

# We Are All Police—Abu Dhabi Police Community Engagement Initiative

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**Abstract** Globally, the concept of community policing while applied in a myriad of customized strategies to meet the needs of individual environments is underpinned by common objectives, which include engaging the community to complement a core business of policing, community safety. In parallel, police agencies of all sizes and nationalities have developed a range of targeted campaigns to support and enhance community engagement with police to contribute to building safe communities. The combination of ‘soft power’ or ‘soft’ policing strategies with community policing campaigns is a central tenant of the Abu Dhabi Police, We Are All Police initiative. This article presents the journey of the We Are All Police initiative and the outcome for more than 200 nationalities combining in a 1.48 million population of Abu Dhabi residents. Aligning the vision, aims, purpose, acceptance, and impact of the Abu Dhabi Police community-based strategy contributes to informing deliberations of policy and practice in the policing of a modern society.

## Introduction

To place the presentation and discussion of the We Are All Police initiative into context, a brief background to Abu Dhabi Police establishment, structure, and responsibilities is insightful. The establishment of Abu Dhabi Police occurred in 1957 under the then ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Shakbut bin Al Nahyan with a commencing brigade of 80 police officers. The early police structure and operational responsibilities drawn from the British system of the day. In the early days of the Emirate, the role of the police centered on

guarding royal and public places. As the UAE has developed and advanced to being recognized on the world stage as one of the most advanced nations, similarly the Abu Dhabi Police has grown into a large public sector organization estimated to employ more than 47,000 officers by the year 2021 (Abu Dhabi Police, 2020). In parallel, the 2021 population of urban Abu Dhabi is estimated at 1,511,768, while the combined on and off Abu Dhabi Island population of the Abu Dhabi Emirate was estimated at 3.23 million. (Globalmediainsight.com, 2021, para 16). The

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structure of the Abu Dhabi police indicates an all-inclusive nature of responsibilities for community safety and security residing under the management umbrella of the Abu Dhabi Police (Fig. 1). The management of correctional services, fire rescue, ambulance services, and border patrol in combination with the more traditional responsibilities of police organisations, (i.e. crime prevention, criminal investigation, prosecution, traffic services, and frontline patrols) are collectively the responsibility of Abu Dhabi Police.

## Community policing and soft policing

To enable a comprehensive and clearly articulated presentation of the We are All Police initiative for policing in Abu Dhabi, it is valuable to offer an explanation of the three interrelated policing concepts and strategies as they informed the development of the initiative: community policing, soft power policing, and volunteers in policing (VIP).

### Community policing

The emergent concept of community policing as developed and applied across the world has been traced to early (1829) Peelian principles for policing (Peed, 2008; Robertson, 2012; Albrecht, 2019) most notably:

To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence (UK Government Home Office, 2021, para. 8).

This Peelian principle resonates in the numerous examples of community policing strategies

that have been developed and deployed with varying levels of success across the globe. The literature associated with community policing reaches back to the later 1900s as evidence by, for example, the work of Brown and Wyckoff (1987), which suggests the objective for community policing is to build partnerships with the community (members of the public) to assist in reducing crime and disorder. Bayley (2005), a well-published researcher in the field of community policing, argues that community policing is viewed as essential to achieving successful crime control. To this end, police agencies develop target campaigns and programme to engage the community in a collaborative effort to address criminal trends. Similarly, 3 decades later explanation of the fundamental objective has been sustained as Gill et al. (2014, p. 3) refer to community-oriented policing as a philosophy of policing that emphasizes community involvement in crime prevention efforts, in contrast to the focus of traditional policing on law enforcement and order maintenance. The work of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990) refers to community policing as both a philosophy and a policing organizational strategy. This interpretation is similarly reflected in more recent literature, in 2020, in the work of Orum and Cossyleon (2020) refers to community policing as a philosophy and practice that treats police–community interaction and communication as a main basis for reduction in crime and fear of crime. Community policing has been defined and implemented differently over time and within different contexts, largely because it is a policing philosophy that is tailored to the changing needs of local communities (Cossyleon, 2019, p. 1). Cossyleon offers that community policing finds its operationalized roots in the work of Kelling and Wilson in the 1980s (Wilson & Kelling 1982) who proffered the ‘broken windows’ theory of crime growing in areas where social disorder is not addressed or managed. As explained by Cossyleon (2019) strategies to address the ‘broken windows’ environments was to

engage the community to assist the police in managing crime and protecting the community.

The emphasis on a brief historical summary of the perception of the widely held intent and objectives for community policing and the universal acknowledgement of a commonality of approach is relevant to the later discussion of the role of community members in the Abu Dhabi Police We Are All Police strategy. Appreciatively, there is a plethora of literature associated with research and discussion of community policing, strategies, outcomes, barriers, officer acceptance, community acceptance, and engagement (see Gill *et al.*, 2014; Carter and Fox, 2019; Gau and Paul, 2019; ) which evidences the concept has been adopted in a customized approach dependent on the needs of the police and community.

The Abu Dhabi Community Police was initiated in 2003 by Lt. General HH Sheikh Saif bin Zayed AL Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, with operation commencing in 2005. The development of the Community Police strategy was informed by application of the central tenets in policing jurisdictions around the world: the engagement of community members in contributing to the work of police to prevent crime, increase social cohesion, and support community safety and security. In Abu Dhabi, complementing the traditional police work toolkit with a community-oriented approach aimed also to prevent and reduce crime rates, as well as counter radicalization and violent extremism, thus supporting, on a micro-level, the broader strategy of Emirati nation-building (Ardemagni, 2019). In 2008, the Community Police achievements were distinguished by the delegation of the United Nations Development Program as ‘a role model that should be emulated by other countries’ (WAM.ae, 2008, para 1).

### Soft power policing

As the operationalization of community policing strategies evolved for Abu Dhabi Police, the inclusion of a ‘soft policing’ approach emerged as an

integral element of the wider community engagement initiative. The literature associated with defining soft power policing suggests a general reference, which indicates it is the alternative to ‘hard power’ coercion and force (McCarthy, 2013; Al Hanaee 2018a, b, c). Joseph Nye, widely regarded as the key proponent of soft power in the 21st century (Fan, 2008; Doeser and Nisbett, 2017; Thompson, 2020; Schere, 2021) explains:

Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2008, p.1).

The work of Nye in the soft power sphere is drawn from developing USA foreign policy based on diplomatic negotiation approaches between countries during the 1980s with a fundamental tenant of attraction and persuasion without force.

In the context of policing, Herbert in 2005 (as cited in McCarthy, 2013) refers to soft power policing as associated with engaging with communities in order to produce greater trust relations and networks of control.

### Volunteers in policing

The combination of the aim to enhance the relationship between the police and the community and to add an element of assistance in increasing safety and security within communities has witnessed a variety of strategies adopted which call for community member involvement. Policing agencies around the world have developed formal and informal volunteer in policing programmes. The range of support work and the level of responsibility provided to VIP is customized for the individual police agencies. Associated with the variation of the engagement of volunteer/and or support personnel is the different approaches to factors such as, and not limited to, training, legislated authority, remuneration/compensation.

Wolf and Bryer (2016, 2020) report in the USA that many police agencies rely on volunteers to serve in various ways, including observational patrols, investigations, administrative support, chaplains, police explorer programmes, and search and rescue teams. Dobrin and Wolf (2016) suggest in 2016, ‘volunteers field approximately 20% of the number of full-time paid officers in the United States’ (p. 220). Policing jurisdictions such as Canada, Australia, the Caribbean, and the USA can trace the origins of their VIP programmes to the UK Special Constabulary Act of 1831 that authorized the duties of volunteer police officers (Wells and Millings, 2019). In the Australian context, for example, the New South Wales Police Force Volunteers in Policing programme was

introduced in 1995 to allow community members to assist police by performing functions that are not core police duties. The VIPs are considered an integral part of the police team: they do not have police powers, do not carry a gun, and do not drive a police vehicle. The VIPs’ role is in support services, that is administration, community events, victim support, promoting crime prevention initiatives within the community (New South Wales Police Force 2021, paras 1–4). Rogers and Wintle (2021) in discussing volunteering in policing in the Australian context proffer:

...Volunteers within the police family have come to represent the embodiment of active community participation. The notion of volunteering

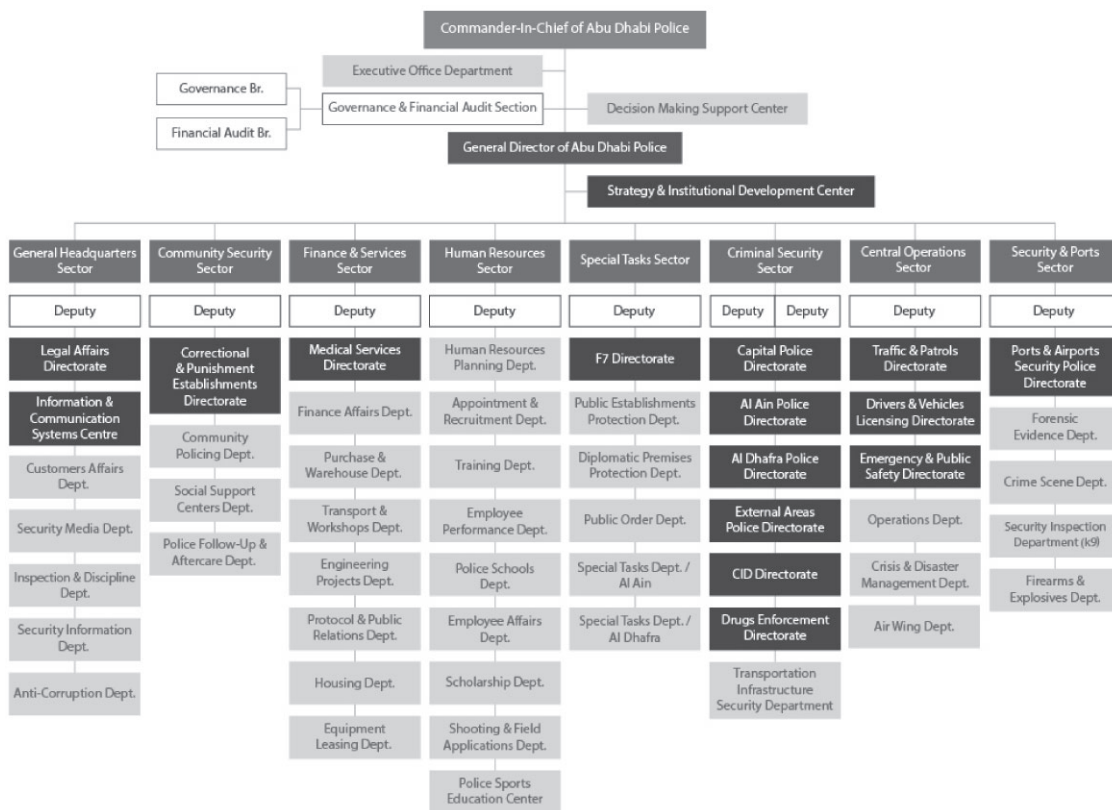


Figure 1: Abu Dhabi Police Organisational Chart (<https://www.adpolice.gov.ae/en/Pages/organization.aspx>)

involves citizens taking responsibility and contributing to the governance of the community of which they are part.

... Volunteers are seen as a way of facilitating civic and neighborhood renewal, seen as a form of empowerment as communities take some ownership, creating local solutions to local problems and this in part can be achieved through volunteering in general (p. 20).

In the UK, there are two categories of police volunteers:

...The special constabulary is a force of trained volunteers who work with and support their local police. 'Specials', as special constables are known, come from all walks of life - they are teachers, taxi drivers, accountants and secretaries, or any number of other careers - and they all volunteer a minimum of four hours a week to their local police force, forming a vital link between the regular (full-time) police and the local community. Once special constables have completed their training, they have the same powers as regular officers and wear a similar uniform (UK College of Policing, 2021, para 7).

The second category is the Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) a programme evolving from 1992 who perform a range of support functions to police to enable officers to concentrate on core duties (Callender *et al.*, 2019; UK College of Policing, 2021). A report by Callender *et al.* (2019, p. 1) indicates 'there are an estimated 8000 PSVs in England and Wales contributing around 650,000 hours each year to an expanding variety of tasks to support their local constabularies.' Japan has experienced an increasing boom over the past

13 years in volunteering activities aimed at crime prevention. A level of 3,000,000 Japanese citizens have involved themselves in volunteering activities associated with crime prevention (Herber, 2018).

O'Connor *et al.* (2021, paras 4–6) in discussing the roles of volunteers in policing across the globe, identify at the centre of the programmes is the use by police organizations to utilize volunteers in a range of roles and tasks to compliment the work of police in the community. Uhnoo and Lofstrand (2018) reported on a study of volunteers in policing in Sweden. The Swedish approach commenced in 2005 and the guidelines established the role of the volunteers to provide a link between ordinary citizens and the police and keep an eye on what is happening around them, alerting the police as needed. The study explains that 'police authorities regarded volunteers as an extended arm of the police...helping the police to prevent crime and improve public safety' (p. 46). As globally, the demands on police organizations have increased there has been increasing reliance on volunteers in policing to undertake an increasing range of activities previously performed by police officers (Callender *et al.*, 2019; Britton and Knight, 2020; Callender *et al.*, 2020; Westall, 2022). Combining both austerity and a community policing approach that relies on volunteers in policing is a key finding from the work of Kang (2021 p. 1) in researching why agencies use volunteers revealed:

Key findings suggest that resource deficiency is strongly associated with the degree of using volunteer officers ... Agencies that encourage officers to engage in collaborative problem-solving with the community are more likely to use volunteer officers.

An important aspect associated with volunteer in policing programmes is the range of training and preparedness that is inherent in customizing volunteer programmes for the community they serve (Dobrin *et al.*, 2019). The following

discussion of the We Are All Police programme implemented by Abu Dhabi police demonstrates a combination of recognition of the important contribution offered by volunteers in supporting the soft power approach to building and sustaining a community policing approach.

### We are all police

The Abu Dhabi Police We are all Police initiative is similarly founded in the vision and mission of complementing the safety and stability of the community through increasing the strength of the relationships between police and all communities within the Emirate (wearealpolice.ad.gov. 2020). Abu Dhabi Police explain the fundamental premise for the initiative, as follows:

This Initiative is devoted to embodying the vision of our founding leader Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (God rest his soul), and that of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed (may God protect him), and his Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. It follows their eagerness to cultivate a spirit of peaceful coexistence and tolerance in the hearts of all members of society, which will positively influence their lives and the lives of future generations.

In helping deliver on this vision, We Are All Police has two key areas of focus:

To adapt to the continually evolving and rapidly growing population centres in the emirate of Abu Dhabi by doubling the number of personnel engaged in policing, thereby providing a more community-centric service (wearealpolice.ad.gov. app. 2021, para 6).

The objectives for the initiative define a clear and direct connection with recognizing the value

of community contribution to both current and future safety and security of neighbourhoods and communities.

- Ensuring a deeper sense of security and safety in communities, neighbourhoods, and across the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.
- Enhancing the happiness of the Abu Dhabi public through a sustainable, community-based policing presence.
- Fostering creativity and innovation amongst the entire community.
- Achieving the participation of the general public in the process of maintaining a state of security and happiness
- Encouraging society to embrace the role of a new solution for a new vision of maintaining advanced safety and security throughout the emirate (wearealpolice.ad.gov. app. 2021, para 4).

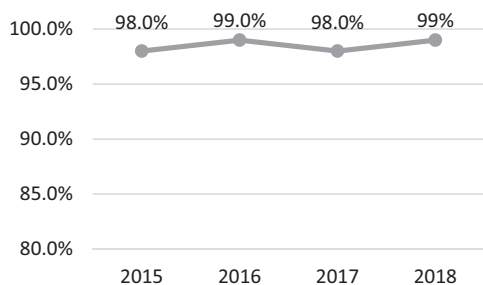
In similarity with several international volunteer policing programmes, We Are All Police volunteers are provided skill development through courses in:

Sense of security, First aid, Crises and disasters, Dealing with community diversity, Writing reports (of all kinds), Organising events and activities, Problem-solving, Public speaking skills, Innovation in providing ideas that leverage security systems (United Arab Emirates 2021, para 14).

We Are All Police volunteers wear reflective vests bearing the We Are All Police slogan and do not carry guns or have legislated police officer powers. Volunteer applicants are screened and if successful are evaluated by a committee. Following selection, the volunteers undertake training courses focused on Sense of security, First Aid, Crisis and Disasters, Writing reports, organizing

**Table 1:** Levels of community perspective of safety and perspective of satisfaction with ADP

Question	Abu Dhabi Government Survey 2018	OECD 2018	Numeo.com	DCD 2021
In general to what extent did you feel safe and secure in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi for the year 2017 AD in the following cases:				
Walking alone in your residential area at night (%)	90	90	85.81	
General feeling of safety in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (%)	94	95	92.4	96
In general how satisfied are you with the Abu Dhabi Police (%)	98.3	Not an OECD Question		
In general how satisfied are you with Abu Dhabi Police solving of social problems (%)	93	Not an OECD Question		
In general, how confident are you in the Abu Dhabi Police for the year 2017	98.9	88% (non-local e.g. expatriate) 86% (local)		
In general how satisfied are you with the following Abu Dhabi Police activities for the year 2017				
We Are All Police Program (%)	93	Not an OECD Question		
Awareness programmes and community initiatives (%)	95	Not an OECD Question		
I contribute as a member of the community in developing and achieving the Abu Dhabi Police Strategy (%)	91	Not an OECD Question		

**Figure 2:** Level of Community confidence in the Abu Dhabi Police General Command

events and activities, problem solving, public speaking skills, and innovation in providing ideas that leverage security systems.

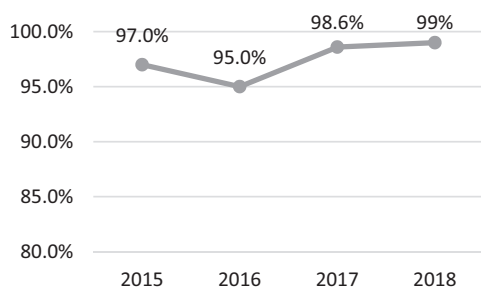
## Methodology

The methodology and data collection approach for this study is in the main drawn from the seminal work of Yin (2018) for case study research.

Specifically, investigating/examining a ‘case’ within its real-world context and employing a data collection approach that draws together a range of sources of evidence, that results in identifying the key themes across the range of data sources. In the context of this study, data are drawn from multiple sources including

- Abu Dhabi Police publications;
- Abu Dhabi Government Community Surveys;
- Global Independent OECD surveys;
- Media publications;
- Abu Dhabi Government publications, media releases, and websites; and
- Academic publications.

The available data were analysed, and the data sources were compared to understand the trends associated with the We Are All Police initiative, in particular the role of participants, the level of



**Figure 3:** Level of Community confidence in the Abu Dhabi Police General Command

community acceptance/satisfaction, and the contribution to supporting policing activities.

## We are all Police initiative outcomes

Since the launch of the initiative in 2016, the We are all Police volunteers have also assisted in targeted policing campaigns including, for example, the Abu Dhabi Police anti-drug campaign, ‘My life is priceless.’ (Gulf News, 2018). As discussed by Col Dr Hamoud Saeed Al-Afari, Director of the Community Police Department in a virtual session titled We are All Police, who acknowledged, ‘volunteer work has become an important part of the initiatives rolled out to address the challenges emerging from the global health crisis’ (Sebugwaawo, 2020). An important role of the We Are All Police volunteers, specifically, during the Pandemic has been facilitating the important safety and security messages to the multicultural population in Abu Dhabi. In May 2020, Lt-Col Hajj Mabkhoot Al Menhali, head of the We are All Police programme, commented:

Volunteers deliver security and awareness messages to citizens, residents and all communities in workers’ areas, addressing them in their native languages. They have also been providing support in educating workers on preventive measures, including proper

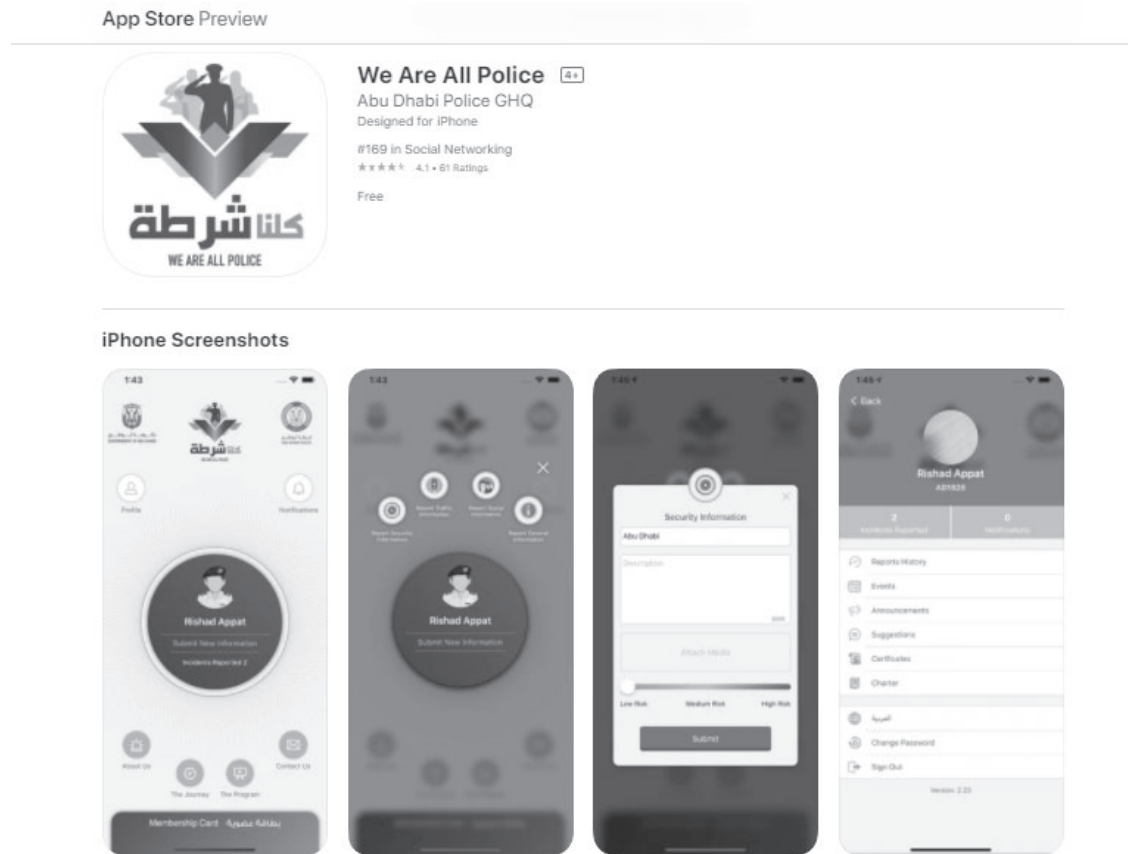
wearing of face masks and maintaining social distancing (Sebugwaawo, 2020).

There are two data sources that contribute to understanding the context in which to consider the role and influence of the volunteer We Are All Police initiative. First, consideration of the overall level of safety experienced by the community in Abu Dhabi and the level of satisfaction with policing. Secondly, the data associated with the We Are All Police initiative outcomes. The Abu Dhabi Government Survey (Community Satisfaction Survey of the Abu Dhabi Police 2018) demographics include a random sampling across the residential areas of the Emirate as follows:

- 1,200 participants: 87% male and 13% female;
- 40% aged 31–40 years; 24% aged 41–50 years; 19% aged 21–30 years; 14% aged older than 50; 3% under 20; and
- 41% UAE nationals; 21% Asian; 30% Arab; 4% Gulf countries; 4% other country.

The results of the survey indicate 94% of respondents experienced a general feeling of safety in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD 2018 Survey results indicate a level of 95% of respondents experienced a general feeling of safety and security in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. The Department of Community Development quality of life survey (2021) for Abu Dhabi is designed to capture residents’ views, needs, and aspirations. The survey examines 14 key indicators including personal safety and security, social connections, civic engagement and// governance, social cohesion and culture, social and community services, and digital and social well-being. In the first and second round of the survey, 188,000 citizens and residents of Abu Dhabi participated the results indicated 96% expressing satisfaction with their experience of safety and security, and similarly 96% agreed they feel safe and protected (Emirates News Agency, 2021, para 7). The Numbeo.com survey is an open platform that is the world’s largest cost-of-





**Figure 4:** Screen shot of We Are All Police App (Source: Abu Dhabi Police (2020) <https://apps.apple.com/ae/app/we-are-all-police/id1151447936>)

living database that is also a crowd-sourced global database of quality of life information. The database including housing indicators, perceived crime rates, and quality of healthcare, among many other statistics is based on perceptions of visitors to the website in the preceding 3 years. In 2021, Abu Dhabi has been ranked the safest city in the world on Numbeo.com for the fifth year in a row.

The data in Table 1 indicate a high level of personal safety experienced with living in Abu Dhabi as drawn from the survey instruments discussed. Table 1 illustrates the high level of satisfaction with the work of the Abu Dhabi Police with a 98.9% level of confidence in Abu Dhabi Police,

98.3% level of satisfaction with Abu Dhabi Police, and 93% level of satisfaction with the Abu Dhabi Police in solving social problems. These levels of satisfaction with the work of Abu Dhabi Police are complimented by the 93% level of satisfaction with the We Are All Police Program.

Figures 1 and 2 present the continuum of levels of community satisfaction and confidence with Abu Dhabi Police 2017–18, the trends are insightful in consideration with the level of safety experienced in Abu Dhabi.

On the basis of the levels of safety experienced by community members and the corresponding levels of satisfaction and confidence with Abu

**Table 2:** Number of We Are All Police Volunteers 2016–18

Number of people registered in the programme		Number of nationalities		
13,788		77		
Number of people currently accepted onto the programme		Males	Females	
4,505		3,807	698	
Level of Education of people accepted onto the programme				
High School	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	PhD
985	2,144	1,000	354	28

**Table 3:** Level of community reporting of incidents 2016–18

Police reports	Number
Security related	1,678
Traffic related	2,933
Social	1,089
Recommendations	583

Dhabi police it is not unexpected the We Are All Police initiative realized popularity amongst the community to volunteer.

The first set of data collected following the launch of the We Are All Police initiative is drawn from the 2016–18 timeframe. A snapshot of the initiative as at 2018 is represented in [Table 2](#).

We Are All Police volunteers are encouraged to support Abu Dhabi Police through reporting potential or actual incidents that may be crime related or disrupt the social cohesion of the community (e.g. anti-social behaviour) ([Figure 3](#)). As an example of the level of reporting, in the period since inception, volunteers have activated and reported on the system with 5,700 reports having been recorded in the period 2016–18 and these are reports exclusively logged by We Are All Police volunteers with the online mobile app (downloadable to iPhone, iPad, and similar digital devices). [Table 3](#) illustrates the respective rate of reports across the four (4) categories: Security related, Traffic related, Social, and Recommendations.

As of October 2020, the number of applicants for We Are All Police was 52,511

**Table 4:** Community level of satisfaction with ADP 2020

Programme	Community level of satisfaction (%)
2020 ADP We Are All Police program	85
2020 ADP Solving social problems	85
2020 Victims protection and support	85
2020 Awareness of ADP about problems	87.1

(weareallpolice.gov.ae, 2020). The 2020 Abu Dhabi Government community survey offers insight into the level of community satisfaction with the initiative. The data presented in [Table 4](#) indicate a level of 85% satisfaction.

## Conclusion

The general evidence presented as it relates to Abu Dhabi and the We Are All Police volunteer programme suggests the initiative is demonstrating alignment and achievements as envisioned. In particular:

- Achieving participation of the general public in the process of maintaining a state of security and happiness.

The early trends indicate volunteer in policing programmes have an important role in a soft power policing approach of attraction and persuasion. Enabling opportunity for volunteers to be involved in the social cohesion of their community through active participation supporting policing

activities and contribute to the positive levels of resident safety as with the We Are All Police initiative demonstrates there is a valuable source of community strength. In 2020 and 2021, the global pandemic, in particular, illustrates the value of volunteers to support the work of police. It is noteworthy the high level of satisfaction with the We Are All Police programme during the period of global vulnerability and the important role undertaken in supporting the Abu Dhabi response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteer in policing programmes is appreciatively varied around the world, customized to the situation, governance, and community being served. The We Are All Police volunteer programme is reflected in the data as a positive initiative and continuing to increase in popularity as an avenue to support the efforts of Abu Dhabi Police. The positivity is drawn from the:

- the perspective of the programme;
- community confidence in safety and security; and
- exponential increase in applicants for We Are All Police volunteer initiative.

Continuing to develop opportunities within the We Are All Police programme enriched by studying programmes globally and locally, recognizing, and investing in the value of community policing through soft policing initiatives contributed to by community-based volunteer programmes is realizing tangible results as an Emirate achieving world leading low crime rates and citizen satisfaction with levels of safety and security.

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