

**Oman**

# *Ethnicity in Oman*

## *Group selection*

Oman's population consists predominantly of **Ibadhi Muslims (Arabs)** who make up about 74% of the total population (Fearon, 2003). The rest of the population is made up of foreigners, mainly from South Asia such as Indians, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Note that other sources such as the CIA Factbook (<sup>4069</sup> distinguish between Ibadhi and Sunni Muslims, each constituting about 45% of citizens. However, this distinction can be disregarded as the two branches of Islam are very close and ethnicity is not politicized in Oman in any case.

<sup>4069</sup> [Central Intelligence Agency, 2020]

## *Power relations*

### *1946-1970*

The Sultanate of Oman was a British protectorate until 1951 and known as the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman until 1970. The country's previous name indicates the then de facto division between the coastal Oman, which includes present day's capital Muscat, and the interior of Oman. The division was a cultural and partly political one where the interior lands were lead by tribal leaders overseen mainly by the Imam.

Potential tensions between the Imam and the Sultan of Muscat were supposed to be contained by the Treaty of Seeb from 1920 granting the Imamate of Oman autonomy but recognizing the sovereignty of the Sultanate of Muscat. Nevertheless, conflicts flared up such as in 1954 when Sultan Said of Muscat ignored the postulations of the treaty seeking oil from the interior lands of Oman. Aided especially by the British forces, the Sultan succeeded against the five-year rebellion lead by Imam Ghalib of Oman, who was finally forced into exile in 1960 (<sup>4070</sup>, 104-106).

<sup>4070</sup> [Jones and Ridout, 2015]

Between 1964 and 1976 the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman faced another major challenge; the Dhofar Rebellion. Dissatisfied with the underdeveloped country and Sultan Said's reluctance to improve the situation, the tribal leader Musallim bin Nufl of the province Dhofar started a rebellion and was aided by the exiled Imam Ghalib. Meanwhile in 1970, Sultan Said's son Qabus ibn Said Al Said overthrew his father and succeeded him on the throne with the promise to develop the country (<sup>4071</sup>, 133-138, 145). These tensions and conflicts were based on tribal frictions and dissatisfaction with the monarchy

<sup>4071</sup> [Jones and Ridout, 2015]

rather than on ethnicity and thus not reflected in EPR.

### *1971-2021*

Since 1970, under Sultan Qabus ibn Said Al Said, Oman transitioned from a poor, underdeveloped country to a modern nation state.

Although the government's administrative structures expanded to accommodate public services, change in the political system was slow. Oman has remained a conservative monarchy, with the Sultan relying on the support of the traditional political elite of the Al Said family, established merchant families, and, to a lesser extent, tribal sheikhs (<sup>4072</sup>). As head of state, Sultan Qabus held the power of the prime minister and presided over the Council of Ministers at the same time. The elected Consultative Council had an advisory role but no legislative powers. Its purview remained limited to social and economic matters and the review of government policies (<sup>4073</sup>). Oman did not have up a constitution and political parties were not allowed. On the other hand, minorities in Oman were "experiencing no oppression or discrimination, either religious or ethnic, and, on the contrary, they were enjoying all the privileges of traditional Omani hospitality and generosity" (<sup>4074</sup>, 129). In fact, Oman was one of the most tolerant countries in the region: the Sultan built churches and Hindu temples for the Christian and Indian minorities. There were no indications for discrimination based on ethnicity.

There is no evidence that subnational identities were politicized in recent years or that minority groups experienced state-led discrimination (see e.g. <sup>4075</sup>). The Sultan continued to enjoy absolute power. While the law did not allow political parties and government policy did not recognize minority groups, citizens did not attempt to form political movements and neither were there self-identified minority communities (<sup>4076</sup>, <sup>4077</sup>). Therefore, ethnicity remained irrelevant in the political sphere up to 2021.

Note that Sultan Qabus died on January 10, 2020 and power was transferred to his cousin Haitham bin Tariq Al Said. Yet, this did not have an immediate effect on ethnic power relations.

<sup>4072</sup> [Federal Research Division, 1994]

<sup>4073</sup> [Peterson, 2004]

<sup>4074</sup> [Ghubash, 2006]

<sup>4075</sup> [Al-Rasheed, 2013]

<sup>4076</sup> [US Department of State, 2016]

<sup>4077</sup> [US Department of State, 2019]

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*Political status of ethnic groups in O*

*From 1946 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Ibadhi Muslims (Arab)	0.74	IRRELEVANT

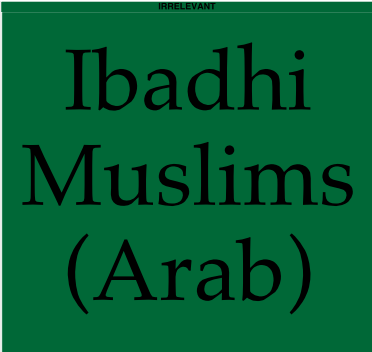


Figure 786: Political status of ethnic groups in Oman during 1946-2021.

# Conflicts in Oman

*Starting on 1957-07-30*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Oman	State of Oman/Free Oman		1957-07-30			

*Starting on 1968-10-30*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Oman	PFLO		1968-10-30			