

Oman | Freedom House



[Freedom in the World 2017](#)

Profile



Freedom in the World Scores

(1=Most Free, 7=Least Free)

Aggregate Score: 25/100 (0=Least Free, 100=Most Free)

Overview:

Oman is a hereditary monarchy, and power is concentrated in the hands of Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, who has ruled since 1970. The regime imposes limits on virtually all political rights and civil liberties, and responds particularly harshly to criticism and dissent.

Key Developments:

- Authorities arrested and imprisoned several human rights activists, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens for expressing views that criticized or were deemed threatening to the regime.
- In July and August, authorities arrested two editors and a journalist from the *Al-Zaman* newspaper in connection to articles about state interference in the judiciary; all three received prison sentences and fines in a trial in September, with the presiding judge also ordering the closure of the paper.
- In December, an appeals court reversed the closure of *Al-Zaman* and acquitted one of the defendants.

Executive Summary:

Oman's lagging economy and budget deficit contributed to heightened political tensions in 2016, particularly as the government took steps to reduce or eliminate longstanding social and economic programs. Activists and critics of the regime were vocal during the year about corruption and mismanagement of state resources, and used both the traditional press and online platforms to express their views. In this tense environment, state authorities stepped up efforts to silence voices that criticized

or were otherwise deemed a threat to the regime.

The most notable case of the year involved the *Al-Zaman* newspaper, which in July published two reports alleging that under state pressure, the head of Oman's Supreme Court had directly influenced the outcome of a high-profile inheritance dispute. In July and August, authorities arrested two editors and a journalist working for the paper, charging them with vaguely defined offenses that included undermining state prestige, disrupting public order, and misusing the internet. The Ministry of Information also ordered that *Al-Zaman* cease operations. A court in September confirmed the closure and convicted all three individuals, although an appeals court in December acquitted the journalist, reduced the prison sentences of the two editors, and reversed the paper's closure.

In a number of separate cases, authorities prosecuted activists, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens for exercising freedom of expression in the press or on social media platforms. In November, an appeals court upheld a fine and a one-year prison sentence against Said Jaddad, an activist, for inciting discord and threatening national unity in a blog post about a 2011 uprising. In April, authorities arrested Abdullah Habib, a prominent intellectual, and held him incommunicado for several weeks. Watchdogs noted that the arrest was likely connected to Habib's Facebook posts about the 2011 and other uprisings in Oman.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process 2 / 12

A1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

A2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

B. Political Pluralism and Participation 2 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

B2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?

B4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

C. Functioning of Government 2 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

- C2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?
C3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

Additional Discretionary Political Rights Question A 2/4

For traditional monarchies that have no parties or electoral process, does the system provide for genuine, meaningful consultation with the people, encourage public discussion of policy choices, and allow the right to petition the ruler?

1. Is there a non-elected legislature that advises the monarch on policy issues?
2. Are there formal mechanisms for individuals or civic groups to speak with or petition the monarch?
3. Does the monarch take petitions from the public under serious consideration?

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief 5 / 16

- D1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?
D2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?
D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?
D4. Is there open and free private discussion?

E. Associational and Organizational Rights 3 / 12

- E1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?
E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?
E3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

F. Rule of Law 4 / 16

- F1. Is there an independent judiciary?
F2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?
F3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?
F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights 5 / 16

- G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?
G2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is

private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

G3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?

G4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Oman, see *Freedom in the World 2016*.