



Oman's Government

On the surface, Oman's government, like many of its neighbors is a traditional monarchy. Yet, in many ways the government is more genuinely popular and representative than that of many other countries.

When the current sultan, Sultan Qaboos, came to power in 1970, he set out to use the country's oil revenues to modernize Oman. Roads, schools, and all the infrastructure of a modern society came about under his leadership, making for a relatively contented population. Many jobs held by natives of Oman are government jobs, making people invested in the continued stability of their government. For these reasons, Oman was affected relatively little by the Arab Spring upheavals in 2011 that overthrew several leaders of other Arab nations.

Although the country is a monarchy, there is a parliament (majlis) that, like in the U.S., consists of two councils. One is made up of elected officials from different regions; another is appointed by the sultan. Having an appointed council sounds rather dictatorial, but it is a way for the sultan to include people who may not have been elected in traditional regions, for example women. (The "Majlis al-Dawla," appointed by the sultan, includes 14 women.)

Unlike in many countries, including the U.S., Omani politics emphasize the value of "shura" (consensus). Rather than arguing bitterly over different points of view and ultimately choosing one over the other, Omani officials look for compromise and try to reach a solution that everyone can accept.

Because of the importance of Sultan Qaboos in shaping modern Oman, people worry about what will happen after his death. (He is currently in his 80s and has suffered a bout of cancer.) He has no children, so there is no heir-apparent. It is said that the sultan has directed that, after his death, the parliament should freely choose a successor. However, if they cannot reach a consensus in 3 days, in order to avoid a possible civil war, everyone is expected to agree to Sultan Qaboos' own choice, as indicated in secret written instructions to be opened in case a decision cannot be otherwise reached.