

World
Watch
Research

Oman: Full Country Dossier

February 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

February 2024

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | North Korea | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 12.8 | 96 | 98 | 96 | 94 | 94 |
| 2 | Somalia | 16.5 | 16.7 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 10.6 | 93 | 92 | 91 | 92 | 92 |
| 3 | Libya | 15.9 | 16.0 | 15.9 | 16.1 | 16.4 | 10.2 | 91 | 88 | 91 | 92 | 90 |
| 4 | Eritrea | 14.6 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 15.9 | 15.7 | 12.8 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 88 | 87 |
| 5 | Yemen | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 5.9 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 87 | 85 |
| 6 | Nigeria | 13.5 | 13.9 | 14.5 | 14.9 | 14.4 | 16.7 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 85 | 80 |
| 7 | Pakistan | 13.2 | 13.9 | 15.0 | 15.1 | 13.1 | 16.7 | 87 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 88 |
| 8 | Sudan | 14.1 | 14.2 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 13.3 | 87 | 83 | 79 | 79 | 85 |
| 9 | Iran | 15.0 | 14.6 | 13.5 | 15.8 | 16.5 | 10.9 | 86 | 86 | 85 | 86 | 85 |
| 10 | Afghanistan | 15.7 | 15.9 | 15.2 | 16.3 | 16.6 | 4.6 | 84 | 84 | 98 | 94 | 93 |
| 11 | India | 12.2 | 12.6 | 13.3 | 14.8 | 13.2 | 16.5 | 83 | 82 | 82 | 83 | 83 |
| 12 | Syria | 13.4 | 14.3 | 13.9 | 14.3 | 14.2 | 11.1 | 81 | 80 | 78 | 81 | 82 |
| 13 | Saudi Arabia | 15.2 | 15.3 | 14.8 | 15.7 | 16.6 | 3.3 | 81 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 79 |
| 14 | Mali | 11.1 | 10.1 | 14.7 | 12.8 | 15.1 | 15.6 | 79 | 76 | 70 | 67 | 66 |
| 15 | Algeria | 14.4 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 14.0 | 15.6 | 9.8 | 79 | 73 | 71 | 70 | 73 |
| 16 | Iraq | 14.2 | 14.4 | 14.0 | 14.8 | 13.9 | 7.8 | 79 | 76 | 78 | 82 | 76 |
| 17 | Myanmar | 12.2 | 10.6 | 13.4 | 13.7 | 13.0 | 16.1 | 79 | 80 | 79 | 74 | 73 |
| 18 | Maldives | 15.6 | 15.5 | 13.6 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 0.9 | 78 | 77 | 77 | 77 | 78 |
| 19 | China | 13.0 | 10.0 | 12.8 | 14.6 | 16.0 | 11.1 | 78 | 77 | 76 | 74 | 70 |
| 20 | Burkina Faso | 11.7 | 9.7 | 13.2 | 11.5 | 13.8 | 15.6 | 75 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 66 |
| 21 | Laos | 11.6 | 10.6 | 13.2 | 14.3 | 14.0 | 11.3 | 75 | 68 | 69 | 71 | 72 |
| 22 | Cuba | 13.2 | 8.7 | 13.8 | 13.3 | 15.1 | 8.7 | 73 | 70 | 66 | 62 | 52 |
| 23 | Mauritania | 14.6 | 14.2 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 1.3 | 72 | 72 | 70 | 71 | 68 |
| 24 | Morocco | 13.2 | 13.8 | 11.7 | 12.8 | 14.4 | 5.4 | 71 | 69 | 69 | 67 | 66 |
| 25 | Uzbekistan | 14.6 | 12.7 | 13.9 | 12.6 | 15.5 | 1.7 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 73 |
| 26 | Bangladesh | 12.4 | 10.6 | 12.5 | 10.8 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 71 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 63 |
| 27 | Niger | 9.4 | 9.6 | 14.5 | 7.7 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 62 | 60 |
| 28 | CAR | 10.3 | 8.6 | 13.9 | 9.6 | 12.2 | 15.6 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 66 | 68 |
| 29 | Turkmenistan | 14.2 | 12.3 | 13.6 | 13.9 | 15.5 | 0.6 | 70 | 70 | 69 | 70 | 70 |
| 30 | Nicaragua | 12.1 | 7.6 | 13.2 | 13.2 | 14.1 | 9.6 | 70 | 65 | 56 | 51 | 41 |
| 31 | Oman | 14.3 | 14.0 | 10.6 | 13.3 | 14.0 | 3.1 | 69 | 65 | 66 | 63 | 62 |
| 32 | Ethiopia | 9.9 | 9.7 | 12.6 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 14.4 | 69 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 63 |
| 33 | Tunisia | 12.3 | 13.2 | 10.2 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 69 | 67 | 66 | 67 | 64 |
| 34 | Colombia | 11.1 | 8.6 | 12.9 | 11.3 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 68 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 62 |
| 35 | Vietnam | 11.3 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 7.2 | 68 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 72 |
| 36 | Bhutan | 13.1 | 12.1 | 12.4 | 14.1 | 14.3 | 2.2 | 68 | 66 | 67 | 64 | 61 |
| 37 | Mexico | 11.5 | 8.5 | 12.5 | 11.1 | 10.6 | 14.1 | 68 | 67 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 38 | Egypt | 12.5 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 10.9 | 7.8 | 68 | 68 | 71 | 75 | 76 |
| 39 | Mozambique | 9.3 | 8.5 | 13.9 | 8.4 | 12.5 | 15.0 | 68 | 68 | 65 | 63 | 43 |
| 40 | Qatar | 14.2 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 13.2 | 14.4 | 0.6 | 67 | 68 | 74 | 67 | 66 |
| 41 | DRC | 8.0 | 7.9 | 12.6 | 9.7 | 13.0 | 15.9 | 67 | 67 | 66 | 64 | 56 |
| 42 | Indonesia | 10.9 | 12.3 | 11.5 | 10.2 | 9.7 | 11.5 | 66 | 68 | 68 | 63 | 60 |
| 43 | Cameroon | 8.8 | 7.6 | 12.6 | 8.0 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 66 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 44 | Brunei | 15.0 | 14.7 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 14.1 | 1.3 | 66 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 63 |
| 45 | Comoros | 12.7 | 14.0 | 11.2 | 12.4 | 14.2 | 1.1 | 66 | 66 | 63 | 62 | 57 |
| 46 | Tajikistan | 13.8 | 12.6 | 12.3 | 12.9 | 13.4 | 0.6 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 66 | 65 |
| 47 | Kazakhstan | 13.3 | 11.8 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 14.3 | 1.1 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 64 |
| 48 | Jordan | 12.9 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 12.8 | 2.2 | 65 | 65 | 66 | 64 | 64 |
| 49 | Malaysia | 13.0 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 12.2 | 11.1 | 2.4 | 64 | 66 | 63 | 63 | 62 |
| 50 | Turkey | 13.0 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 13.2 | 11.4 | 3.1 | 64 | 66 | 65 | 69 | 63 |

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 51 | Kenya | 10.3 | 9.2 | 11.4 | 8.0 | 11.5 | 12.4 | 63 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 61 |
| 52 | Tanzania | 9.3 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 14.4 | 62 | 63 | 61 | 58 | 55 |
| 53 | Nepal | 12.1 | 10.4 | 9.5 | 13.2 | 12.3 | 4.4 | 62 | 61 | 64 | 66 | 64 |
| 54 | Kuwait | 13.1 | 13.6 | 9.4 | 12.0 | 12.2 | 0.9 | 61 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 62 |
| 55 | Djibouti | 12.3 | 12.6 | 12.7 | 10.1 | 12.3 | 1.1 | 61 | 60 | 59 | 56 | 56 |
| 56 | Chad | 11.6 | 8.2 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 61 | 58 | 55 | 53 | 56 |
| 57 | UAE | 13.3 | 13.4 | 9.5 | 11.3 | 12.8 | 0.7 | 61 | 62 | 62 | 62 | 60 |
| 58 | Sri Lanka | 12.9 | 9.2 | 10.8 | 11.5 | 9.7 | 5.9 | 60 | 57 | 63 | 62 | 65 |
| 59 | Azerbaijan | 13.2 | 9.9 | 9.6 | 11.9 | 13.6 | 1.7 | 60 | 59 | 60 | 56 | 57 |
| 60 | Palestinian Territories | 13.1 | 13.3 | 9.7 | 10.7 | 12.1 | 0.9 | 60 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 60 |
| 61 | Kyrgyzstan | 13.2 | 10.3 | 11.3 | 10.5 | 12.2 | 1.3 | 59 | 59 | 58 | 58 | 57 |
| 62 | Russian Federation | 12.7 | 7.7 | 10.6 | 12.8 | 12.9 | 1.7 | 58 | 57 | 56 | 57 | 60 |
| 63 | Rwanda | 9.4 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 10.4 | 11.7 | 9.4 | 58 | 57 | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| 64 | Burundi | 7.6 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 9.8 | 9.7 | 12.8 | 57 | 55 | 52 | 48 | 48 |
| 65 | Bahrain | 12.0 | 13.2 | 8.6 | 11.3 | 8.5 | 1.1 | 55 | 55 | 57 | 56 | 55 |
| 66 | Honduras | 7.9 | 4.7 | 12.2 | 7.3 | 9.9 | 12.6 | 55 | 53 | 48 | 46 | 39 |
| 67 | Venezuela | 6.0 | 4.4 | 11.1 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 10.7 | 53 | 56 | 51 | 39 | 42 |
| 68 | Togo | 9.2 | 6.7 | 9.3 | 7.1 | 11.0 | 8.9 | 52 | 49 | 44 | 43 | 41 |
| 69 | Guinea | 10.3 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 10.5 | 7.2 | 52 | 48 | 43 | 47 | 45 |
| 70 | Uganda | 8.1 | 5.0 | 7.4 | 6.7 | 8.8 | 15.9 | 52 | 51 | 48 | 47 | 48 |
| 71 | Angola | 6.8 | 6.7 | 8.1 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 7.2 | 52 | 52 | 51 | 46 | 43 |
| 72 | Lebanon | 11.0 | 10.2 | 7.0 | 6.1 | 6.6 | 7.2 | 48 | 40 | 11 | - | 35 |
| 73 | Gambia | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 8.8 | 8.9 | 3.7 | 47 | 44 | 44 | 43 | 43 |
| 74 | South Sudan | 5.7 | 4.4 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 7.6 | 15.6 | 46 | 46 | 43 | 43 | 44 |
| 75 | Belarus | 9.6 | 3.8 | 5.8 | 9.7 | 13.3 | 3.3 | 46 | 43 | 33 | 30 | 28 |
| 76 | Ivory Coast | 12.0 | 6.5 | 8.7 | 5.9 | 8.0 | 3.3 | 44 | 44 | 42 | 42 | 42 |
| 77 | Ukraine | 5.5 | 4.8 | 8.0 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 2.8 | 44 | 37 | 37 | 34 | 33 |
| 78 | Israel | 9.8 | 8.6 | 5.8 | 6.3 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 44 | 38 | 41 | 40 | 38 |

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Oman

Brief country details

| Oman: Population (UN estimate for 2023) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 5,412,000 | 196,000 | 3.6 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



| Oman: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 69 | 31 |
| WWL 2023 | 65 | 47 |
| WWL 2022 | 66 | 36 |
| WWL 2021 | 63 | 44 |
| WWL 2020 | 62 | 42 |

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Oman: | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Main persecution engines | Main drivers |
| Islamic oppression | One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs |
| Clan oppression | One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs |
| Dictatorial paranoia | Government officials |

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Omani citizens who convert to Christianity are put under pressure from family and society to recant their faith. They can be expelled from the family home and from their jobs and face problems over child custody and inheritance. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience similar pressure as in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities. Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated, but their facilities are restricted and Christian meetings are monitored to record any political statements and if any Omani nationals are attending. All religious organizations must be registered with the authorities.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Oman has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
2. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Oman is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Children of Christian converts are forced to receive Muslim religious education and to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals that are not in line with their religious beliefs (CRC Art. 14)
- Female converts to Christianity do not have the option of marrying a Christian spouse, as women registered as Muslims are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim (CEDAW Article 16)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Christians in Oman, especially known converts from a Muslim background, are strictly monitored by the security services, forcing them into self-censorship. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, no cases of physical abuse by the authorities were reported.
- Most Omani converts from Islam to Christianity keep their new faith hidden. They are highly aware of the volatile consequences of breaking family norms and have seen and heard of the consequences for those converts in Oman and other Gulf countries who have revealed their new faith; severe physical, mental and emotional abuse by family members.
- The expatriate Christian community remains monitored and is frequently obliged to self-censor.

Specific examples of positive developments

- In 2023, Oman and the Vatican established full diplomatic relations, with Archbishop Nicholas Thevenin being appointed as the first Vatican Ambassador to Oman ([Oman Observer, 5 July 2023](#)).
- In September 2019, a new Roman Catholic Church was inaugurated at the religious complex in Salalah, in the south of Oman. The religious complex is built on land donated by the Sultan.
- Oman continues to encourage interfaith dialogue, for example via the [al-Amana Center](#) (website last accessed 31 January 2024). Although very much intended to boost its diplomatic ties with the Western world (which in Omani eyes is seen as Christian), the center is helping to create a more tolerant attitude towards Christians in the country.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Oman Observer, 5 July 2023 - <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1139678/oman/first-vatican-ambassador-lauds-omans-social-fabric>
- Specific examples of positive developments: al-Amana Center - <https://alamanacentre.org/our-centre/>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Oman

Links for general background information

| Name | Quote Reference | Link | Last accessed on |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International 2022/23 Oman report | AI Oman 2022 | https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/oman/report-oman/ | 13 July 2023 |
| BBC News Oman profile - updated 5 May 2023 | BBC Oman profile | https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150 | 13 July 2023 |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries | BTI Oman Report 2022 | https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/OMN | 13 July 2023 |
| CIA World Factbook Oman - updated 26 May 2023 | World Factbook Oman | https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/ | 13 July 2023 |
| Crisis24 Oman report (Garda World) | Crisis24 Oman report | https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/oman | 13 July 2023 |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries | EIU Democracy Index 2022 - MENA pp.60-63 | https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf | 13 July 2023 |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries | FSI 2023 Oman | https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ | 13 July 2023 |
| Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Oman not included | Democracy Index 2023 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores | |
| Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries | Global Freedom Index 2023 Oman | https://freedomhouse.org/country/oman/freedom-world/2023 | 13 July 2023 |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Oman not included | Freedom on the Net 2023 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores | |
| Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries | GIWPS 2021 Oman profile | https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/oman/ | 13 July 2023 |
| Girls Not Brides Oman report | Girls Not Brides Oman | https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/oman/ | 13 July 2023 |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 covering 100+ countries, Oman not included | HRW 2023 world report | https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023 | 13 July 2023 |
| Internet World Stats available in 2023 | IWS 2023 Oman | https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#om | 13 July 2023 |
| Middle East Concern Oman country profile | MEC Oman profile | https://www.meconcern.org/countries/oman/ | 1 February 2024 |
| RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries | World Press Freedom 2023 Oman | https://rsf.org/en/oman | 13 July 2023 |
| Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries | CPI 2022 Oman | https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/omn | 13 July 2023 |
| UNDP: Human Development Report Oman - data updates as of 8 September 2022 | UNDP HDR Oman | https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/OMN | 13 July 2023 |
| US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Oman | IRFR 2022 Oman | https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/oman/ | 13 July 2023 |
| USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Oman not included | USCIRF 2023 | https://www.uscirf.gov/countries | |
| World Bank GCC overview – updated 13 February 2023 | World Bank GCC overview | https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview | 13 July 2023 |
| World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Oman - April 2023 | Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Oman | https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-omn.pdf | 13 July 2023 |
| World Bank Oman data - 2021 | World Bank Oman data | https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57bar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=OMN | 13 July 2023 |

Recent history

Located at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, Oman was an influential sultanate during the medieval period. Arabic is the official language, and more than half of Oman's population is Arab. Having been occupied by the Portuguese, Ottomans and others, the sultanate became powerful in the 18th century and took control of the coastal region of present-day Iran and Pakistan, colonized Zanzibar and Kenyan seaports, brought back enslaved Africans and sent boats trading as far as the Malay Peninsula. The country was then subdued by British forces; treaties of friendship and cooperation with Great Britain were signed in 1798 allowing the country to maintain its independence.

The discovery of oil in the 1970s fundamentally changed the country. After overthrowing his father in 1970, late Sultan Qaboos used oil profits to develop his country, investing in programs on education, health and agriculture during his five decades in power. In 1971, Oman joined the League of Arab States and the United Nations and has since then developed a unique position in the international arena. Although not accepting any internal criticism or dissent, Qaboos developed Oman's status as an international mediator, always steering away from conflict and looking for peaceful solutions. This has made Oman an intermediary between very different and even hostile countries, having close contact with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as with Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Pakistan, India, Turkey, the USA, UK and Israel (BTI 2022, pp.36-37).

The GCC is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. It was established in May 1981, but the cooperation suffered under the [Qatari crisis](#) and continuing disagreements among the member states (BBC News, 19 July 2017, [Al-Monitor, 5 February 2021](#)). While the UAE and Bahrain, two other GCC members, normalized ties with Israel in August 2020, Oman kept a neutral stance, stating that the nation "prefers initiatives that support the Palestinian people" ([Le Figaro, 27 May 2022](#)). In February 2023, Oman opened its airspace for Israeli commercial flights, but due to Israel's far right cabinet (formed in December 2022), no further steps towards normalization were likely in the short-term ([Arab Center Washington DC, 7 March 2023](#)). This prospect worsened even further following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023. Although usually keeping a neutral profile on the international stage, the strong support for the Palestinians among the Omani public made the government publicly rebuke the USA, a key security partner, for its outspoken support for Israel ([Arab Center Washington DC, 5 January 2024](#)).

Sultan Qaboos died in January 2020. It was feared that his death would lead to political turmoil as many Omani tribes had sworn allegiance to him, rather than to the Omani state and he had not appointed a successor. However, a quick succession process prevented any power vacuum and chaos. Rather than having a quarrel among themselves, the royal family council decided to follow Qaboos' suggestion to appoint his cousin Haitham bin Tariq as the new sultan ([BBC News, 11 January 2020](#)). Combining both continuity and change, Sultan Haitham announced his intention to follow in his predecessor's footsteps at the international level, but opted to reshuffle his cabinet, especially in financial and economic areas ([Atlantic Council, 19 August 2020](#)). In another major step, he delegated most of the powers previously held by Sultan Qaboos, including that of defense minister, foreign minister, finance minister and chairman of the Central Bank, to other officials, some of them outside the royal family ([Washington Institute, 19 August 2020](#)). Furthermore, using the COVID-19 crisis as an excuse, Sultan Haitham implemented several reforms including the introduction of VAT as well as income tax ([ISPI, 16 April 2021](#)). In addition, he accelerated 'Omanization', the replacement of expatriate workers with Omani citizens, in order to pursue a much needed reform of the public sector. Despite an initial drop during 2020 and 2021, mainly as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the number of expatriates rebounded in 2022 and 2023. Statistics vary, but expatriates still make up more than 40% of the Omani population, indicating Oman's dependence on foreign workers ([Muscat Daily, 25 October 2023](#)). However, the number of skilled workers from abroad decreased: The number of expatriates working in the Omani government sector dropped by almost 20% in 2022 ([Muscat Daily, 20 July 2022](#)). Two reasons for this are: i) Many Western expatriates did not return after COVID, and ii) Obtaining a visa has become more difficult. It would seem therefore that foreign workers are increasingly being recruited for low-skilled labor only.

Rare protests occurred in May 2021 following lay-offs, with protesters demanding jobs ([Al-Jazeera, 25 May 2021](#)). The country remains stable overall and increased 18 places on the 2023 Global Peace Index, ranking third in the MENA region, behind Qatar and Kuwait ([Institute for Economics & Peace, accessed 12 July 2023](#)). Further demonstrations occurred following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, with the Sultan repeating Oman's official stance that there can be no peace without the establishment of a Palestinian state ([Asharq Al Awsat, 15 November 2023](#)).

In the modern era, Christians have been present in Oman since the end of the 19th century following the establishment of the Arabian Mission in the capital, Muscat. However, the number of Christians in the country only really started growing after Oman's oil boom in the 1970s, followed by the increasing need for expatriate workers, who included many Christians.

Political and legal landscape

The country is ruled by a monarchy with two advisory bodies (State Council and Consultative Council). Sultan Haitham bin Tariq succeeded long-time ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said after his death in January 2020. Although delegating some of his powers, he seems to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, with his government also being classified as authoritarian by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU Democracy Index 2022).

Sultan Qaboos has been credited with abolishing slavery, forging relations with the USA, bringing stability to the economy and election reforms. In 1997 women were granted the right to be elected to the country's consultative body, the Shura Council (Majlis al-Shura) and in 2003, the sultan extended voting rights to everyone over 21; previously, voters were selected from among the elite. However, the legislative powers of these bodies remain limited.

Other sources report

Middle East Concern states (MEC Oman profile):

- "The Basic Law of Oman establishes Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as the basis of legislation. The Basic Law also affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion, and asserts the right to practise recognised religious rites provided such practice does not disrupt public order or conflict with accepted standards of behaviour. More severe penal code sanctions were introduced in 2018 for offenses of blasphemy and insulting Abrahamic religions. Classical Ibadhi Islamic jurisprudence is applied in personal status matters. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs closely regulates and monitors religious activities, including Islamic activities. Religious leaders must be registered with the Ministry, and permission sought for visiting clergy. Only approved messages can be given within mosques. Prior permission is required for the distribution of religious materials, and for the publication or importing of religious materials. Non-Muslim worship is only permitted on premises officially designated for that purpose, on land donated by the Sultan."

Humanist International's [Freedom of Thought report](#) (updated 12 May 2023) describes the constitution and government as severely discriminating:

- "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 of the Basic Statute of the State), however legislation is largely based on civil code. The principles of sharia inform the civil, commercial and criminal codes, but there are no sharia courts. The Basic Law prohibits discrimination based on religion (Article 17) and protects the right to practice religious rites on condition that doing so does not disrupt public order or contradict morals (Article 28). However, all religious groups are required to register and the law restricts collective worship of non-Muslims. ... The law pro-

hibits 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 [and] censor religious texts."

Gender perspective

Omani laws continue to discriminate against women with respect to marriage, divorce, inheritance, nationality and guardianship of children (HRW 2023 Oman country chapter). Although Oman acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2006, it maintained a reservation to Article 16 ([UNDP, Oman: Gender Justice and the Law, 2019](#)) - which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage - stating that no elements should contradict provisions of the Islamic Sharia. Whilst not deemed to be an endemic issue in Oman, the practice of child marriage still occurs, particularly in rural communities; 4% of girls in Oman are married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Oman). Legislation also fails to adequately protect women from domestic violence, marital rape and violence against women. Only [2.3%](#) of seats in national parliament were held by women in 2022 (World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023). Escaping abusive marriages is problematic; under Sharia law a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq* (verbal repudiation), whereas a woman must file for divorce through the courts on specified grounds.

Religious landscape

| Oman: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 196,000 | 3.6 |
| Muslim | 4,859,000 | 89.8 |
| Hindu | 275,000 | 5.1 |
| Buddhist | 32,200 | 0.6 |
| Ethno-religionist | 630 | 0.0 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 14,500 | 0.3 |
| Atheist | 250 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 7,900 | 0.1 |
| Other | 26,620 | 0.5 |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> | | |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to WCD 2023 estimates, just under 90% of Oman's inhabitants are Muslim. The next largest religion in the country is Hinduism with 5.1% of the total population.

Ibadism

Islam is the state religion. According to Islamic tradition, Oman was one of the countries reached by Islam within Muhammed's lifetime. Around 75% of Omanis practice a unique brand of Islam called Ibadism (also spelt Ibadhism), which is a majority sect only in Oman. Ibadism has been characterized as "moderate conservatism", with tenets that are a mixture of both austerity and tolerance. According to experts, the followers of the Ibadi sect are "the least fanatic and sectarian of all Muslims" (Hoffman J V, [Ibadi Islam](#), accessed 12 July 2023). They do not believe in the use of violence even towards those who leave Islam or who are not Muslims, but rather focus on "dissociation" which is usually an internal attitude of withholding "friendship" (*wilaya*). Thus, even though Islam dominates the lives of Omanis, there is also a tendency to tolerate Christians. What is even more noteworthy is the observation that in many Omani mosques Ibadi, Sunni, and even Shia practitioners worship together peacefully.

This tolerance was strengthened by Sultan Qaboos, who liked to present the country internationally as a model of tolerance and diplomacy, especially by attempting to mediate in international talks with some of the militant groups in the region. However, pressure on Omani converts from Islam to Christianity (and on expatriate Christians involved in proselytizing) still remains very high.

Middle East Concern states (MEC Oman profile):

- "Expatriate Christians enjoy considerable freedom in Oman, provided their activities are restricted to designated compounds and that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. Church compounds are typically overcrowded on days of worship as they seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages. Omani nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members. Those considered apostates could also face sanctions such as forcible divorce and removal of child custody under Ibadhi personal status laws overseen by Shari'a courts."

Economic landscape

According to the World Factbook Oman and World Bank Oman data:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$34,300 (2021 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 3.1% (2021), with youth unemployment being 14.6% (2021), indicating the need for economic opportunities for the young population.
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** No data available, but probably low. The Omani government is known to take care of all citizens.

According to the World Bank's [Gulf Economic Update \(October 2022\)](#) and [MENA Economic Update \(April 2023\)](#):

- **State of the economy:** "The economy is projected to continue its recovery and strengthen over the medium-term, driven by robust energy prices, expansion of oil and gas production, and wide-ranging structural reforms. The overall fiscal deficit is expected to turn into a sur-

plus of nearly 6% of GDP in 2022—the first surplus in almost a decade—reducing gross financing needs. Similarly, the external balance is swinging back into surplus (6% of GDP in 2022)—the first surplus in 7 years—on the back of higher oil receipts and recovery in non-oil exports."

- **Economic growth:** "The fastest growing economy within the GCC in 2023 is projected to be Oman, at 4.3 percent growth. Despite weakening demand for oil, relatively high growth is expected to be sustained by increased hydrocarbon production capacity, in particular aided by the development of new natural gas fields."

In November 2023, the IMF reported that Oman's economy keeps recovering and growth is forecast to reach 3.7% in 2024, although further reforms are needed and the regional and global circumstances are volatile ([Reuters, 16 November 2023](#)).

'Omanization'

Oman is increasingly trying to replace expatriates in its workforce with Omani citizens, a process called "Omanization". Since introducing its 'Vision 2020' program in 1995, Oman has been trying to increase the number of Omani's working in the private sector instead of the government-funded public sector. However, in 2020, the percentage was less than 20% instead of the targeted 75% ([Wafoman, 29 September 2020](#)). The Sultan wants continuous stability by providing jobs to the Omani citizens in exchange for their loyalty, legitimizing his regime. But the Omani workforce lacks the skillset needed to sustain the economy, while expecting the government to simply provide jobs at the same time. As long as the oil and gas exports remain central, the economy is dependent on skillful foreign workers and there seems little chance of reducing the high number of young Omani's looking for jobs. Hence, while using a strict penal code to quell dissent, in its 'Vision 2040' program, the government lowered its requirements to enable expatriate blue collar workers to be replaced, while keeping high skilled expatriate workers (BTI report 2022).

Oil and gas wealth has eliminated much poverty in Oman, although poverty among expatriate workers is probably under-reported. Although possibly not primarily faith-related, Christian expatriates, especially domestic workers, do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other ways of unfair treatment, related to Oman's *kafala* system ([Council on Foreign Relations, 18 November 2022](#)). Omani converts from Islam to Christianity are very likely to be placed under economic pressure. There is high chance they will lose employment and economic benefits provided by the state.

Other sources report

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 12 July 2023) puts the Omani economy in the high income category.
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Oman) shows improvement regarding the 'Human Flight and Brain Drain' indicator, which already was low. The 'Economy' indicator shows further improvement, following decline caused by the COVID-19 impact in 2020. However, the 'Economic Inequality' indicator has worsened slightly, while the 'External intervention' indicator continued to rise, indicating Oman's dependency on foreign investment.

- The Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU 2023 Oman](#)) writes: "Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said will continue to command political authority in 2023-27, although this could be tested by popular protests later in the forecast period, driven by growing socioeconomic pressures and the possible imposition of economic austerity measures. Real GDP growth will slow in 2023 as hydrocarbons prices and output fall, but a fiscal surplus will allow the government to delay introducing austerity measures. However, as the level of public debt rises again, the budget balance tips into a deficit and austerity measures are implemented gradually as hydrocarbons prices fall further, economic growth will slow in 2024-27."

Gender perspective

Women are among the most economically vulnerable in Oman, in part due to low participation in the workforce and patrilineal inheritance practices (UNDP HDR Oman). Under Sharia rules of inheritance, daughters inherit half that of a son (Personal Status Law, Sec. 242). Oman also has one of the highest gender gaps as regards labor force participation with only 32% of women aged 15 and older engaged in the labor force compared to 86.5% of men ([World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Oman:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Omani population are from Arab descent. Other ethnicities include Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi) and African groups, among the wide variety of ethnicities that can be found within the expatriate community. Particularly noteworthy are the Omani citizens of Zanzibari descent, who were colonized and enslaved by Oman, but were granted citizenship by the late Sultan Qaboos. There is also a tribe of Irani (Persian) decent.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic. Other languages include English, Baluchi, Swahili, Urdu and Indian dialects.
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 88.4% of the population lived in urban areas, with an annual urbanization rate of 2.3%.
- **Literacy rate:** 95.7% of the population can read and write; with a difference between men (97.0%) and women (92.7%).
- **Population/age:** Non-Omanis make up 46.0% of the total population (2019 est.). The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 47.5% of the population, making it another country in the wider region with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 5000 refugees from Yemen reside in the country (2017).
- **Life expectancy:** 77.1 years on average; women (79.1 years), men (75.2 years).
- **Education:** On average, Omanis are expected to have 15 years of schooling (15 for girls and 14 years for boys) (2020).

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Oman:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Oman ranks #54 out 191 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score on the Human Devel-

opment Index (HDI).

- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 0.900, women are disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.
- **Labor Force Participation Rate:** 28.7% of women and 85.0% of men, indicating a significant gender gap.

Oman is a Muslim nation which is conservative and tribal in nature. Education levels have improved considerably in the last decades. The younger generation is interested in new ideas - visible also in the clothing of younger people. Moreover, a cultural shift is taking place from agrarian nomadic to urban lifestyle. To tackle future unemployment - almost half the Omani population is under 24 - Oman is gradually replacing expatriates with nationals (see above: Economic landscape for further details). Due to this, the percentage of educated and skilled Omanis is growing. Female education has dramatically reduced illiteracy. Highly educated teachers and technicians from abroad are currently still in demand but ultimately 'Omanization' will lead to a decrease in the level of non-Muslim residents. Although the 'Omanization' process initially started with a series of speeches with little implementation, it has since been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis and the challenging economic situation. The government has, for example, not renewed the contracts for more than 70% of its foreign consultants ([Al-Monitor](#), 29 May 2020).

Fragile State Index indicators show stagnation in social and cohesion indicators overall, but a rather high rating for "Factionalized Elites" is indicative for the tribal way in which the country is ruled (FSI 2023). At the same time, "Group Grievance" is on the rise, while "State Legitimacy" is also worsening, indicative of the political and economic demands the government needs to address.

Under the official kafala sponsorship system, domestic workers are bound by contract to their employers, who confiscate their passport and often force them to work excessive hours. This leaves them vulnerable to abuse. Although from January 2021 migrant workers are allowed to change jobs without having to seek permission from their employers, they remained vulnerable for abuse and insufficiently protected against exploitation ([AI, Oman country report 2021/22, p.285](#)). Although not primarily faith-related, many Christians in Oman also experience discrimination or abuse. Skin color and ethnic background play a significant role in determining vulnerability for abuse. Hence, Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled expatriates will face less difficulties than low-skilled migrants. In short, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African or Asian background will be most vulnerable in Oman.

Gender perspective

By law, men are recognized as the head of the household and must provide for their family, whilst women "owe obedience" to their husbands (Personal Status Law, Sec. 38). It is rare for women to assume positions in public office or senior legal positions. As noted by Human Rights Watch, to date no woman has ever acted as a judge in the country ([HRW 2021 Oman country chapter](#)). Women typically assume domestic responsibilities such as housekeeping and raising children. Domestic violence is considered a private matter, meaning that many victims choose

not to report crimes against them. According to a 2019 study, 28.8% of surveyed women indicated that they had experienced domestic violence ([Kendi et al, 2021](#)). However, domestic violence is probably underreported as certain practices, including house arrest, 'light' physical abuse and withholding food, are culturally accepted and not considered to be abusive. While FGM is officially outlawed in Oman, studies suggest that rates are nevertheless the highest in the Arab Gulf states, with suggestions that the percentage of Omani women having undergone FGM is at least 78%, if not higher ([Equality Now, 2020](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Oman):

- **Internet usage:** 75.3% penetration (January 2022)
- **Facebook usage:** 59.6% penetration (January 2022).
[Napoleon Cat \(June 2023\)](#) reports that 66.8% of Facebook users are male, compared to 33.2% female.

According to the World Bank Oman data:

- **Mobile phones:** 135.1 per 100 people

The advancement of communication technology and the increased use of social media has not led to an increased level of freedom of speech. According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 Oman:

- Oman is rated as "not free".
- "The media are constrained by legal limits on freedom of expression, including a ban on criticism of the sultan. There are private media outlets in addition to those run by the state, but they typically accept government subsidies, practice self-censorship, and face punishment if they cross political redlines. Media outlets were reportedly told to avoid reporting on demonstrations that were held in several cities in 2021. The government has broad authority to close outlets, block websites, revoke licenses, and prosecute journalists for content violations, and it has used this authority on multiple occasions in recent years. The government's efforts to suppress critical news and commentary regularly include arrests and prosecutions of prominent individuals who are active on social media."
- "Among other cases involving reprisals for online speech during the year, security forces in February [2022] arrested Abdulmajeed al-Rawahi and detained him for four days after he posted comments on social media that were deemed critical of the ruling family. In December [2022], the Internal Security Service reportedly abducted online activist Majid bin Abdullah al-Ruhaili and held him incommunicado in response to social media posts that were critical of the government."

According to Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023 Oman):

- Oman is ranked #155 out of 180 countries, up from #163 in 2022, but down from #133 in 2021.
- "Self-censorship is the rule in this peaceful sultanate, where criticism of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq or his cousin and predecessor, Qabus ibn Said, are unacceptable. ... Any content

judged 'insulting' to the royal family, the government, Islam, the country's economy, or, simply, tradition results in the conviction of the writer (a fine or prison sentence). ... Journalists and bloggers are frequently arrested, sometimes detained in secret and sentenced to prison on charges including insulting the head of state, or the country's culture or traditions, inciting illegal demonstrations, or disturbing public order. Advocating for environmental protection or the safeguarding of nature reserves is considered highly sensitive for journalists."

Just like all other Omanis and expatriates in the country, Christians and churches are well aware that their online activities are monitored and that they need to avoid discussing sensitive issues in public.

Security situation

Despite the ongoing war in neighboring Yemen since 2015, Oman has remained a stable and safe place in the region. While maintaining neutrality in the conflict and acting as diplomatic intermediary, it has offered help and support to Yemenis affected by the war and has kept the border with Yemen open ([Al-Monitor, 7 January 2020](#)). Due to its neutrality, the country has several times been able to act as an intermediary in the release of hostages held captive in Yemen ([The Arab Weekly, 25 April 2022](#)). Similarly, it played an important role in the release of several foreigners being held hostage in Iran in recent years ([Iran International, 26 May 2023](#), [The Arab Weekly, 8 October 2022](#)).

As mentioned above (in Recent History), after the death of Sultan Qaboos in January 2020, political turmoil was feared, as many Omani tribes had sworn allegiance to him, rather than the Omani state ([Carnegie Endowment, January 2015](#)). However, a quick succession process prevented any power vacuum and chaos from developing.

Oman endorsed and welcomed the normalization of ties between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, as well as between Morocco and Israel. However, Oman's Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Al-Khalili strongly denounced what he described as "wooing the enemy" ([The New Arab, 19 October 2020](#)). Hence, establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel themselves could potentially lead to unrest; although Oman had already under the previous sultan warmed up relations with Israel without popular backlash. Nonetheless, in line with its neutral position in all conflicts, in July 2021 Oman's foreign minister declared that the country would only normalize ties after a two-state solution with the Palestinians has been reached ([The New Arab, 10 July 2021](#)), a position repeated in May 2022 ([Le Figaro, 27 May 2022](#)) and November 2023 ([Asharq Al Awsat, 15 November 2023](#)). Although Oman decided to open its airspace for Israeli commercial airliners earlier in 2023, there were no further developments suggesting any change in stance (see also above: *Recent History*).

Since the country is stable and secure at the moment, expatriate Christians have nothing to fear as long as they abide by the laws and customs of the country's Islamic culture. Oman's security agencies are strong and the risk of attacks by radical Islamic groups is low. On the other hand, both expatriate Christians as well as Omani converts from Islam to Christianity are well aware that the well-developed intelligence agencies are also used to monitor their activities.

Trends analysis

1) Government and society both put pressure on Christians

Society puts pressure on both indigenous and expatriate Christians to encourage compliance with the Islamic rules, thus giving the authorities no need to act with force against Christians. This in turn helps the government to maintain a friendly face towards the world, especially the West. One way of doing this, is through the continued government support for the al-Amara Center which works to promote dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians. At the same time, the government strictly monitors both Christians and churches in the country. In general, it has become more difficult to obtain residency permits for expatriate Christians to stay in the country due to the ongoing 'Omanization' of the workforce.

2) In line with the wider Gulf region, the Sultan remains wary of 'harmful ideologies'

The future for Omani Christians is shaped by social, political and regional factors. Looking at the situation of many countries in the Middle East and the Gulf, it is difficult to envisage positive developments - and Oman is no exception. In the Sultan's first formal address to the Omani parliament in November 2023, he explicitly warned against "challenges pervading our society and ... their intolerable impacts on its ethical and cultural fabric" ([Washington Institute, 27 November 2023](#)). In line with the above mentioned trend, he also stated that "the family, the cornerstone of our society, ... acts as a bulwark in safeguarding our progeny from harmful ideologies that are in direct opposition to the tenets of our venerable religion and core values." ([Foreign Ministry of Oman, 14 November 2023](#)). Although he did not provide any further specification, it is to be feared that any Christian ministry to Omani citizens will also be viewed as 'harmful'.

3) Economic and geopolitical challenges

Despite high gas and oil revenues following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Oman knows that it needs to reform its economy and become less dependent on the oil and gas industry in the long term. Hence, Oman will require foreign investment in the years to come and its economic dependency might make it a vassal of the highest bidder. China has already invested millions in projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative and has become Oman's largest (green) energy partner, a key growth area. Meanwhile, wealthy neighboring UAE has recently softened its stance somewhat, it still does not like Oman's neutrality regarding Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Hence, the Omani government will have to act sensitively to keep its "traditional balancing posture" ([Washington Institute, 22 December 2022](#)).

External Links - Keys to understanding

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- Trends analysis: Washington Institute, 22 December 2022 - <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/stabilizing-factor-omans-quiet-influence-amid-mounting-uncertainty-gulf>

WWL 2024: Church information / Oman

Christian origins

Traditionally, Oman's earliest Christianity was the result of mission work carried out by Theophilus Indus from Karachi. He became a Christian in Rome and Emperor Constantine II (316-340 AD) sent him to Yemen. He erected two churches in Yemen and one in Sohar, Oman. In 424 AD, Bishop Yohannan from Sohar attended a Nestorian synod. The Azd tribe that migrated to Oman because of persecution by the Jewish rulers in Yemen (ca 380-522 AD), were probably Christians.

According to Islamic tradition, Islam reached Oman in 632 AD. However, Sohar's Bishop Stephanus attended a Church Council in 676 AD and so it is clear that Christianity had not at that point disappeared.

Oman has always been an important hub on the trading route between Iraq and India, and this must have created regular contact between Omanis and Christians. This became more intense when the Portuguese ruled over Muscat (1515-1650). In 1798, Oman and Great Britain signed a Treaty of Friendship. Under this treaty, Britain guaranteed the sultan's rule. In 1891, Oman and Muscat became a British Protectorate. This guaranteed much freedom for foreigners to live and work in Oman.

In 1893, Peter Zwemer and James Cantine of the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) started the Muscat Station for their mission. Because of endemic leprosy in Oman, a medical ministry was soon set up. The RCA opened a hospital in Muscat, which became the center of the nation's Christian presence for many years. This foundational work by the RCA

has led to the formation of the Protestant Church of Oman, which includes Protestants of many denominational backgrounds and continues to be served by RCA staff. Its work is concentrated in Muscat and in the nearby communities of Ruwi and Ghala. The Sultan of Oman also granted parcels of land to the Protestant church in Salalah and Sohar.

The Roman Catholic Church re-established itself in the region in 1841 with an assignment of personnel to Aden (Yemen). That work grew successively into a prefecture (1854) and a vicariate (1888), and in 1889 it became the Vicariate of Arabia, now administered from Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) and responsible for Catholics in Oman. The first Roman Catholic church in Oman was erected in 1977 in Muscat.

(Source: Melton J. & Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the World*, 2nd edition, 2010, p.2147.)

Church spectrum today

| Oman: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|----------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 26,200 | 13.4 |
| Catholic | 127,000 | 64.8 |
| Protestant | 12,500 | 6.4 |
| Independent | 22,300 | 11.4 |
| Unaffiliated | 8,400 | 4.3 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 196,400 | 100.2 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 6,600 | 3.4 |
| Renewalist movement | 39,500 | 20.2 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox.
Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The vast majority of Christians in Oman are expatriates. Most of them are from the Philippines, India and from Western countries. They are concentrated in the country's urban areas in and around Muscat and Sohar in the north, and Salalah in the south. There are two church compounds in Muscat, with other church compounds being located in Sohar and Salalah. More than sixty different Christian groups, fellowships and assemblies are active in the capital city, Muscat, and church groups worship in a variety of languages including Arabic, Tamil, Hindi, Korean, Tagalog, Malayalam and English.

Middle East Concern (MEC Oman profile) states:

- "Expatriate Christians enjoy considerable freedom in Oman, provided their activities are restricted to designated compounds and that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. Church compounds are typically overcrowded on days of worship as they seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages."

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Omani society is still very tribal and levels of pressure on Christians tend to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas (e.g., Muscat). Social and family control is generally higher in rural areas, while urban areas offer the possibility for converts to live a more anonymous life.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are a number of expatriate communities in Oman, located mainly in the major urban areas of Muscat and Sohar in the north and Salalah in the south. These include Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant congregations. All religious organizations must register and Christian meetings are monitored. Foreign Christians are allowed to worship discreetly in private homes or work compounds. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals.

Historical Christian communities: There are no historical Christian communities (other than expatriate ones covered in the first category above).

Converts to Christianity: All known converts from Islam to Christianity face persecution from family and society, including physical and mental abuse, to force them to renounce their faith. Converts can also lose their family, as the law prohibits a father who leaves Islam from retaining paternal rights over his children.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are no non-traditional Christian communities in the country (other than expatriate ones covered in the first category above).

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Oman

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

| Oman: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 69 | 31 |
| WWL 2023 | 65 | 47 |
| WWL 2022 | 66 | 36 |
| WWL 2021 | 63 | 44 |
| WWL 2020 | 62 | 42 |

The rise of 4 points in WWL 2024 was due to an increase in the violence score (from 0.6 points to 3.1) and an increase in the pressure score, above all in the Church sphere. This was caused by several incidents involving the community of converts from Islam to Christianity. Average pressure remained at a very high level for Christians, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. Christians continue to be closely monitored by the government.

Persecution engines

| Oman: Persecution engines | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Strong |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Not at all |
| Ethno-religious hostility | ERH | Not at all |
| Clan oppression | CO | Strong |
| Christian denominational protectionism | CDP | Not at all |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO | Not at all |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Not at all |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Strong |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Not at all |

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Islamic oppression (Strong)

Islam is the state religion and legislation is based mainly on Islamic law. All state school curricula include instruction in Islam. Apostasy is not a criminal offense, but it is not respected by the legal system either, which assumes that all citizens are Muslims. A convert from Islam to Christianity faces problems under the Personal Status and Family Code, which, for example, prohibits a father from having custody over his children if he leaves Islam.

Levels of persecution vary for converts from Islam to Christianity. Those from an Omani background face highest levels of pressure. For converts from Islam with other backgrounds, such as those originating from Pakistan or the Levant (i.e., Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, among other countries), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Oman. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Omani government, although their Omani employers can fire them, which would result in deportation if they could not find another job. Within those expatriate communities, the consequences for converts depend more on the cultural norms from their home countries, than on the cultural practices of Oman. For expatriates, conversion to Christianity is sometimes easier than in their home country, because family and relatives are often far away and social pressure is less stringent.

Clan oppression (Strong)

Tribal values, in which family honor plays a very important role, are blended with Islamic values. To be Omani is to be Muslim. There is great pride in being Omani, and often the celebration of tradition is held in higher regard than the meaning behind the tradition. To break with tradition or to question the reasons behind it are unimaginable for the general population. Society shuns those who leave Islam, even though violence is not encouraged.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

Oman has been ruled by a dynasty that does not respect the will of the people. There is discontent among Omanis who generally believe that the government is authoritarian, even though they accept that recent economic reforms have been beneficial. Freedom House rates the country as "not free" in its Global Freedom Index 2023 report for Oman and states: "The regime restricts virtually all political rights and civil liberties, imposing criminal penalties for criticism and dissent." The media also faces harassment and intimidation. Pressure on Christians in this regard has further increased under the new Sultan (who took over leadership in January 2020), with most Christians applying strict self-censorship to avoid accusations of proselytization or of criticizing the government.

Drivers of persecution

| Oman: Drivers of persecution | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
|--|--------|----|-----|----------------|-----|------|----|--------|-----|
| | STRONG | | | STRONG | | | | STRONG | |
| Government officials | Strong | | | | | | | Strong | |
| Ethnic group leaders | Strong | | | Strong | | | | | |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong | | | Strong | | | | | |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong | | | Strong | | | | | |
| One's own (extended) family | Strong | | | Very strong | | | | | |

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor, strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target family members who convert to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Oman. Families will most certainly expel converts from their home, as they see conversion not merely as being an attack on Islam, but also on the family honor.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Although there is no criminal penalty for conversion, it is socially unacceptable and a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized. Omani Christians (mostly converts from Islam to Christianity) have been interrogated by government officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced threats of losing their jobs and homes. Conversion is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status matters. For example, fathers who leave Islam are likely to lose custody of their children. Foreign Christians have to practice their faith carefully as the government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to speak about the Christian faith publicly; proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. Christian expatriate workers have been interrogated and instructed not to share their faith if they wish to keep their visas. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The fear of hostile pronouncements or actions by Islamic leaders contributes to the high degree of caution converts feel compelled to exercise.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Strong):** Omani society is conservative and proud to be Islamic. Society will put pressure on both the government and family members to uphold Islamic religious norms.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Family and tribal heads will make sure that Islam is respected within their tribe or extended family. They will influence family members to pressurize con-

verts into recanting their faith.

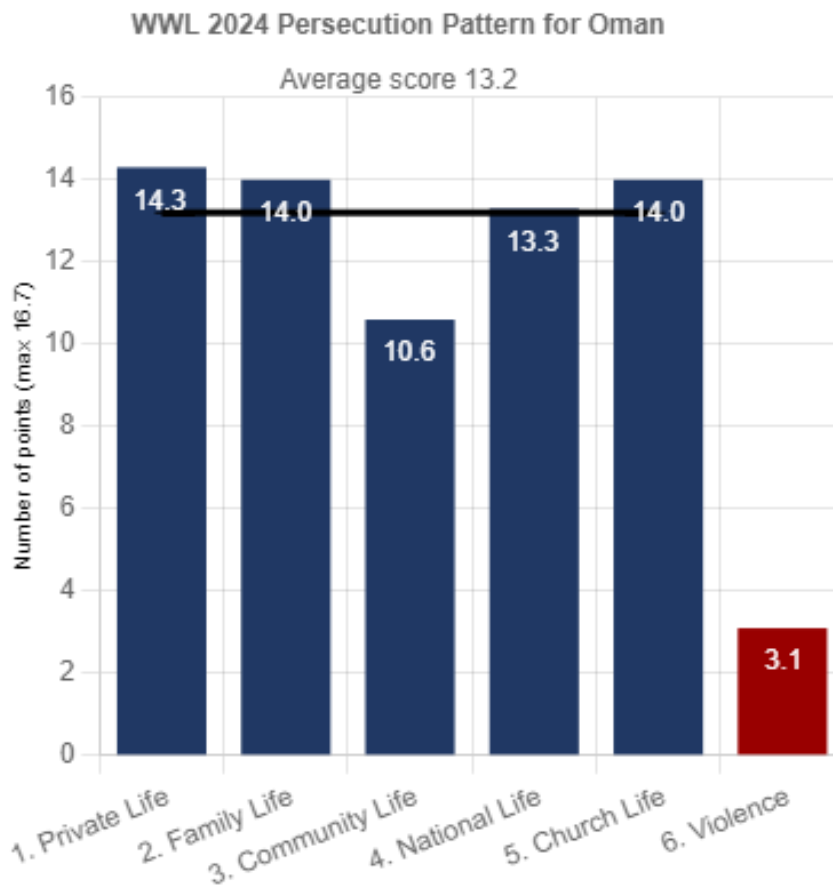
Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Very strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element in the reasons for persecuting a convert family member, this cannot be viewed separately from the concept of 'family honor'. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is the betrayal of everything a conservative Muslim family stands for and a shame to the name of the family. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families for shaming them.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Tribal and family heads will make sure that the honor of their group is not defiled by a member converting to Christianity, which is regarded as a great insult. For Omanis, being Omani is their nationality, but their tribe is their real identity. As a communal society, a convert to Christianity brings great shame upon the entire tribe. The leaders of the tribe and of the family then bear the burden of restoring honor to the tribe. This can only be done if the person returns to Islam, leaves the community or dies. The persecution most often seen is the unwavering pressure on a convert to return to Islam, or the complete abandonment of the individual by their community.
- **Citizens (people from broader society) (Strong):** Tribalism still has a widespread influence within Omani society and the social standing of tribe and family is very important to Omanis. Thus, there is social pressure to keep up societal norms in order not to shame the good name of the tribe and family.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Local imams will encourage the upholding of the cultural norms, which are intertwined with Islamic principles.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The new Sultan has followed his predecessor's example and has kept hold of all decision-making powers. The Omani government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including their managing of religious affairs. Expatriates speaking out against the government will likely face deportation. While many Christians fear the monitoring of their phones and social media, most often this technology is focused on Omanis and is used to suppress any hint of dissent or criticism of the government.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Oman shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.2 points), increasing from 12.9 in WWL 2023.
- The *Family, Private and Church spheres of life* have reached extreme levels of pressure. The next highest levels of pressure occurs in the *National sphere of life*. This reflects, on the one hand, the difficult situation for Christian converts who face intense pressure from their (extended) family; on the other hand, church life is difficult for both convert and expatriate Christians, as proselytizing and integrating converts from a Muslim background are socially unacceptable.
- The score for violence rose from 0.6 points in WWL 2023 to 3.1 points in WWL 2024. A higher number of incidents involving both Omani converts and expatriate Christians were reported.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)

It is impossible for Omani converts to Christianity to publicly post content on social media about their faith. That would bring great shame to the (wider) family and serious backlash. Omani converts would also face immense social hostility. If a convert posts something deemed insulting to Islam, the police are likely to make an arrest. A female Omani convert to Christianity living in the USA made [a telling statement](#); after receiving severe backlash for revealing her new faith, she wrote on Twitter: "if I were in Oman, they would kill me or imprison me as soon as I criticized or left Islam" (Al-Bawaba, 16 January 2020).

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

Oman is one of the few countries where Islam is state religion, but where conversion is not a crime as long as it is not done publicly. Yet there are consequences, especially on issues related to family matters; converts in particular face persecution in their private life. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is viewed extremely negatively within the wider Muslim community, which explains why a convert will be ostracized by his family. Given the tribal culture, ostracization means that a convert will lose all social securities normally provided by the family.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.50 points)

Not only Omani converts from Islam to Christianity face difficulties if they want to pray or read the Bible by themselves, with pressure mostly coming from their family members. It has also been reported that domestic workers and migrant workers in labor camps also struggle to do so, as private acts of worship are discouraged by both their employers and co-workers within their living quarters. With Omani society structured around ethnicity, this mostly concerns low-paid Christians from Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

Risks are highest for Omani converts; for non-Omani converts, the level of risk depends on the norms of their own community. Expatriate Christians who publicly talk about Christian faith, can be accused of proselytism which can lead to deportation.

Block 1: Additional information

Expatriate Christians are generally able to read their Bibles and pray in private, although some migrant workers are hindered by other non-Christian migrant workers with whom they share accommodation. This is especially the case for Christian migrant workers from a Muslim background. For Omani Christians from a Muslim background private worship is often very difficult or only possible when taking precautions. Most Omani converts do not possess a physical copy of a Bible or other Christian material out of fear of possible discovery of their new faith. The Internet offers many Omani Christians a way to learn more or even be disciplined by other Christians, but this also has to be done secretly due to the high levels of social control. Because of that same control, meeting other Omani or expatriate Christians face to face has often been difficult. Female Omani converts, in particular, are at risk of house-arrest and other forms of isolation imposed by their families, if their faith becomes known.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)

This is especially true for converts from Islam to Christianity. Islamic instruction is compulsory within state schools, and as there is zero recognition of their new faith, their children cannot be exempted. Private schools can offer alternative religious courses; however, these schools are very expensive and hence inaccessible for most expatriate Christians. Even if non-Muslim expatriate Christian children are exempted from Islamic instruction, the whole education system and curriculum anyway revolves around Islamic values and norms.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)

There is no recognition of conversion, hence it is impossible for converts to register a Christian marriage (having celebrated a church marriage), nor can their children be registered as Christians or have Christian names officially recorded.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Baptizing both Omani converts and expatriate converts from Islam to Christianity is a very sensitive matter, as this is considered to be a confirmation of both conversion as well as proselytism. Hence, expatriate churches are often very cautious about baptizing converts. For the converts themselves, baptism brings significant risks: If their baptism becomes known, it is something almost unexplainable in Omani society.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)

While expatriate Christians face difficulties raising their children in a Christian way in an Islamic society, establishing Christian family life is almost impossible for both Omani and expatriate converts. Even if they are able to marry or are married to a Christian spouse, their faith needs to remain a secret for the wider family and community, creating an additional layer of complex-

ity in raising their children.

Block 2: Additional information

Converts are legally considered to be Muslim and can only marry under Islamic rites. Having a Christian wedding or funeral is difficult for expatriate converts and virtually impossible for Omani converts. In addition, spouses will be pressurized into divorcing a convert, while Omani men by law lose the custody over their children after their conversion. Bringing immense shame on the family with their conversion, Omani converts are very likely to be disinherited.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

Christians are in general monitored not only by the government but also by society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of any 'suspicious circumstances'. Especially local Omanis and expatriates suspected of evangelism will be placed under tight surveillance by the security services.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.50 points)

Omani converts often have to take part in Islamic ceremonies to avoid discovery of their new faith or to make sure they do not shame their family by their absence.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

In addition to the monitoring, Christians who are suspected of evangelism (both expatriates and nationals), are regularly interrogated by the police. Interrogation usually takes place without the use of physical violence but it keeps the pressure on the Church high.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

In a tribal society like Oman, employment is often obtained via (family) relationships. Known Omani converts will be ostracized and hence not be able to find a job anymore. It is an accepted fact that Christian expatriate workers are likely to experience discrimination on the work-floor. Their Christian faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism often plays a negative role as well.

Block 3: Additional information

In their local communities it is especially converts who are likely to face discrimination, harassment and bullying. Arranged marriage remains the cultural norm in Oman, so especially female indigenous converts fear to have to marry a Muslim spouse. In general, there is also growing pressure on women to conform to local dress standards. Fasting is strictly observed dur-

ing Ramadan, with little room for converts not to participate in religious ceremonies.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (4.00 points)

Churches at the designated compounds do not display crosses or other Christian symbols that might be visible to the public outside those compounds. Any Christians meeting up outside the official compounds, and especially Christians from a Muslim background, recognize the even greater need for restraint to avoid provocation.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

In Oman, Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the basis for legislation ([2011 Constitution, Article 2](#)). The Constitution (Article 28) only guarantees the "freedom to practice religious rites" under the condition that they "do not ... contradict morals". Hence, there is no freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity, for example.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

All Christians will try to keep a low profile in order to avoid provoking a hostile reaction. Criticizing both the Omani government or Islam would probably lead to deportation for expatriate migrants. Hence, speaking about social justice in Oman from a Christian perspective, needs to be done sensitively.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Only Christian organizations offering a clear benefit to Omani society (e.g., a hospital) will be welcomed. It is impossible to establish a Christian organization with the intention of proselytizing; organizations with a clear Christian profile will be suspected of proselytizing and opposed.

Block 4: Additional information

Christians have to live under policies and laws that are enacted in accordance with Islam. The media are controlled by the state, making hate-speech against Christianity unlikely. However, it also means that any issues that could taint Oman's international image will be kept out, including reporting on Omani converts from Islam to Christianity. Opposition to conversion is viewed as a family issue and mistreatment of Omani converts by family members can happen with impunity. Like all citizens and residents in Oman, Christians are monitored by the Omani police and intelligence agencies.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)

Since public Christian activities will often be interpreted as proselytism, churches will not be allowed to organize them. Most churches apply self-censorship in this regard in order to avoid any problems with the government or society.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

Due to societal pressure, churches will be very careful about integrating converts. In addition, the government would most likely act against any church found actively integrating converts within their community.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)

The publication, importing and distribution of religious materials are heavily regulated. Churches are no longer allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)

Churches are mostly confined to their compounds and cannot establish any institution of organization that is clearly Christian. No Christians schools or NGOs with a Christian identity are allowed. This policy underlines the fact that the Omani government is willing to tolerate the presence of the Church, but does not want society to be influenced by it.

Block 5: Additional information

There are many recognized congregations in Oman. Yet constructing and registering a church-building is difficult. The government must also approve any buildings rented by religious groups. The law prohibits public proselytizing by any non-Islamic religious group.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). Data obtained for WWL is based on reported cases as much as possible. However:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced

Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*

- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

For security reasons, only limited details about violence targeting Christians in Oman can be published. In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christian buildings attacked:** At least two incidents occurred in which buildings used for Christian activities were attacked.
- **Christians attacked:** Several incidents took place involving both Omani converts and expatriate Christians. No further details can be shared, but several of them had to relocate inside or outside the country as a result.
- **Christians abused:** It is widely known that housemaids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of abuse, including sexual abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Oman needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the housemaids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake (although Philippine President Duterte imposed a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine maid was found in the [freezer](#) of a Kuwaiti home in February 2018, as reported by World Asia, 16 February 2018).

The employers of abused housemaids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The housemaids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as being 'dirty', whether in Oman itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Oman, and the housemaid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any abuse is due to the housemaid being a non-Muslim. Nevertheless, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least

10 Christian housemaids were abused in the WWL 2024 reporting period with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

5 Year trends

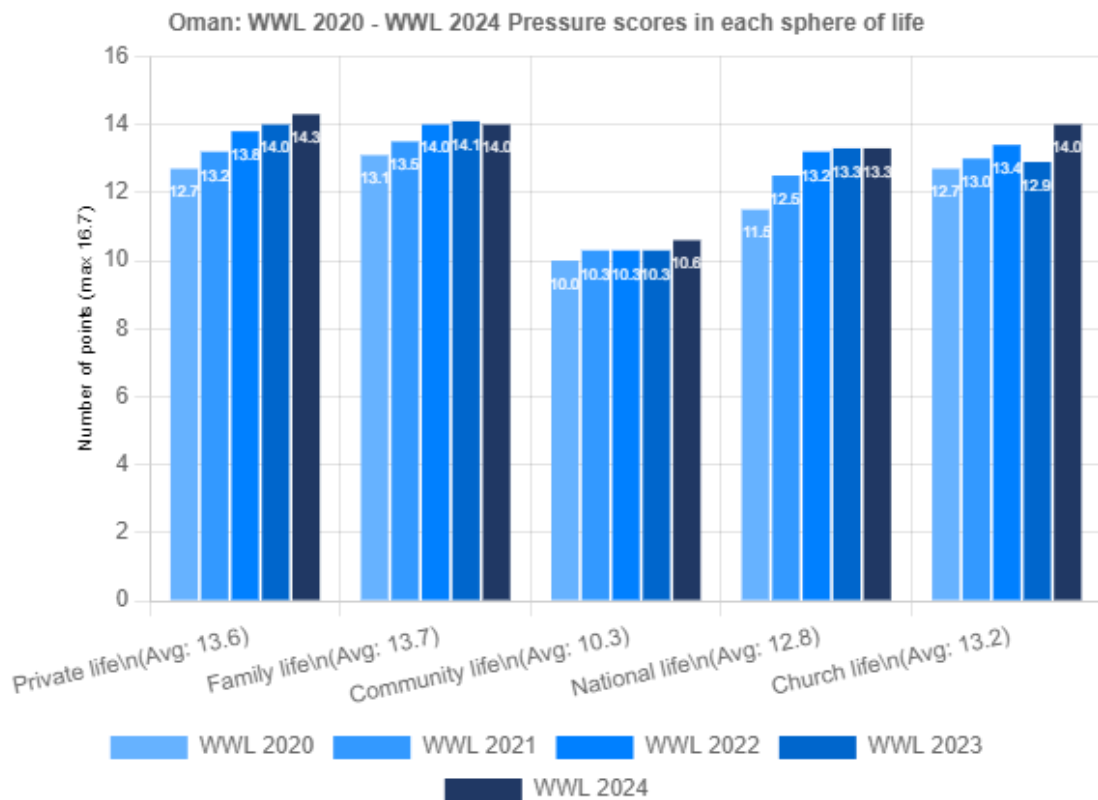
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Oman: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---------------------------|---|
| 2024 | 13.2 |
| 2023 | 12.9 |
| 2022 | 12.9 |
| 2021 | 12.5 |
| 2020 | 12.0 |

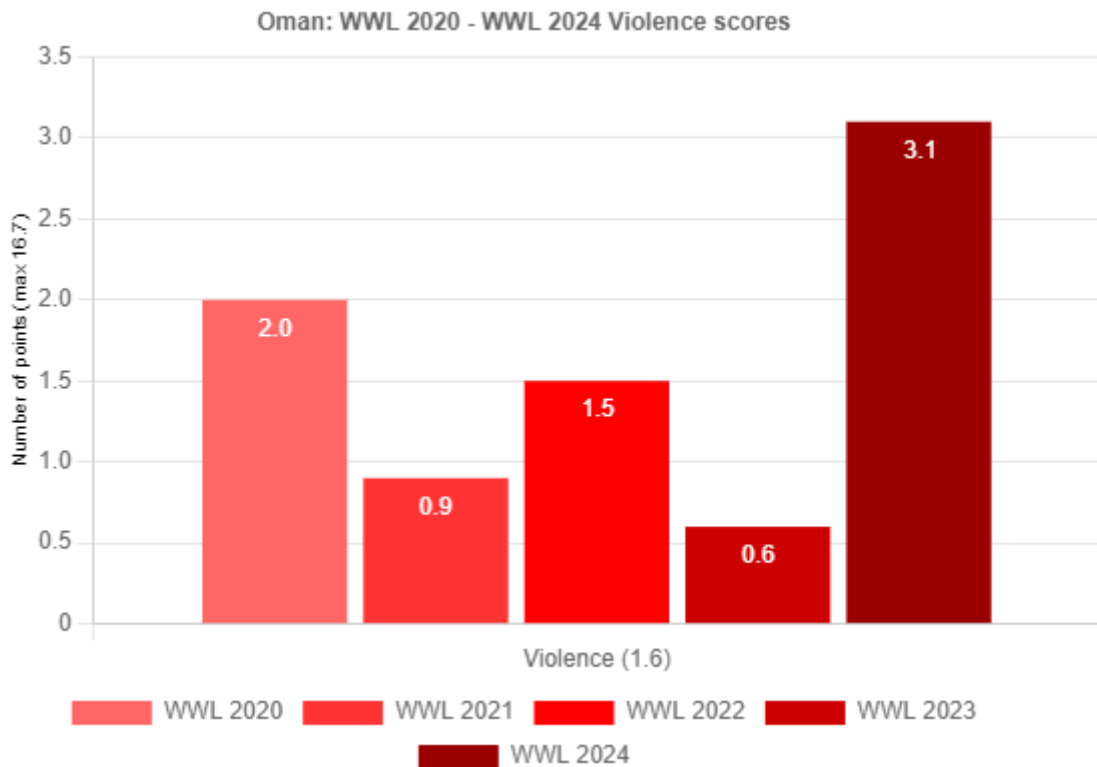
The average pressure on Christians has been consistently very high and has increased from a level of 12.0 points in WWL 2020 to 13.2 points in WWL 2024.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the last five reporting periods, especially the *Private, Family and National spheres of life* have shown a trend of rising pressure. The *Church sphere of life* showed a particularly major increase in WWL 2024. The levels of pressure in the *Private, Family, National and Church spheres of life* have always been higher than those in the *Community sphere of life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Oman is a typical Gulf country in that the very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line', thus avoiding any violent reactions. From WWL 2020 to WWL 2023, the scores for violence remained at a low or very low level. However, in WWL 2024, the score increased to the 'fairly high' level of 3.1 points. The number of violent incidents recorded in Oman does not normally change dramatically from year to year, but the WWL 2024 reporting period did see an uptick due to more reported incidents. Violence is usually low because the number of converts from Islam to Christianity is small, with most converts applying self-censorship and living with little contact to other Christians.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group | Female Pressure Points |
|---------------------|--|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied access to social community/networks; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement |
| Security | Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual |
| Social and Cultural | Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal |
| Technological | - |

Despite the legal declaration that all citizens are equal, Oman’s Personal Status Law perpetuates multiple gender inequalities. For example, Section 38 requires women to obey their husbands. The law also perpetuates [inequalities](#) around divorce, inheritance and child custody (UNDP, 2018, “Oman: Gender Justice and the Law”). This is reflective of the generally vulnerable position of women in the ultra-conservative society of Oman, where fathers, husbands and male guardians exert significant control over their lives. As a country expert explained: “Women see all eyes on them ... women have always had to earn honor, men have always had it.”

Women typically stay in the family home with their children and assume a subservient role. This has an impact on their faith; as they have no voice in Omani society, they are not expected to have their own religious beliefs. As such, it is extremely difficult for women to convert from Islam to Christianity, and they will experience severe persecution should they do so including physical, psychological and verbal abuse; the level of persecution converts experience reflects their social standing.

One of the first ways of exerting pressure on converts is to isolate them from other Christians, stripping them of all means of communication and keeping them within the family home. They are also denied access to Christian materials and teachings. Unmarried converts may also be put under pressure to marry a Muslim in order to force them to return to Islam. Converts to Christianity do not have the option of marrying a Christian spouse, as women registered as Muslims are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim.

Housemaids working in Oman can face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience some form of abuse.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group | Male Pressure Points |
|---------------------|---|
| Economic | Denied inheritance or possessions |
| Political and Legal | Denied custody of children; Imprisonment by government |
| Security | Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical |
| Social and Cultural | Violence – psychological |
| Technological | - |

It is very difficult for Muslim men to convert to Christianity in Oman. Christian converts are likely to suffer from the ramifications of social ostracism, both by immediate and extended family, as well as by the surrounding community. Men who convert to Christianity are likely to lose the financial support of their families as well as the necessary connections to find or maintain a job in Oman's network-based society, or access further study opportunities. Furthermore, no Omani family will allow their daughter to marry a man who disrespects his own family by rejecting them and all they have taught him.

If a convert has family and employment at the time of his conversion, he risks losing it all. When a man leaves Islam, by law he automatically loses custody of any children; as a country expert explains, "he is deemed to be not sensible, untrustworthy, and incapable of bearing the duties as a guardian." His wife might also divorce him, and he can easily lose his job, which has major implications for all his family members since men are traditionally the breadwinners for their families. Converts may even be exiled from their family home, placing them in an extremely vulnerable position.

As for expatriate male Christians, any pressure they experience because of their faith is most likely encountered at the workplace, from co-workers and employers. There is a clear risk that they might lose their work permits if their faith activities are too public or otherwise considered unacceptable.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Hindus, Buddhists and non-Ibadi Muslims are relatively free to practice their own beliefs. The US State Department (IRFR 2022 Oman) states that other non-Muslim groups are relatively free to gather in designated areas, but that overcrowding remains a problem; they also continue to meet in private locations, although this is officially prohibited. In addition, they also struggle to register themselves with the government, as procedures are not clear. According to the report, all imams have to be licensed by the government and mosques are not allowed to let unlicensed imams preach. In addition, all licensed imams "must deliver sermons within 'politically and socially acceptable' parameters". The government introduced these measures to avoid political discontent being expressed in the mosques.

Atheism is viewed with suspicion in Oman. During a two-day symposium at the Sultan Qaboos University, entitled "Atheism and the trust of monotheism", atheism was described as a "behav-

ioral psychological problem". The event was attended by high ranking (religious) officials, including the Grand Mufti ([Oman Observer, 24 May 2022](#)).

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Although the threat of future Islamization does exist, there is also the positive trend of the government trying to develop a culture of religious harmony. The al-Amana Center, a Protestant initiative supported by the government, works to promote dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians on the premise: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions" and "No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions" ([Al-Amana Centre](#), accessed 31 January 2024). Nevertheless, conversion will remain a very sensitive and controversial issue well into the future and churches will remain limited in their activities, especially when it comes to evangelization.

Clan oppression

Although urbanization and modernization are influencing every new generation, family and tribalism will most likely remain significant factors in society. As long as religious identity and tribal identity remain interwoven, converting to Christianity will be seen as a betrayal of family and tribe, making it difficult to make such a choice.

Dictatorial paranoia

Under the new sultan, expatriate Christians will most likely retain their limited freedom to worship. The government will keep monitoring Christians for forbidden activities (proselytizing) which can cause public unrest, but is not likely to put pressure on Christians aggressively. The government will probably continue to leave it to family members to act against converts from Islam to Christianity, although the monitoring of Omani Christians from a Muslim background has increased in recent years. This might correlate with the new sultan wishing to prove himself as a Muslim leader by displaying a more conservative approach than his predecessor regarding Freedom of Religion and Belief.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points): a telling statement - <https://www.albawaba.com/node/if-i-was-oman-id-get-killed-woman-activist-denounces-islam-and-converts-christianity>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points): 2011 Constitution, Article 2 - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Oman_2011.pdf?lang=en
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: freezer - <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: inequalities - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Oman%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Oman Observer, 24 May 2022 - <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1119709/oman/seminar-on-atheism-and-the-truth-of-monotheism-begins>
- Future outlook: Al-Amana Centre - <https://alamanacentre.org/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Oman>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.