



How Assimilative Primary School Education Affects Insurgency

in Areas of Ethnic Conflict

Tugba Bozcaga & Asli Cansunar

KCL & University of Washington

Motivation



Avar köylerden topladığı öğrencileri okula götürürken.

"Avar (a prominent figure and education administrator in Early Republican Turkey) taking village girls to school."

Motivation

- Despite the 'pacifying effect' of education, we still observe high levels of insurgency in countries with free and compulsory education.

Motivation

- This outcome is particularly surprising due to the indoctrination impact of education curricula.
 - Used by governments for ethnic assimilation and imposing the state's religion (Tilly 1975; Hobsbawm 1990; Paglayan 2020, Bozcaga and Cansunar, 2021).
 - Stories of "success": French Catalans (Balcells, 2013), Prussia (Barkin, 1983), "Peasants into Frenchmen" (Weber, 1976).

Question

How does mass and compulsory primary education (in the state-building era) affect insurgency participation?

Existing theories

Education's impact on insurgency participation can operate through multiple mechanisms (Otsby 2018). Existing studies mostly find a negative (pacifying) effect:

- Education can reduce relative deprivation and grievances (Gurr 1970; Aoki et al. 2002; Thyne 2006).
- Greater levels of educational attainment increase the opportunity cost of joining insurgency (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Kuhn and Weidmann 2015; Lochner and Moretti 2004).
- Higher educational attainment (and indoctrinization) decreases the risk of violence by encouraging political participation (Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Hegre 2003; Hibbs 1973; Huntington 1968) and by promoting a culture of peace and social cohesion (Kuhn and Weidmann 2015; Thyne 2006).

Argument

- However, equally crucial to economic decisions in ethnically and socially divided societies is the threat of losing group identity, ascriptive privilege, and power.
 - Therefore, another impact of education can be its threat to group identity, leading to increased levels of insurgency participation.
- ⇒ The overall impact of primary education on insurgency participation is nothing but inconclusive.

Empirical Implications

- We re-examine the hypothesis that primary education decreases the likelihood of insurgency.

Setting

- Turkey is a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian country.
 - Kurds: an ethnic and linguistic group indigenous to the Mesopotamian plains (around %20)
 - Alevis: heterodox Muslim communities with links to Shia Islam and Sufism (10% to 25%)
 - Dominant ethno-religious group: Sunni Turks

Primary education in Turkey



Centralized funding and curriculum, compulsory, free, in Turkish.

Primary education in Turkey



Emphasis on national pride and Turkishness, every-day rituals such as singing the national anthem and reading the "student oath".

Student Oath

I am Turkish, honest and hardworking.

My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself.

My ideal is to rise, to progress.

My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence.

How happy is the one who says "I am Turkish."

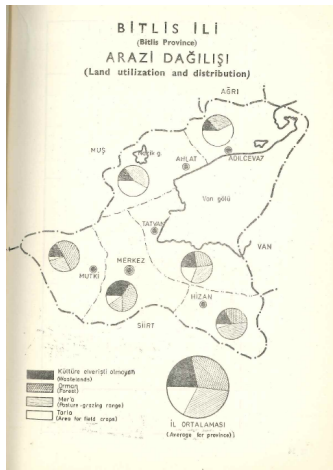
The 'Kurdish Problem' in Turkey

Commenting on what it termed the “persistence of Kurdish separatism” in eastern Turkey, an assessment written in 1979 by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) stated:

The Kurds' sense of separate identity has not been significantly reduced by the [Turkish] government's attempts to co-opt or suppress them. The Kurdish language has flourished, and clandestinely published Kurdish literature is surreptitiously obtainable in Kurdish areas. . . . In the past several years, several overt “cultural associations” and covert liberation groups have formed to promote the idea of Kurdish autonomy and independence.³

– Michael Gunter (1988)

Data: Archival Village Inventories and Education Census



Tablo - (Table) : 29
Topraksız aile, ortakçı, kiracı durumu ve arazi kıymeti
(Landless families, share-croppers, tenants and value of arable land) **BİTLİS İLİ**

İsk. Pl. Örnek : 7 ve 9

İlçe (District)	Köy Sayısı (Number of villages)	K ö y d e k i - (In The Village)							Etilik alanının Düzünü Kıymet Y. (Value of tillable area of arable land TL.)		
		Hane sayısı (Number of houses)	Genel aile sayısı (1) (Total-number of families)	Çiftçi ailesi sayısı (Number of farm-families)	Hiç topraksız aileler (Landless families)					Kuruada Ölüt - Irigated	Suladık (Irrigated)
					Ortakçı (Sharecroppers)	Kiracı (Tenants)	Tarım işçisi (farmworkers)	Toplam (Total)			
Merkez	92	3 556	5 240	5 191	258	55	1 929	2 242	42,8	25-100	70-3000
Adilcevaz	23	1 192	1 630	1 621	22	35	295	352	21,7	30-150	100-300
Ahlat	25	1 391	1 700	1 695	3	11	470	493	29,1	15-100	60-250
Hizan	31	2 538	3 569	3 543	48	2	1 074	1 124	31,7	200-500	100-4000
Rutki	40	2 741	3 818	3 797	82	2	1 117	1 201	31,6	50-1000	500-9000
Tatvan	42	2 029	3 174	3 141	28	10	1 120	1 158	36,9	15-750	100-2000
Toplam ve extremes (Total and extremes)	253	13 447	19 131	18 988	441	115	6 014	6 570	34,6	15-1000	60-9000

(1) Genel aile, köyde oturan ve tarımla uğraşan veya uğraşmayan ailelerin tümüdür.
(The total number of families referred to the total number of families who dwell in the village whether they work or not on agriculture.)

Variables by Data Source

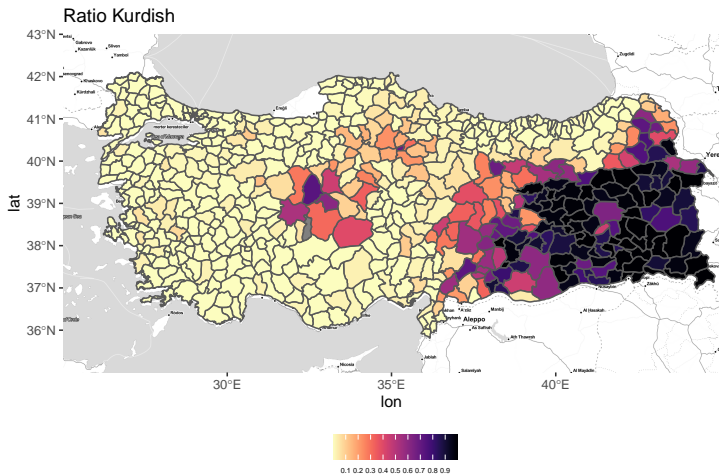
- **Village inventories & education census of 1945:** School enrollment rates, teachers, schools.
- **Kurdish insurgency dataset (Tezcur 2016):** Number of insurgents by birth year.
- **Original ethnicity census:** An original village-level census that lists the names of the ethno-religious minority settlements among Turkey's 35,000 villages (e.g., Alevi, Kurdish, Sunni Turkish), aggregated at the district level.
- **Village inventories:** Landless farmer ratio, land gini, tractors, population.
- **Geospatial controls:** Percentage of villages with road access, percentage of villages with railway access.

Empirical Strategy

$$Y_{it} = \beta S_{it} + \lambda X_{it} + \eta_i + \epsilon_{it}$$

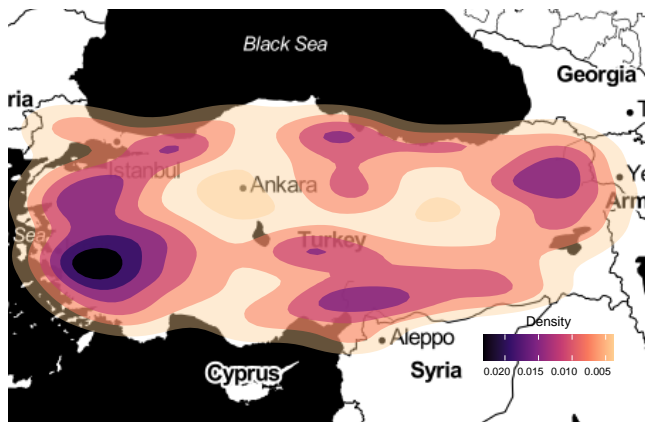
- i refers to each Kurdish-majority district; t refers to two time periods, 1945 and 1965.
- Y_{it} is the outcome in district i (Number of insurgents at primary school age between 45-65 and post-65)
- S_{it} indicates the proportion of villages with a school (or teachers per village district) in district i
- X_{it} : district level control variables (landless farmers, land gini, tractors, population, geospatial controls).
- η_i : district fixed effects

Identifying Kurdish districts



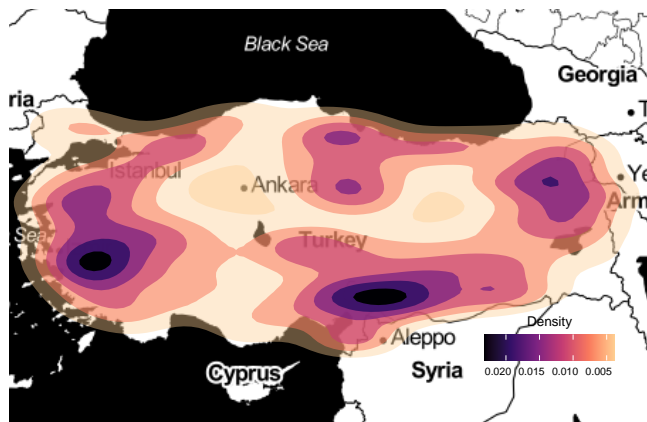
Districts where at least 50% of villages is Kurdish, but we also test alternative thresholds.

Spatial density of primary schools, 1958



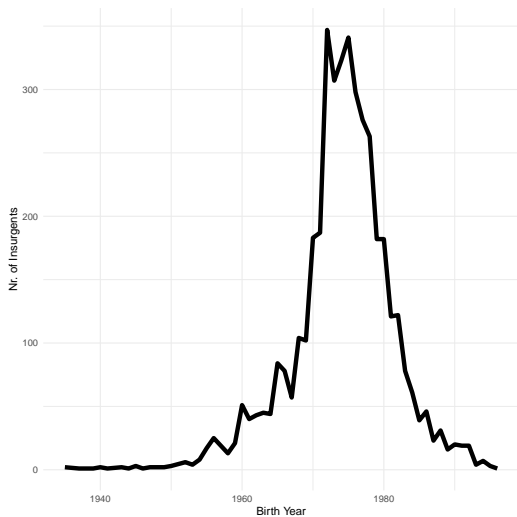
Rapid expansion of primary schools to Kurdish districts as of the 1960s (Bozcaga and Cansunar 2021).

Spatial density of primary schools, 1968



Rapid expansion of primary schools to Kurdish districts as of the 1960s (Bozcaga and Cansunar 2021).

Insurgent Birth Years



Main Results

Table 1: Primary School Services per Village and Insurgency

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Nr. of insurgents (log)	
	(1)	(2)
School per Village	1.255** (0.506)	
Teacher per Village		0.856** (0.340)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	115	115
R ²	0.703	0.698
Adjusted R ²	0.294	0.282

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors clustered by district.

Main Results by Alternative Thresholds

Table 2: Primary School Services per Village and Insurgency

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Nr. of insurgents (log)		
	KM prov.	KM dist.	Only Kurdish dist.
Schools per village	1.250*** (0.440)	1.047*** (0.368)	1.255** (0.506)
Control variables	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	137	191	115
R ²	0.677	0.686	0.703
Adjusted R ²	0.255	0.306	0.294

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: KM means Kurdish-majority (where Kurdish villages > 50%). Standard errors clustered by district.

Main Results by Alternative Thresholds

Table 3: Primary School Services per Village and Insurgency

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Nr. of insurgents (log)		
	KM prov.	KM dist.	Only Kurdish dist.
Teachers per village	0.725** (0.331)	0.375** (0.184)	0.856** (0.340)
Control variables	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	137	191	115
R ²	0.677	0.686	0.703
Adjusted R ²	0.255	0.306	0.294

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: KM means Kurdish-majority (where Kurdish villages > 50%). Standard errors clustered by district.

Conclusion

- The effect of education on insurgency is not straightforward as it operates through multiple mechanisms.
- Centralized education based on national curricula in the national language may create a backlash effect and instigate political exclusion and insurgency participation.