# **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.

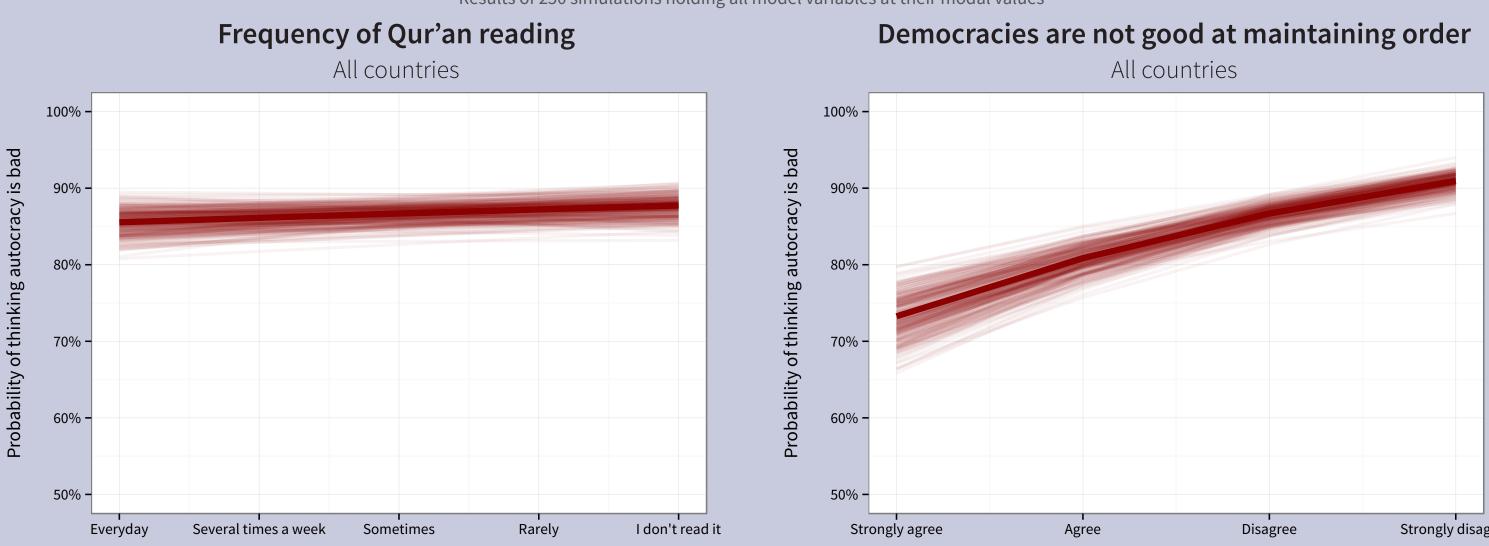
But **12%** of those who support democracy believe that having a strong, nondemocratic leader that does not bother with parliament and elections is good.

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.

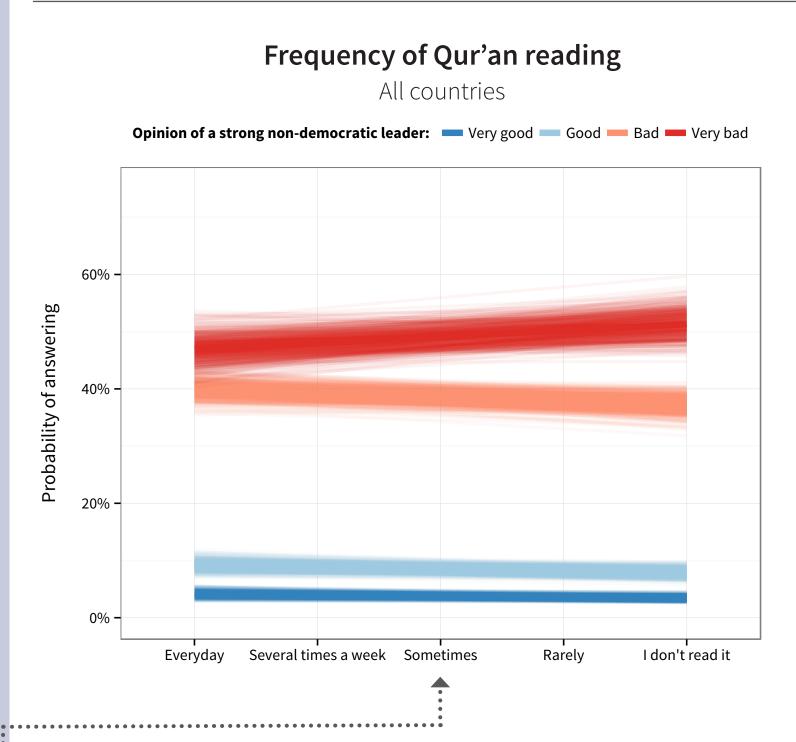
#### Model specification Frequency of Qur'an Read Qur'an more Sometimes ▶ Rarely ▶ I don't read it Prime minist Great deal of trust ▶ Quite a lot of trust ▶ Not very much trust ► None at all Maintain orde Strongly agree ► Agree ► Disagree ► Strongly disagree Family economic **Democracies are not good** Strongly agree ▶ Agree ▶ Disagree ▶ Strongly disagree Illiterate ► Elementary ► Primary ► Education Secondary ► College diploma ► BA ► MA or higher Citizen influence 18-24 ▶ 25-34 ▶ ... ▶ 65-74 ▶ 75+ Family economic situation Very good ► Good ► Bad ► Very bad Results of 250 simulations holding all model variables at their modal values



### 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.

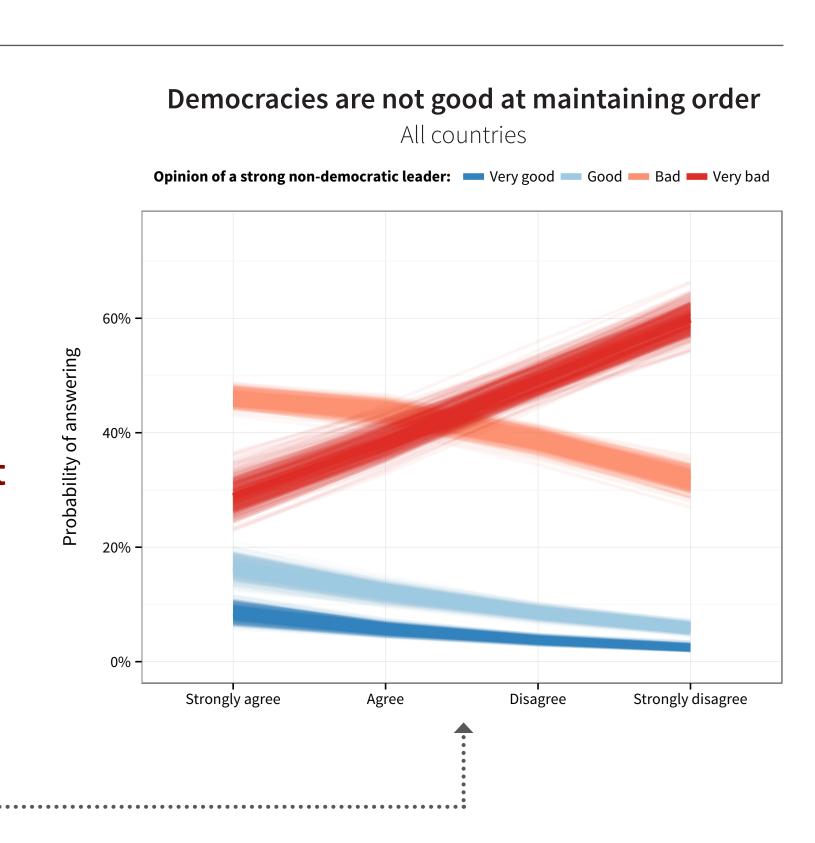
Ordered logistic regression can show patterns within the different categories and levels of the data and yield better insights.



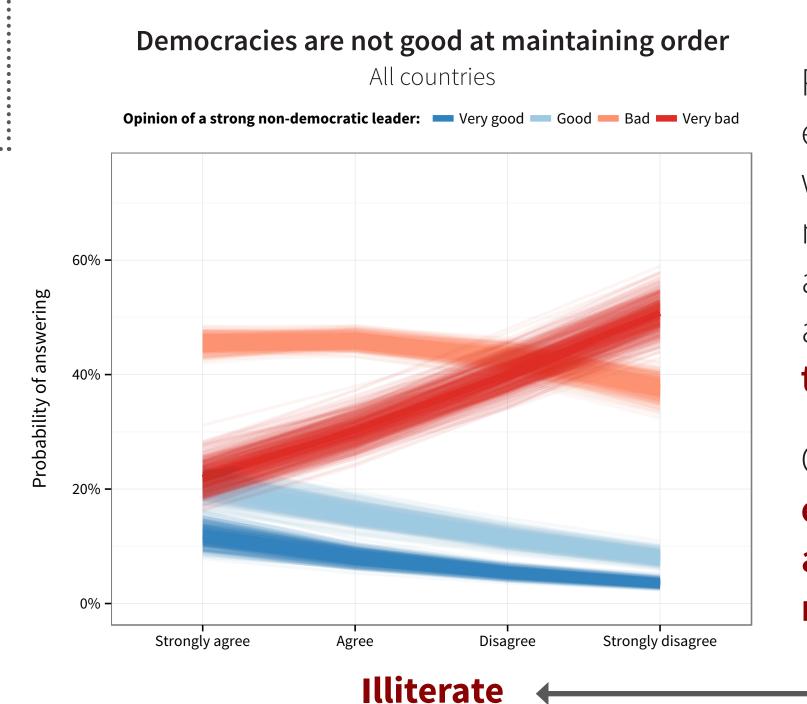
■ Regardless of how religious they are, the average person will consider a strong non-democratic leader very bad about **50%** of the time, bad **40%**, good **8%**, and very good 2%.

Results of 500 simulations holding all model variables at their modal values

► An average **person who feels that** democracies are not good at maintaining order is more than twice as likely to feel that a strong non-democratic leader is good (16% vs. 5%). Additionally, the intensity of opposition to autocracy reverses as political evaluations improve.

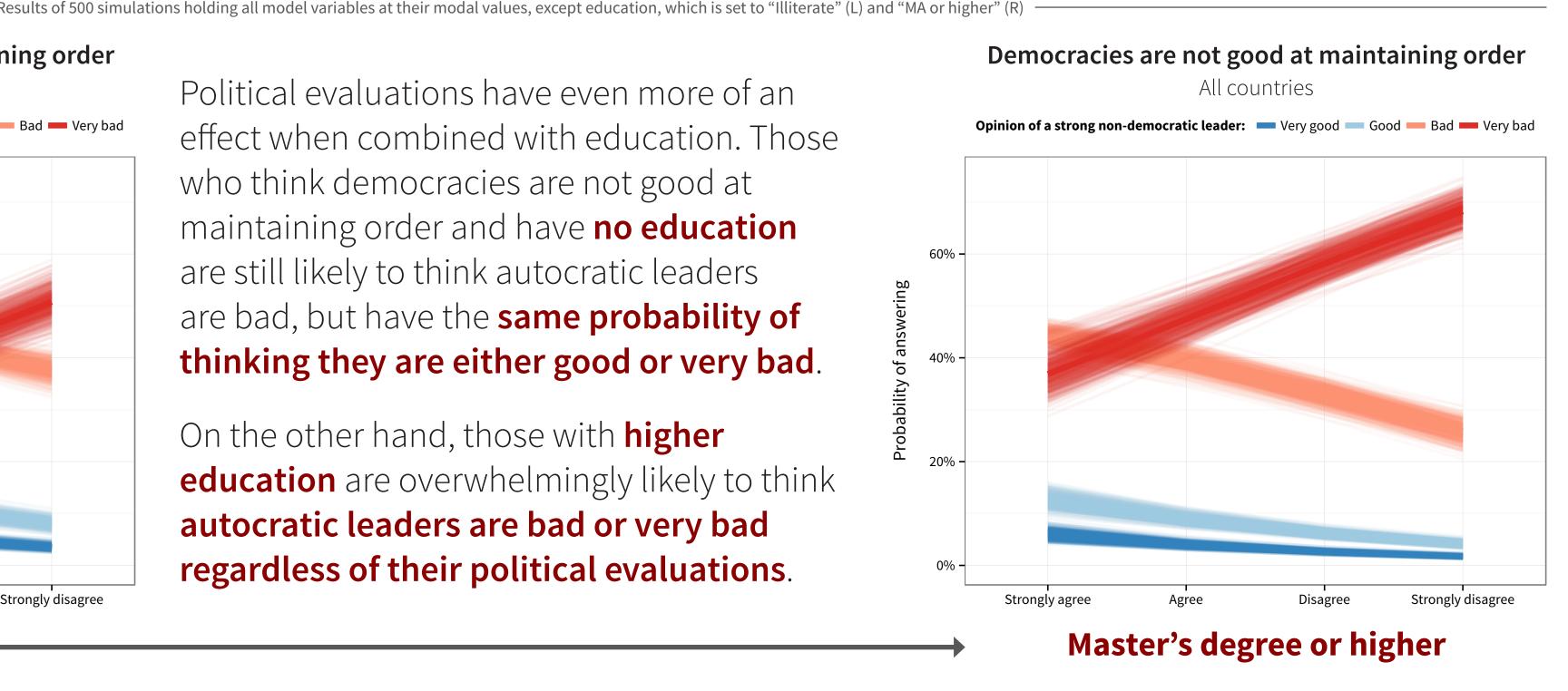


#### **Education and Political Evaluations**



Political evaluations have even more of an effect when combined with education. Those who think democracies are not good at maintaining order and have no education are still likely to think autocratic leaders are bad, but have the same probability of thinking they are either good or very bad.

On the other hand, those with **higher** education are overwhelmingly likely to think autocratic leaders are bad or very bad regardless of their political evaluations.

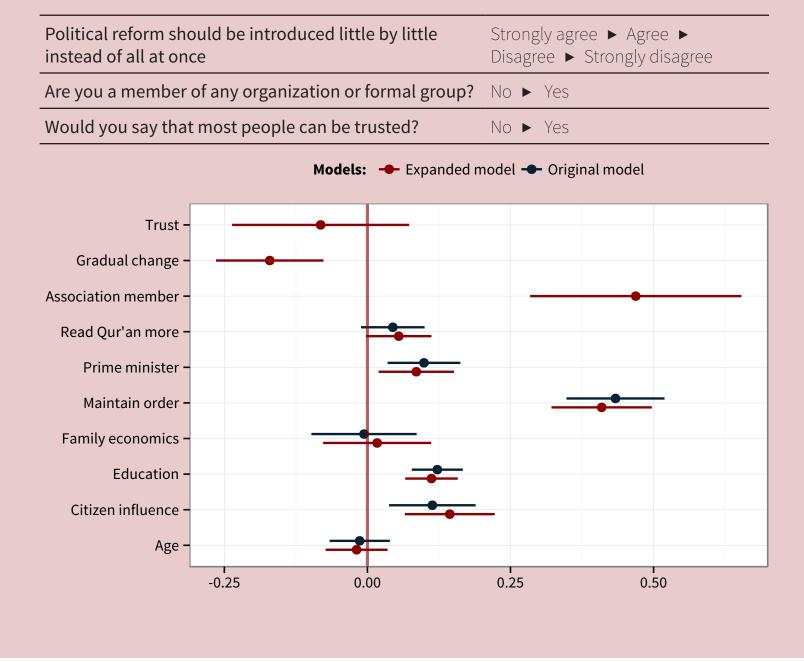


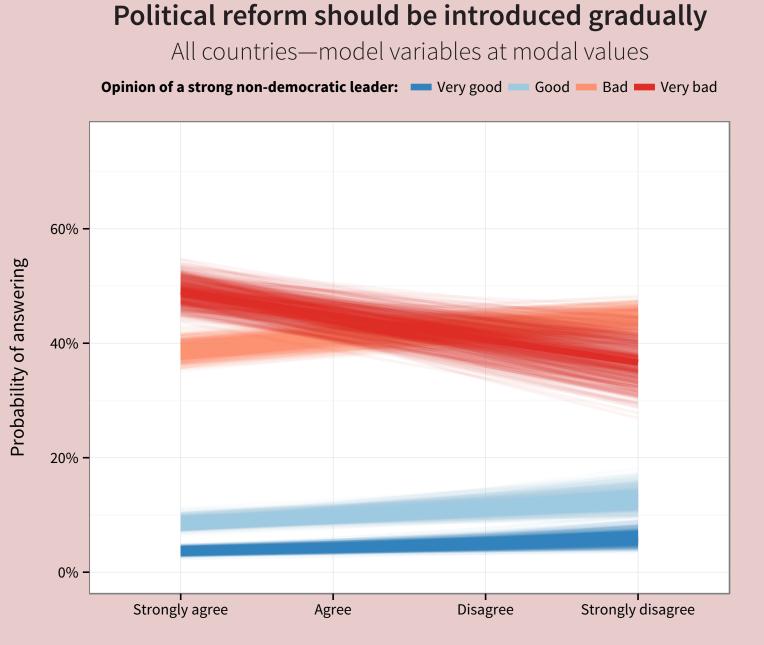
# **Gradual Change and Social Capital**

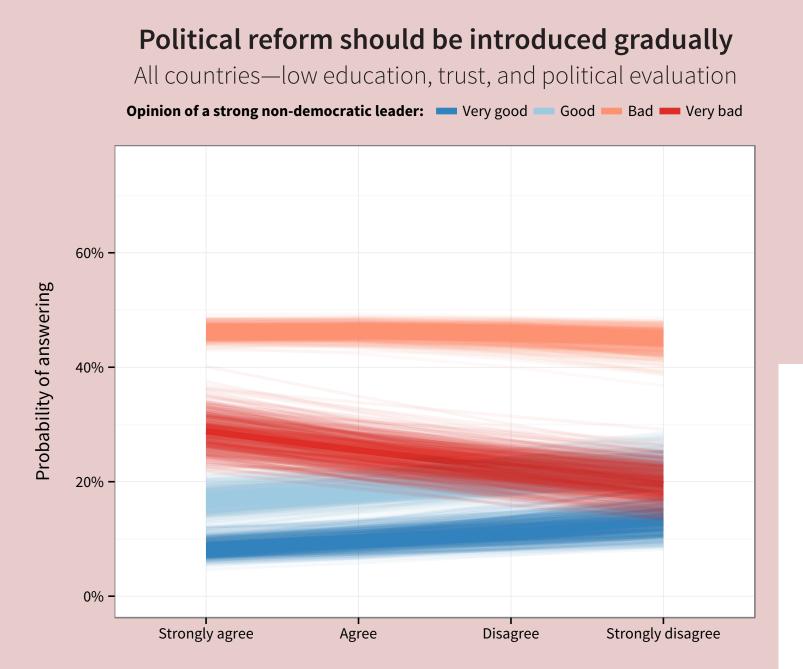
Political evaluations partially explain why people might support democracy and a strong non-democratic leader. But there are additional potential hypotheses.

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.







Those who perfer **gradual reform** are the most opposed to a non-democratic leader.

In the extreme, those with low education, no trust, and poor political evaluations, think an autocratic leader is good 50% of the time, but very bad, good, and very good are all equiprobable.

#### 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.