

World
Watch
Research

Oman: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2022

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2022	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	5
External Links - Introduction	5
WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Oman	5
Brief country details	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Oman	8
Links for general background information	8
Recent history	8
Political and legal landscape	9
Religious landscape	11
Economic landscape.....	12
Social and cultural landscape.....	13
Technological landscape	15
Security situation	16
Trends analysis	16
External Links - Keys to understanding	17
WWL 2022: Church information / Oman.....	18
Christian origins.....	18
Church spectrum today.....	19
WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Oman.....	20
Reporting period	20
Position on the World Watch List	20
Persecution engines	20
Drivers of persecution.....	22

Areas where Christians face most difficulties 23

Christian communities and how they are affected 23

The Persecution pattern..... 24

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life 25

Violence..... 29

5 Year trends 32

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female 33

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male 34

Persecution of other religious minorities..... 35

Future outlook..... 35

External Links - Persecution Dynamics..... 36

Further useful reports.....36



Man from Oman (c) Alamy

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.

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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Oman

Brief country details

Oman: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
5,270,000	190,000	3.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Map of country



Oman: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	66	36
WWL 2021	63	44
WWL 2020	62	42
WWL 2019	59	44
WWL 2018	57	46

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

During the WWL 2022 reporting period, at least one Omani convert from Islam to Christianity faced persecution from family members, and several other converts from Islam to Christianity were interrogated and actively monitored by the authorities about their faith and activities. The pressure on the expatriate Christian community on the basis of alleged proselytism further increased under the new sultan, resulting in several families feeling put under pressure to leave the country.

Specific examples of positive developments

- 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 6 January 2022). 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: al-Amana Center - <https://alamanacentre.org/our-centre/>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Oman

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/oman/	17 August 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150	17 August 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-OMN.html	17 August 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/	17 August 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	17 August 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	17 August 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Oman is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/oman/freedom-world/2021	17 August 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Oman is not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/oman	17 August 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/oman	17 August 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#om	17 August 2021
Middle East Concern Country report	MEC Oman report	https://meconcern.org/countries/oman/	17 August 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/oman	17 August 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/omn	17 August 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/OMN	17 August 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/oman/	17 August 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Oman is not included)	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://data.worldbank.org/country/oman	17 August 2021

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 finally 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' rule. 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 2020, p.36). 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 coop-

eration 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 profile, stating that the nation is "content with current relationships" ([The Arab Weekly, 12 February 2021](#)).

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. As of July 2021, there were 15% (320,000) less expatriates in the country than in 2016 ([Arabian Business, 5 July 2021](#)). Rare protests occurred in May 2021, following lay-offs and with the protesters demanding jobs ([Al-Jazeera, 24 May 2021](#)).

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, including 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 2020).

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.

Reports from other sources

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Oman report):

- "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](#) (accessed 4 August 2021) 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), however legislation is largely based on civil code. In 1999 civil courts replaced Sharia courts. The Basic Law prohibits discrimination based on religion and protects the right to practice religious rites on condition that doing so does not disrupt public order. However, all religious groups are required to register and the law restricts collective worship by non-Muslims. The criteria for approval are not published."

Omani laws continue to discriminate against women with respect to marriage, divorce, inheritance, nationality and guardianship of children (HRW 2021). Whilst it 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, 2018](#)) - 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. Legislation also fails to adequately protect women from domestic violence, marital rape and violence against women ([OECD, 2019](#)). Escaping abusive marriages is problematic; under Sharia law a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq* whereas a woman must file for divorce through the courts on specified grounds.

Religious landscape

Oman: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	190,000	3.6
Muslim	4,760,000	90.3
Hindu	252,000	4.8
Buddhist	26,600	0.5
Ethno-religionist	630	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	11,800	0.2
Atheist	230	0.0
Agnostic	7,400	0.1
Other	21,560	0.4
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

According to WCD 2021 estimates, over 90% of Oman’s inhabitants are Muslim. The next largest religion in the country is Hinduism with 4.8% of the total population.

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 23 December 2020). 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 – a tolerance not found in some of the neighboring countries. 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 report):

- "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 CIA Factbook and World Bank data:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$27,299 (2019 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 5.0% (2020), with youth unemployment being 13.7% (2020), 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 [World Bank's GCC Economic Update April 2021](#):

- **COVID-19:** "Rapid and well-coordinated measures have limited the spread of COVID-19, but lockdown restrictions weighed heavily on economic activity in 2020. The slump in oil prices and exports have significantly widened fiscal and external deficits and resulted in higher public debt and financing risks. The outlook assumes containing the pandemic, avoidance of another oil price plunge, and successful implementation of fiscal consolidation plans. Materialization of downside scenarios would heighten external financing pressures."
- **Economic growth:** "Overall growth is estimated to have contracted by 6 percent in 2020. This is mainly driven by more than 9 percent contraction in non-oil GDP as the subsequent lockdown measures weighed heavily on domestic demand where tourism and services sectors have suffered the most. A significant increase in the production of condensates that is not subject to OPEC+ cut deal, has helped the oil sector to adapt to the crisis, at least in volume terms, with oil GDP has seen only 2 percent contraction. Inflation turned negative at -1.0 percent (y/y) in 2020 reflecting weak domestic demand."
- **Outlook:** "Overall growth is projected to post a tepid recovery of 2.5 percent in 2021 supported by the vaccine roll-out and the ease in lock-down restrictions. A backloaded rebound will see growth peak at 6.5 percent in 2022 lifted by rising oil prices, and further development of the hydrocarbon sector, before declining to 4 percent in 2023 in view of fiscal austerity measures. Inflation is projected to pick up to 3 percent in 2021, reflecting the recovery of domestic demand and the April 2021 introduction of VAT, but to decline in the years to come as VAT-driven impact on inflation dissipates."

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 do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other ways of unfair treatment. 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 6 August 2021) puts the Omani economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2021) shows some improvement regarding the 'Human Flight and Brain Drain' indicator, which already was low. However, the 'Economy' indicator has worsened sharply following the COVID-19 impact, which also led to a deterioration of 'Economic inequality'. In addition, the indicator 'External intervention' is rising, indicating Oman's dependency on foreign investment.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2021) writes: "Oman will benefit geopolitically from maintaining a neutral position in regional affairs in a tense region. The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic continues to lead to internal and external movement restrictions, with vaccinations proceeding at a slow pace. As a result, the economy is forecast to recover by only 1.5% in 2021. Oman's high debt is becoming difficult to sustain, and the country is expected to run a fiscal deficit of 10.7% of GDP in 2021, weighing on economic growth in 2021-25."
- The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2020) states:
 - "The foundations of a free market-based economy are present. The currency is freely convertible, and the government has incrementally introduced laws to ensure a free market. Oman's government has initiated laws to encourage and facilitate foreign investment and to offer incentives for both private and foreign investors. Establishing a business in Oman is relatively easy."
 - "Oman ranked 37 out of 190 countries in the category of starting a business."
 - "[P]olitically strategic segments of the economy remain controlled by business owners who are loyal allies of the regime. This remains a source of concern."

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **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.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic. Other languages include English, Baluchi, Swahili, Urdu and Indian dialects.
- **Urban population:** In 2021, 87.0% of the population lived in urban areas, with an annual urbanization rate of 2.32%.
- **Literacy rate:** 95.7% of the population can read and write; with a notable difference between men (97.0%) and women (92.7%).
- **Population/age:** The total population is around 4.7 million, with immigrants making up 46.0% of the total population (2021 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:** 76.6 years on average; women (78.7 years), men (74.7 years).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Oman ranks #60 out of 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Education:** On average, Omanis are expected to have 14.2 years of schooling. (15.0 for girls and 13.7 for boys).
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 0.936, 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:** 31% of women and 89.9% of men, indicating a significant gender gap.

Oman is conservative, Muslim 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. 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).

Oman has deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. By law, men are recognized as the head of the household and must provide for his family, whilst women are legally required to obey 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 (HRW 2021), to date no woman has ever acted as a judge in the country. Women typically assume domestic responsibilities such as housekeeping and raising children (OECD, 2019). 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, Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, Vol 27(3), 2021).

Fragile State Index indicators show slight improvements in social and cohesion indicators, but a high rating for factionalized elites is indicative for the tribal way in which the country is ruled. (FSI 2021).

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 permission of their employers, their general situation worsened under the COVID-19 measures, as did the levels of abuse ([Amnesty International Report 2020/21](#), p.278; [The Guardian](#), 23 March 2021).

Hence, although not primarily faith-related, Christians in Oman do 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.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 76.8% penetration (June 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 58.7% penetration (June 2021)

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phones:** 138.2 per 100 people

Statistics on technology access by gender are lacking. However, giving us some insight into the extent of this gender gap, [Napoleon Cat \(2021\)](#) reports that 68.7% of Facebook users are men, compared to 31.3% of women.

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/Global Freedom 2021:

- Oman as "not free".
- "Freedom of expression is limited, and criticism of the sultan is prohibited. 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. 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." Social media is not safe either: "The government's efforts to suppress critical news and commentary extend to online activity and social media. In June 2020, the Court of First Instance in Muscat sentenced Adel al-Kasbi, a broadcaster, and Salem al-Awfi, a former member of the Consultative Council, to a year in prison for "using information technology to spread harm to public order" through critical Twitter posts."

According to Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2020):

- "Despite a uniform media landscape and apparent unanimity, self-censorship is the rule in this peaceful sultanate and criticism of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq ... is not tolerated. Journalists and citizen-journalists are often arrested (and sometimes held incommunicado) and some are given long jail sentences on charges of insulting the head of state or the country's culture and customs, or inciting illegal demonstrations and disruption of public order. Independent media outlets are also targeted whenever they take too close an interest in sensitive issues such as corruption within the judicial system."

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](#)).

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 vacuums and chaos (see above: *Recent History*).

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 expressed that the country will only normalize ties after a two-state solution with the Palestinians has been reached ([The New Arab, 10 July 2021](#)).

As the country remains safe and stable 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

There are several reports of active government monitoring of both Omanis and expatriates, which has put pressure on several of them. This has led to the forced closure of several businesses owned by Christians. In addition, it has become more difficult to obtain residency permits for expatriate Christians to stay in the country. At the same time, society puts pressure on both indigenous and expatriate Christians to comply with the Islamic rules, giving the authorities no need to act with force against Christians and thus helping the government to maintain a friendly face towards the world, especially the West. To end on a positive note, the government continues its support of the al-Amana Center which works to promote dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians.

2) The new sultan has yet to prove himself

The future for Christians in Oman 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 envision positive

developments - and Oman is no exception. If social unrest happens in the future, the regime might weaken, which could well lead to further Islamization of the country's political institutions and a stricter application of Sharia legislation. The new sultan is believed to be the main force behind the security and stability of the country, but does not yet have the same status as his predecessor. If he is not able to keep the country united, the country might end up in a civil war in a worst case scenario.

3) The situation in Yemen remains a threat

Yemen remains unstable and both refugees and Islamic militants could try to enter Oman if the situation does not improve. This would harm Oman's reputation of being a safe haven of neutrality.

4) COVID-19 and economic challenges

The COVID-19 crisis came on top of an already challenging economic situation: Oman has been struggling to reform its economy and become less dependent on oil and gas revenues. Hence, Oman will need foreign investment in the years to come and its economic dependency might make it a vassal of the highest bidder. For example, China has already invested millions in projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative, while wealthy neighboring UAE does not like Oman's relative neutrality regarding Iran, Qatar and Turkey.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: Qatari crisis - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40173757>
- Recent history: Al-Monitor, 5 February 2021 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/02/gcc-reconciliation-saudi-arabia-summit-uae-egypt-qatar.html>
- Recent history: The Arab Weekly, 12 February 2021 - <https://the arabweekly.com/oman-maintain-current-level-relations-israel>
- Recent history: BBC News, 11 January 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-50902476>
- Recent history: Atlantic Council, 19 August 2020 - <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-sultan-of-omans-new-cabinet-combines-continuity-and-change/>
- Recent history: Washington Institute, 19 August 2020 - <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/omans-sultan-devolves-some-his-powers-new-cabinet>
- Recent history: ISPI, 16 April 2021 - <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/respice-reform-sultan-haitham-stamps-his-mark-oman-30092>
- Recent history: Arabian Business, 5 July 2021 - <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/real-estate/465620-omans-expat-exodus-placing-strain-on-sultanates-real-estate-sector>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 24 May 2021 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/24/rare-protests-in-oman-over-jobs-draw-massive-police-response>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of Thought report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/oman/>
- Political and legal landscape: UNDP, Oman: Gender Justice and the Law, 2018 - https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/gender-justice-and-the-law-study.html
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/OM.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: Ibadi Islam - <http://islam.uga.edu/ibadis.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's GCC Economic Update April 2021 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/economic-update-april-2021>
- Economic landscape: World by Income and Region report - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>

- Social and cultural landscape: Al-Monitor - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/05/oman-contracts-spending-coronavirus-economy-oil-royal-court.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Amnesty International Report 2020/21 - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1032022021ENGLISH.PDF>
- Social and cultural landscape: The Guardian, 23 March 2021 - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/23/alone-oman-covid-worsens-abuse-trafficked-women-africa>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat (2021) - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-oman/2021/01>
- Security situation: Al-Monitor, 7 January 2020 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/01/oman-humanitarian-aid-yemen-pragmatic.html>
- Security situation: Carnegie Endowment, January 2015 - https://carnegieendowment.org/files/omani_spring.pdf
- Security situation: The New Arab, 19 October 2020 - <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/10/19/oman-grand-mufti-slams-arabs-wooing-enemy>
- Security situation: The New Arab, 10 July 2021 - <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/oman-will-not-normalise-ties-israel-fm>

WWL 2022: 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	25,600	13.5
Catholic	123,000	64.7
Protestant	12,200	6.4
Independent	20,900	11.0
Unaffiliated	8,400	4.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	190,100	100.1
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	6,200	3.3
Renewalist movement	37,400	19.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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 Ruwi, 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 report) 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."

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Oman

Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Oman: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	66	36
WWL 2021	63	44
WWL 2020	62	42
WWL 2019	59	44
WWL 2018	57	46

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The rise in score of three points in WWL 2022 was mainly caused by an increase of reported pressure on the Church. Christians, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, came under higher pressure after the Omani government intensified its monitoring of Christians and their activities, resulting in the average score rising from 12.5 to 12.9 points. The violence score increased from 0.9 to 1.5 points, mainly due to several Christians being forced to leave the country.

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	Medium
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 (e.g. 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 (Medium)

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" (Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021) 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.

Drivers of persecution

Oman: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong							Medium	
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			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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". 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 converts into recanting their faith.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (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 (Medium):** While the new sultan still has to show his true colors, he will probably be a similar ruler like his predecessor and keep hold of all decision-making powers himself. The Omani government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including their managing of religious affairs. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported. 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 dissension or criticism of the government.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Omani society is still very tribal and different levels of pressure exist in urban areas (like Muscat) and rural areas. 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

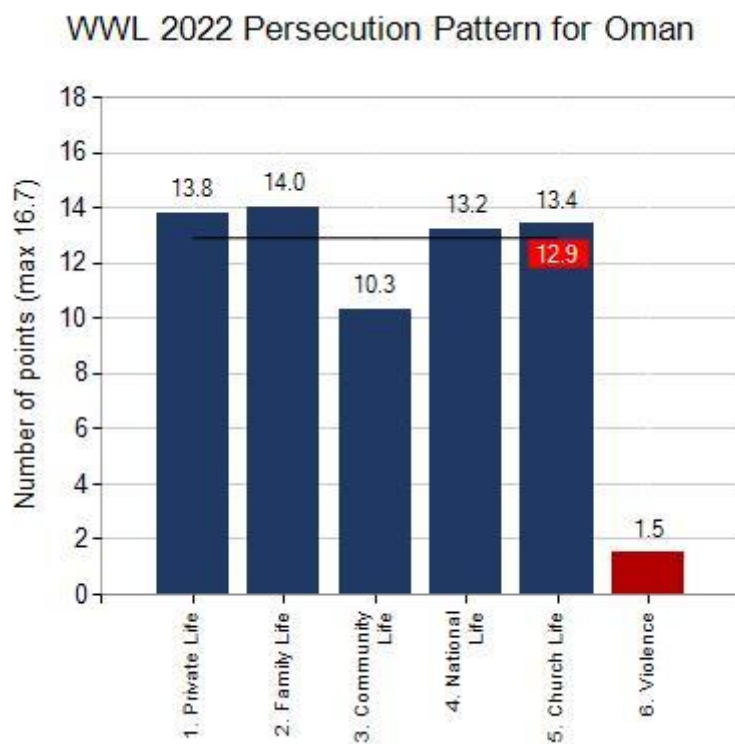
are allowed to worship discreetly in private homes or work compounds. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals.

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

Converts to Christianity: Converts from Islam to Christianity risk persecution from family and society, mostly in the form of pressure to renounce their faith and isolation. Converts can 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).

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Oman shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.9 points), rising from 12.5 in WWL 2021.
- The *Family* and *Private spheres of life* have reached extreme levels of pressure. The next highest levels of pressure occur in the *Church* and *National spheres of life*. This reflects, on the one hand, the difficult situation for convert Christians 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 remained low, increasing from 0.9 points in WWL 2021 to 1.5 points in WWL 2022.

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 2022 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 1.1: 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. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020): "Members of religious minorities reported conversion from Islam was viewed extremely negatively within the 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 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, arrest by the police is likely to happen. Telling in this regard, is a statement by Majda al-Balushi, an Omani convert to Christianity living in the USA. 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 1.8: 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 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Converts cannot wear any Christian symbols as these could lead to discovery of their conversion. Expatriate Christians are sometimes careful too, as publicly displaying a cross can lead to negative remarks or other types of harassment, especially when working in an Omani home (as a domestic worker for example).

Block 1 - further 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 amid high levels of social control. Due to that same control, meeting other Omani or expatriate Christians face to face has often been difficult; especially when COVID-19 restrictions were imposed. 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 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)

All children born to Omani parents are considered to be Muslim. This principle also applies to the children of Omani converts.

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 with Christian names.

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 act, 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 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

This is especially true for converts from Islam to Christianity. As there is zero recognition of their new faith, their children cannot be exempted from Islamic education, like the children of non-Muslim expatriates. Islamic instruction is compulsory within state schools. Private schools can offer alternative religious courses.

Block 2 - further information

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. 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 (almost) 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 3.13: 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 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 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 3.10: 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 anymore to find a job. It is an accepted fact that Christian expatriate workers can 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 - further information

In their local communities - and particularly in schools - it is especially converts who are likely to face discrimination, harassment and bullying. A country researcher notes: "Public school curricula include Islamic teaching. It is a must for Muslim students to take Islamic teaching. Christians or other non-Muslims are not obliged to take the Islamic courses. However, converts

who do not want to reveal their new Christian faith for safety reasons will still be required to take Islamic teaching. In addition, there is no similar Christian teaching included in school curricula for Christian students."

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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. (4.00 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 for example no freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity.

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

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

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 - further 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. (4.00 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 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (3.75 points)

Churches can print materials for their own use, but printing large quantities of Christian materials would be seen as an act of proselytism. Establishing a Christian publishing house would not be possible in Oman.

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 - further information

It is true that 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). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

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.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol “x” in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Oman: Violence Block question		WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	1	0
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	11

6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1	1
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10	0

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

Christians attacked

It is widely known that house-maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of (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 house-maids 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 house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as "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 house-maid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of sexual abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any sexual abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim. Nevertheless, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian house-maids were (sexually) abused because of their faith in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

Apart from the abuse discussed above, at least one Omani convert from Islam to Christianity is reported to have faced severe hostility from family members.

Christians forced to leave the country

Several expatriate Christians accused of activities involving proselytism were deported.

5 Year trends

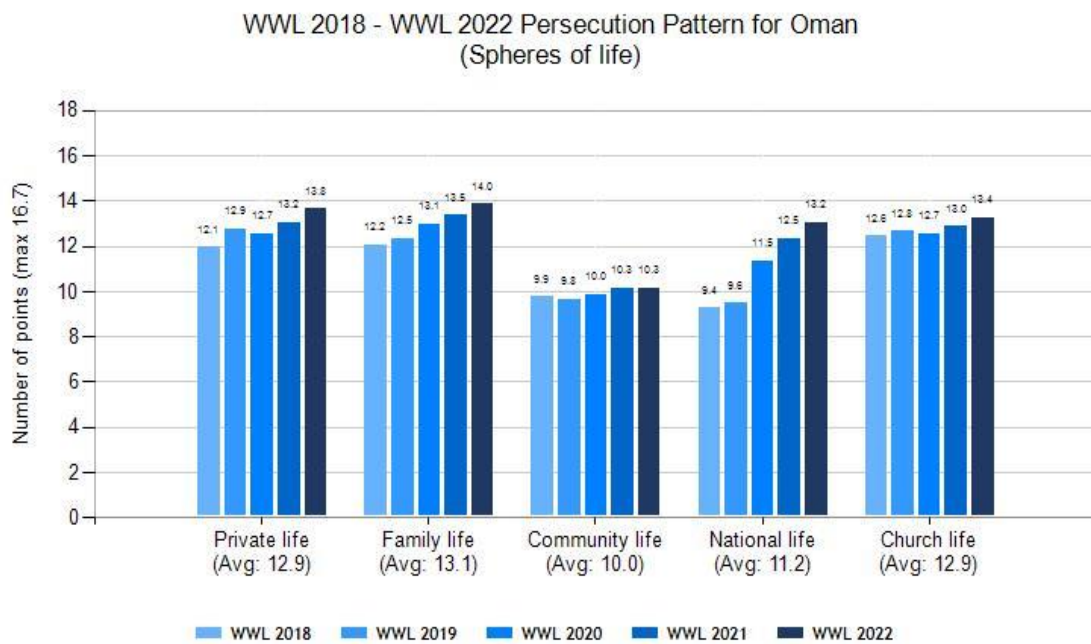
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Oman: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.9
2021	12.5
2020	12.0
2019	11.5
2018	11.2

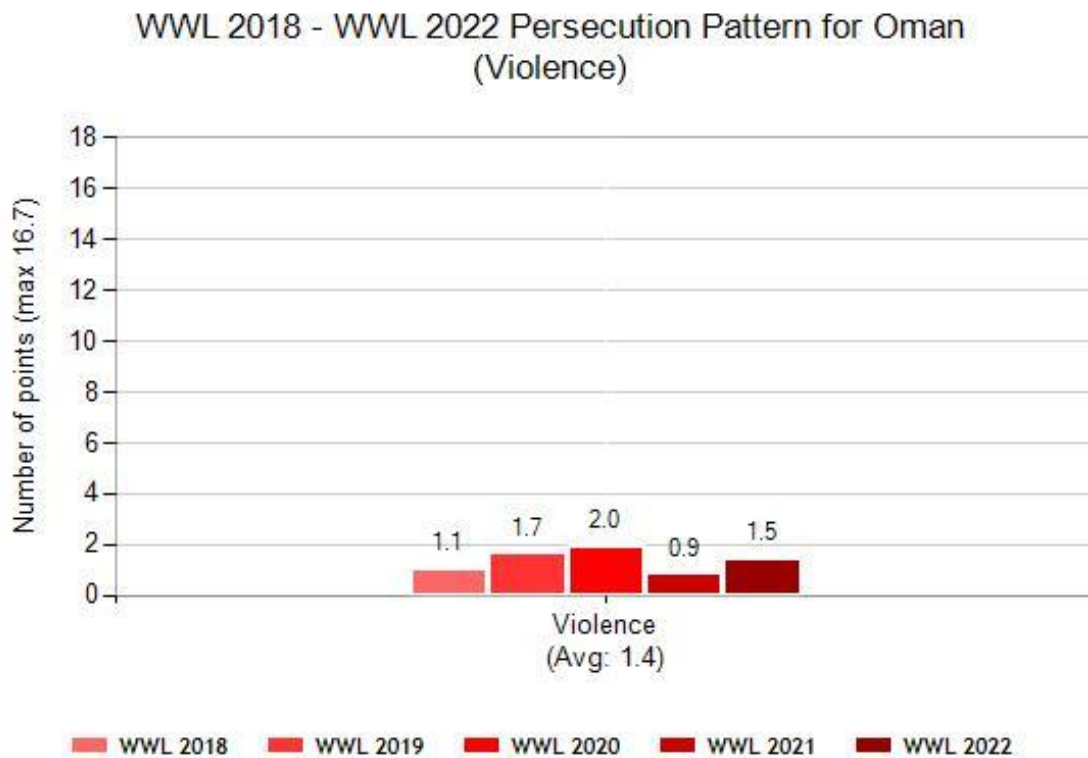
The table above shows: The average pressure on Christians has increased each reporting period from 11.2 points in WWL 2018 to the very high level of 12.9 points in WWL 2022.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows: Over the last five reporting periods, all *spheres of life* show a trend of rising pressure (except in *Community life*). The levels of pressure in the *Private, Family, National* and *Church spheres of life* have normally been higher than those in the *Community sphere of life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows: The scores for violence have remained more or less stable at a low or very low level. The number of violent incidents recorded in Oman has not changed dramatically from year to year, although more incidents were reported during the WWL 2019 and WWL 2020 reporting periods. Violence is so low because the number of converts from Islam to Christianity is small, with most converts applying self-censorship and living with little contact with other 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.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual

Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
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.

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 opinions. As such, it is extremely difficult for women to convert from Islam to Christianity, and they will experience severe persecution should they do so; the level of persecution converts experience reflects their social standing. As a country expert explained: “An elder son who financially supports his parents and his family who becomes a Christian is likely to have less severe persecution from his family. An unmarried daughter living at home will likely receive more severe persecution.”

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. 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.

House-maids 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 (sexual) abuse.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – Verbal
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 ([Musawah, Articles 160-163 of the Personal Status Law \(1997\)](#)); 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. There is a clear risk that they might lose their workers visa if their faith activities are too public or otherwise undesired.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Hindus, Buddhists and non-Ibadi Muslims are relatively free to practice their own beliefs. The US State Department (IRFR 2020) 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 have to follow the government-approved sermons. The government introduced these measures to avoid political discontent being expressed in the mosques.

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 6 January 2022). 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 and hence displaying a more conservative approach than his predecessor regarding Freedom of Religion and Belief.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- 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. (4.00 points): 2011 Constitution, Article 2 - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Oman_2011.pdf?lang=en
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: freezer - <https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Personal Status Law - http://odaa.oregon.gov/events/personal_status_law_english_sharia_law.pdf.
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: inequalities - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Oman%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Musawah, Articles 160-163 of the Personal Status Law (1997 - <https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Oman-Overview-Table.pdf>
- Future outlook: Al-Amana Centre - <https://alamanacentre.org/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

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