

Oman - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Oman, officially the Sultanate of Oman, is a country bordering the Arabian sea, the Persian gulf and the gulf of Oman, between Yemen and the UAE. The territory is largely arid and the capital is Muscat.²

Official language: Arabic

Ethnic groups : Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African

Government: Hereditary monarchy

- Sultan: Qaboos bin Said Al-Said
- Crown Prince: no designated successor
- Prime Minister: Qaboos bin Said Al-Said

Death penalty: Retentionist

Population: 3.3 million

Life expectancy: 74.2 years

Under-5 mortality: 13.5 per 1000

Adult literacy: 91.1 percent



Section 1: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Respected³

There have been no reports of the government or its agents committing arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected⁴

There were no reports of political disappearance in the Sultanate.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Partially respected⁵

The use of torture is legally prohibited in Oman. However, there have indeed been reports of various forms of torture, and nongovernmental observers have not been permitted inside an Omani prison for more than 10 years. Oman is not a signatory of the Convention against torture.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected⁶

Omani law supposedly prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. Nevertheless, bloggers, human rights and pro-reform activists and intellectuals were arbitrarily arrested and detained in 2013 for criticizing the regime. Most were released without charge after several weeks of detention.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Partially respected⁷

In theory, the law provides for the right to a fair trial and the judiciary is independent, even if the Sultan is the chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, the highest legal body. However, there are reports of several irregularities of various types, usually with political dissidents.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Largely disrespected⁸

Omani law does not require authorities to obtain search warrant. Perhaps as a result, widespread surveillance practices are noted in Oman: monitoring of private communications, etc.. In addition, Omani citizens need authorization in order to marry a foreigner.

Section 2: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)⁹



Score: 38.83, Rank: 127 / 180 – Partially controlled, limited or intimidated¹⁰

The law prohibits any kind of criticism against the Sultan. Freedom of speech is largely disrespected both in media and on the internet.¹¹ Since the 2011 mass protests, many bloggers were arbitrarily detained for charges including “inciting hatred of the regime”¹² or “insulting the Sultan”.¹³

Freedom from academic censorship



Largely disrespected¹⁴

The government largely restrains academic freedom and as a result, self-censorship is widely practised. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for the surveillance of any academic activity.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Largely disrespected¹⁵

The law and government restrict freedom of assembly and association, and international human rights organizations have condemned violations of freedom of assembly and association in Oman. Any public gathering requires pre-approval, or participants are arrested and prosecuted.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹⁶

Omani law prohibits discrimination based on religion. Non-Muslims have the right to worship, but they are not allowed to proselytize and non-Muslim religious organizations are required to register with the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Partially respected

Immigrants make up 30% of the Omani population.¹⁷ Noncitizens do not have access to basic rights and protection (especially migrant workers.) A new law passed in February 2015 permits the government to revoke one’s citizenship for subjective reasons, (e.g. Oman’s “best interests.”)¹⁸

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)¹⁹



5 / 7 – Not free²⁰

The freedom of expression is not respected. The government controls all media, as well as internet content. As mentioned above, the government highly restricts freedom of assembly and association.

Section 3: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc..

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²¹



6 / 7 – Not free²²

Sultan Qaboos has ruled over Oman for 30 years, and the promises of reform made after the mass protests in 2011 have yet to be implemented. The judiciary, legislative, and executive powers are controlled by the Sultan, and the elected Consultative Council does not have any power.

Section 4: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²³



Score: 45%, Rank: 64 / 175 – Some corruption²⁴

Although the law bans official corruption, there were reports of corruption among government officials, including in police and in state-owned companies.

Section 5: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²⁵

There are no domestic independent human rights organization in Oman, and the UN special rapporteur for the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association described “a pervasive culture of silence and fear” in the Sultanate.

Section 6: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Rights of women (World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index)²⁶



Score: 60.9%, Rank: 128 / 142 – Very unequal rights²⁷

Although the law prohibits discrimination based on gender, women in Oman still face broad discrimination: they enjoy less rights and protection than men in terms of marriage, divorce, child custody, employment, education, financial independence, nationality rights, and property rights.

Rights of Children (KidsRights Index Overall Score)²⁸



Score: 79.7%, Rank: 14 / 165 – Protected²⁹

The rights of children in Oman are generally respected. However citizenship in Oman is derived from the father, therefore children can be born stateless.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected³⁰

Persons with disabilities are entitled with the same rights under the law; however, they continue to be discriminated against, especially in terms of education and employment.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Partially respected³¹

Foreign workers are largely discriminated against, especially female domestic workers. The protection provided by the law for migrant workers is inadequate and leads to widespread exploitation and abuse³².

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{33 34}

Homosexual activity is criminalized and results in a jail term from six months to three years. The Omani government shows no effort to address discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Section 7: Workers’ Rights

Workers’ rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Partially respected³⁵

Although the law allows workers to join and form unions, as well as to conduct strikes, the rights of unions are greatly restricted in Oman: any meeting must be approved by the government one month in advance, strikes are allowed, but employers must be given a three-week notice.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Partially respected³⁶

Omani law bans forced or compulsory labour and the government has taken various measures to enforce the law. However, some foreign workers, especially female domestic workers from South East Asia or low-skilled workers, face working conditions suggestive of forced labour.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Partially respected³⁷

Minimum age of employment and protection of children from child labour is generally respected in Oman. However there were some reports of child labour, especially in the agricultural sector.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Partially respected³⁸

Oman is effective at enforcing regulations regarding minimum wage, hours of employment and working conditions for Omani citizens. However, many of the regulations do not apply to foreign workers, even less to domestic workers, who face poor, dangerous or exploitative conditions.

Right to employment



8% - Reasonable unemployment³⁹

While the unemployment rate in Oman has decreased somewhat over the last three to four years, it is projected to climb in the coming years.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: “Death sentences and executions in 2013.” Amnesty International. March 24, 2014. Accessed September 28, 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>.

³ “Oman 2014 Human Rights Report.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236828.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a “disappearance” is different than simple arbitrary detention because a “disappearance” is considered permanent.

⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (25 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (29 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (32 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (49 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (42 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹⁰ “World Press Freedom Index.” Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <http://index.rsf.org/#!/>

¹¹ “Amnesty International report 2014/15 – Oman”, Amnesty International, January 1 2014. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/oman/report-oman/>.

¹² “Oman 2014 Human Rights Report.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236828.pdf>.

¹³ “Human Rights Watch-World Report 2015-Oman”. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/oman>.

¹⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁵ “Human Rights Watch-World Report 2015-Oman”. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/oman>.

¹⁶ “Freedom in the world-2015-Oman”. Freedom House. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/oman>.

¹⁷ “The World Factbook”. US Central Intelligence Agency. September 24, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>.

¹⁸ “Amnesty International report 2014/15 – Oman”, Amnesty International, January 1 2014. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/oman/report-oman/>.

¹⁹ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly

free) and 6-7 (not free). Freedom House’s Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed September 29, 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2015/methodology>.

²⁰ “Freedom in the world-2015-Oman”. Freedom House. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/oman>.

²¹ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed September 29, 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2015/methodology>.

²² “Freedom in the world-2015-Oman”. Freedom House. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/oman>.

²³ Transparency International (TI) publishes a “Corruption Perceptions Index” annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt.

²⁴ “Oman.” Corruption by Country. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015. <http://www.transparency.org/country#OMN>.

²⁵ “Oman 2014 Human Rights Report.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236828.pdf>.

²⁶ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁷ “Oman.” World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed September 29, 2015. <https://global-gender-gap-index.silk.co/page/Oman>.

²⁸ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable.

²⁹ “The KidsRights Index: Overall Score.” The KidsRights Index. January 1, 2014. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/Portals/5/Users/034/34/34/The%20KidsRights%20Index%20-%20Total%20view%20-%20may%202015.pdf>.

³⁰ “Oman 2014 Human Rights Report.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236828.pdf>.

³¹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³² “Amnesty International report 2014/15 – Oman”, Amnesty International, January 1 2014. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/oman/report-oman/>.

³³ “State homophobia” International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2015. Accessed October 5, 2015.

http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2015.pdf. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁵ “Oman 2014 Human Rights Report.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed September 29, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236828.pdf>.

³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

³⁹ “Global Employment Trends.” International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed October 5, 2015. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.