the "1—the Herfindahl-index" formula. The Herfindahl index is defined as the sum of the squares of the share of the nationalities reportedly presented within a district, ranging from 0 to 1. A score of 1 implies a highly ethnically heterogeneous district, whereas a score of 0 refers to a perfectly ethnically homogeneous district. Both measures were calculated from the survey data. The ethnic diversity measure employed at the region level was "concentration of expatriates"—the share of expatriates in total population, which was computed from official statistics (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, 2020).

At the individual level, variables examined in this study included gender, age, nationality, education level, employment status, and "satisfaction with household income," the last two of which were considered as the proxy for economic gains.

3.2 | The models

When units are nested within higher level units, multilevel modeling has the advantage of complying with statistical assumptions about independence of observations and avoiding aggregation bias. Because the hypotheses included individual, community, and region levels of analysis, multilevel modeling was used to test the hypotheses. For this present study, the modeling process was conceived as a three-level model in which 19,535 residents (level 1) were nested in 32 residential districts (level 2) nested in 3 regions (level 3). The models were fitted using MLwiN 2.30.



Six models were estimated. Model 1 was the unconditional model. From Model 2 to Model 4, the individual level variables and the district level variables were entered step by step. Model 5 represented the fully restricted model in which all the predictor variables including a region level variable were introduced. In Model 6, cross-level interactions were included. All predictor variables were grand mean centered.

4 | RESULTS

Although the data have a low degree of clustering, the log-likelihood test statistics and associated p-values generated from the unconditional model favored the three-level model over the single-level model and the two-level individuals-within-regions model. The three-level model did not offer a significantly better fit to the data than the two-level individuals-within-districts model. Variation partition coefficients suggest that 98.9% of the variance in social trust lies within district between individuals. Individuals reside in the same region are more homogenous than individuals residing in other regions, while individuals from the same district are not more homogenous than from other districts.

Comparing Model 1 and Model 2 in Table 2, adjusting individual characteristics and individual level psychological dimension predictors reduces the resident level variance by 14.2%, the district level variance by 87.5%, and the region level variance by almost 100%, suggesting there are some differences in individual characteristics between district and region. The likelihood ratio test confirms that the inclusion of individual level social dimension variables significantly improved the fit of the model, while district and region level ethnic diversity predictors and cross-level interactions failed to do so (Model 4, Model 5, and Model 6).

Looking at the fixed effects of the models, gender, age, and education have no effect on social trust (results not presented), after other variables being controlled in the models. In Table 2, the z values calculated show that nationality is among individual characteristics the most significant predictor of social trust. Most noticeably, people of European, Northern American, Oceanian, Asian, African, and Latin American nationalities are more likely to have a higher level of social trust than Emiratis, who in turn have a higher level of trust than other Arab nationalities. Also, people with full-time employment have higher trust than those who are part-time employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force.

All the psychological and social dimension variables included in the model are significant predictors of social trust, with "social network size," "feeling loneliness," and "satisfaction with social contacts" showing higher predicting power. After the social dimension variables are controlled for Model 3, the predicting power of the employment status predictor increases, while the predicting power of the psychological predictors declines but remains significant. H1-H7 are supported, and the results as a whole provide evidence to support both the social capital and the social network theories.

Ethnic fragmentation scores range from 0.250 to 0.930 with a mean of 0.746. The score of 0.746 means that based on the survey data, the odds of two people selected randomly from a district in the emirate of Abu Dhabi belonging to different ethnic groups are 74.6%. The share of non-Arab expatriates in a district ranges from 3.0% to 73.0% with a mean of 35.9%. While the coincidence of ethnical heterogeneity and low social trust is consistent with the theories of trust, both variables do not contribute significantly to the variance of social trust across residential districts, despite a negative relationship between social trust and ethnic fragmentation. Thus, H8 is rejected. Representing a significant predictor, the share of expatriates in a region has a mean of 80.5%. Ethnic pluralism or diversity is positively associated with social trust at the region level. H9 requires cross-level interactions. There is evidence at the district level to suggest that the impact of satisfaction with income on social trust is greater among districts with higher levels of ethnic diversity. The impact of employment status on social trust is especially significant for people who are not in the labor force and reside in districts of higher ethnic diversity.

5 | DISCUSSION

This present research confirms that race or nationality is a strong predictor of social trust (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Patterson, 1999; Uslaner, 2002). Arab nationals living in Abu Dhabi reported the lowest level of social trust, followed by Emiratis, whereas residents of European, North American, and Asian nationalities in general self-indicated a higher level of social trust. The relatively higher trusting propensity reported by residents of European, Oceanian, and North American nationalities in this study is consistent with the findings elsewhere (Spierings, 2019).

While the concepts and measurements of social trust are perceived differently in different national and cultural contexts, as "strangers" may be understood as people of a same or different ethnicity and religion (Torpe & Lolle, 2011), it is clear that ethnicity and religiosity are deeply connected (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). The role of religion in social trust is not directly explored by this study; however, it is worth mentioning that ethnical diversity is more evident than religious diversity in Abu Dhabi. Islam is the official religion of the UAE and is followed by the vast majority of the resident population, including some proportions of expatriates of Asian, European, and North American nationalities. Nevertheless, such a Muslim predominance context does not lead to the observation that religious minorities are distrustful of generalized other.

Trautmüller (2010) noted that the effect of individual religiosity and regional religious contexts interacted differently for various religious groups in Germany. Spierings (2019) also indicated substantial differences in the relationship between religious belonging and social trust

TABLE 1 Variables

Variable	Question item(s) and coding
Social trust	"Generally speaking, do you agree that most people can be trusted?". Question was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
Gender	"What is your gender?": 0 = female, 1 = male
Age group	"How old are you?": 1 = 15-19, 2 = 20-24, 3 = 25-29, 4 = 30-34, 5 = 35-39, 6 = 40-44, 7 = 45-49, 8 = 50-54, 9 = 55-59, 10 = 60 and above
Education	"What is the highest educational qualification that you have completed?": 1 = below secondary school, 2 = secondary school, 3 = post high school training certificate, 4 = college diploma, 5 = bachelor's degree, 6 = master's degree, 7 = doctorate degree
Nationality group	"What is your nationality?": 1 = UAE, 2 = Arab country, 3 = European, North American, Oceanian country, 4 = South Asian country, 5 = East and Southeast Asian country, 6 = African, Latin American, and other country
Employment status	"Last week, did you do any work at all in a job, business or farm?": 1 = yes, full-time work/self-employed; 2 = yes, part-time work/self-employed; 3 = unemployed; 4 = retired; 5 = not in the labor force
Satisfaction with household income	"How satisfied are you with your household income?". Question was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied)
Feeling loneliness	"In the last four weeks, how often have you felt isolated from people around you?". Questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time)
Life satisfaction	From a scale of 0-10, all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?
Feeling safe and secure	Scale is consisted of 4 items: "In Abu Dhabi, I feel protected and safe"; "In Abu Dhabi, I feel safe when walking alone at night"; "In Abu Dhabi, I feel safe when using the internet for online transactions"; "In Abu Dhabi, I have the ability to obtain rights through legal channels." Questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
Involvement in social groups	Scale is consisted of 5 items: "To what extent do you get involved in the following social groups?": sport groups; physical recreation groups; arts groups; heritage groups; religious or spiritual groups. Questions were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not much at all) to 5 (to a large extent)
Social network size	"How many people can help and support you whenever you need them?": 1 = 1, 2 = 2-3, 3 = 4-6, 4 = 7-9, 5 = 10, or more
Frequency of social contact	"How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?". Questions were measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 to 6 (no recent contact, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, several times a week, every day)
Satisfaction with social contact	"In general, I am satisfied with my relationships with other people I know (including acquaintances, friends, workmates, and neighbors)." Questions were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
Community participation	"In the last 12 months, how often did you participate in volunteer and community work in Abu Dhabi?". Questions were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5 (never, once, several times in a year, at least once a month, at least once a week)
Role within community	How often do you feel you able to have a say within your community on important issues? Questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time)
Institutional trust	Scale is consisted of 5 items: "How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following institutions in Abu Dhabi can be trusted?": the health system; the police; the education system; the courts; the media. Questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
Ethnic fragmentation	1-the Herfindahl index, ranging from 0 to 1 at district level
Concentration of non-Arab expatriates	Share of non-Arab expatriates at district level
Concentration of expatriates	Share of expatriates in the total population at regional level

across countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa region. Thus, while the link between religion and trust is not to be underestimated (Bègue, 2002), the socio-economic and cultural context may have a larger role to play in explaining the differences in social trust among different ethnical groups in Abu Dhabi (Ziller, 2015). As argued by Inglehart (1999), a base level of trust and tolerance is formed, usually at a young age, by the economic, political, social, and cultural forces both at the society and community level through socialization. Many Arab countries in the Middle East have suffered from mundane and ethno-religious conflicts and instability (Owen, 2003), which may have negatively affected the general level of social trust in those countries (Spierings, 2017).



Apart from individual characteristics and experiences (Bauer, 2015), individuals of different ethnic background or from different cultures are influenced by different norms, social structures, and prevailing institutions, which direct the direction of trust and the size of trust networks (Doney et al., 1998; Fukuyama, 1995). In traditional Arab societies, tribe loyalty and paternalism exert a hierarchical control of social relationships (Samin, 2015), which consequently leads to an orientation toward more closed social relationships centered around tribe and family. Arguably, such family-centrism will enclose trust inside (Fukuyama, 1995), as nurturing general trust toward outgroups that assume more open social relationships and networks is not conformed to norms. Bahry et al. (2005) indicate that strong attachment to ingroup norms and negative stereotypes of the outgroup lower cross-ethnic confidence.

Along with the socioeconomic transition in the UAE, the influence of globalization on the UAE society and families has been clearly felt. While there is a continuation of religious and cultural belonging, connection with extended families tends to be on the decline (Sabban & Mohamad, 2014). In Abu Dhabi, the trust radius of Emiratis is more fluid than in the past, as people have a greater opportunity for contact with people outside their own groups or to expand their own radius. This holds true especially for those who are the gainers in the labor market. As confirmed by this research, the full-time employed recorded a higher level of social trust than people of other different labor market status, so did people who indicated a higher level of income satisfaction. On the one hand, this contradicts with Spierings' (2019) synthesis of 47 surveys from 15 countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa which shows that employed, higher education and wealthier citizens are not necessarily more trusting. On the other hand, this may suggest that outside family, ingroups trust is effectively developed in workplaces through work-related networks (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), which serve as arenas for exposure to people of different ethnic background.

Furthermore, consistent with the literature, this research found that the larger the radius one has, the more frequently one socializes with social contacts, the higher likelihood of having higher general trust. Semyonov and Glikman (2009) show with the European Social Survey that positive contacts are likely to reduce perception of threat and social distance. With British data, Laurence (2011) finds that bridging contact, measured as proportion of outgroup friends, neutralizes the negative effect of diversity.

In addition to familiarity, trust in heterogeneous others also has to do with actual or perceived risks. The unemployed and those not in the labor force are more likely to view the increasingly diversified labor force in Abu Dhabi as a threat. The survey data of this research reveal that ethnic fragmentation is high in Abu Dhabi, but the negative effect of the exposure to people of different ethnic background on people's trusting attitudes toward the generalized other is insignificant at the district level. In fact, ethnic diversity is positively associated with social trust at the region level. It may be argued that in the context of Abu Dhabi, meaningful interethnic contacts are less likely to occur at the community level, but more likely to happen at workplaces where intergroup contacts are hard to avoid (Kokkonen et al., 2014). Bearing in mind that smaller contextual units better reflect interracial interaction, we posit that the lower level of trust in Al Ain region with less ethnic diversity than in Abu Dhabi region with higher ethnic diversity probably reflects the difference between the more traditional and the more modern societies.

Stolle et al. (2008) and Uslaner (2012) argue that it is ethnic segregation rather than ethnic diversity per se that results in a negative effect on social trust. Ethnic segregation inhibits meaningful ethnic contacts, which could result in lower trust in the generalized other (Stolle et al., 2008). Rydgren et al. (2013) study in Iraq indicates that ethnically heterogeneous interactions are conducive for outgroup friendship ties and social trust. Uslaner (2012) further argues that within ethnically diverse aggregate contexts people tend to live in homogeneous ethnic enclaves where few interethnic interactions may occur. Ethnic vicinity but without meaningful actual contacts fosters feelings of threat. The social interactions perspective argues that the consequences of ethnic diversity for trust depend on the nature of the intergroup interactions (Schmid et al., 2014; Singh, 2012).

Jamal (2007) argues that as societies transition, the ability to find and belong to networks depends on the legal protections afforded by the regimes and public institutions. In Abu Dhabi, residents generally report a high level of trust in public institutions, which is positively associated with social trust. The differences of findings between Jamal (2007), Spierings (2019), and this present research are likely the results of the divergent socioeconomic and political situations among countries in the Middle East. Among other things, Abu Dhabi has a more youthful population, more ethnically heterogeneous and expatriate dominant population and labor force, and a higher level of economic and institutional development.

The results of this present research show that satisfaction with income, satisfaction with public safety and security, satisfaction with life, and those social dimension variables are strongly and positively associated with trust. These are in general consistent with the findings elsewhere (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016). For example, multiple studies showed a robust relation between social trust and subjective well-being (Glatz & Eder, 2020; Graafland & Lous, 2019; Puntcher et al., 2015). Overall, the findings presented above appear to reinforce the argument that tradition, norms, social participation, social networks, and globalization all are at play.

As noted above, the pitfalls of measurement of contextual diversity were overlooked and heterogeneity indexes were used as proxies for intergroup contact (Abascal & Baldassarri, 2015), which constitutes one of the limitations to this study. Furthermore, the dataset cannot locate residents at the tribe or family levels, which may be more suitable for a multilevel analysis in the context of Abu Dhabi. It is also clear that most variance in social trust occur at the individual level; thus, important predictors of trust may come from the social psychological dimension. Core personality characteristics such as optimism and the capacity to control and anxiety and insecurity are among the social psychological origins of trust, the effect of which on social trust should be explored by future research. Future research should also employ longitudinal approaches or integrate qualitative methods with quantitative methods for a better understanding of how social changes influence trust. The sociological



TABLE 2 Three-level random intercept models for social trust

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Fixed Part												
Cons	2.617**	0.043	2.476**	0.032	2.312**	0.032	2.317**	0.031	2.320**	0.026	2.318**	0.026
Nationality (ref. UAE)												
Arab			-0.086**	0.018	-0.068**	0.018	-0.069**	0.019	-0.069**	0.019	-0.068**	0.019
Europe, North America, Oceania			0.711**	0.026	0.751**	0.026	0.748**	0.027	0.749**	0.027	0.748**	0.026
South Asia			0.544**	0.021	0.550**	0.022	0.547**	0.022	0.547**	0.022	0.547**	0.022
East and Southeast Asia			0.554**	0.038	0.534**	0.038	0.531**	0.038	0.532**	0.038	0.532**	0.038
Africa, Latin America, and other countries			0.460**	0.041	0.478**	0.040	0.476**	0.041	0.474**	0.040	0.473**	0.040
Employment status (ref. full time)												
Part-time			0.005	0.034	-0.057*	0.033	-0.056*	0.033	-0.057*	0.033	-0.054	0.033
Unemployed			-0.039	0.025	-0.070**	0.024	-0.070**	0.024	-0.069**	0.024	-0.073**	0.025
Retired			-0.013	0.043	-0.032	0.042	-0.032	0.042	-0.031	0.042	-0.024	0.045
Not in labor force			0.003	0.020	-0.131**	0.021	-0.131**	0.021	-0.130**	0.021	-0.132**	0.021
Satisfaction with income			0.054**	0.007	0.048**	0.007	0.048**	0.007	0.047**	0.007	0.048**	0.007
Feeling loneliness			-0.114**	0.007	-0.075**	0.007	-0.075**	0.007	-0.075**	0.007	-0.074**	0.007
Life satisfaction			0.064**	0.004	0.040**	0.004	0.040**	0.004	0.040**	0.004	0.040**	0.004
Feeling safe and secure			0.023**	0.003	0.006*	0.003	0.006*	0.003	0.006*	0.003	0.006*	0.003
Involvement in social groups					0.012**	0.002	0.012**	0.002	0.012**	0.002	0.012**	0.002
Community participation					0.039**	0.007	0.039**	0.007	0.039**	0.007	0.039**	0.007
Social network size (ref. 1)												
2–3					0.131**	0.026	0.131**	0.026	0.131**	0.026	0.131**	0.026
4–6					0.197**	0.027	0.197**	0.027	0.197**	0.027	0.197**	0.027
7–9					0.249**	0.033	0.249**	0.033	0.249**	0.033	0.250**	0.033
10 or more					0.282**	0.030	0.282**	0.030	0.282**	0.030	0.283**	0.030
Frequency of social contact					0.036**	0.005	0.036**	0.005	0.036**	0.005	0.037**	0.005
Satisfaction with social contact					0.082**	0.009	0.082**	0.009	0.082**	0.009	0.082**	0.009
Role within community					0.030**	0.006	0.030**	0.006	0.030**	0.006	0.030**	0.006
Institutional trust					0.015**	0.002	0.015**	0.002	0.015**	0.002	0.015**	0.002
Ethnic fragmentation							-0.032	0.083	-0.064	0.074	-0.009	0.081

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Concentration of non-Arab expatriates					0.075	0.087			0.082	0.073	0.075	0.069
Concentration of expatriates									0.441**	0.138	0.351*	0.157
Part-time × Ethnic fragmentation											0.159	0.218
Unemployed × Ethnic fragmentation											-0.211	0.159
Retired × Ethnic fragmentation											0.085	0.282
Not in labor force × Ethnic fragmentation											-0.211*	0.123
Income satisfaction × Ethnic fragmentation											0.096*	0.042
Part-time × Concentration of expatriates											0.116	0.539
Unemployed × Concentration of expatriates											0.604	0.438
Retired × Concentration of expatriates											0.141	0.791
Not in labor force × Concentration of expatriates											0.230	0.325
Satisfaction with income × Concentration of expatriates											-0.055	0.111
Random Part												
Region variance	0.004	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
District variance	0.008	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Resident variance	1.080	0.011	0.927	0.009	0.896	0.009	0.896	0.009	0.897	0.009	0.896	0.009
-2*log-likelihood:	56,989.603		53,973.566		53,319.153		53,318.411		53,312.081		53,299.482	
Units: Region	3		3		3		3		3		3	
Units: District	32		32		32		32		32		32	
Units: Resident	19,535		19,535		19,535		19,535		19,535		19,535	

Note: **Significant at .01; *Significant at .05; one-tailed hypothesis. Variables grand mean centered.

literature on trust has also expanded to concern globalization, risk, and identity. The way structural changes in the economy and social life have combined to underline the need for a far more comprehensive definition of trust and explanation of the field of enquiry.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated how perceived social and economic conditions, social participation and contact practices, and ethnic diversity relate to social trust. The impact of individual characteristics on social trust was also examined and accounted for. The results of this preliminary exploration extend knowledge about how social trust may develop in a fast-changing socioeconomic context. The transformation from a traditional society to a modern one, globalization and the emergence of multinational labor market have emerged as a situational imperative for Emiratis, as large-scale social changes can influence the course of individual lives in different ways and the direction and the way they trust the generalized others. This paper tentatively argues that the changing social trust is seen as a residue of traditional societies, while reflecting an intrinsic element of complex modern or modernizing societies as individuals respond to the inadequacies of institutionalization.

This research has shown the ability of both social capital and social network approaches in explaining generalized trust in the context of Abu Dhabi Emirate. Moreover, diversity should be encouraged to cement the integration progress of migrant workers and foster stronger community cohesion. Involvement in the local community and its voluntary activities breed trust, reciprocity, solidarity, and cooperation, all of which are significant elements of local and community development. What the Abu Dhabi government promotes toward enhancing social cohesion, tolerance, and volunteering will continue to provide a basis for social trust to gradually grow and sustain.

ORCID

Guang Yang  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6676-7808>

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