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The education backlash: How assimilative primary school education affects insurgency in areas of ethnic conflict

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WIDER Working Paper 2023/50

The education backlash

How assimilative primary school education affects insurgency in areas of ethnic conflict

Tugba Bozcaga¹ and Asli Cansunar²

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Abstract: Education is a public service, assumed to be highly valued by citizens, allowing politicians to use it to reward their co-ethnics. However, nation-states have also used education to create loyal citizens, leaving politicians in times of heightened threat of ethnic mobilization. This study investigates whether assimilatory national public investments in ethnic minority areas induce violence. To examine this question, we leverage the spatial and temporal variations in education infrastructure and insurgent recruitment through a difference-in-differences design, focusing on the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey. We combine original archival data on the expansion of primary school provision to rural areas and geocoded data on the ethnoreligious distribution of over 30,000 villages in Turkey with data sources that provide information on insurgents' birthplaces. We find that the expansion of primary school provision in villages increased the likelihood of insurgency participation, despite its potential social mobility effect.

Key words: education, mobilization, assimilation, insurgency, Turkey

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1 Introduction

Numerous studies of public goods provision in plural societies suggest that the co-ethnics of ruling coalitions benefit disproportionately from investments in public goods, especially in developing countries (Burgess et al. 2015; Franck and Rainer 2012; Kramon and Posner 2016). As the most visible and concrete side of the government to its citizens, public goods are not only essential for equity and citizens' social welfare, but also affect various political outcomes such as voting behaviour, state legitimacy, and even support for democracy. Not surprisingly, when inequalities in access to public services overlap with ethnic or other identity-based divisions and cleavages, service provision can lead to conflicts or strengthen existing conflicts. Conceptualized as a public good, education should therefore mitigate out-group communities' grievances by equipping non-co-ethnics with easy access to education. In addition, by increasing out-group members' social mobility and thus the cost of supporting and joining anti-regime movements, education can reduce out-group incentives to participate in armed rebellion groups.¹

However, entailing a strong indoctrination and nationalization aspect, education not only complicates politicians' calculations—bringing up a long-term benefit of 'educating' out-group members—but also those of citizens of minority status. Just as investments in education could be beneficial to the ruling elite for reasons other than potential electoral rewards or helping in-group members, such as transforming out-group citizens into loyal and indoctrinated citizens (Bozcaga and Cansunar 2007), their implications for out-group members' attitudes and behaviour are also two-fold: on one hand, improved access to education can mitigate grievances and increase political stability (Singh and Vom Hau 2016). On the other hand, the assimilative dimension of nationalist content and curricula may have a negative impact on out-group attitudes to the incumbent regime.

We argue that national primary education could have adverse political effects by increasing the likelihood of conflict despite its potential mitigating effects emphasized in the literature. To the extent education decreases social inequalities along class lines, educational investments in ethnic minority areas may serve to reduce grievances and increase the social mobility of out-group members. However, an education system based on national curricula in the national language, as commonly used by nation-states to create a national identity, may also create a backlash effect and instigate political exclusion. This is because national education poses a threat to the cultural autonomy of out-group members and their perception of being recognized. Existing studies support the idea that refusal to recognize alternative cultural preferences—such as religious or multi-language education over secular and single-language curricula—can feed into minority groups' perceptions of marginalization (Davies 2003).

We test this argument by examining whether the expansion of primary school education to minority areas induces insurgency participation using a longitudinal dataset from Turkey. Turkey provides a suitable empirical setting to estimate the effect of national education on ethnoreligious conflicts due to its centralized structure and heavily national, monocultural, and monolingual education curriculum and the extant ethnoreligious diversity in the country. Second, it is possible to observe varying levels of ethnoreligious mobilization and insurgency throughout Turkey's history, as its population involves one of the world's largest transnational and stateless ethnic groups, Kurds, estimated to constitute almost 20 per cent of Turkey's population.

To estimate the effect of primary school education on insurgency, we employ a panel data design and an original, longitudinal dataset showing the expansion of primary schools in rural areas in Turkey with different ethnoreligious populations between 1923 and 1966. We focus on rural areas as they are composed of villages, the most granular unit that allows us to group communities by their ethnic and

¹ For a detailed discussion of these arguments and related findings, see Østby et al. (2019).

religious affiliations. We identify Kurdish villages in Turkey by using an original dataset that lists all the minority settlements in Turkey, relying on ethnographic inventories (Bozcaga 2020). To measure the dependent variable, violent conflict, we focus on the hometowns of militants that join the Kurdish insurgency group, *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (PKK). We rely on Tezcür's (2016) original dataset, used in his seminal study on insurgency participation. These data involve information on the birthplace of deceased militants, coded by the obituaries published by PKK, allowing us to measure the number of (deceased) militants from each village in a given year. Our inferences rely on a panel data design with a fixed effects estimator. We find that an increase in the number of schools in rural areas indeed leads to a substantial increase in the number of insurgents from that area. The next sections introduce our argument and research design, which are followed by a discussion of the results and contributions of the study.

2 Background and argument

The persistence of civil wars and insurgencies across the world raises the question of what motivates individuals to join insurgency groups and how state policies influence this process. Existing literature on the factors of conflict can be categorized by the type and level of the explanatory variable on which they focus. The first group of studies argues that relative deprivation and grievance lie at the root of insurgencies (Gurr 2015; Horowitz 2000; White 1989; Wimmer 2012). Inequalities in access to wealth and public services can foment grievances and conflict (Huntington 2006; Wood and Jean 2003). Due to the potential tension between individual and group interests, though (Olson 1965; Tullock 1971), other scholars focus on individual motivations, assuming that individuals make their decisions to join or not by calculating the benefits and costs for themselves, among which scholars list various factors such as material incentives provided to join (Lichbach 1994), social mobility (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Lee 2011; Weinstein 2006), extreme security threats in the face of state violence (Goodwin 2001; Hechter 1987; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Kilcullen 2011; Mason and Krane 1989; Stoll 1993) and communal sanctioning by insurgents' supporters (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). Highlighting the interplay between psychology and state repression, Tezcür (2016) argues that an existential threat perception can increase insurgency participation among individuals with high levels of political efficacy.

Other scholars emphasize the role of altruistic and moralistic concerns, norms, and social identity (Cederman et al. 2010; Elster 1985; Fanon 2007; Gates 2002; Varshney 2003; Viterba 2013; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). This line of research suggests that individuals can even behave at odds with their self-interest if they think the perceived similarity between them and the members of the insurgent group is stronger compared to the national identity (Sambanis and Shayo 2013; Shayo 2009), or if the individual behaves by familial or communal moral commitments regardless of individual costs and benefits (Aspinall 2009; Gould 1991; McAdam 1986; Parkinson 2013; Petersen 2001).

Education may trigger many of these mechanisms (Østby et al. 2019). On the one hand, it can raise the economic status and social mobility prospects of the individual or group. Primary school education, by paving the way to a more skilled labour force, has the potential to boost the economic and social status of out-group populations. Therefore, the expansion of public goods such as education services to out-groups has the potential to mitigate relative deprivation, grievances drawing on poverty and inequality, and unrest (De Ferranti 2004; Gurr 2015; Thyne 2006). Greater levels of educational attainment at the individual level also increase the opportunity cost of participating in insurgency groups. Educated rural residents are more likely to seek out higher wages in urban areas, meaning their transformation from a rural class to an urban working class and the lessening of human capital supply within reach of armed groups (Barakat and Urdal 2009; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Kuhn and Weidmann 2015; Lochner and Moretti 2004). Last but not least, education can decrease the risk of violence by encouraging political

participation (Alesina and Perotti 1996; Huntington 2006), promoting a culture of peace and social cohesion (Kuhn and Weidmann 2015; Thyne 2006), or narrowing the gap between the individual and the national identity through indoctrination.

However, equally crucial to economic decisions in ethnically and socially divided societies is the threat of losing group identity, ascriptive privilege, and power. We argue that education, when used as an assimilation tool by states, can create a backlash effect and increase resentment by out-group members against the regime. Ethnoreligious out-groups differ radically from the dominant group in terms of their group consciousness, identity, and institutions, the threat of losing which is likely to increase their incentives to mobilize and join armed or unarmed groups to prevent the threat to their identity. A national education curriculum can flesh out the differences between the group and the national identity and strengthen the perception of threat to the group identity. Therefore, both sociological explanations and individual-level cost–benefit calculations can lead to divergent predictions with respect to the impact of mass education on insurgency participation. The overall impact of primary education on insurgency participation is nothing but inconclusive.

Crucial here is the question of the extent to which governments consider and use education as part of their nation-building efforts. Singh and Vom Hau (2016), for example, show that three modes of nation-building—the *assimilation*, *accommodation*, and *exclusion* of minority groups—where assimilationist states pursue an approach of erasing ethnic differences between minority groups and the co-ethnics of ruling coalitions, while accommodationist states respect the ethnic and religious differences between different factions of society. Primary schools are capable of ensuring the widespread use of a national language, imposing the state’s religion, and enabling an attachment to the national values through the organization of mass public instruction (Paglayan 2020; Tilly 1975). Primary education may be even more vital in transforming the lives of citizens in remote corners of countries, such as rural areas. Not surprisingly, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most states used state-controlled primary schools ‘to spread the image and heritage of the “nation” and inculcate attachment to it’ (Hobsbawn 1990), culminating in numerous ‘successful’ attempts. By expanding state-controlled primary education, many states aspired to efface ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities. You (2018) shows, for example, that the Chinese Pinyin reforms, which enforced education in modern standardized Mandarin, strengthened national identity while weakening local identities in China. Similarly, while a Catalan national identity is not salient in French Catalonia due to the *en masse* national education under French rule, it remained salient in Spain because Catalans were not subject to the nationalistic agenda of Spanish primary education Balcells (2013). This nationalistic agenda, motivated by the willingness to transform the local population into loyal citizens, however, also creates the threat of losing group consciousness, identity, and institutions for minority populations, which is why we hypothesize that in an assimilationist primary school system, *the expansion of primary school education can increase the likelihood of joining insurgency groups for minority groups*.

3 Setting

3.1 Ethnoreligious diversity in Turkey

After the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in World War I, the Allied Powers occupied and partitioned the Empire’s remaining lands, which had already shrunk to the Eastern Thrace and Anatolian peninsula, prompting the emergence of local Muslim resistance groups and non-state secret societies throughout the country to restore Turkish sovereignty. Following this occupation, Mustafa Kemal, a former Ottoman commander, began uniting local resistance organizations into a national liberation army and a revolutionary government in Ankara that directed the resistance movement. Following the military victory,

the parliament abolished the Ottoman Sultanate and signed the peace treaty of Lausanne with the Allies, which recognized the legitimacy and boundaries of the newly established state of Turkey.

The new regime implemented a comprehensive set of top-down reforms. In a way, the declaration of the Republic not only changed how and by whom the new state would be governed, but was an unprecedented economic, social, and cultural revolution to ‘transform the entire fabric of the society along modern Western lines’ (Kazamias 1966: 17). For example, the government abolished the Caliphate and exiled the last caliph, Abdülmecit. This critical political institution validated the Ottoman Empire’s power to govern different Muslim ethnic and racial groups for centuries. In 1926, the new regime abolished the old civil and penal codes based on Sharia law and adopted modern and secular codes from the Swiss and Italian legal systems. In 1928, the government repealed the second article of the 1924 Constitution, which declared Islam the state’s official religion (Azak 2010).

The removal of Islam from the legal and formal administrative apparatus of the new state was genuinely revolutionary. One prominent theme of wartime propaganda to unite local resistance forces into a national campaign portrayed the movement as ‘the brotherhood of all Muslims within and beyond the borders, including Kurds, Circassians, and Lazis against the Christian invasion’, which had the intention of ‘exterminating Islam’ (Turnaoğlu 2017: 199). The unified organization of the local resistance groups under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, the Association for the Defence of Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafası-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*), announced, for example: ‘All the Muslim elements [ethnic groups] living on the Ottoman territory are genuine brothers who are full of feelings of respect for and devotion to each other and are respectful to each other’s social and ethnic norms and local conditions’ (Yeğen 2007: 126).

Unsurprisingly, these secular reforms broke the bonds between different Muslim ethno-sectarian groups and created a significant dilemma for the founding elites. Although the country’s religious heterogeneity decreased considerably after the loss of the Balkan territories and the Turkish–Greek population exchange, the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity between the remaining Muslim population was substantial.

Keeping different factions together voluntarily with the promise of the new Republic was a challenge, with the new regime moving away from Islam and towards Western modernization. To minimize the backlash against the new and fragile order, Mustafa Kemal and the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) minted an alternative (Turkish and Sunni) national identity that could supersede the undesirable Ottoman-Muslim one through extensive and occasionally coercive indoctrination, propaganda, and state-building campaigns during the single-party era (1923–50) (Zürcher 2014). Thus, the ambitious state-building programme introduced a striking departure from the resistance movement’s wartime politics that had focused on the unifying power of the Muslim identity.

The sudden divergence from the unifying power of the Muslim identity during the non-democratic single-party era sparked a backlash from local traditional elites with diverse backgrounds around the country, which would continue throughout the first 15 years of the new Republic. For instance, there were at least 13 local flare-ups between 1925 and 1930, most of which were instigated or supported by tribal chiefs, the majority of which had Kurdish backgrounds due to the dominance of the tribal structure in Kurdish society, a characteristic that was absent in other minority groups except for Arabs. Therefore, most local revolts took place primarily in Kurdish-majority areas. By increasing its military capacity and presence, the new regime had controlled these local flare-ups by 1938.

3.2 Primary education

Perhaps the most crucial outcome of the local revolts in the first years of the new Republic was increasing the nation-making attempts in the country. The governing elite sought to create a united nation from

disparate ethnic and cultural Muslim groups within the newly drawn borders after World War I by implementing a comprehensive state-building programme in which education was envisioned as the primary instrument to create a nation. Hence, one of the first significant reforms of the new regime involved unifying and centralizing the religious, decentralized, and unregulated education system under state control in 1924 through the adoption of the Unification of Instruction Law (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*).

Turkey had inherited a much more decentralized education system from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman education system had started its reformation in the early nineteenth century, when struggles between the reformers and *ulema*—Islamic scholars who taught in the traditional religious school system—started. During Mahmud II's era (1808–39), state education was extended to the civilian population. Although a Ministry of National Education was founded back in 1857—when a system of non-military schools began to emerge—a formal structure for state schools was not established until 1869. This first unified education system consisted of four main types of schools: elementary school (*rusdiye*), lower secondary school (*idadiye*), secondary school (*sultaniye*), and university. Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) continued to open many other schools, particularly higher education institutions. Notably, in 1913, with the Provisional Law of Elementary Education, primary schools started to be administered solely by the Ministry of National Education instead of *ulema* and *waqfs* (Islamic charitable endowments). However, the traditional elementary schools (*sibyan mektebi*) continued to coexist with modern schools. They were still respected by the Muslim population as centres of higher Islamic learning, while there was some apathy or hostility towards modern state schools.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic, Turkey's education system was entirely centralized in 1924 with the Law for the Unification of Instruction (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*), one year after the foundation of modern Turkey. In line with modern Turkey's strategy to use education as a tool for nation- and state-building, all schools were placed under the Ministry of National Education's jurisdiction in 1924, thereby allowing the single-party government to regulate the curriculum and textbooks. The Ministry of National Education started to administer all education institutions, including private schools and foreign and missionary schools operated by Western countries.

A centralized curriculum administered by the Ministry of National Education is one of the crucial components of the new national education system, given the double goals of strengthening national identity and increasing the literacy rates in the newly founded country. Curricula programmes adopted by the Ministry of National Education explicitly emphasize the aim 'to raise children who attend primary school as strong republican, nationalist, statist, secular, and revolutionary citizens' (Kaplan 2013: 189) and who 'consider it their duty to promote ideas that honor the Turkish nation, the parliament, and the Turkish state' (Kaplan 2013: 189). The Ministry also appoints teachers, distributes money dedicated to education in the national budget for buildings, repairs, and equipment, and inspects schools through its vast network of inspectors (Kazamias 1966: 123). Thus, the Ministry in Ankara is not only responsible for the content of education but also for the geospatial distribution of brick-and-mortar education infrastructure.

It is worth noting that the nation-making strategy in the education sector was accompanied by other efforts. The founding party CHP emphasized the imperative to work on a new encompassing definition of 'being Turkish' that was built on the unity of the spoken and written national language (Yilmaz 2013: 139), as well as a shared history (Çağaptay 2006: 45). To create a sense of unity and a common past between ethnically heterogeneous Muslims living within Turkish borders, the Society for the Study of Turkish History, commissioned by Mustafa Kemal, worked extensively 'to show that the earliest civilization had been developed by prehistoric Turks of Central Asia and thence carried to the four corners of the world' (Tachau 1964: 200). Similarly, the Turkish Language Society developed a hypothesis that aimed to prove that the Turkish language was the source of the world's languages (Lewis 1999; Tachau 1964). The government spent considerable effort to promote Turkish as the only spoken language, as well as the Turkification of Kurdish, Greek, and Armenian toponyms (Aslan 2007).

All these nationalist strategies in the cultural arena were heavily incorporated into the education curriculum. The CHP envisioned education as the primary instrument to spread the principles of the new regime to the people.² Thus, public education in Turkey has three main attributes that are instrumental in assimilating minorities, if they have chosen to build schools in those minority areas. First, all primary education in public schools is conducted in Turkish, with no instruction or elective courses in Kurdish (Taylor and Skutnabb-Kangas 2009). In fact, many Kurdish children are subject to Turkish for the first time during their primary school education. The Turkish state has long believed that if citizens who speak Kurdish are taught Turkish, they will not be caught up in separatist propaganda and will eventually ‘remember’ their Turkishness (Gündoğan 2005). Second, the education curriculum and textbooks emphasize national pride and Turkishness. Finally, all Muslim students, including Alevi, have been subject to mandatory religion courses in primary school since 1948 that exclusively teach a Sunni version of Islam. These classes are taught by teachers who have studied at Sunni Muslim religious institutions. Also, the textbooks teach Sunni practices without accommodating the differences from other belief systems. Numerous reports reveal that Alevi children were subject to teacher violence or peer harassment because they refused or failed to participate in the Sunni religious class activities, which were significantly different from Alevi practices (Kaya 2009).

By the 1958–59 school year, around 2.4 million students were attending primary schools, of which 19,379 schools were located in villages and only a small portion, 2,085 schools, were in urban areas. Over the single-party period from 1923 to 1949, primary school attendance rose gradually from 30.9 to 58.3 per cent (Robinson 1961). By 1955, almost 72 per cent of school-aged children were attending primary school. However, these numbers mask the high drop-out rates: only 35–40 per cent of primary school students could receive a primary school diploma³. Similarly, only a small portion of primary school graduates (about one in eight students) were attending secondary schools (grades 6–11)⁴. Furthermore, the gender inequality in primary school attendance was substantial. In 1959, only 42 per cent of students in urban areas and 35 per cent of students in rural areas were girls.⁵

Although the subsequent governments after the single-party era differed in political ideology, the Ministry of National Education preserved the significant importance given to the nationalist primary school curricula throughout the twentieth century (Kaplan 2013: 225).

3.3 Kurdish movement and its history

Kurdish people, an ethnic and linguistic group indigenous to the Mesopotamian plains and the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, are estimated to make up almost 20 per cent of the population. Kurds speak Kurdish, which encompasses Kurmanci, Zazaki, and other dialects. Historically, the Kurds are densely clustered in the eastern and south-eastern regions of the country, constituting the overwhelming majority. However, some native Kurdish population exists in other regions due to reasons ranging from urbanization to forced migrations of Kurdish communities from about the sixteenth century. While it is hard to estimate the exact number of the Kurdish population in urban areas, it is possible to identify the identity of villages in Turkey thanks to their longstanding and relatively stable populations. Figure 1 shows the percentage of Kurdish villages for each district in Turkey.

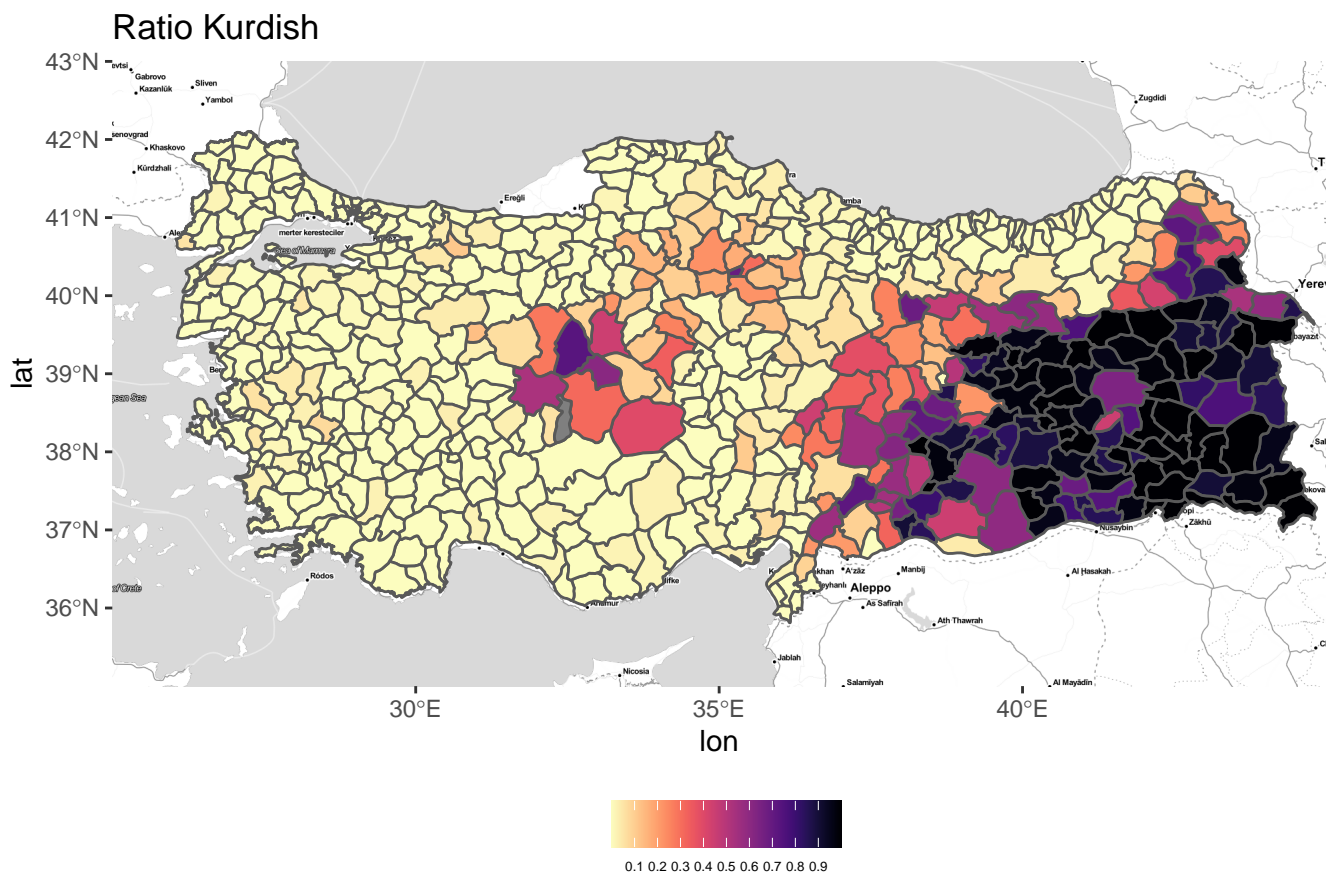
² Ersanlı (2002) presents a detailed account of the role of education in creating national identity by examining how the new Turkish national identity was presented in primary and secondary school textbooks.

³ Aylık İstatistik Bülten (İstatistik Umum Mudurluğu, Ankara, November 1956, No. 33)

⁴ Aylık İstatistik Bülten (İstatistik Umum Mudurluğu, Ankara, November 1956, No. 33)

⁵ İstatistik Yilligi, İÇ52 (İstatistik Umum Mudurluğu, Ankara, 1953), p. 159

Figure 1: Kurdish villages in Turkey



Source: authors' compilation.

Radical reforms in the Republican era did not only aim at a centralized and nationalist state, but also a very secular one. Not surprisingly, secular reforms also generated considerable resentment and backlash among religious conservatives, particularly among local Kurdish tribes with Islamist sentiments. Given the dominance of the tribal structure among the Kurdish population, a characteristic that was absent in other minority groups except for Arabs, the local flare-ups between 1925 and 1930 were mostly instigated or supported by Kurdish tribal chiefs. While most local revolts, therefore, took place in primarily Kurdish-majority areas, scholars are divided as to whether these local rebels were mainly of an anti-secular, anti-regime nature or included any Kurdish nationalist elements. In 1925, for example, an armed revolt organized by a Kurdish sheikh as a nationalist and reactionary Islamist movement aimed to restore the Sharia broke out in the eastern provinces, followed by 13 other local flare-ups until 1930 (Çağaptay 2006: 21).⁶ Similarly, in 1930, a group of dervishes initiated a riot by rallying an armed crowd against the policies of the secular government and calling for the restoration of the Sharia and the Caliphate, where the rioters ultimately beheaded the commanding officer of the responding squad (Zürcher 2017).⁷ The government took drastic measures to crush these anti-revolutionary revolts; through military presence and power, the new regime had controlled these local flare-ups by 1938.

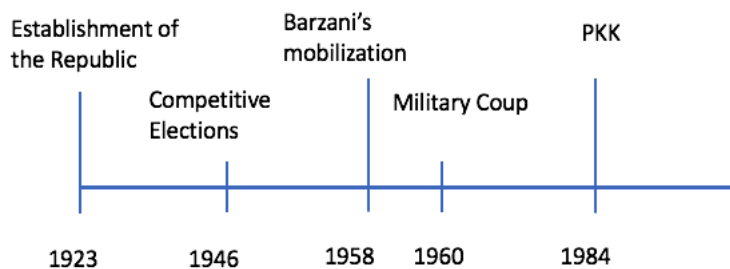
⁶ For a detailed account of *Sheikh Said's Revolt*, see Van Bruinessen (1992: chapter 5) and Türkmen (2021: chapter 1).

⁷ For more information on the *Menemen Incident*, see Azak (2010: chapter 1).

The single-party regime's nation-making efforts, though, have lasted from then until today. The Democratic Party elected in the 1950 elections portrayed itself as resentful of the elites of the Republican revolution and offered a more liberal environment to those who belonged to different factions of society. The period after 1950, of the newly formed electoral democracy, witnessed the relative accommodation of minority groups, including Kurds, into politics and economic life. This process included the integration of Kurdish tribal leaders into the cadres of political parties.

However, despite the relatively stable period in the 1950s, the political position of Kurdish minorities started to show signs of change and to evolve into a Kurdish nationalist movement. A coup d'état in neighbouring Iraq led by Abdul Karim Qasim in 1958, followed by the return of the Kurdish leader Molla Mustafa Barzani and his friends to Iraq, resulted in the recognition of all minority groups, including Kurds, in the Iraqi constitution. Their return to Iraq instigated the idea of autonomy among Iraqi Kurds, and these ideas, unsurprisingly, spread to the Kurdish populations in neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Syria. Following these events, the political pressure on Kurds started to escalate again. For example, on 17 December 1959, 52 Kurds were accused of committing separatist and nationalist activities and taken into custody. Figure 2 shows the timeline of these and the following events pertaining to Kurdish political mobilization in Turkey.

Figure 2: Timeline of Kurdish political mobilization



Source: authors' compilation.

Archival evidence demonstrates that, throughout these political processes, the Turkish state used education as one of its primary tools to increase the loyalty to the nation of Kurdish minorities. These attempts involved not only measures such as setting up schools in the eastern districts to reach out to Kurdish children, but also the Turkification of the names of the Kurdish villages and the establishment of Turkish radio broadcasting in the Kurdish-majority districts. The power of education in transforming minorities was recognized even in official government documents:

The Kurdish problem becoming an important issue for the Republic of Turkey is not because of Kurds' overwhelming majority. The main issue is that the Kurds are mostly concentrated in the eastern provinces. The Kurdish movement developed in neighboring countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria cannot be underestimated when considering the Kurdish concentration in the provinces neighboring these regions (Doğan 1958).

When discussing the measures to be taken for the eastern region, Doğan (1958) advised 'a common national atmosphere to defend the national unity' and 'the adoption of assimilationist strategies to Turkophonize the Kurds'.

Teaching Turkish to Kurdish children in the region was particularly prioritized by the government and was considered one of the most effective ways to fight the Kurdish nationalistic mobilization. In the prologue chapter written for a book attempting to prove the Turkic origin of the Kurds, the president of the military junta, Cemal Gürsel, stated that 'This work proves once again that our citizens living in Eastern Anatolia, who consider themselves separate from Turkic people because they speak a language that does not resemble Turkish, are Turks. This mistake was made because of ignorance. The scientific

evidence cannot be denied' (Firat 1961). A newspaper article by a primary school teacher published in 1967 explains how the Turkish government used primary education as a means to suppress the Kurdish nationalistic mobilization. In the article, the teacher mentions an order that was sent to all village schools by the Minister of the Interior. It reads: 'There is a secret Kurdish activity in our eastern region. The reason for this is that the eastern people do not know that they are descended from Turks. If citizens who speak Kurdish are taught that they are of Turkish descent, they will not be caught up in this separatist propaganda. Village teachers and civil servants should take on this duty' (Yön 1967).

Despite the assimilation efforts by the Turkish government, the Kurdish political movement gradually evolved into a violent insurgency. Since 1984, the Turkish government has been fighting a Kurdish insurgency campaign led by the ethnic separatist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Interrupted by short periods of ceasefires, the armed conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK has claimed more than 30,000 lives and continues today.

4 Research design

A visual description of the expansion of primary schools from 1958 to 1968 is presented in Figure 3, which demonstrates the increased levels of density in south-eastern Turkey, the region in which the Kurdish population is concentrated.

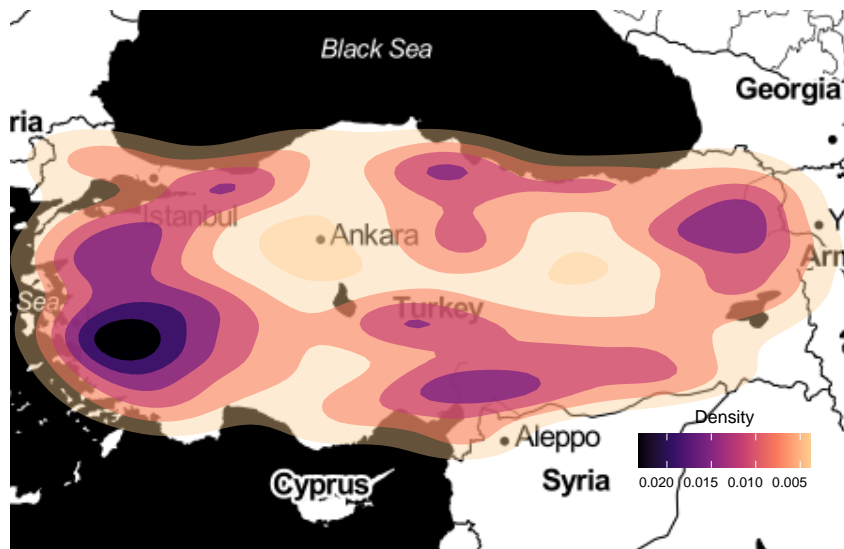
The fact that all public education investments in Turkey are made by the central government enables us to test our argument in this empirical context. Most public services in Turkey, including education, are entirely financed and administered by the central government through coordination with the local directorates of relevant ministries. The central governing body in the education sector, the Ministry of National Education, has complete control over the distribution of primary schools, with no involvement from local municipalities. The content of the primary school curriculum is also uniform across the country and directly designed by the Minister of National Education. Finally, all primary education in public schools is conducted in Turkish, with no instruction or elective courses in Kurdish until very recent years (Taylor and Skutnabb-Kangas 2009).

We rely on a panel data design employing three different sources of data to test how minorities react to the expansion of public primary schools. To measure the number of public schools in Kurdish-majority districts, we use an original dataset compiled from a rich archival inventory at the district level. This dataset includes information on the total number of primary schools and teachers in the rural units (villages) of each district. To identify Kurdish-majority districts, which determines which observations (districts) will be included in our sample, we employ an original village-level census that maps the ethnoreligious distribution of villages across Turkey (Bozcaga 2020). Finally, to see the number of insurgents per district, we use Tezcür's dataset on insurgency participation (Tezcür 2016). These data involve information on the birthplace of deceased militants, coded by the obituaries published by PKK, allowing us to measure the number of (deceased) militants from each village in a given year. Figure 4 demonstrates the distribution of the number of insurgents by birth year.

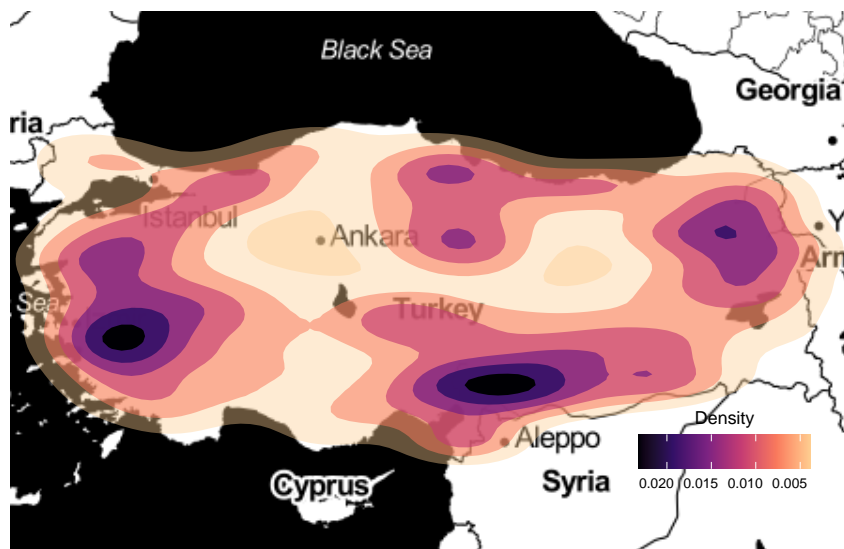
We use a two-way fixed effects estimator to account for district-level time-invariant unobserved characteristics. We also add a number of time-varying demographic and geographic control variables to our model to account for factors that may vary over time. First and foremost, while access to public services is a crucial potential source of relative deprivation and grievances, a dominant explanation of conflicts and armed rebellion in the literature, inequality in the distribution of other resources, and poverty also play crucial roles in fomenting grievances and instigating conflict (Paige 1978; Russett 1964). Therefore, we control for the amount of landless population and total cultivated land area (log) (based on the size of landholdings), for which we use the same archival inventories aggregated at the district level.

Relative deprivation, though, may not only be experienced at the individual level; the economic development of the community wherein the individual lives may also instigate grievances. Therefore, we add a second group of control variables to our model: the number of tractors and harvesters per village, as proxies of the general economic and technological development level of the district.

Figure 3: Density of primary schools across Turkey
(a) 1958

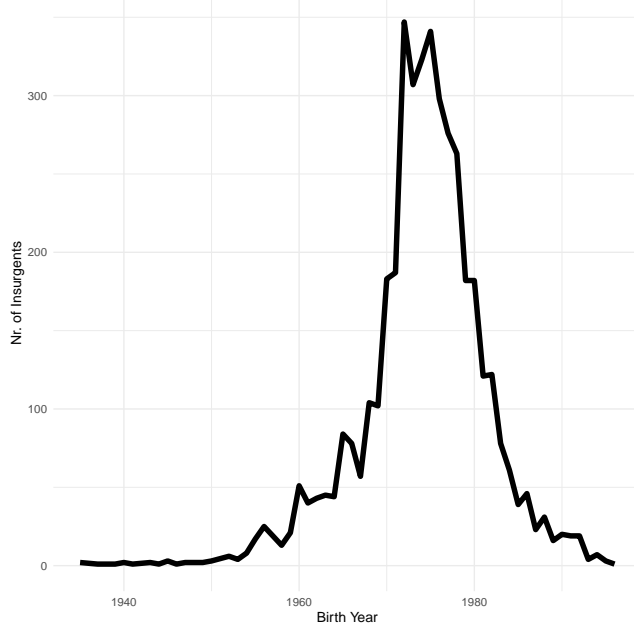


(b) 1968



Source: authors' compilation.

Figure 4: Number of insurgents by birth year



Source: authors' compilation and data from Tezcür (2016).

Finally, to what extent the expansion of primary schools would create a backlash effect on the community is contingent on whether children actually attend these schools. Given the higher school enrolment rates of male children in the region, a trend seen across the whole country during the same period, we also control for the population gap between female and male children through a ratio, which simply indicates the ratio of female children to male children. Finally, we also control for the size of the rural population in the district. The main specification thus looks as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta Schools_{it} + X_{it}\theta + \delta_i + \gamma t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{it} is an outcome for district i at time t , which is simply the number of insurgents from district i who were of primary school age at time t . $Schools_{it}$ is an indicator variable that shows the percentage of villages with a school in district i at time t . In an alternative specification where we estimate the effect of teachers, $Teachers_{it}$ shows the number of teachers with a school per village in district i at time t . γt controls for the time effect, where the first period covers insurgents born between 1945 and 1965 and the second period covers those born after 1965. δ_i indicates district fixed effects. X_{it} is a vector of time-varying district controls, including the percentage of landless farmers, total area of cultivated land, number of tractors per capita, number of harvesters per capita, sex ratio, and size of rural population. Table 1 presents summary statistics for all the variables. Error terms are clustered at the district level.

Table 1: Summary statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	Std dev.	Min	Max
nrinsurgents1	192	0.484	1.153	0	8
Schools per village	192	0.252	0.245	0.000	0.903
Teachers per village	192	0.351	0.376	0.000	1.804
Landlessness (%)	192	0.419	0.149	0.167	1.000
Dist. area farm	192	19.072	49.563	0.000	430.043
Total pop.	192	25,475.120	16,442.370	3,094	99,387
Student gender ratio	192	0.784	0.399	0.220	4.746
Harvesters per village	192	0.029	0.123	0.000	1.411
Tractors per village	192	0.123	0.495	0.000	5.744

Source: authors' compilation.

This analytical approach improves upon cross-sectional analysis on two dimensions. Crucially, the district fixed effects control for all time-invariant differences between districts, including those that are unobserved and may drive the decision to join the armed rebellion. This approach helps us to provide a more precise test of the theory in two ways. First, it captures the effect of any observed or unobserved confounders associated with primary schools and may affect the results. Second, it increases our confidence that a sort of selection bias into districts with high levels of school investment is not driving the results.

5 Results

Table 2 presents the coefficients and associated standard errors from the specification in Equation (1). The standard errors are clustered by district for arbitrary serial correlation and heteroscedasticity. The coefficient on the number of schools (and number of teachers) per village shows whether the likelihood of participating in armed rebellion increases with the number of schools (and number of teachers) in villages. We find that the coefficient on the number of schools per village is statistically significant and positive, while in the case of teachers per village the estimate is also positive but significant only at a 90 per cent confidence level. These findings suggest that primary school provision, particularly new school investments, increases the likelihood of insurgency participation. The magnitude of the increase is substantial: a one standard deviation increase in the number of schools per village (0.25) increases the number of insurgents from that district by 28 per cent.

Table 2: Primary school services per village and insurgency

	Dependent variable	
	Nr of Insurgents (log)	
	(1)	(2)
Schools per village	0.752** (0.369)	
Teachers per village		0.311* (0.182)
Landlessness (%)	-0.875** (0.429)	-0.970** (0.388)
Cultivated land (log)	-0.047 (0.033)	-0.048 (0.033)
Population (log)	-0.473* (0.255)	-0.446* (0.267)
Student gender ratio	-0.272*** (0.070)	-0.264*** (0.068)
Harvesters per village	-0.472 (0.334)	-0.603* (0.331)
Tractors per village	0.053 (0.101)	0.097 (0.101)
District FE	Yes	Yes
Time FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.679	0.674
Adjusted R^2	0.304	0.292
Residual std error (df = 88)	0.397	0.400

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

Source: authors' calculations.

5.1 Pre-1945 levels in education investments

To provide more causal leverage to our findings and interpret β as a causal effect, we also investigate whether our data contradict the standard panel data 'parallel trends' assumptions. More specifically,

we need to check the possibility that the expansion in primary schools is confounded with trends in insurgent participation. For example, if the state invested more in primary schools in districts with higher insurgency participation, this would bias the estimates of schools' impact. We cannot completely rule this out with our data, as the earliest insurgent birth date in our dataset is 1938, which prevents us observing any 'pre-treatment' trends. Nonetheless, we provide evidence that the local tribal revolts in the pre-1945 era in a district do not predict the number of primary school investments in that district. While limited in our ability to perform a test for parallel trends in other relevant dimensions due to data constraints, we show that there are no differences across districts with a low or high number of anti-regime tribes that participated in the local revolts in the pre-1945 era in a district. In other words, examining the predictors of the education investments in 1945, we provide evidence that districts with a higher number of anti-regime tribes do not receive more education investments compared to other districts, controlling for the same control variables in the main model, as well as province-level fixed effects (Table 3).

Table 3: Primary school services per village and insurgency

	Schools per village (1)	Teachers per village (2)
Anti-regime tribes	0.004 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)
Landlessness (%)	-0.032 (0.033)	-0.039 (0.043)
Cultivated land (log)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Population (log)	0.018 (0.014)	0.037* (0.019)
Student gender ratio	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.016* (0.009)
Harvesters per village	1.286 (1.440)	2.779 (2.228)
Tractors per village	0.653 (0.750)	1.579 (1.187)
Constant	-0.121 (0.139)	-0.283 (0.188)
Province FE	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	95	95
<i>R</i> ²	0.240	0.381
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.188	0.339
Residual std error (df = 88)	0.043	0.058

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

Source: authors' calculations.

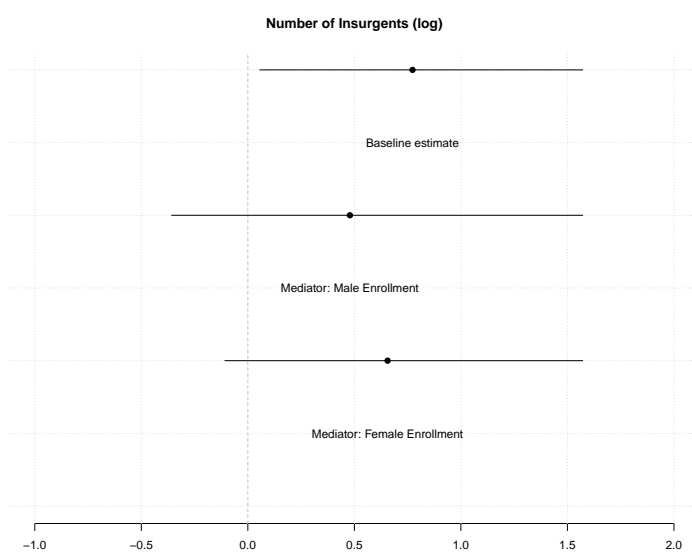
5.2 Sequential g-estimation

In addition to the main empirical findings, we also present the results of an additional analysis where we examine whether the effect of primary school provision on insurgency participation weakens when we treat school enrolment rates as a mediator variable. If the education system based on national curricula in the national language indeed creates a backlash effect and leads to higher insurgency participation rates, it should foremost do so in districts where school enrolment rates are high. In other words, at least some part of the effect of primary school should be mediated by school enrolment rates (indirect effect), implying that the *direct* effect of primary schools should attenuate when this mediator effect is incorporated into the model. To deal with this, we implement the sequential g-estimator (Acharya et al. 2016), which, in short, estimates the controlled direct effect as well as the mediated effect of schools on the number of insurgents. It does so by first estimating the effect of enrolment rates on the outcome, controlling for everything else, and then transforming the outcome variable by subtracting this effect of enrolment. This enables us to see to what extent the effect of schools is through school enrolments—that

is, through direct exposure to education. Our models include the full set of controls as well as district fixed effects, as in Table 2.

Figure 5 presents the coefficients on the number of insurgents from three models: (1) the baseline model of primary school provision with all the control variables; (2) the second stage of sequential g-estimation using male school enrolment rates as a mediator; and (3) the second stage of sequential g-estimation using female school enrolment rates as a mediator. When the indirect effect through the mediator variables, school enrolment rates, is taken into account, the coefficient on the number of insurgents diminishes in magnitude and loses statistical significance. The change is particularly strong when male school enrolment rates are treated as a mediator, a finding we should expect given the higher insurgency participation rates among males. This suggests that a substantial portion of the effect of the expansion in primary school investments indeed operates through school enrolment rates—that is, through direct exposure to the national education curriculum.

Figure 5: Coefficients from the sequential g-estimate model



Source: authors' calculations.

5.3 Extended analysis

In this section, we assess an alternative explanation. As discussed above, there were some local flare-ups in the first years of the Republic, the majority of which were instigated or supported by tribal chiefs. These revolts took place by and large in the Kurdish-majority areas of the country, due to the dominance of the tribal structure in Kurdish society, a characteristic that was absent in other minority groups except for Arabs. While scholars may be divided about the main motivation of these revolts, among which we can list tribal chiefs' opposition to centralization and state-building, opposition to secularism, or a demand for autonomy stemming from Kurdish nationalist sentiments, it might be the case that education investments were targeted primarily to those areas with a history of tribal revolts. Specifically, it might be the case that our results simply derive from the increase in insurgency participation in places with previous tribal revolts. If the geographical variation of tribal revolts is correlated with the spatial variations in education investments, the effect of education investments on future insurgency participation, our main parameter of interest, might simply result from this spurious correlation.

To address this potential alternative explanation, we re-examine our main models and incorporate the time-varying impact of past tribal revolts as well as their interactive effect with education investments. Specifically, we first examine whether the time-varying impact of the presence of anti-regime tribes in the district predicts the increases in insurgent participation. Next, we examine whether primary school

education leads to a higher increase in insurgent participation in districts with a larger number of anti-regime tribes. We measure the presence of anti-regime tribes by a continuous measure that indicates the number of anti-regime tribes in the district, as identified by a given tribe's (past) participation in tribal revolts in the early years of the Republic. The data for this variable comes from an intelligence report compiled in the early 1980s that involves information on participation in revolts for each tribe, which was published in 2014 (Perincek 2014). While the objectivity of the information in this report might be questionable, it gives us direct evidence about which tribes were perceived as a threat by the state.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 4 show the results for the model where we examine whether our main estimates remain significant when the time-varying impact of the presence of anti-regime tribes on insurgent participation is controlled for. Models 3 and 4 in Table 4 show whether primary school education leads to a higher increase in insurgent participation in districts with a larger number of anti-regime tribes compared to districts with a lower number of anti-regime tribes.

Table 4: Primary school services per village and insurgency

	Dependent variable:			
	Nr of insurgents (log)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Schools per village	0.790** (0.364)		1.040*** (0.394)	
Teachers per village		0.363* (0.186)		0.492** (0.221)
Anti-regime tribes × time period	-0.031 (0.027)	-0.035 (0.027)		
Schools per village × anti-regime tribes			-0.084 (0.054)	
Teachers per village × anti-regime tribes				-0.045 (0.033)
Landlessness (%)	-0.855** (0.429)	-0.955** (0.378)	-0.845* (0.436)	-0.983** (0.382)
Cultivated land (log)	-0.044 (0.032)	-0.047 (0.032)	-0.044 (0.032)	-0.047 (0.033)
Population (log)	-0.442* (0.250)	-0.408 (0.261)	-0.439* (0.252)	-0.425 (0.264)
Student gender ratio	-0.260*** (0.070)	-0.253*** (0.068)	-0.258*** (0.069)	-0.255*** (0.068)
Harvesters per village	-0.456 (0.349)	-0.576* (0.341)	-0.457 (0.356)	-0.501 (0.367)
Tractors per village	0.034 (0.106)	0.070 (0.107)	0.022 (0.108)	0.050 (0.115)
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	192	192	192	192
R^2	0.684	0.679	0.685	0.678
Adjusted R^2	0.306	0.296	0.309	0.293
Residual std error (df = 87)	0.396	0.399	0.395	0.400

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

Source: authors' calculations.

We find that, even after controlling for the time-varying impact of anti-regime tribes, our coefficients of interest showing the effect of the expansion of education investments on insurgency participation remain statistically significant. If anything, the substantive effect of the number of schools and teachers per village gets stronger, where the former increases from 0.752 to 0.79 and the latter increases from 0.311 to 0.363. Equally importantly, the statistically insignificant interaction terms in Models 3 and 4 imply that the effect of the expansion of education investments is not driven by insurgent participation in districts with a larger number of anti-regime tribes. These findings raise our confidence in our main findings by providing evidence that it is not an increase in insurgency participation in places with previous tribal

revolts, which could potentially be correlated with the targeting of education investments, that derives the effect of education investments on insurgent participation.

6 Discussion

The expansion of public services in the nation-states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides us with an important opportunity to examine their implications for various economic, social, and political outcomes. However, their implications are not limited to the social welfare of citizens or even their trust in the state and state legitimacy. In line with this view, many studies show that when inequalities in access to public services overlap with identity-based cleavages, inequality in access to these services can instigate ethnic or other identity-based conflicts in a country.

However, this study shows that the expansion of public services in the education sector may provide us with a different story. If the content of the education curriculum is not pluralistic and poses a threat to the identity of minority groups by excluding them from the content, the expansion of primary education can instead create the opposite effect and further foment the grievances of minorities. For this reason, we argue that, especially in contexts where the education curriculum does not have a pluralistic nature, the expansion of public education, particularly primary schools, can increase the likelihood of support for insurgency groups affiliated with these minority groups and insurgency participation. Combining original archival and geocoded datasets on the education infrastructure and ethnic identity of rural areas in mid-twentieth-century Turkey, we demonstrate that an increase in the number of schools in rural areas indeed leads to a substantial increase in the number of insurgents from that area. Nonetheless, this analysis also suggests scope conditions for the positive effect of primary school provision on insurgency participation: we expect that this effect should be most pronounced in countries where the state follows an assimilationist instead of an accommodative strategy and ignores the demographic diversity and ethnic differences in the education sector.

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