

# Teim



## TEIM Election Watch Analysis

**ELECTORAL REPORT:**

**OMAN/Consultative Council**

27 October 2007

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## **Background of the elections:**

Elections were held to choose the new members of the Consultative Council after the body's fifth term came to an end. Both the voting day itself and the campaign were peaceful, without any important incidents being recorded.

These were the second elections with universal suffrage held in the country. In November 2002, and by Royal Decree, Sultan Qaboos bin Said introduced free and direct elections based on universal suffrage. Until then, both voters and candidates had been bound by strong restrictions since, in order to register, they had to receive the approval of the government. Under this system, only 25% of the population had the right to vote.<sup>1</sup> The decree of 2002, in addition to introducing universal suffrage, lowered the minimum voting age from 30 to 21. Women's suffrage has been recognised in Oman since 1997.

Compared to the first elections with universal suffrage held on 4 October 2003, the elections of 27 October had many innovations. To begin, the elections were marked by an intense government campaign to motivate participation in the elections among Omanis, and thanks to this effort, the number of registered voters increased in 2007. The number of candidates also increased with respect to 2003. Two new constituencies were also added to the list of the 59 existing ones, and the number of seats increased to 84. Moreover, and after a decree in October 2003, the length of the term in the Consultative Council was increased from 3 to 4 years. But the most important innovation in these elections was that, for the first time in Oman's history, candidates were allowed to run an open and free campaign.

The Consultative Council is the only elected body in the Omani political system. It was founded by Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1991 and is a consultative body with limited legislative power. Its responsibilities are highly restricted and limited to reviewing the bills relating to social and economic matters presented by the Council of Ministers or the Sultan and providing consultations or recommendations to the government on these topics. It cannot express any opinions relating to defence, foreign affairs or other sensitive matters. Its powers also include the right to question ministers. It is responsible to the Sultan and the Council of Ministers.

## **Quantitative Indices of Democracy:**

Oman is classified in the following democratic performance rankings:

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<sup>1</sup> The minority with the right to vote was largely made up of tribal leaders, intellectuals and notable businessmen. At [FRIDE-CARNEGIE: Proyecto de Indicadores Políticos, at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/oman\\_APS.doc](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/oman_APS.doc), consulted March 2007.

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	<a href="#">Freedom House Report 2007</a>	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 6, CL 5: (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) <b>Classification: Not free</b>
Degree of democracy in earlier elections	<a href="#">Polyarchy 2.0 2004</a>	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	There is NO DATA available because there were no elections before this time
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	<a href="#">Polity IV 2004</a>	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 0 Autocracy: 8 Polity: +/- -8 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) <b>Classification: Non-democratic</b>
Perception of corruption	<a href="#">Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2007</a>	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 4.7 points out of 10, (Scale of 1 = very corrupt to 10 = not at all corrupt) <b>Rank: 53 out of 163 countries</b>
Management of political and economic change	<a href="#">Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2006</a>	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	NO DATA AVAILABLE
Democracy, including press status and corruption	<a href="#">World Democracy Audit May 2007</a>	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: <b>88 out of 150 countries, division 4 out of 4</b>

### Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

The election analysed in this profile produced the following electoral democracy quantitative results:

Degree of democracy in these elections	Measurement of democracy in these elections according to the Polyarchy 2.0 index, calculated by <a href="#">TEIM Election Watch</a>	ID: __ <sup>3</sup> , max. 49 Part: 6.84 <sup>2</sup> , max. 70 Comp: __ <sup>3</sup> , max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30)	<b>Classification: Non-democratic</b>
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<sup>2</sup> Participation was calculated out of the number of voters (212,354) and the total population (including non-nationals) of 3,102,229 inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> Given that there are no legal parties, competition cannot be calculated easily.

### **Definition of the political system:**

Oman has an absolute monarchy dominated by the Sultan. The Sultan is constitutionally Head of State, Head of the Armed Forces, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Treasury Secretary. According to the Constitution, he can also fill the position of Prime Minister and preside in the Council of Ministers. If the Sultan cannot personally fulfil the last two positions, he is responsible for designating the person or persons who will fill these roles.

Since 23 July 1970, when he overthrew his father, Qaboos bin Said al-Said has been Sultan of Oman and since naming himself Prime Minister in 1972, has also held that post.

### **Definition of the electoral system and parties:**

Oman has a plurality/majority electoral system, requiring a simple majority (First Past the Post).<sup>4</sup> No minimum percentage of votes is required as a threshold.

Since political parties are illegal, there are no party lists and therefore, all of the candidates who run in the elections for the Consultative Council do so as independent candidates. In each constituency, the candidate who obtains the most votes is elected.

In the case of a tie among several candidates in the same constituency, the law requires the Election Committee to draw lots in the presence of the tied candidates with the winner of the draw winning the seat in competition.

The results of the elections are preserved and archived in the Home Office. The list contains the names of the candidates, the constituency in which they are running and the number of votes obtained. In the case that one of the seats on the Consultative Council remains vacant, the candidate who achieved the second position in number of votes in that constituency is called to form part of the Council.

Voting is not compulsory in Oman. Any citizens who wish to exercise their right to vote must register in the voter registry. The local Election Committees draw up the lists of voters registered in each province and submit them to the Central Election Committee which is responsible for reviewing, approving and publishing the final lists. All registered voters are given a numbered election card that contains their data: name, tribe, place and date of birth, passport number, residence, card number and issue date. The card is required to be able to vote.

### **Impact of the electoral procedure and size of the constituency on the elections:**

The 84 seats in the Consultative Council are elected in 61 districts. Constituencies with fewer than 30,000 inhabitants have one seat while those with more than 30,000 inhabitants have two seats.

In the 27 October 2007 elections, of the 61 districts:

- 23 were plurinomial (two seats per district)

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<sup>4</sup> The names of the electoral systems are those used by IDEA, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. For details, see the Electoral System Design on their webpage: <http://www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm>

- 38 were uninominal.

Two new districts were introduced in these elections: al-Mazuna in the Dhofar region to the southeast of the country and al-Sinaihah in the northern region of al-Buraymi. In addition, due to the demographic decline that Muscat, the capital of Oman, has undergone in the last few years, this district has gone from being plurinominal to uninominal. Muscat is the only constituency that experienced a variation in its number of representatives.

In the 27 October elections, for the first time, Omani citizens living abroad were allowed to exercise their right to vote. On 20 October, one week before the elections were held, eleven polls were opened in Omani embassies in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi and the consulate in Dubai), Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen and Malaysia for Omani citizens living in those countries to cast their vote.<sup>5</sup>

### **Election results:**

Participation: Registered voters: 338,683  
Approximate number of people with the right to vote: 882,000  
Total number of votes: 212,354  
Participation percentage according to the Home Office: 62.7%  
Total population: 3,102,229 (of which 577,293 were non-nationals)

The final list of the winners of the elections for the 6<sup>th</sup> term of the Consultative Council can be found at: <http://www.observatorioelectoral.es>.

### **Evaluative analysis of the elections:**

#### Participation:

According to the figures from the Home Office, participation in the 2007 elections was 62.7%, a percentage rather lower than the 74% reached in 2003. However, in real terms, these elections recorded higher electoral participation given that the number of votes cast was slightly higher than in October 2003.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that Oman has a population of 3,102,229, only 2,524,936 are Omani nationals. It has been calculated that of these, only 882,000 are of age to vote and have the potential right to vote.<sup>7</sup> However, only 388,683 of the almost 882,000 potential voters are registered as voters and therefore, only they have the real right to vote. This figure, despite being very low, is considerably higher than that reached in the 2003 elections, in which approximately 262,000 voters were registered.

The important increase in the number of registered voters was due to an extensive campaign carried out by the Omani government to promote participation in elections. At the beginning of 2007, the Home Office established several committees and awareness-raising teams responsible for organising

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<sup>5</sup> Source: *Oman News*, 21 October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See end table.

<sup>7</sup> It is important here to bear in mind that neither active duty military or law enforcement personnel have the right to vote for up to two years after finishing their tour. Others without the right to vote include anyone in quarantine by judicial sentence or order, anyone declared guilty of a criminal offence or minor crime, anyone who has declared bankruptcy and anyone who has been isolated due to mental illness.

encounters with Omani citizens in their workplaces. The main objective of these campaigns, in which both government institutions and private sector companies participated, was to promote the registration of citizens, but also to try to extend the belief in the importance of positive, widespread participation in the electoral process. With the aim of optimising this citizen awareness campaign, the voter registration period, which was originally intended to be over at the end of April, was extended by three months.

In the weeks prior to the elections, a lengthy pamphlet explaining how to exercise the right to vote was also distributed. This format was also used to remind citizens of their duty to go to the polls, appealing to their love of country.<sup>8</sup>

The high number of registered voters created enthusiasm among the government elites. However, the election results showed much lower participation that was expected in the beginning.

Although the official participation figure was 62.7%, it is important to consider that the percentages provided by the Home Office are calculated based on registered voters, i.e., on the basis of the number of voters who completed the formalities to register as voters. However, the Home Office does not provide any percentage based on the approximate number of potential voters, i.e., the number of members of the population of age to vote with the right to vote and who, upon registering, can also exercise their right to vote. If these figures have been manipulated by the Home Office, the voter percentage would be much lower.

This table comparing the two elections held in Oman shows the participation rate according to the number of registered voters (voters with the real right to vote) and the approximate number of people with the right to vote (potential voters):

	2003 Elections	2007 Elections
Approximate no. of people with the right to vote	800,000	882,000
No. of registered voters	262,000	336,683
No. of votes cast	194,000	243,704
Percentage according to no. of registered voters (official figure)	74%	62.7%
Percentage according to the approximate no. of people with the right to vote	24.2%	27.6%

### Competition:

According to the information published in the main Omani papers, 880 candidates, of whom 25 were women, presented a petition to the Election Committees in the middle of June. Months later, the figure was reduced to 631.<sup>9</sup> While some of the candidacies were not approved by the Election Committees, others withdrew voluntarily. This was the result of the fact that in some provinces, the tribes held internal elections to choose the most popular candidates and withdrew the rest.<sup>10</sup> With this system, they tried to prevent votes

<sup>8</sup> The words of the pamphlet were: "Love of country is part of your faith and service to your country is a religious duty". In *Gulf News*, 21 October 2007.

<sup>9</sup> The number of official candidates was 632; however, three days before the elections, one of the candidates, Abdullah bin Said al-Maamari, died. The electorate was officially informed of the death of this candidate before election day. In the end, 20 women ran for office.

<sup>10</sup> Source: *Gulf News* 27/10/2007.

from being split within the same tribe and ensure the access of their candidates to the Consultative Council.

On this occasion, the number of candidates for the Council was higher than that recorded in 2003 when 509 candidates ran, 15 of whom were women.

Regarding the results of the 2007 elections, it is important to note that of the 631 candidates who ran, 64 were seeking re-election but only 38 of these won. Furthermore, none of the 20 women candidates won a seat, meaning that the representation of women in the Consultative Council, which had been achieved in 2003, was lost.

The candidates, as long as they met and did not violate the conditions established by law, were allowed access to the elections.

#### Transparency:

Despite the fact that rumours of vote buying were rampant in the days after the elections, the Home Secretary, Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim al-Busaidi, stated that he had not received any complaints in this regard in his Ministry and asserted that if any were presented, an immediate investigation would be carried out.

The vote count was done using 71 electronic machines provided for this purpose. This system, which had been used in earlier elections with great success, guaranteed the speed and efficiency of the vote count. There is no record of any *in situ* international monitoring missions at these elections.

#### Party representation and debate during the election:

For the first time in the history of Oman, candidates to the Consultative Council were allowed to run a free and open campaign. Before these elections, campaigns were limited to personal contacts and *sabla* (small meetings in the towns). In these elections, candidates were allowed to place billboards, banners and posters announcing their candidacies in streets and public places. They were also allowed to publish advertisements in the local press providing information on their candidacies.

However, the posters and advertisements only showed the candidate's photograph, name and the district s/he wished to represent and on just a few, a short slogan as well. This was the only information that voters were given to assist them in their choice of a preferred candidate.

#### Openness:

Of the 64 members of the 5<sup>th</sup> Consultative Council term that sought re-election, only 38 retained their seats. Although this figure is probably much lower than what was initially expected, a review of the list of winners from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> terms of the Consultative Council reveals that, while complete names do not repeat frequently, the surnames do. I.e., in many of the constituencies in which the same candidates did not win in the 2007 elections, a family member with the same surname did so.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the women candidates, the analysts expected that some of the 20 women candidates would be voted into the Council, especially considering the high participation rate of women in the elections and that fact that two women won seats in 2003.

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<sup>11</sup> The lists of the winners of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Council terms are available at the TEIM Election Watch webpage:

[http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/TEIM/observatorio/Oman/resultados\\_elecciones\\_Oman.htm](http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/TEIM/observatorio/Oman/resultados_elecciones_Oman.htm)

Significance:

As discussed above, the Consultative Council is an institution with very limited legislative power and restricted, secondary responsibilities. Many Omanis thought that these elections would be a mere repetition of the 2003 elections, which did not fulfil their expectations, and are critical of the fact that the Consultative Council's powers are so limited.<sup>12</sup>

International political reaction and implications:

Despite the fact that some of the media announced that nearly 80 international journalists went to Oman to cover the elections to the Consultative Council, the coverage of these elections in the international press was insignificant. Apart from a few members of the press from the Persian Gulf who covered the events (the most important of which were the *Gulf News*, the *Khaleej Times* and some other Arab newspapers), most of the international press barely mentioned the elections and when they did so, it was to note the lack of women's representation in the Council.

No news was published in Spain relating to the elections in Oman in any of the main national publications.

This absence of interest by the media with respect to the elections in Oman was shared by the political powers. Beyond some congratulations from other Arab leaders for the democratic advances in a GCC country, the elections were not of any great significance or have any serious implications.

**Conclusions:**

The second elections with universal suffrage continued the dynamic of the first elections held in October 2003. Although government initiatives were carried out to increase participation and voter registration and tried – although completely insufficiently – to create free campaigns, the elections, if they are measured in terms of participation, once again failed to achieve the desired results. Although the participation figure provided by the government was 62.7% in these elections and 74% in 2003, the participation figure, using the number of potential voters instead of registered voters, was really 27.6% and 24.2% percent respectively.

The lack of interest in these elections, reflected in the low participation, is easily understandable. The fact that citizens are only involved in the political process through the election of a body that has such restricted and limited powers inevitably gives the voter the feeling that his or her vote is of no great importance. Given this situation and believing that they really have little or no power to affect political decision-making in the country, it is not surprising that Omani citizens have lost interest in the institution and, by extension, in the elections.

Furthermore, and as asserted by the journalist and director of the Gulf Citizenship Forum, Rafiah al-Talei, the feeling of frustration is not only felt by the citizens, but also among the very members of the Council. The complaints formulated by them and presented by al-Talei in his article can be summarised in two: on one hand, they complain that suggestions from the Council often go unheard and ignored by the government and on the other, they protest the lack

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<sup>12</sup> Article by Salid al-Saqaf entitled "New Vote, Same Council" published in *Gulf News* 25 October 2007.

of coverage of their initiatives in the press, which, showing a lack of interest, does not contribute to bringing the institution closer to the electorate.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the low participation, another of the characteristic features of the Oman elections was the importance of personalism and client and/or tribal networks when electing a candidate. The fact that political parties are illegal, that candidates to the Council are independent and promoted by weak campaigns that lack any debate, intensifies the personal and client-based nature of Omani society. It is not surprising, then, that candidates are often re-elected and that seats often remain within the same family.

Regarding the loss of women's representation in the Council, this situation has been met with great disappointment and sadness by the country's political elite, as well as by many analysts and journalists who presented the information both on a national and international level.

However, it is important to remember that these elections were the first in which a relatively free campaign was carried out where candidates could advertise and promote their candidacies without having to rely only on personal contacts and meetings in the *sabla*. Finally, it is important to note that, beyond the calls to reinforce and strengthen the Consultative Council, to broaden its powers and develop new and more effective means of controlling the government, according to Freedom House, there is no important organisation for political opposition in the country.<sup>14</sup>

## **References to other analyses of these elections, preferably on the Internet.**

There is no evidence of any election watch missions being carried out nor have any reports been found on the Internet. On the other hand, the Dubai newspaper *Gulf News* published a complete dossier of the elections and the *PARLINE Database on national parliaments* has announced on its webpage that it is preparing a document on the background and results of the elections without specifying when they plan to upload it.

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<sup>13</sup> Rafiah al-Talei "Oman Shura Council Elections and aspirations of change" in *Arab Reform Bulletin* of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, published in September 2007 and available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19578&prog=zgp&proj=zdr1.zme#altalej>, consulted January 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Freedom House Report 2007 available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7246&year=2007>, consulted December 2007.