

# Explaining Support for Undemocratic Leaders in Democracies in the Middle East

## Original and Replicated Findings

Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal completed the first wave of the Arab Barometer (<http://www.arabbarometer.org>) in 2007 and published initial findings from the survey the following year (Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, "Attitudes in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (January 2008): 97–110.), with results from Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, Morocco, and Kuwait.

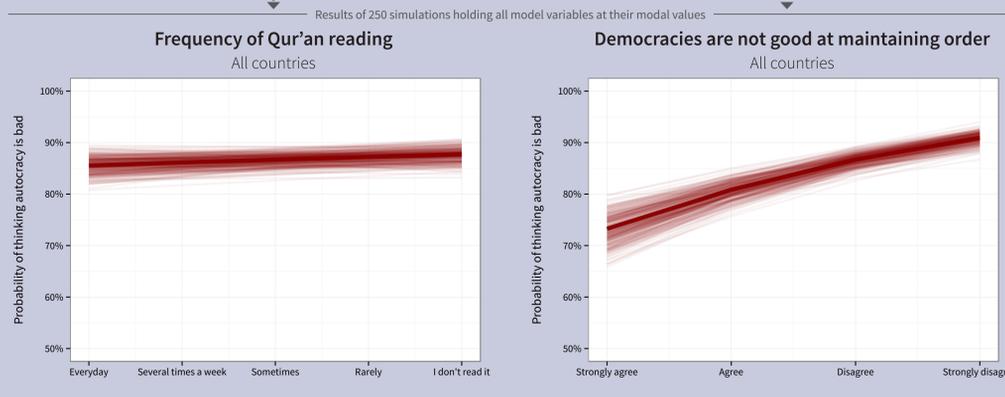
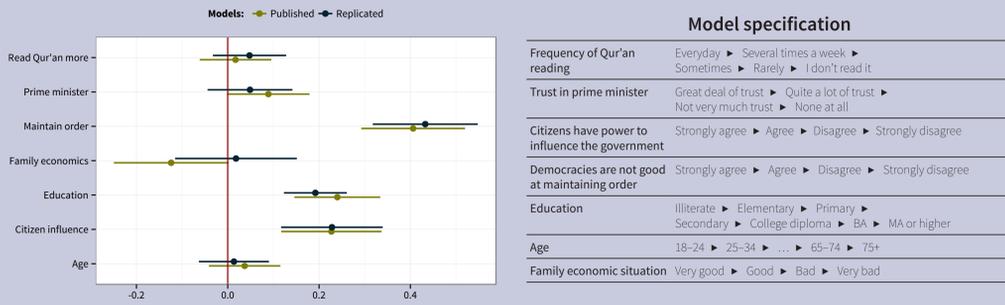
They found that **86%** agree that despite its problems, **democracy is better** than any other form of government.

But **12%** of those who support democracy believe that having a **strong, non-democratic leader** that does not bother with parliament and elections **is good**.

Why? They had two theories: **personal religiosity** and **political evaluations**.

Perhaps Islam made people inherently want an autocratic leader. Or perhaps discontent with existing political institutions soured their perceptions of democratic executive leadership.

Their logit model had little predictive power, but it did show that **personal religiosity has no significant effect** on support for a non-democratic leader, while political evaluations do have a significant effect—**those who feel democracies are not good at maintaining order are more likely to prefer an autocratic leader**.



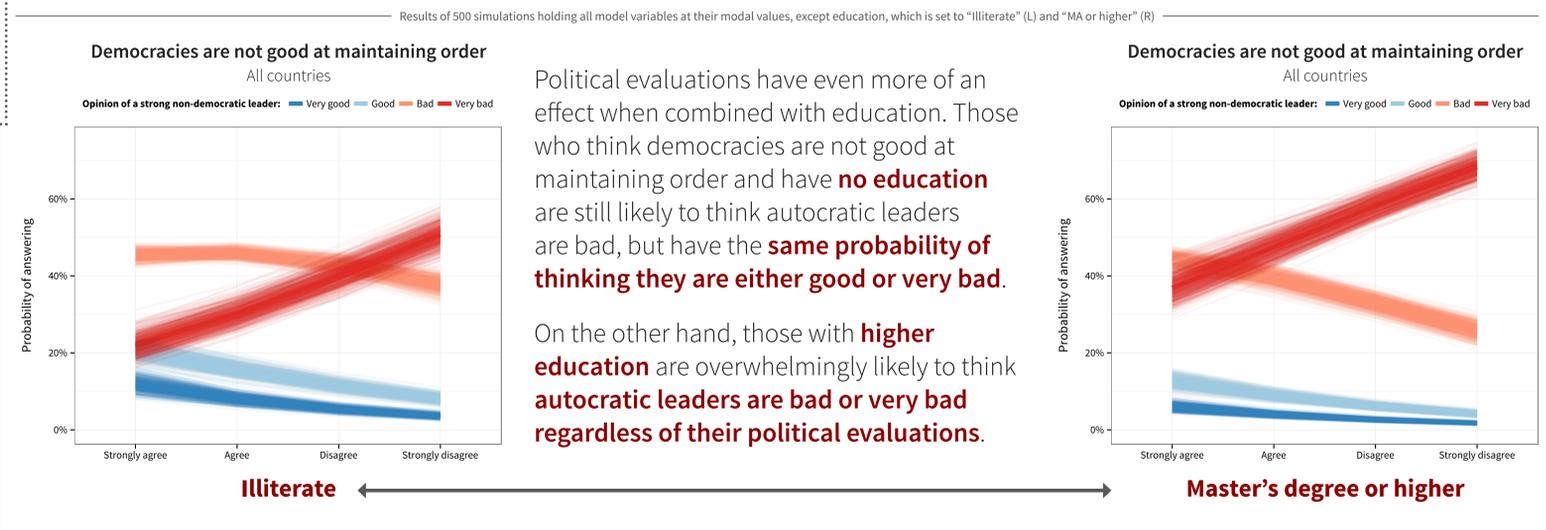
## More Appropriate Models Lead to Better Results

**Collapsing survey categories**—converting from “very good”, “good”, “bad”, and “very bad” to just “bad” and “good”—is **common practice**, but eliminates substantial nuance from the model and **hides important insights and results**.

**Ordered logistic regression** can show patterns within the different categories and levels of the data and yield **better insights**.



## Education and Political Evaluations

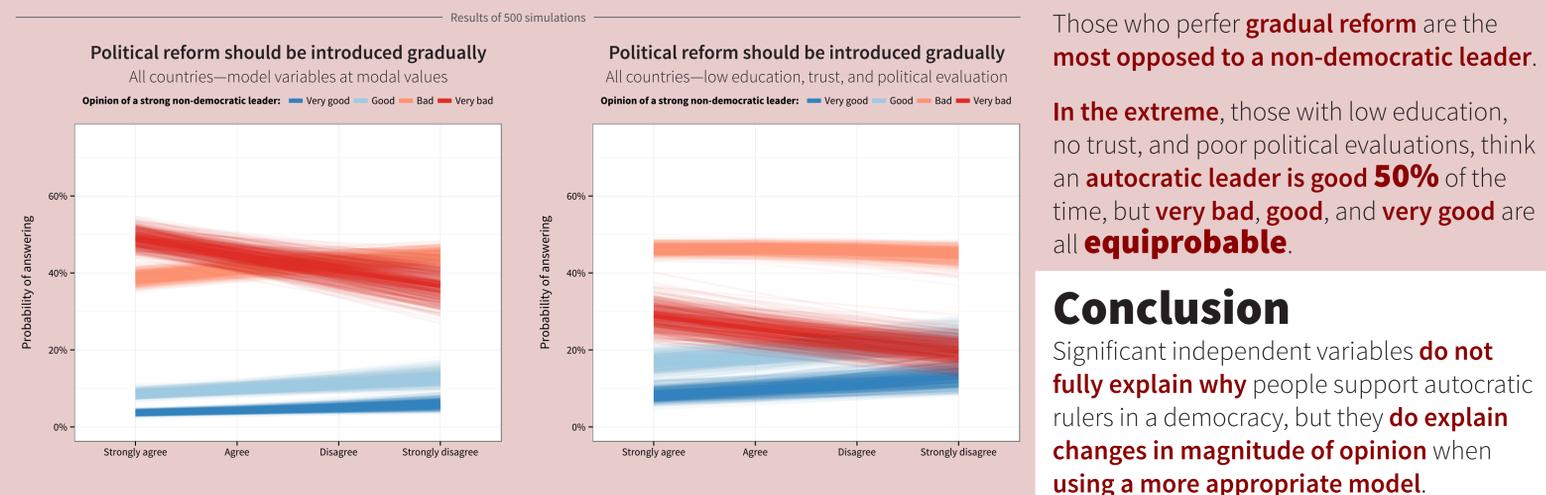
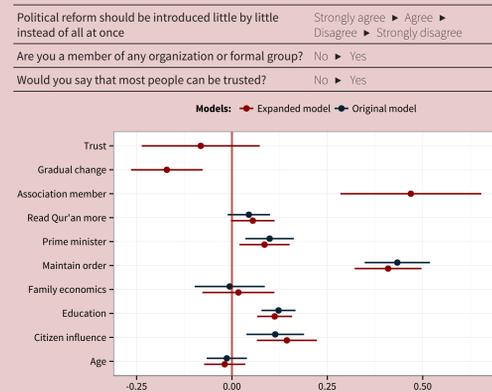


## Gradual Change and Social Capital

Political evaluations partially explain why people might support democracy and a strong non-democratic leader. But there are additional potential hypotheses.

Perhaps people want **democratic change** to happen **quickly**, shepherded by a strong leader.

Or maybe societies with **less social capital** or **trust** prefer having a strong leader.



## Conclusion

Significant independent variables **do not fully explain why** people support autocratic rulers in a democracy, but they **do explain changes in magnitude of opinion** when using a more appropriate model.