

From without or from within: deconstructing the discourse of political leadership and the legal framework which drive Oman's parliamentary institutions

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Abstract:

The process of democratic transition in a monarchy such as the Sultanate of Oman as it builds and empowers its parliamentary institutions, is based on what can be called "Shura". The process began when Sultan Qaboos (1970-2020) came to power in Oman. His aim was to deal with a divided political discourse, as he confronted a separatist movement in the south, and an Imamate entity in the north. He went on to do this over his reign through laws and regulations, such as those establishing the Shura Council system, the Basic Law of the state, the Oman Council law, and the Shura Council elections law. Over time these shaped a parliamentary entity through institutionalization of the Islamic tradition known as "Shura." The political culture within the resulting parliamentary institution is one that supports the work of the executive branch and does not oppose it. This is reflected in the nature of parliament's discourse today.

But the Oman Council Law issued in 2021, does allow members of the elected chamber to set the agenda; it widens their working horizon and gives them the right both to interpret the provisions of new laws and to issue their own procedural regulations - although in media interviews, some members have complained that the 2021 law restricts their legislative and oversight role.

This paper seeks to examine two important variables in the process of building and shaping Oman's parliamentary institutions, namely the discourse of political leadership (as set out in Sultan Qaboos's speeches at the opening of the Oman Council's annual sessions), and the legal framework regulating the institutions and parliamentary functions of the Oman Council. The focus in the paper is on the Shura Council - the elected chamber. The aim is to arrive at an understanding of the current circumstances in which the institution operates and of the extent to which reform is needed to the way in which parliament functions and to its political culture.

Keywords: Oman Council (Majlis Oman), Shura Council, political culture, parliamentary reform.

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Introduction

The Sultanate of Oman is a monarchical state with a hereditary sultanate system, and it settled on that by 1970, when it was before that within a certain geography under another political system, the “imamate system” in conflict with the sultanate, in addition to confronting the expansion of separatist movements in the south of the country with communist ideology (Al Mukhaini, 2020). Until the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said ascended the throne (1970-2020), "the Sultan concentrated the authority on him and followed a path to create a new national identity and a renewed sense of the nation. He evaluated the existing joints of governance and followed the path of reconciliation and common choice in the state apparatus. In order to embody a national identity with a new set of values associated with it, the Sultan decided to focus his efforts on the duality of representation and consultation known in the Omani context (Shura)” (Al Mukhaini, 2020) .

“Shura” from an important term in the context of the political discourse of the Sultan Qaboos in the first decade to the emergence of the form of institutionalization of the word rooted in the Islamic heritage and its source is the Holy Qur’an- for which did not set a specific framework for the form of its practices, and left that to the people, according to their lives and the context they are living a part, to determine the form and rules of its practice.

This institutionalization took place gradually over four decades, starting with the establishment of the “**State Consultative Council**” in 1981, whose members and its chairman were representatives of the government sector (17 members), the private sector (28 members), the private sector (11 members), and representatives from geographical regions of Oman (17 members) appointed by through a royal decree by the Sultan. To the establishment of the “**Shura Council**”- unicameral parliamentary model in 1991, to the bicameral parliamentary model “**Oman Council**” (the **State Council** is an appointed chamber, and the **Shura Council** is an elected chamber) in 1997. The Shura Council members are elected by the people through secret ballot, representing all the 86 states of the Sultanate.

The foregoing refers to, in the notable temporal context, "the tendency of the political leadership in Oman towards finding a special democratic model, still maintains caution and gradualism... towards democratic transition, while emphasizing the presence of societal traditions and alerting to the religious constants from which that model is based in the Sultanate of Oman." (Al hamdani, 2021)

From the researcher's point of view, during the past decade (2011-2020) in the political scene of the Sultanate of Oman the role of Oman Council in general and Shura Council in particular were questioned. The protestations took place in 2011 in various parts of the Sultanate of Oman, but a prominent scene after these incidents is the granting of the Oman Council in general and the Shura Council in particular, a set of constitutional rights, which came because of popular demands raised through the protests (Al Talei, 2021).

Which contained a distinct scene related to the Omani legislation system and “constitutionality”, a royal Decree 39/2011 to form a specialized technical committee to draft the amendments to the basic law of the state and ensuring the matter of granting the powers referred to the Oman Council. What followed this is the issuance of the issuance of Royal Decree 99/2011 amending some provisions of the Basic Law of the State, and what was raised in its wake empowering the Shura Council in particular with “reasonable powers and competencies, despite the presence of a wide scope for expansion and development. Significant

developments within the Shura Chamber since 2011, where members feel more empowered and freer to express themselves. Their interaction with public concerns has become better and, consequently, their representation deepens” (Al Mukhaini, 2020). During that period, it led to an unprecedented turnout at the polls, as the participation rate exceeded (76%) of the total voters. The same period (2011-2014) witnessed the first elections to choose the Speaker of the Shura Council. This was followed in 2013 by the issuance of the Shura Council Members Elections Law 58 /2013 (Al Khamisi, 2020).

In the wake of the issuance of the Basic Law of the State by Royal Decree No. 6/2021 and the issuance of Oman Council Law by Royal Decree No. 7/2021 and within the context of different important circumstances all during the year (2021), the researcher monitored by selecting radio interviews within a platform in which the appearance of members of the Shura Council were active¹. Three samples of members within Shura Council are within the positions of responsibility and supervising in the institution, according to the nature of the functions of the job titles they practice, (Vice-President of the Council - Member of the Council's Office - Head of the Legal and Legislative Committee).

First radio interview of the Vice-President of the Council came in a context related to the issuance of the Basic Law of the State and the Law of Oman Council (promulgated January 2021) to comment on the laws in the context of extrapolating the situation formed by the issuance of the laws specifically on the function of the Council through the powers granted.

While the second interview with the Chairman of the Legal and Legislative Committee in the Council was in a circumstantial context connected to the occurrence of protest vigils in the Sultanate, "it did not expand much to others, as the political motive as in previous protests in 2011 was not present but rather the social motive specifically the demand for employment" (Al Adhawi, 2021). As for the third radio interview with a member of the council's office, his meeting comes in the context of popular demands via social media platforms to address the state's policies in the context of the electricity sector and the prices of public services.

These three radio interviews deal in their details with the specific competencies of the Shura Council and its ability to perform its function, the ability of its members to political action, their relationship with the executive authority “the government” and their relationship with public opinion and its formations. The importance of these radio interviews in total and their timing is important in posing the main question related to this paper: What is the role of each of the political leadership - and we mean Sultan Qaboos by it, because the period of his rule coincided with the establishment of the institutionalization of the Shura and the issuance of its legal frameworks - and the legal frameworks on the occasion of the formation of the Shura Councils in building and forming a representative-parliamentary institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

This paper presents a context of analysis and critical reflection on the discourses of the political leadership in openings of annual sessions of the “Shura” Councils- with its different models- and linking them to the stages of development of the legal frameworks regulating the representative-parliamentary institution with a focus on the elected chamber "the Shura Council".

Which determines the features of the consistency of the practices of the Council and the members of the elected chamber with the given political leadership discourse, and changes in the relevant legal frameworks using the historical analysis method by reviewing the political discourse of the political leadership in the Sultanate of Oman and the development of legal frameworks. The attempt to focus on the role of political leadership and legal frameworks, as they are an essential material for examining the effectiveness of

¹ Hala FM private radio station, the Shura council members appeared (+10 appearances) more than the other private radio stations in the year of (2021).

parliamentary activity from outside, because of its potentials or obstacles, and the ability to provide key explanations regarding the reality of the role of the representative-parliamentary institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

The discourse of political leadership in the context of building and forming a representative-parliamentary institution in the Sultanate of Oman

When leadership in Oman is discussed, it is assumed that reference is made to the sultan, indicating the centralization of political power in the person of the sultan (Common, 2011). Sultan Qaboos bin Said (1970-2020) concentrated power in his own hands when he took power in the Sultanate of Oman in 1970. The Sultan followed a path to create a new national identity and created a renewed sense of the nation. He evaluated the existing joints of governance and followed the path of reconciliation and common choice in the state apparatus. In order to embody a new national identity and a set of associated values, the Sultan decided to focus his efforts on the duality of representation and consultation known in the Omani context as shura” (Al Mukhaini, 2020).

During his reign, the phrase “the Shura Council” appeared in the context of the political discourse related to building the system of government and the formation of state institutions, in a framework in which Sultan Qaboos indicated that “familial rule without popular support is out of date, the rule must enjoy the confidence of all.” (Abu'aon, 2014)².

The perception of the existence of a representative institution “the Shura Council” (Abu'aon, 2014)³ has been present since the beginning of his reign to form a system based on the Shura. This entailed various forms of institutionalization of the political leadership's perceptions of popular participation and the question of representation. The models of shura councils were gradually formed over three decades, starting with “appointed councils,” whose forms and competencies were renewed, leading to the bi-cameral parliamentary mode with an “elected council” made up of the people through general elections.

In the context of this paper, the context of the political discourse of Sultan Qaboos(1981-2015) will be considered through the speeches he made at the opening of the annual sessions in the various forms of representative councils “Shura Councils” that were formed in the Sultanate of Oman from 1981 to 2011, and observing the evolution of the role of the representative-parliamentary institution in the context of the political leadership discourse.

However, this precedes the importance of referring to the trend of the decade preceding the eighties and its importance in building a comprehensive vision of the evolution of the perceptions of the political leadership in forming a representative-parliamentary institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

In the context of the first decade (1970 and after) of Sultan Qaboos’ assumption of power in the Sultanate of Oman, he took three dimensions in the state-building process, which are, as (Bani Salama, 2009) points out:

(a) Building a modern political system, and starting internal reform in a cautious and gradual manner, consistent with the prevailing social heritage in a tribal society, and working to modernize it in a manner that suits the requirements of modern life,

² A press interview of Sultan Qaboos bin Said with the Lebanese newspaper Al-Seyassah on January 26, 1974

³ A press interview of Sultan Qaboos bin Said with the Egyptian newspaper Al-Gomhouria on July 8, 1972

(b) The start of the modernization program in the two areas: the economic and social, and

(C) Securing stability by confronting the rebellion in the southern region of the Sultanate.

In a press interview with Sultan Qaboos in 1972, I quote: *“I will be the happiest person when the state of the country permits the formation of the Shura Council, but this can only be achieved after things are stable, ... and certainly that will not be after many years ... Our country certainly needs a shura council to be the cornerstone of a system based on shura, and this council, in my opinion, should include representatives of all people, and it must have the opportunity to discuss all matters... I seek first to provide an atmosphere that allows the formation of a righteous person so that the results of the election to the Shura Council are in order. The formation of a righteous person will not be achieved without the scientific renaissance...”* (Abu'aon, 2014).

The text of the previous speech included specific conditions in the context of political discourse during the seventies to establish the Shura Council as a representative-parliamentary institution that includes representatives of the people and has the space to discuss all matters. These conditions are as follows:

a) It is not possible to establish a representative-parliamentary institution “the Shura Council” in turbulent conditions - as was the case in the Sultanate of Oman -. Thus, the conditional political stability for building a representative and parliamentary institution.

b) Enabling the Omani human resources to understand the institutionalization and practices related to the representative and parliamentary institution before initiating the establishment of the institution, and thus what can be called conditionality related to empowering the local environment with its components, including the people.

c) The foundations of the democratic model in the Sultanate of Oman must be characterized by justice and inspired by the reality of societal life and Omani politics and its Arabian and Islamic contexts and requirements⁴.

The decade of the seventies, in the context of establishing the representative institution, as described by (Al hamdani, 2021), was accompanied by the launch of “institutional” type of democracy in a cautious and limited manner represented in the establishment of the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry in the year 1979⁵. The implications of establishing this council are considered “the utilization of popular participation in order to serve specific purposes of Development, which is development in its economic aspect, and this may be due to the country’s need for economic advancement at that stage and the enhancement of resources in addition to accelerating development processes and diversifying income sources and economic activities”⁶.

Royal Decree 19/1979 regarding the establishment of the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry defines the directions of this representative institution as being based on the involvement of citizens in the responsibility of shaping and directing the economic future in the country.

The appointed council is composed of (12) members, (3) of whom are appointed by virtue of their positions (1- President of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2- Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Oil and Minerals, 3- Undersecretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry). And nine others are appointed by the Sultan, according to a nomination mechanism determined by the decree in

⁴ His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' speech on the first national day

⁵ Royal Decree 19/79 regarding the Establishment of the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry

⁶ Al-Hamdani Mubarak, *The Tribe between Political Dismantling and Social Repositioning: A Study of the Tribe’s Current as a Political and Social Horizon in Omani Society*, Book of Social Transformations in the Gulf Countries, Identity, Tribe and Development, pp. 107-140, Beirut (2021)

Article (9) by submitting the three mentioned bodies a list that includes (18) candidates representing the three sectors (agriculture, fisheries, and industry) according to the shares determined by the decree. One of the requirements of the candidates is not to hold a government position or position. This council formed the seed for the emergence of representative councils in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first stage: 1981-1990

In the context of the political discourse of Sultan Qaboos bin Said during the period of the eighties, the period of establishing the first model of representative councils in the Sultanate of Oman called the Consultative Council, the following characteristics emerge in the perception of the representative institution model and its development:

1. The establishment of the council and the development of its competencies and tasks comes with the development of the state and its stages are required for the establishment of the council and its competencies coincide with its development⁷. The political leadership excludes the reproduction of experiments from outside its borders, except within a limited framework determined by the extent of the need for it, and not making a breakthrough in the context of social engineering⁸.
2. The association of the council's development with the orientations of the political leadership that monitors the practice and responses in the context of the council's various work, committees, and outputs, and reviews them in the context of the speech addressed to the council. The political leadership attributes this to the creation of best practices in the context of the state and the institutionalization of the "Government Shura"⁹ (Abu'aon, 2014) in line with cultural, social, and political patterns¹⁰.
3. The emergence and development of this institution is linked to finding the most appropriate context for the relationship between the government and the people, and an extension of the political leadership's promise to expand popular participation¹¹.
4. The political leadership of the "Sultan" interferes in the development of the practices of the Council without the need for direct legalization. He added to the Council the right to ask ministers and state officials about the executive tasks in governance¹², and for ministers to make ministerial statements before the Council during the sessions¹³.
5. Focusing the council's competencies on contribution and action in the development context and overlap in economic and social affairs due to the political leadership's assessment of the delay in development after the seventies, when the state was mainly preoccupied with confronting the separatist movements in the south of the country. Turning to the development issue may find its explanation in the context of the study of Carles Boix (Democracy, Development, and the International 2011), which conveyed its conclusions (Elwahishi, 2015), one of which was that: "Development has a causal effect on democracy, as the process of economic development is linked to the spread of skilled labor force declining inequality and economic diversification. All these transformations make it possible for a democratic transition to lead to a political equilibrium in the country."

⁷ Press conference for the Omani media with Sultan Qaboos on 23/10/1985, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of His Majesty, Amman (2014)

⁸ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the State Consultative Council 03/11/1981

⁹ A term used by the political leadership in a press interview with the Egyptian magazine al-Musawwar on 08/01/1987, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of Galala, Amman (2014)

¹⁰ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the State Consultative Council 03/11/1981

¹¹ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the State Consultative Council 03/11/1981

¹² A press interview with the Egyptian magazine al-Musawwar on 08/01/1987, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of Galala, Amman (2014)

¹³ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the beginning of the second mandate term of the Consultative Council 11/16/1983

6. The themes of the topics discussed by the political leadership before the council develop during the opening of each period, from focusing on the general issues of development and economic and social affairs to discussing the strategic directions of the state in its economic affairs that focused on (agriculture - industry - marine wealth - the labor sector)¹⁴ to discussing the affairs of Political, regional and international state relations, and the repercussions of political conflicts¹⁵.

Thus, this stage, after the model of the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry, and up to the model of the State Consultative Council, indicates the continuity of internal reform and the focus on the emergence of institutions and trends that support the trends of the state in the context of economic and social development, and building the model of the representative institution in a cautious and gradual manner, consistent with the condition of developing the local environment that embraces the representative council model.

Second stage: 1991-1997

The establishment of the second model of representative councils called “the Shura Council” in 1991 preceded the adoption of the administrative division of the state by Royal Decree 6/1991, which is evident from the preamble of his decree which indicates the direction of the political leadership to establish the Shura Council based on expanding the base of representation and shifting from the direction of appointment to trend of popular choice¹⁶. The establishment of the Shura Council was based on three foundations defined by the political leadership in Royal Decree 94/1991¹⁷, as follows:

1. The foundations of the representative institution on the Islamic shura,
2. Preparing citizens to participate in the government’s efforts towards development, and
3. Expanding the base of participation to include representation of the various wilayats of the Sultanate.

The political leadership maintains in its discourse during this stage the assertion that the modernization of the representative institution model must be based on preserving the values of society and the traditions of religion and the state. Also, political, and social change must take into account the contexts in which it arises, and the political leadership will prevent mutations from occurring in the context of a society “mostly based on the traditional form of social construction,” as described by the Sultan¹⁸, and linking the experience of the Shura Council institution to this course.

The political discourse also indicates the tendency of the political leadership to remove the influence of the executive authority's decision from the mechanism of forming the council¹⁹. In an important reference to enhancing the effectiveness of the council, according to what (Al-Sayed, 2019) refers to, “one of the factors affecting the council’s effectiveness is the mechanism by which the council is formed. If he was elected by the people, he derives his strength from him and becomes free to confront the government and he exercises control over it.” The voter base in the Sultanate of Oman for those who have the right to vote increased

¹⁴ From the speech of Sultan Qaboos on the occasion of the beginning of the fourth mandate term of the Consultative Council 01/09/1988

¹⁵ Starting from Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the start of the third mandate term of the Consultative Council 01/04/1986

¹⁶ "To facilitate the selection of representatives of states in the Shura Council" Royal Decree No. 6/1991 approving the administrative division of the Sultanate

¹⁷ Preamble to Royal Decree 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

¹⁸ Middle East Policy Journal interview with the Sultan on 04/30/1995, Nasser Abu Oun, Journalists at the Court of Majesty, Amman (2014)

¹⁹ "Its members were not appointed directly by a government decision, but were chosen from among those nominated by their states and without interference from any administrative body" - Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the opening of the Shura Council 12/21/1991

from 5900 male citizens in the 1991 nominations to 822,000 male and female citizens in the 2003 elections (Shura Council, 2006).

The political leadership affirmed that the Council is an entry point for the arena of interaction between people and the government for its contributions to a central issue, which is development^{20, 21}. The political leadership also added new themes in the context of the topics under discussion before the Council, namely: (a) the environment, (b) women's affairs in the contexts of the council's work. By calling for a future bypassing the procedures for limiting nomination and selection for membership in the Shura Council for women at the level of the capital, Muscat, (c) women and the civil work sector, and (d) family affairs in adopting trends in the interest of developing the national economy by encouraging individuals to work, educate, save, and rationalize consumption²².

Third stage: 1996-2010

This stage is important in the context of the democratic transition in the Sultanate of Oman. It comes with a major event represented in the promulgation of the constitution called the Basic Law of the State by Royal Decree 101/1996 and its content of presenting a new third model for the representative-parliamentary institution called Oman Council, based on parliamentary dualism, with an elected chamber called the Shura Council, and another by appointment known as the State Council. The Basic Law of the State of 1996 referred the organization of its functions and affairs to the law. Reaching this stage after more than 25 years of Sultan Qaboos' assumption of power, and the political leadership indicated in a press interview its belief that "the constitution should be drawn up and stemmed from the experience"²³ that the state goes through in its interaction with society. In the context of intersection with the "Shura", this constitution (the basic system of the state) contained the directions set by the political leadership in its discourse during the period prior to the issuance of the basic system of the state. It established the Shura as a basis for governance in the Sultanate of Oman, and within its political principles to consolidate the foundations of the Shura of Government, as well as the right of citizens to participate in public affairs²⁴.

The discourse of the political leadership at this stage²⁵ bears the following signs in the formation and building of the representative and parliamentary institution:

1. Emphasis on the gradual progression of the development of the representative-parliamentary institution model for the Sultanate of Oman and the essentiality of building it around the values of society and the state and benefiting from international experiences within the framework of the requirements of the state-building phase.
2. Oman Council - in particular the Shura Council - as a representative of the people and taking into account the national perspective on the issues it deals with, and the parallel relationship with the government.
3. The political leadership's emphasis on key topics to be discussed in the context of the political discourse directed at the opening of the Oman Council's terms, the most prominent of which are:
 - The development of Oman Council with its two chambers is entrusted with what it contributes and what is paralleled by the development of popular awareness.

²⁰ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the opening of the first mandate term of the Shura Council 12/21/1991

²¹ Sultan Qaboos' speech on the occasion of the opening of the second term of the Shura Council 12/26/1994

²² Previous source

²³ Sultan Qaboos's interview with the Egyptian newspaper Al-Gomhouria 07/08/1972, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of His Majesty, Amman (2014)

²⁴ See Articles (9-10) of the Basic Law of the State 101/1996

²⁵ Speeches of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos at the opening of the sessions of Oman Council (1997, 2000, 2011, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)

- Women's affairs and their participation in the context of parliamentary work and public affairs,
- The principles of the state's foreign policy and its interaction in the context of international and regional issues,
- Establishing integration between the three business sectors,
- Human resource development, education, and employment policies,
- Policies to diversify the economy and develop the non-oil sectors,
- Reviewing government performance, policies, and structures of the state's administrative apparatus.

Fourth stage: 2011-2020

Oman witnessed popular protests at the beginning of 2011 that were "partly inspired by other revolutions in the region. One of the first demonstrations was called the "Green Rally", and hundreds of demonstrators, mostly young people, organized hundreds of demonstrators, carrying slogans in support of Sultan Qaboos, and in some slogans (People They love the Sultan) and (Hand in hand with the Sultan to fight corruption), and (We are all ready to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the Sultan)" (Al-Rawi, 2016).

One of the most prominent responses from the political leadership during that current situation, and what was reflected on Oman Council in general and the Shura Council in particular, and was expressed within the political leadership's discourse, was to seek "to bring about a qualitative leap for the work it is doing in light of expanded powers in the legislative and oversight field."²⁶ This is the first verbal reference to the "oversight" role of the Council within the discourse of the political leadership. Despite the political leadership's emphasis on the gradual experience of developing the Omani shura experience to meet the requirements of the stages of development of state institutions and to respond to the needs of society, it indicates that there are "great challenges... and huge responsibilities that require the council as a body to participate in decision-making."

Considering the council as a channel that bridges the relationship between the Sultan and the people with the symbolism of the speeches at the opening of the annual sessions of the Shura Council, the political leadership emphasizes the basic themes of the topics before the council and their repercussions on the exercise of its functions as in the previous stages, but adds to it the topics suggested by the temporal and political context, the most prominent of which are Freedom of expression, anti-corruption²⁷, infrastructure projects and social development²⁸.

Legal frameworks in the context of building and forming a representative-parliamentary institution in the Sultanate of Oman

Through the previous presentation, we note through the stages that we have seen that there are four models of shura councils in the Sultanate of Oman, which are:

1. State Consultative Council 1981,
2. Shura Council 1991,
3. Oman Council, with the presence of the Shura Council, the elected chamber of Oman Council in accordance with the 1996 Basic Law of the State,
4. The Shura Council, the elected chamber of Oman Council, according to the amendments to the Basic Law of the State 2011.

²⁶ Sultan Qaboos' speech at the opening of the annual session of Oman Council 2011

²⁷ Same source

²⁸ Sultan Qaboos' speech at the opening of the annual session of Oman Council 2012

In the context of this part of the paper, we will review the legal frameworks that have organized the models of the Shura Councils since the establishment of the Consultative Council in 1981 to the amendments to the Basic Law of the State of 2011. From the perspective of the factors referred to (Al-Sayed, 2019) as factors affecting the effectiveness of the Shura Councils²⁹, which are as follows:

1. The mechanism of forming the council and selecting the president,
2. Functions of the council,
3. Resolutions issued by the Council, and
4. The term of the council's membership.

The mechanism for forming the shura councils, their duration, and the selection of the president

In this part, we discuss the mechanism decided by the legislator to form the models of the Shura councils in the Sultanate of Oman and how to choose the president. We will also discuss the issue of choosing the vice presidents and the head of the council's "general secretariat."

First: Formation of the Advisory Council 1981

During this decade, despite the absence of a constitution for the state, which may be understood from the context of the political discourse, which suggests that the constitution is the product of the development of the state and society. The creation of an appropriate climate and a sound basis is the guarantor of creating the most appropriate constitution³⁰. As for the development of institutionalization in the state, there are signs of establishing a representative institution with the establishment of the "State Consultative Council" in the year (1981), which refers in its preamble to the orientations of the political leadership based on gradual work in a phased framework in the development of the institution of governance in two main things³¹:

1. The central role of the government in policy-making and development action,
2. The growing realism of the need to involve citizens in public affairs and the demand for state empowerment for them.

This council, with legal personality and financial independence, is formed of representatives from the governmental and private sectors, with the stipulation of choosing from among those with experience, taking into account that it is an expression of representation for all citizens, and their number does not exceed forty-five members³², including the president, distributed by (17) members representing the government sector³³, (28) Members representing the civic sector³⁴, including (11) members from the private sector, (17) members representing the regions³⁵. A special royal decree is issued for their appointment and the selection of the council chairman, his deputy³⁶ and the general secretary. The membership of the Council extends for two Gregorian years, and all or some of the members may be reappointed for a subsequent term or more³⁷.

²⁹ (Al-Sayed, 2019) defines effectiveness as the ability to make an impact in reality or the ability of something to influence, and in the context of the research, the ability of the Shura Council to make an impact on the reality of political life.

³⁰ A press interview of Sultan Qaboos bin Said with the Egyptian newspaper Al-Gomhouria on July 8, 1972, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of Majesty, Amman (2014)

³¹ Royal Decree No. 84/81 establishing a State Consultative Council

³² It was amended by Royal Decree 61/1983 to "and their number, including the chairman, shall not exceed fifty-five members.."

³³ It was amended by Royal Decrees 61/1983 and 102/1985 to (19) members and then to (18) members in succession.

³⁴ It was amended by Royal Decree 61/1983 and 102/1985 to (36) members

³⁵ It was amended by Royal Decree 61/1983 to (25) members

³⁶ Amended by Royal Decree 61/1983 to appoint two Vice-chairmen

³⁷ See Article (4) Royal Decree No. 84/81 establishing an advisory council for the state

Second: Formation of the Shura Council 1991

The 1991 Council was established by the issuance of Royal Decrees 94/1991 and 97/1991 respectively, enjoying legal personality and administrative and financial independence. The membership of the Council established by Royal Decree 94/1991 consists of 59 members representing all the states “wilayats” of the Sultanate, and each wilayat, through a committee “comprising of state notables and experts³⁸” submits a list of nominations of 3 citizens from each state. One representative is chosen from each list, and a Royal Decree is issued naming the selected members^{39, 40}.

Membership may be revoked upon a recommendation from the Council, and the membership term is for three Gregorian years, and membership may be renewed for a subsequent period or more. A royal decree is issued appointing the chairman of the council, while the two vice-chairmen are chosen by the council’s decision from among the members in the first session of the council, while the secretary-general is appointed by a decision from the council’s office based on the nomination of the council chairman⁴¹.

Third: The Shura Council, the elected chamber of Oman Council in accordance with the 1996 Basic Law of the State

The issuance of the Omani constitution called the Basic Law of the State in 1996 is a unilateral will of the Sultan. Article (81) stated that “the system shall not be amended except in the same manner in which it was issued.” It contained a dedicated chapter indicating the Sultanate’s tendency to rely on the parliamentary bi-parliamentary system with the presence of the Oman Council consisting of two chambers: the Shura Council, the elected chamber, and the State Council as a specific chamber. However, the Basic Law of the State referred to the law to specify the competencies of each of them, its duration, its convening roles, and its work system. It also determines the number of its members, the conditions that must be met by them, the method of selecting or appointing them, the obligations for their exemption, and other organizational provisions.

Royal decrees were issued regarding Oman Council 86/1997, and regarding the Shura Council 88/1997 issuing the internal regulations of the Council, and the law states that both the State Council and the Shura Council have legal personality, enjoy administrative and financial independence. The term of membership for both the State Council and the Shura Council is three Gregorian years, and membership may be renewed for one further term only⁴².

The Shura Council is composed of representatives of the wilayats of the Sultanate who are chosen as follows:

- a) Each state nominates four of its residents if its population is thirty thousand or more, two of whom are selected for membership in the Council.
- b) If the state’s population is less than thirty thousand, only two are nominated, one of whom is chosen for membership in the council.

³⁸ See Article (2) of Royal Decree 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

³⁹ Same source

⁴⁰ Membership provisions were amended by Royal Decree 74/1994, which changed the method of selection by setting a criterion for membership that does not specify a specific number but is linked according to the number of residents in the state. Two members for the state if its population is (30) thousand or more, and one member if the population is less but by the same method of selection, a number of citizens from each state are nominated through a committee of state notables and people with experience.

⁴¹ See Articles (4,5,7) of Royal Decree 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

⁴² It was amended by Royal Decree 104/2000: “The term of membership for both the State Council and the Shura Council is three Gregorian years. Membership of the State Council may be renewed for other similar terms, but the membership of the Shura Council may only be renewed for one further term.” Then by Royal Decree 74/2003: The membership of each of the State Council and the Shura Council is four Gregorian years, ... membership may be renewed for other similar terms.”

A Royal Decree is issued naming the selected members of the Shura Council. A Royal Decree is also issued appointing the Chairman of the Council and the Secretary-General. The Shura Council chooses from among its members two vice-chairmen in the first session of the Council.

The above method for selecting state representatives in the Shura Council was amended by Royal Decree 35/2000 and the state directed the direct election of the people so that they are elected as follows:

- a) Each state elects two of its candidates if its population is thirty thousand or more.
- b) Each state elects one of its candidates if its population is less than thirty thousand people.

The Minister of Interior announces the results of the elections, and those who obtain the largest number of votes are representatives of their states in the Council.

Fourth: The Shura Council, the elected chamber of Oman Council in accordance with the amendments to the Basic Law of the State for the year 2011.

The constitutional amendments “Amendment to the Basic Law of the State” in 2011 included a shift in the legal framing of the provisions of Oman Council and the Shura Council. In particular, by including its provisions in the Basic Law of the State itself within Chapter Five thereof, with the amount of (44) articles within this Chapter. The Shura Council is composed of elected members representing all the wilayats of the Sultanate, and the number of council members is determined so that each state represents one member, if its population does not exceed thirty thousand on the date of opening the candidacy door, and two members when the state’s population exceeds this limit on the same date. The election of the members of the Shura Council shall be by direct secret ballot, in the manner indicated by the election law.

In contrast to other Shura council models that do not require an academic qualification, but general knowledge of culture and the possession of experience, the provisions of Chapter Five came within the conditions for membership of the Council that the educational level - that is, the candidate for membership - should not be less than the general education diploma (grade twelve). The right to re-candidacy for membership in the Council was also opened by allowing anyone whose membership period has expired to run again for membership in the Shura Council without limit. Also, the council has the right to choose a president from among its members by electing amongst themselves by direct secret ballot and by an absolute majority of council members, during an extraordinary session following the completion of the elections and prior to the beginning of the period.

Functions and resolutions of the council

First: Functions of the Advisory Board 1981

Since the issuance of the decree establishing the Consultative Council in 1981, it has not been clear that a parliamentary institution has been established with an independent legislative authority, but with a consistent and growing trend to institutionalize shura to place it in the context of state institutions and as a basis for governance, according to the discourse of the political leadership. whose reflection appears in the context of the preamble to the establishment decree, which refers to the nature of the council as a platform for bridging the relationship between the governmental side and the citizens.

The advisory nature of this council was specified as it appears in Article (6) of the Royal Decree of 1981: “The objectives of the council are determined to share opinion in the areas of economic and social development for the country, and the council chairman shall submit his recommendations to His Majesty the Sultan.”

Then what follows from the definition of the council’s competencies in the context of Article (7):

Legislative functions:

1. Expressing an opinion on the economic and social laws in force in the Sultanate and recommending what the Council deems to be developed in order to meet the development requirements that have arisen or are emerging.

Policy-related functions:

2. Expressing an opinion on the general policy presented to it by the government in the field of development and recommending what the council deems to take in order to complete the development plans and legislation that the government intends to issue.
3. Suggest what the council deems to take in terms of governmental steps and measures in the development fields that the government has not previously addressed, in order to advance the wheel of development and raise the efficiency and capacity of national production.
4. Consider the bottlenecks faced by the private sector working in the economic and social fields and recommend appropriate treatment methods within the limits of the capabilities available in the state.

Despite the advisory nature of the council and the nature of its issued resolutions described as recommendations, which are devoid of an obligatory character. However, the law binds the council in its recommendations to the sultan. In the context of the Royal Decree 86/1981 in the internal system of the State Consultative Council, the role of the Sultan in maintaining the “recommendations” of the Consultative Council’s decision to obligate the system to government agencies in what it does not consider to be adopted from the recommendations of the Council to submit a report on the reasons for that to the Sultan. The legal system of the Council has been fortified by the inadmissibility of its amendment except by a Royal Decree and upon the recommendation of the Council.

Second: The functions of the Shura Council 1991

Functionalism developed in the context of the second model of the Shura Council, with its development in terms of representation, which was previously discussed. The context of the phrase described in his role differed, from “sharing the opinion” to “helping the government,⁴³” indicating a balance in the roles of the two institutions. Other competencies were added to it, suggesting the emergence of the features of the legislative and oversight function of the Council, which are as follows:

Legislative functions:

1. Reviewing the economic and social bills prepared by the concerned ministries before taking the procedures for issuing them.
2. Submit what the council deems appropriate in the field of developing the economic and social laws in force in the Sultanate.

Policy-related functions:

3. Expressing an opinion on the public policies that the government presents to it and presenting appropriate proposals in this regard.
4. Participation in the preparation of development plans for the country.
5. Participation in knowing the nature of the necessary needs and requirements of the regions and deepening the link between citizens and the government.
6. Participation in efforts to preserve and protect the environment from pollution damage.

⁴³ See Article (8) of Royal Decree No. 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

7. Looking into matters related to public services and utilities and suggesting ways to develop them and improve their performance.
8. Considering the obstacles facing the economic sector and suggesting appropriate treatment methods for them.

Oversight function:

9. Follow up on the implementation of development plans.
10. Tools for exercising oversight over government actions.

What is noted in the context of these competencies is the expansion of the legislative function to a role prior to the issuance of the legislature by reviewing draft laws. The council's function in relation to the general policy-making context of the state expanded by expanding the topics of intervention and even became involved in preparing the state's development plans by reviewing the projects of the five-year development plans referred by the government before adopting them and allowing a sufficient period of time - not accurately framed - for review and calling for a general session in the council to discuss it with A representative from the executive branch.

The features of the oversight function emerged with its ability to follow up on the implementation of government plans in the development field⁴⁴, and it enabled the Council, through this law, in the exercise of its powers, to obligate the executive authority to submit annual statements to the Council and to appear before it whenever an invitation was made, in addition to obligating the executive branch units to cooperate with the Council. To facilitate his tasks and to provide what he requests of data or information⁴⁵.

Also, the features of the control tools appeared - they were not named that at the time - and they were limited to three forms⁴⁶, namely:

1. Expressing proposals: Expressing wishes to the government with a proposal that is available to every member of the Council to submit in matters related to public services and utilities or the economic sector, whenever the Council decides on its own that the public interest requires it. However, there is no indication in the law to the extent of the obligation in the face of the executive authority to respond to the council with the expressed wishes submitted.
2. Questioning: the right to direct questions to the ministers of services, expressing the member's question about a matter he is ignorant of or about an incident that came to his knowledge to verify its occurrence. Senior Ministry employees or by depositing a written response in this regard.
3. Request for Discussion: Upon a written request signed by at least five members and with the approval of the council, one of the general topics that fall within the council's jurisdiction may be presented for discussion and exchange of opinion with the concerned minister. All members may participate in the discussion, and the council may issue, from the objective point of view, the recommendations or wishes it deems appropriate.

In addition to framing the council's bridging role between the government and the citizen, the council has the authority to receive requests and suggestions from the people and to clarify the government's opinion on it. With regard to the devolution of the council's work and recommendations, it is referred to the Sultan, and what the executive branch units do not take into account is justification before the Sultan himself, in a

⁴⁴ See Article (9) of Royal Decree No. 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

⁴⁵ See Articles (11, 12) of Royal Decree No. 94/1991 establishing the Shura Council

⁴⁶ See Articles (75-87) of Royal Decree No. 97/1991 issuing the internal regulations of the Shura Council

way that the Sultan's association with the institution continues to maintain its role within the state institutions.

Third: The functions of the Shura Council in accordance to 1996 Basic Law of the State

With the issuance of the Basic Law of the State as the constitutional framework for the state in the Sultanate of Oman. The features of the system of government and the distribution of powers and their functions are evident, and despite the allocation of a separate chapter to Oman Council, it legislated the existence of the parliamentary duality with the existence of Oman Council with two chambers (elected and appointed), but it referred the detail to the law, and subsequently issued Royal Decree No. 86/1997 in the matter of Oman Council.

In it, the competencies and powers of the appointed council "the State Council" appear, including preparing studies in the social and economic fields on its own or by what is referred by the Sultan or the cabinet, in addition to a legislative function related to reviewing draft laws in the context of the legislative cycle that requires it to pass first to the Shura Council for review.

As for the jurisdiction of the Shura Council, they are almost the same as the 1991 Council, but with a difference required by the parliamentary bi-parliament, especially in the legislative aspect, and we highlight them as follows: Reviewing draft laws prepared by ministries and government agencies before taking the procedures for their issuance, with the exception of laws that His Majesty the Sultan believes that the public interest requires their issuance directly. The Council refers the draft laws that it reviews, together with its recommendations, to the State Council. The council may also submit what it deems appropriate in the field of developing the economic and social laws in force in the Sultanate, and the council shall refer the draft amendments that it proposes to make to these laws to the State Council.

It is noted in the context of the legislative competences of the Council that the issues of legislation of an economic and social nature have been bypassed from the 1991 Council, and all bills have become subject to the Council's review. The only exception is that the Sultan has the right to assess the public interest that calls for his issuance of legislation directly without the legislative review of Oman Council, which was subsequently amended in Royal Decree 104/2000 with the exception of draft laws of an administrative and procedural nature from review by Oman Council, and draft laws that the Council of Ministers recommends not He presented it to the Oman Council and submitted it to the Sultan for promulgation. Then in the 74/2003, amendment that repeated what provided for the exception contained in the review of draft laws for a reason necessitated by the public interest.

On the other hand, and within the provisions of the 1996 Basic Law of the State, it refers a form of legislative function in the state in terms of proposing draft laws to the competences of the Cabinet, and one of the administrative bodies determined by law has the function of drafting laws⁴⁷. The regulation of oversight tools over the government's work came as it was in the council of 1991, represented in: Expressing proposals, Questioning, and Request for Discussion.

Forth: The functions of the Shura Council in accordance the amendments to the Basic Law of the State for the year 2011

In light of the response of the political leadership in the Sultanate of Oman to popular demands in the context of the grass-roots demonstrations, and in connection with the Oman Council, Royal Decree 39/2011 was issued regarding granting the Oman Council legislative and oversight powers, which also contained a distinct scene on the issue of Omani legislation and "constitutionality" - if it is true. - With the text of the

⁴⁷ See Articles (44, 69) of the Basic Law of the State of 1996

Royal Decree to form a specialized technical committee to draw up a draft amendment to the basic system of the state in order to achieve the issue of granting the powers referred to to the Oman Council. This was of course followed by the issuance of Royal Decree 99/2011 amending some provisions of the Basic Law of the State, which allocated a chapter to the provisions of the Oman Council in its two chambers by (46) articles, in addition to referring it to each council that established its internal regulations. The rules of debate, voting, and interrogation in relation to the Shura Council, and other powers assigned to members⁴⁸.

Within the framework of the legislative competence of the Council, the features of the Oman Council appear to have legislative authority, so it became⁴⁹:

- Draft laws referred by the Cabinet to the Oman Council require approval by the Council or making amendments to them and submitting them to the Sultan for issuance.
- The Oman Council proposes draft laws, refers them to the government for study, and then returns to the Council.
- The Shura Council's review of the projects of economic and social agreements (international and regional, bilateral and collective) that the government intends to conclude or join.

The amendments to the Basic Law of the State added one of the tools of control over the government's actions represented in the right to questioning. Upon a request signed by at least (15) members, to question any of the ministers of services in matters related to exceeding their powers in violation of the law. In addition, with its authority to set its own bylaw, the Council added three other tools to the government's work control tools⁵⁰:

- Urgent statement: making a statement about an urgent and important matter related to the public interest.
- Briefing request: a request for data and information from the government on an issue of urgent importance and falling within the competencies of the person to whom it is directed.
- Fact-Finding Committee: A temporary committee established with the aim of clarifying the truth about matters related to the public interest.

In order to enable the oversight function, the system also obliges the State's Financial and Administrative Oversight Authority to send a copy of its annual report to both the Shura Council and the State Council, including the violations the report notes and monitors the performance of the units of the state's administrative apparatus from the administrative and financial perspectives.

In the matter of interfering in the political affairs of the state, the Oman Council became responsible for reviewing the projects of the five-year development plans. In addition to an obligatory review of the state's draft general budget before its approval, the law obligates the Cabinet to notify the two councils of the recommendations of the two councils that have not been taken into account following the review, with reasons mentioned.

It is evident from the legal framework courses that various aspects of the four models of the Shura Councils have been reviewed that differed in their formation mechanism, competencies and powers exercised since the establishment of the State Consultative Council to the Oman Council with its two chambers with a

⁴⁸ See the amendments to the Basic Law of the State issued by Royal Decree 99/2011

⁴⁹ Previous Source

⁵⁰ See Article (146) of Shura Council's internal regulations issued by the Council Chairman's decision 1/2012 after approval by the Council

legislative and oversight function that approximates it to a representative parliamentary institution. From reviewing all its details, important observations were also reached, as follows:

1. A very important scene in the formation of the authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, under the hereditary sultanate system, that the Sultan is the head of the state⁵¹, and he is the head of the executive⁵² and judicial authority⁵³ by virtue of a direct provision in the law, in contrast to the relationship of the Sultan with the system of the legislative authority in Oman whose institutional weight is formed in the institution of the Oman Council . This is what the Oman Council bears of the symbolism of the convergence of the political will of the Sultan, the head of state, with the political will of the nation by virtue of its selection of its representatives within the elected chamber represented in the Shura Council. There is no explicit text regarding the Sultan's capacity as Chairman of the Oman Council, but rather a set of functions that were framed by the will of the Sultan within the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Oman Council, whether for the years 1997 or 2021 within the legislative system, and are based on the following aspects:
 - Ratification and promulgation of laws⁵⁴
 - .. Issuing decrees of ratification of international conventions⁵⁵
 - Appointment of members of the State Council⁵⁶
 - Issuing decrees that have the force of law between the sessions of the Oman Council, and during the period of dissolution of the Shura Council and the suspension of the sessions of the State Council⁵⁷
 - Inviting both the State Council and the Shura Council to meet at a location other than the seat of the two councils located in Muscat⁵⁸
 - Exemption from membership in the State Council⁵⁹
 - Calling for the extraordinary session of the Shura Council at the beginning of the first annual session of the period to elect a chairman and two deputies⁶⁰
 - Dissolving the Shura Council and calling for new elections within four months from the date of the dissolution⁶¹
 - The invitation to the ordinary session and its annual adjournment of the Oman Council by Royal order⁶², as is the invitation to the meeting in other than the meeting sessions⁶³
 - Returning draft laws to the Oman Council⁶⁴

This context reflects the importance of the relationship between the Sultan and the Oman Council and the prospects for its development as a parliamentary institution.

⁵¹ Article (48) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021

⁵² Article (49) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021: The Sultan performs the following duties and powers - among which he mentioned: "The Presidency of the Council of Ministers..."

⁵³ Article 1 of Royal Decree 9/2012 regarding the Supreme Judicial Council: "The Supreme Judicial Council is formed under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan," whose capacity and purpose of formation is determined. Judicial work and the care of its systems." Article (81) of the Basic Law of the State authorizes the issuance and implementation of judicial rulings in the name of the Sultan.

⁵⁴ Article (49) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021

⁵⁵ previous source

⁵⁶ Article (69) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021

⁵⁷ Article (73) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021

⁵⁸ Article (75) of the Basic Law of the State 6/2021

⁵⁹ Article (11) of the Oman Council Law 7/2021

⁶⁰ Article (17) of Oman Council Law 7/2021

⁶¹ previous source

⁶² Article (38) of Oman Council Law 7/2021

⁶³ Article (40) of Oman Council Law 7/2021

⁶⁴ Article (47) of the Oman Council Law 7/2021

2. Through four models of Shura councils, approximately (22) direct legislative intervention was issued in the establishment and organization of these councils, during a period of (30) years, during which the forms of functions assigned to this institution developed, which indicates a reality consistent with the theses of political discourse and the continuity of gradation and development what may It is consistent with the idea that “parliament is changing; it slowly adapts to meet the needs of society as society itself develops” (Joh17). Through it, a set of indicators shown by (Elwahishi, 2015) are achieved for democratic transformation, which are: (a) drafting a constitution that meets the aspirations of members of society, (b) establishing constitutional and institutional arrangements between the main political actors, (c) institutionalizing state institutions.

Conclusion:

Within the context of the four phases of the development of the Shura Council, Oman experienced four successive models of the Council in which the concept of function and representation varied, and in which the features of a parliamentary institution were formed as part of the legislative system. In this process the role of the Shura Council expanded from discussion of aspects of local services to national legislation and policies (Al Mukhaini, 2020): “From regionally based service-oriented discussions to a national policy level,” he adds: “Even within existing powers and responsibilities, the Shura can develop its performance and the extent of its representation significantly. This will require a modus operandi based on the concept of accountability to voters and to the Basic Law.”

We can draw the following conclusions from the speeches and remarks of the political leadership over the development of the four successive Shura councils and from the parallel the legislation introduced to establish and govern them:

1. In their infancy (Consultative Council 1981 - Shura Council 1991 - Oman Council 1997) the Shura Councils were not established as a parliament equal in authority to the executive, but rather as consultative bodies to assist the government in performing its duties through non-binding recommendations.
2. The evolution of the four models of Shura councils in the Sultanate of Oman is consistent with the idea that “Parliament is changing; it slowly adapts to meet the needs of society with the development of society itself” (Johnson, 2017) and that it does so as a bridge between a traditional society⁶⁵ and the modern nation state (Due-Gundersen, 2019).
3. The political leadership has taken a realistic and pragmatic approach in developing the successive Shura Council models. It has done so within the specific political, cultural and social context of the Sultanate. This has required a modern approach to defining state powers, making them conditional and subject to political relationships carrying obligations and consequences (Johnson, 2017).
4. The political leadership’s speeches to members of successive Shura Councils⁶⁶, prioritized the process of government planning, and used it to define basic themes for the deliberations of the two chambers (AlSaadi, 2020)(the Shura Council - the elected chamber, the State Council - the appointed chamber) as well as for the formation of its permanent committees⁶⁷. These themes are as follows:

⁶⁵ As expressed by Sultan Qaboos in an interview with the American Journal of Middle East Policy with the Sultan on 04/30/1995, Nasser Abu Aoun, Journalists at the Court of His Majesty, Amman (2014)

⁶⁶ Since the inception of the advisory council to the two-chamber work system.

⁶⁷ Formation of Shura Council committees according to Regulation No. 1/2012 issued by the Shura Council following the amendments to the Basic Law of the State for the year 2011:

1. Legislative and Legal Committee

- The need for a philosophy and set of values for the Shura (consultation) process based on the customs, traditions and practices of Omani society.
- The need to take advantage of the accumulated experience of Oman's traditional practice of Shura.
- Human development as an essential foundation for development.
- The importance of the principles and foundations of the Sultanate's foreign policy.
- The importance of the national role played by the Sultan's Armed Forces.
- The importance of the role of the private sector in development.
- The main features of the successive five-year development plans, with a focus on vital sectors such as education.
- A focus on the roles of particular groups within society, especially women and youth.
- The principles and values of the Renaissance and the importance of expanding popular participation.

5. The work that the Oman Council does has evolved in light of the guidelines set out by the political leadership in speeches and elsewhere, and of the legislation that these guidelines have generated. This is the path for the future, further evolution towards a council with broader parliamentary powers in Oman's political scene. It is given impetus by the changes brought in by the new Basic Law of the State in 2021, and by the Oman Council Law of the same year. The latter detailed the procedures and jurisdiction of the Oman Council as a self-standing law, separate from the Basic Law which has the status of a constitutional document which can be amended only by the monarch. The Oman Council is consequently able now to propose draft amendments to its governing law (the 2021 Oman Council Law) and to do so in a way that can enhance its parliamentary sovereignty.

6. The political leadership's discourse reflects an empirical philosophy linked to political and cultural goals and a belief that rationally planned state policy can be a powerful tool for progress (Edgar, 2009). The resulting legislation reflects the Sultan's own role in building Oman's model of representative councils both in terms of the procedures set out for the Shura councils as they have evolved and of the councils' relationship with the executive authority "the government".

7. As the Shura Council continues to develop in transparency and public accountability, the Sultan is in a position to enhance its role through the encouragement of more openness and cooperation between the Oman Council, in particular the Shura Council, and the executive: the "cabinet". This would match the rapid development of Shura in Oman and popular expectations of it.

In this paper after dealing with the political context in which the Shura Council operates and showing that there is a space in which the Shura Council can work effectively, I find that there is good reason to study further the Council's internal workings. The existing body of research into Oman's parliamentary and legislative processes lacks such an empirical study. There is a need for research looking at the current operations of the elected council, examining its effectiveness through such factors as the members, the staff and internal procedures, in particular those dealing with the workings of the legislative and oversight functions of the council. The aim would be to assess firstly the extent to which external factors (political

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2. Economic and Financial Committee
 3. Budget and Final Account Committee
 4. Defense, Security and Foreign Relations Committee
 5. Health and Environment Committee
 6. Education and Scientific Research Committee
 7. Services and Social Development Committee
 8. Youth and Human Resources Committee
 9. Committee on Food and Water Security
 10. Media and Culture Committee

discourse - legal frameworks) align – or not - with internal factors (members and workers in the council - internal procedures), to form the public's perception of the Shura Council; and secondly the case for further parliamentary reform, which could be internal, to reshape the way parliament works and its political culture.

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