

Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is an absolute monarchy with a population of 3.2 million people, of which only 55% are citizens. 75% of the citizens are Ibadi Muslims, a branch distinct from both Shia and Sunni Islam. There is a 5% Shia minority and the remaining citizens are mostly Sunni Muslims. Non-citizen religious groups include Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha'is, and Christians. Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al-Said came to power in 1970. Oman is a member of the League of Arab States (LAS), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and GCC The Gulf Cooperation Council.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>State legislation is partly derived from religious law or by religious authorities</u>		<u>Systemic religious privilege results in significant social discrimination</u> <u>Religious control over family law or legislation on moral matters</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is severely restricted</u> <u>'Apostasy' is outlawed and punishable with a prison sentence</u> <u>'Blasphemy' is outlawed or criticism of religion is restricted and punishable with a prison sentence</u>
<u>There is an established church or state religion</u> <u>Legal or constitutional provisions exclude non-religious views from freedom of belief</u>	<u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in at least some public schools (without secular or humanist alternatives)</u>	<u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u>	

Legend

Constitution and government

The monarch is both chief of state and head of government. There is in Oman a bicameral parliament, consisting of a Council of State (Majlis al-Dawla) with members appointed by the Sultan and a Consultative Council with members elected by citizens every four years. Candidates are appointed by the government. Political parties are forbidden, and no organized opposition exists.

Oman imposes substantial restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Islam is state religion and Sharia is the basis of legislation (Article 2), however legislation is largely based on civil code. In 1999 civil courts replaced Sharia courts. The Basic Law prohibits discrimination based on religion and protects the right to practice religious rites on condition that doing so does not disrupt public order. However, all religious groups are required to register and the law restricts collective worship by non-Muslims. The criteria for approval are not published. The law prohibits public proselytizing by all religious groups, although religious groups are allowed to proselytize privately within legally registered houses of worship. The

authorities monitor sermons at mosques, censor religious texts and pay the salaries of some Ibadi and Sunni imams, excluding non-Muslim and Shia leaders.

Education and children's rights

Islamic studies are mandatory for Muslim students in public school on primary and secondary level. Non-Muslim students are exempt from this requirement. Private schools are allowed to provide alternative religious studies.

Family, community and society

All civil courts have a Sharia department, which deals with the matters of personal status law. The Family law is largely based on Islamic (Ibadi) law. Oman is the only state, in which Ibadi school is predominant. However, the code allows non-Muslims to follow their own religious laws regarding family law (Article 282). Shia Muslims may resolve family and personal status cases according to Shia jurisprudence outside the courts, and retain the right to transfer their case to a civil court if they cannot find a resolution within Shia religious tradition. Although the government records religion on birth certificates, it is not printed on other official identity documents.

Although Article 17 of the Basic Law states the equality of all citizens, women are discriminated in law and practice. The Penal Code weights the evidence of woman just the half of the evidence of a man, according to Islamic law. The family law discriminates women in divorce, child custody, inheritance and legal guardianship. Men are legally considered to be the heads of the households (Article 38). After a divorce, men receive the right of child custody. Female heirs inherit generally half as much as male heirs, in accordance to Islamic law. Muslim men are allowed to marry Muslim, Jewish or Christian women, women are allowed to marry only Muslim men. Women are required to obtain their family's approval before marrying. The family law allows men to take up to four wives and according to the authorities' estimate one of 20 men is in a polygamous marriage. Men have the right to divorce their wife, while women can obtain a divorce only in certain circumstances, as for instance with the Islamic principle of "khula", where a woman agrees to forfeit any future financial support and her dowry. If an unmarried woman gives birth to a child, it is taken away from her in order to correct her "immoral behaviour". Women also experience restrictions on their self-determination in respect to health and reproductive rights.

In addition, a father who converts from Islam loses his paternal rights over his children.

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Freedom of expression is limited, and criticism of the sultan is prohibited. The 2004 Private Radio and Television Companies Law allows for the establishment of private broadcast media outlets. The government permits private print publications, but many of these accept government subsidies, practice self-censorship, or face punishment for crossing political red-lines. Using the Internet in a way that "might prejudice public order or religious values" is also a crime, with a penalty of between one month and a year in prison, and fines of not less than 1,000 rials (US\$2,600). The law also provides for a maximum 10 years imprisonment for inciting religious or sectarian strife. Omanis have access to the internet but the government censors politically sensitive content and pornographic content. The sultan issued a decree in 2008 expanding government oversight and regulation of electronic communications, including on personal blogs.

In February 2015 a new citizenship law came in force, which empowers the government to strip nationals of their citizenship, if they uphold principles or beliefs that undermine the country's best

interests.

Restrictions on conversion and freedom of thought

Apostasy is not a criminal or civil offense per se, however, a conversion from Islam has consequences; in family law, as stated above, fathers who convert from Islam lose paternal rights. Religion is printed on birth certificates.

In addition, it is thought that Article 209 of Oman's Penal Code could be used to punish apostasy (though not by name). The article criminalizes an individual who commits an affront to religions and faiths by spoken or written word; a public declaration of "apostasy" may constitute such an act. The offences under this article are punishable with a prison term between ten days and three years, or a fine between five to five hundred Omani Riyals (approximately US\$13 to \$1,300)

<loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/#oman>

Defamation of religion

It is a criminal offense to defame any religion. The same Article 209 of the Penal Code allows a prison sentence of up to three years for anyone who publicly blasphemes God or his prophets.

Other freedoms

The right to peaceful assembly within limits is provided for by the Basic Law Articles 29, 30 and 31. However, other laws undercut the Basic Law provisions. All public gatherings require official permission, and the government has the authority to prevent organized public meetings without any appeal process. Article 37 of the Penal Code prohibits private gatherings of ten or more people, if it threatens the public order. In 2014, the UN special rapporteur on the rights of freedom of assembly and of association stated that the limits on peaceful assembly were "quite restrictive, to the point where they often annul the essence of the right."

Since 2011 several individuals have been arrested and sentenced for insulting the authorities, posting insulting material on social media or inciting protests. Free speech is criminalized and an offence frequently occurring is a charge of 'insulting the Sultan'. In detention, many people have reported to have been ill-treated or tortured. In 2013, the English-language newspaper *The Week* was briefly suspended for publishing an article about the Omani gay community. The newspaper later published an apology.

<ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15028&LangID=E>

Highlighted cases

In 2015, an activist and former diplomat Hassan Mubarak Baloch, known as "Hassan Basham" was arrested for insulting the divine self and spreading atheism.