

Beyond the Classroom? Primary Schools and Rural Civic Participation

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Abstract

What aids governments in establishing centralized political authority and gaining legitimacy among rural populations? We hypothesize that primary schools in rural communities play a pivotal role in enhancing state legitimacy through teachers, who serve as knowledgeable state representatives that offer assistance and guidance to local villagers in addition to educating children. We empirically test this by employing a unique dataset from early Republican-era Turkey (1927-1933) that contains information on petitions and primary schools. Using a differences-in-differences design, however, we show that establishing primary schools does not increase civic engagement with the state, evidenced by the likelihood of villagers submitting petitions to the national assembly. These findings hold after accounting for various village-level geographic variables, ruling party organization, and other potential confounders. We contend that in environments characterized by limited development and inhabited by populations where language barriers and perception of state bias against them precludes them from initiating relations with the center, teachers struggle to “build” states.

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1 Introduction

Setting up a strong, unified central authority with a reach into rural peripheries yields profound and long-lasting impacts on the economic, social, and political landscapes (Berwick and Christia, 2018; Boone, 1994). However, in most developing contexts where the state's resources are constrained, a robust state presence, control, and monopolization of political power in rural areas have traditionally been rare, rather than commonplace (Migdal, 1988). Often, local elites maintain their grip on political, social, and fiscal authority, regardless of the state's efforts to consolidate and monopolize its capacity. So, how exactly do governments attain centralized political control and legitimacy over rural populations?

In this paper, we argue that primary schools in rural communities can serve the purpose of enhancing the state's capacity. While recent studies in the political economy of education underscore the connection between state capacity and the expansion of primary education, their focus often remains on the direct impact through children's education (Paglayan, 2017, 2021). Moving beyond this perspective, we argue that primary schools foster a link between rural communities and the central government through teachers as knowledgeable state representatives embedded in these communities. Through this mechanism, the presence of primary schools fulfils a role that goes beyond the confines of traditional classroom instruction.

In many rural contexts, apart from law enforcement officers and tax collectors, who are typically viewed with disdain, primary school teachers are often the first state representatives villagers encounter. These teachers impart not only educational knowledge to school-aged children, but also socio-political and economic insights to adults. As such, we argue that their presence serves to bolster the relationship between rural inhabitants and the central government through daily, non-threatening and low-risk interactions. Through these interactions, teachers enlighten villagers about their legal rights against traditionally dominant

landlords, tax collectors who make unjust land assessments, and security forces who extract bribes through intimidation and threats. Furthermore, teachers assist villagers in engaging with the state by utilizing tools available to them such as writing petitions and visiting government offices. This support is especially vital in areas where the state has minimal or no presence at the village level. Hence, in this role, village teachers penetrate societal barriers, overcome the prevalent social and political isolation in rural communities, and enable formal interactions between the state and society.

We test this theory using a unique dataset from the early Republican era in Turkey (1927-1933). This dataset comprises data of village primary schools, petitions sent from villages to the national parliament and other village-level economic, social, and political indicators. We employ a differences-in-differences design to ascertain the causal effect of primary school establishment on rural civic engagement, which is quantified as the likelihood of a villager submitting a petition to the national assembly. We find that the establishment of a primary school does not increase state capacity and political power in villages, measured as the probability of submitting a petition to the central government. These results hold after controlling for a set of village-level geographic variables: cotton, wheat, and tobacco yields, mean temperature and precipitation, and distance to the closest road, to the train station, to the capital, and to the province and district centers. Lastly, we also include the presence of the ruling party organization and post offices as potential confounders. We complement our difference-in-difference estimations with LASSO to ascertain variables that impact petition writing in a cross section. We find that structural variables, such as electricity infrastructure, or socio-economic characteristics of the villagers, such as the language of the rural populace, is more effective in estimating the likelihood that a petition is written than the presence of schools.

The theory and findings presented in this article not only enhance our comprehension of the political implications of brick-and-mortar public service providers in rural communities

but also contribute to ongoing discussions about how the proliferation of primary education influences state capacity. Studies in the field of political economy of education and development usually posit that states establish schools as a part of a nation-building and assimilation strategy or in an effort to enhance state capacity and exert control over difficult-to-govern populations (Bozcaga and Cansunar, 2021; Paglayan, 2017, 2021). However, these perspectives primarily address the supply aspect, neglecting to explore whether investments in schools actually boost state capacity and legitimacy. This paper shows that, in the very early stages of state building, primary schools and teachers fail to play the functional role of state bureaucrats, specifically in their role as a link between citizens and political institutions. The state’s goals of using education and inputting teachers to lend power to the state and enhance its capacity do not seem to be met in the early state formation years. Rather, the results in this paper reveal that the initial structural and geographic determinants as well as the ethnic characteristics of the villages are the determining factors; villages with majority Kurdish-speaking population is less likely to engage in petition writing, while villages with better infrastructure and higher agricultural (cotton and wheat) yield are more likely to engage in petition writing. Thus, despite the state’s efforts in reaching distant areas to establish legitimacy through schooling, their efforts are more likely to succeed in areas with predominantly Turkish population and more developed areas, suggesting that it is the predetermined structural factors that drive the effect of the state’s effort and not the reverse.

2 Theory

The provision of costly public goods in autocratic settings is puzzling due to the lack of electoral incentives to do so. Provision of education as a public good is particularly puzzling as educated populace tends to favor the establishment of a democratic system (Huntington, 1993; Lipset et al., 1960), presenting a threat to an autocratic regime (Acemoglu and

Robinson, 2000). Scholars have found that autocracies invest in public education as part of nation-building goals; some of these goals include the need for loyal and skilled workers among the growing urban middle class (Gellner, 1983; Green and Green, 1990) and to address a threat by an out-group, to assimilate and co-opt the same (Bozcaga and Cansunar, 2021; Paglayan, 2021) as well as the need to fight inter-state wars (Aghion et al., 2019).

Autocracies also invest in public education to centralize political control and enhance state capacity and legitimacy (Paglayan, 2017). Schools serve as a link between the central government and distant, rural areas. Teachers, in the capacity as state representatives, serve as important political and social actors. Beyond their role in shaping societies by imparting knowledge on school-aged children and transmitting cultural values and identities (Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1982), they also serve a more functional role as knowledgeable state representatives in service to their communities. Since teachers live within the communities they serve, they are commonly the ones with whom villagers interact with and from whom villagers seek guidance. Teachers, like nurses and tax collectors, are “front-line workers” that are in direct connection to citizens in their daily activities (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017). Moreover, given that the other groups of state representatives are predominantly local officials, dominants landlords, tax collectors, or security forces, comparatively, teachers are the trusted “street-level bureacuracts” from whom villagers can obtain information and resources through low-risk interactions. In this way, teachers are “interstitial elites” (Watkins, 2017), who not only provide relief to villagers by providing essential information for their well-being, but they also have the expertise and capacity to connect and strengthen the relationship between the central government and the rural population. Teachers have historically fulfilled this role across time and societies (Vaughan, 1997), assisting civilians in universalizing their local needs to state-level discourse.

One way that teachers can provide assistance to villagers is by helping them utilize tools available to them in connecting with the state. One such tool is petitioning the central gov-

ernment to express dissatisfaction, request assistance or remedy for a social or legal situation, or make a claim. Petitions have been historically used as instruments of civic engagement. Individuals use petitions to interact with the government, express their grievances or principles of belief, draw the government’s attention to everyday issues, and signal a ruler of collective need or dissatisfaction (Carpenter, 2016). Petitions can be part of the “political participation” or “contentious politics”, depending on the nature and the score of petitioning (Brady, Schlozman and Verba, 1999; Caren, Ghoshal and Ribas, 2011; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). In both forms, petitions have been pivotal in the political development of many nations – both republican and monarchical Europe (Carpenter, 2016; Lueders, 2022), North America (Carpenter, 2021; Carpenter and Schneer, 2015; Nall, Schneer and Carpenter, 2018), communist Eastern Europe (Dimitrov, 2014), and continue to serve as important political instrument in modern times (Dimitrov, 2015; Li, Liu and O’Brien, 2012).

In societies with democratic governance, the incentive of elections creates the responsiveness to citizens’ demands, some of which are expressed through petitions (Mayhew, 1987). However, in uncontested autocracies, a government arguably does not have the incentive to encourage or respond to citizens’ demands. Moreover, expressing dissatisfaction or outright rejecting a particular state claim while also identifying oneself publicly through petitions is risky for individuals in these autocratic settings. Yet, curiously, petitioning was and continues to be a common practice in closed autocracies (Carpenter, 2021; Chen, Pan and Xu, 2016; Pan, 2020). Scholars argue that autocratic governments use petitioning as a “barometer of popular opinion,” to help them understand the state of citizen satisfaction as a less costlier tool than preventing a larger public dissent due to mounting citizens’ dissatisfaction (Dimitrov, 2014). Petitions are also useful for dictators in understanding whether fear or conviction drives support for the regime (Wintrobe, 2000) and to resolve the information problem of preference falsification, the roots of dictators’ insecurity (Kuran, 1991). In this way, petitions, particularly those that do not require canvassing and collection of signatories,

allow dictators to gain knowledge about their citizens and to meet citizens' demands "quietly," mitigating the possibility of an eventual larger unrest. Finally, petitions also provide information to the central government about the performance of local officials; in a large territory where lack of resources prevents the government for a robust presence, control, and monopolization of political power in distant and rural areas, petitions provide information of local performance and areas that need government's attention. Responding to demands in petitions can assure citizens' competence in the regime (Gorgulu, Sharafutdinova and Steinbuks, 2020; Lueders, 2022), increase their trust in the government (Chapman, 2021), improve monitoring of local officials, and help build legitimacy for the regime in the process. In all these ways, petitioning enhances state capacity and legitimacy, and our argument is that teachers are the conduit to these outcomes.

In Republican Turkey, petitioning was a common administrative channel through which citizens expressed their opinions, complaints, and needs. This practice had started during the Ottoman Empire as a way to promote the "sultan's image as the ultimate guardian of justice and sole protector of the weak" (Akin, 2007:437) and lend legitimacy to his rule. Moreover, these petitions, whose early forms came in the shape of complaints, appeals, and decrees, were also used to monitor local abuses and detect any disobedience of imperial orders, strengthening state capacity in monitoring and sanctioning disobedience (Karateke, 2005). During the republican period, the petitioning process was institutionalized and the right to petition was granted with the 1924 constitution; the Petitions Commission of the Grand National Assembly was the institutional body where petitioners could submit their requests. Especially in the context of this period, where the authoritarian circumstances did not allow for other forms of expressing popular opinion, petitioning was one mode of interaction between the elites and the people and was a tool used to mediate between "political elites' need for political legitimacy and people's concerns regarding their social, political, and economic experiences" (Akin, 2007:442). However, writing petitions requires literacy. Quali-

tative evidence also shows that often, petitioners had to be very creative in how they crafted their political and social personae in these petitions in order to have their requests fulfilled; in addition to referencing personal deprivations and need, petitioners had to carefully craft the letters to reflect “private” demands interwoven with public and national importance (Akin, 2007). Moreover, state responses to societal demands had class, educational, religious, and ethnic biases (Lamprou, 2017), hence the need for careful crafting of petitions. Teachers, who became increasingly important with the education reforms in Republican Turkey, could arguably be the much needed assistance villagers needed in coaching and instructing in writing petitions.

2.1 Primary School Education in Turkey

The Ottoman Empire started its education reforms in the early nineteenth century, when struggles between the reformers and ulema, teachers in the traditional religious school system, started. During Mahmud II’s era (1808- 1839), state education was extended to the civilian population. Although a Ministry of 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.

A significant shift occurred in 1913 when primary schools transitioned from the oversight of ulema and waqfs (religious charitable endowments) to being administered by the Ministry of Education, thanks to the Provisional Law of Elementary Education. Nevertheless, traditional elementary schools (known as "sıbyan mektebi") coexisted with modern schools, maintaining their status as centers of higher Islamic learning and receiving respect from the Muslim population. Simultaneously, there was some indifference or even hostility

towards modern state schools. Despite these modernization efforts, which primarily aimed to secularize elementary education during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, modern elementary institutions were primarily limited to major cities. Most villages in the periphery lacked access to modern educational institutions and trained teachers.

The aftermath of World War I saw the Ottoman Empire's defeat and the occupation and partition of the country by the Allied Powers. In May 1919, Mustafa Kemal, a former Ottoman military officer, initiated efforts to unify various local resistance organizations among the Muslim population in Anatolia into a cohesive national movement. Most Ottoman generals and their troops, who overwhelmingly supported the resistance, joined forces with local resistance groups in Anatolia, smuggling weapons and ammunition from the Ottoman army. The Great National Assembly in Ankara was formed with representatives elected by local branches of the resistance movement, combined with some former members of the Ottoman parliament, following the British occupation of Istanbul in March 1920 (Zürcher, 2017).

Through a series of military victories, the Turkish resistance army succeeded in expelling Greek, British, Italian, and French forces by late 1922. In November 1922, members of the parliament in Ankara abolished the Ottoman Sultanate, and in July 1923, they negotiated a peace treaty with the Allies. The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey occurred on October 29, 1923, marking the beginning of the single-party rule of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP)) until 1950, with Mustafa Kemal serving as the first president of the Republic until his death in 1938.

The proclamation of the Republic was accompanied by a comprehensive series of top-down secularization, nation-building, and modernization reforms. In 1924, the parliament abolished the caliphate, the ministry of Sharia law, and religious seminaries, followed by the closure of religious shrines in the subsequent year. Sharia courts were replaced with the Swiss civil code and the Italian penal code in 1926 (Azak, 2010). The second article of the 1924 Constitution, which declared Islam as the state's official religion, was removed, and

in 1928, the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic script. These reforms laid the groundwork for secular movements in the Middle East in the twentieth century that aimed to separate religion from public life¹.

After 1923, Turkey became more religiously homogeneous compared to the pre-World War I Ottoman Empire. However, the remaining Muslim population was ethnolinguistically and culturally diverse, partly due to Muslim Ottoman migrations from lost territories. Apart from Kurdish Muslims, who lived under Ottoman rule and constituted nearly 20 percent of the post-World War I population, Anatolia saw more than 7 million immigrants, including Greek, Serbian, Macedonian, and Bosnian Muslims, between 1856 and 1914 (Akgündüz, 1998). In 1924, due to a population exchange between Greece and Turkey, an additional 350,000 Muslims migrated from Greece².

During the War of Independence, religion was emphasized as a unifying factor among these ethnically and culturally diverse groups to foster a "rally around the flag" effect and encourage various factions of the Muslim community to participate in the resistance against Western powers. However, with the absence of an Islamist state and a ruling caliph, a departure from the traditional use of Islam as a unifying factor posed a significant challenge to the political elite. For the first time since the Ottoman Sultan's claim to the caliphate in 1539, it became increasingly difficult to rely on Islam to unite and stabilize these diverse populations (Azak, 2010).

Predictably, the radical reforms initiated considerable resentment and backlash among religious conservatives. In 1925, an armed revolt led by a Kurdish Sheikh, acting as a nationalist and reactionary Islamist movement with the aim of restoring Sharia law, erupted

¹Other instances of assertive secularism can be observed in countries like Iran under the Pahlavis (1925-1978), Tunisia under Bourgiba and Ben-Ali (1957-2011), Egypt under Nasser (1952-1970), and Baathist Iraq (1968-2003).

²According to the 1927 census, a significant portion of the population did not speak Turkish. That year, 86.42 percent spoke Turkish, while 13.58 percent spoke other languages such as Kurdish, Arabic, Greek, Armenian, Bosnian, and Judeo-Spanish (İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, 1928).

in the Eastern provinces. This was followed by 13 other local uprisings until 1930(Çağaptay, 2006:p.21)³. Similarly, in 1930, a group of dervishes initiated a riot, rallying an armed crowd against the policies of the secular government and calling for the restoration of Sharia and the Caliphate. During the riot, the commanding officer of the responding squad was ultimately beheaded by the rioters(Zürcher, 2017)⁴. In response, the government implemented martial law and silenced growing political opposition⁵.

Backlash among religious conservatives or ethnic minorities was not the only problem the new regime was experiencing. In fact, backlashes and uprisings were rare, albeit difficult, events. Most of the rural population was simply oblivious to the regime change, the new government in Ankara, and the reforms. The extent to which it was hard to establish the legitimacy of the new regime and inform the rural population of the political changes can be traced in one of the inspection reports written by Türkan Baştuğ, a member of parliament, in 1935. She writes,

To closely witness the life of the villagers in these places is to grant a person both the greatest hope and suffering. When we expressed our desire to inquire about and understand their needs, the villagers said, 'May Allah grant a long life to our Sultan.' Despite my efforts to explain the absence of a Sultan and the current political situation in a language they could comprehend, they did not understand. I tried to find a historical reference to remind them of the events (related to the War of Independence and the new regime). They managed to find one with great difficulty. From that point on, I narrated the events in the simplest language and, when explaining the current administrative style, reforms, and our own role, the

³For a detailed account of the Sheikh Said's Revolt, refer to Van Bruinessen (1992:Chapter 5) and Türkmen (2021:Chapter 1).

⁴For more information on the Menemen Incident, see Azak (2010:Chapter 1).

⁵For more information on the multiparty politics experiment of 1930, the impact of the Great Depression on political discontent, and the Free Republican Party, refer to Emrence (2000).

villagers once again said, 'May Allah grant a long life to our Sultan'.⁶

The CHP (Republican People's Party) saw primary education as the key tool for disseminating their principles and, as a result, for instilling the nation-state project and the new regime's legitimacy in the minds of the people.⁷ Consequently, Turkey's education system underwent complete unification in 1924 through the Law for the Unification of Instruction (Tevhid-i Tedrisat), just one year after the establishment of modern Turkey. Simultaneously, a series of secularization reforms were implemented during the same period. These reforms marked the end of the caliphate, abolished the Ministry for Waqfs, and prohibited all medreses (religious schools). The Ministry of Education assumed control over all educational institutions, including private and 'foreign' ones. Additionally, these reforms strictly prohibited any form of religious propaganda or the display of religious symbols. In essence, the educational reforms progressed alongside and were integral to the nation-building and state-building agenda. By building schools and placing teachers in rural areas, the regime's goals were to reach into these distant areas and install knowledge of the changes that the Republic had endured and instill legitimacy for the new regime. Having teachers and other state representatives as "state-level bureaucrats" that have daily and trusted interactions with villagers was an intentional goal for building state capacity and legitimacy. Did these goals materialize as intended?

3 Empirical Strategy

To test the effect of schools on the probability of writing a petition to the central government, we compiled an original dataset that includes Turkey's villages for the years 1927-1933 – a period marked by the new Turkish government's extensive efforts to enhance its capacity

⁶BCA 490.1.0.0/618.28.1

⁷Childress (2002) provides a comprehensive account of the role of education in shaping national identity, examining how the new Turkish national identity was portrayed in primary and secondary school textbooks.

and legitimacy amid religious and ethnic uprisings. Our unit of analysis is the village-year and the number of observations is 135,848.

3.1 Dependent Variable

Our main dependent variable is whether a petition was sent to the national parliament from a village in a given year. We measure this variable by coding the petition archives of the National Parliament of Turkey for the petitions written in the years 1927, 1928, 1931, and 1935. The petition archives contain information on the sender’s name, their occupation, and their address. They also contain information on the petition’s content, as well as how the government responded to the petition. We matched petitions with villages based on province names, district names, and village names.

We only focus on petitions that were sent to the parliament from rural villages. We identified 2,885 unique petitions sent to the parliament in 1927, 1928, 1931, and 1935. Only 198 of these petitions were sent from the villages to the parliament over the course of four years under examination. These numbers reveal that a petition from a village to the parliament was a rare event.

3.2 Treatment

In our main specification, the treatment involves the establishment of a primary school either within the village itself or in close proximity to the village. We recorded the establishment dates of each village school using a primary source published by the Ministry of Education, titled ‘Information about city, town, and village primary schools affiliated with the Directorate of Primary Education’ (*İlköğretim Genel Müdürlüğüne bağlı şehir, kasaba, köy ilkokulları ve bu okullara ait bazı bilgiler*), which lists the establishment dates of each village school until 1963. We matched these village schools with our village data to determine

whether a village had a primary school in the year under investigation.

3.3 Control variables

We employ a comprehensive set of control variables to account for variations that could potentially influence the impact of schools on petition behavior. The initial set of control variables pertains to village-level characteristics, encompassing factors such as total population, the male-to-female population ratio, proximity to the nearest post office (1923), proximity to the nearest road (1927), proximity to the nearest railway station (1927), elevation, average temperature, average precipitation, wheat yield, tobacco yield, cotton yield, and distance to the nearest urban center. Population data is sourced from the 1927 Census, while geographical data is derived from maps housed in the National Archives of Turkey. We also integrate control variables indicating village accessibility through distance to the nearest post office and the presence of a party organization. Additionally, we factor in the development score of the nearest urban centers, which is calculated based on government development reports containing information on population, economic activity, and infrastructure. Notably, we utilize Chat GPT 4 to generate development scores on a scale of 1 to 10 based on these reports. We also use district-level controls for the share of Kurdish speakers to control for how the presence of ethnic minorities impact civic engagement.

3.4 Estimation

This paper uses a difference-in-differences (DID) design that looks at the effect of primary schools on the probability of a petition being sent from a village to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. We compare differences in the probability of sending a petition in the post-elementary school period, relative to the pre-elementary school period. Our baseline

specification is as follows:

$$Post_{it} = \beta(School_i \times Post_t) + \theta(x_i \times Post_t) + \tau_t + \gamma_d + \mu_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

The coefficient of interest, β , measures the change in the likelihood of a village sending a petition to the parliament (relative to the villages without schools) after they receive a school (relative to before). We define $School_i$ in two different ways depending on the specification. First, we construct $School_i$ as a binary variable that takes the value of one if village i had a school, and $(School_i \times Post_t)$ is the interaction between the minority and a post-shock dummy that takes the value one for periods after the establishment of an elementary school, zero otherwise. In some specifications, $School_i$ refers to whether there is a school in close proximity to the village i .

The estimate $(x_i \times Post_t)$ represents the interaction between a vector of time-invariant village-level characteristics (the percentage of Kurdish speakers in the district, population of the village, distance to the capital, distance to the closest post office, distance to the closest road, distance to the closest rail station, elevation, mean temperature, mean precipitation, wheat yield, tobacco yield, cotton yield, whether there is a CHP organization at the sub-district level, male to female population ratio at the village level, whether the district is a central district within the province, development index of the closest urban center, and the distance to the closest urban center) and the post-treatment dummy. τ_t is the year-fixed effects that account for any time-specific factors that apply equally to all villages in a year. Finally, we include the more general village-level fixed effects (μ_i). We always cluster our standard errors at the village level.

4 Results

We present the main results in Table 1. In Models 1 and 4, we use the establishment of a school in the village as a treatment, where as in Models 2 and 5, and in Models 3 and 6 we use the establishment of a school within 5 kms of the village and the establishment of a school in the subdistrict as treatments respectively. Across all specifications we find that a new school does not impact the probability of a village sending a petition to the Grand National Assembly. These results are robust to different fixed effects (village or district).

In response to recent concerns regarding the weighting of treatment estimates in multiperiod difference-in-differences analysis using two-way fixed effects, (see [Goodman-Bacon \(2021\)](#)), we employ alternative aggregation procedures to estimate the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) of schools on the probability of petition submission.

In Figure 1, we present the results from three distinct types of ATT aggregation proposed by [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#). In addition to employing different aggregation methods, our model excludes villages that received treatment (i.e., had a school) in the initial period, specifically in the year 1927.

Plot A considers the establishment of a school in the sub-district as the treatment, while Plot B defines the treatment as the establishment of a school within a 5 km radius of the village. Once again, our findings indicate that the presence of a school, regardless of how it is defined as a treatment, does not have a statistically significant impact on petition-writing behavior.

Lastly, we use LASSO variable selection procedure to determine the set of prognostic covariates that impact petition writing limiting our data to 1928. The results are shown in Figure 2. The blue line shows the optimal lambda parameter. At the optimal lambda, wheat yield (+), cotton yield (+), the proportion of the district whose mother tongue is Kurdish (-), and the electricity infrastructure in the closest urban center (+) to the village impact

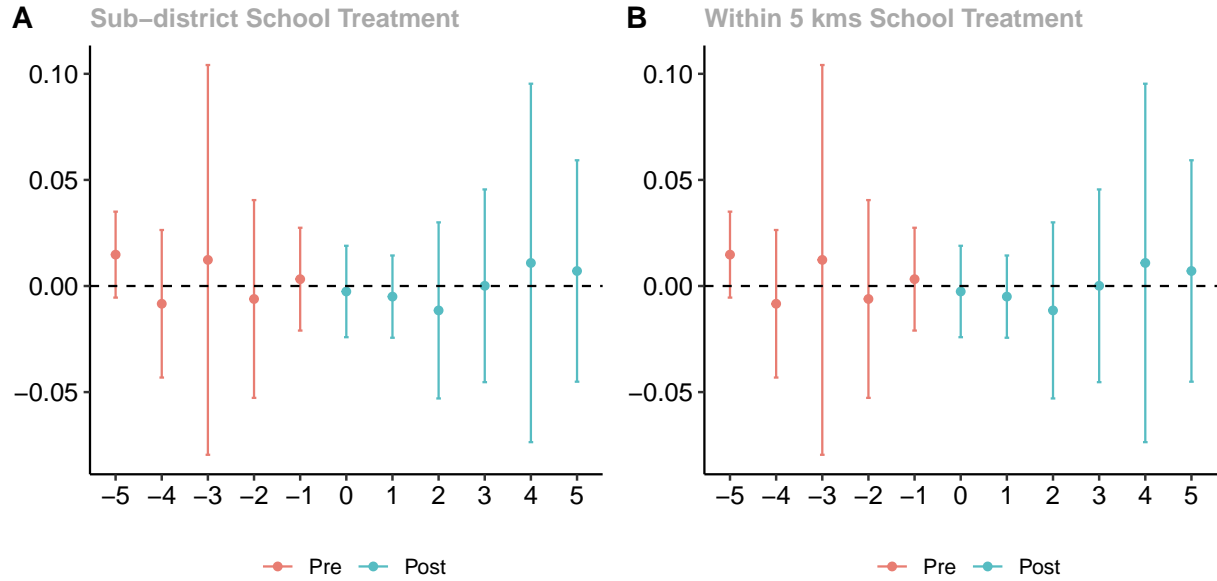


Figure 1: Callaway and Sant'Anna estimators for multiperiod staggered difference-in-differences models.

the petition-writing. Thus, these results show that geographic determinants of development or ethnic characteristics of the population are more effective in determining the probability of writing a petition than state capacity indicating variables such as schools, roads, train stations, and post-offices.

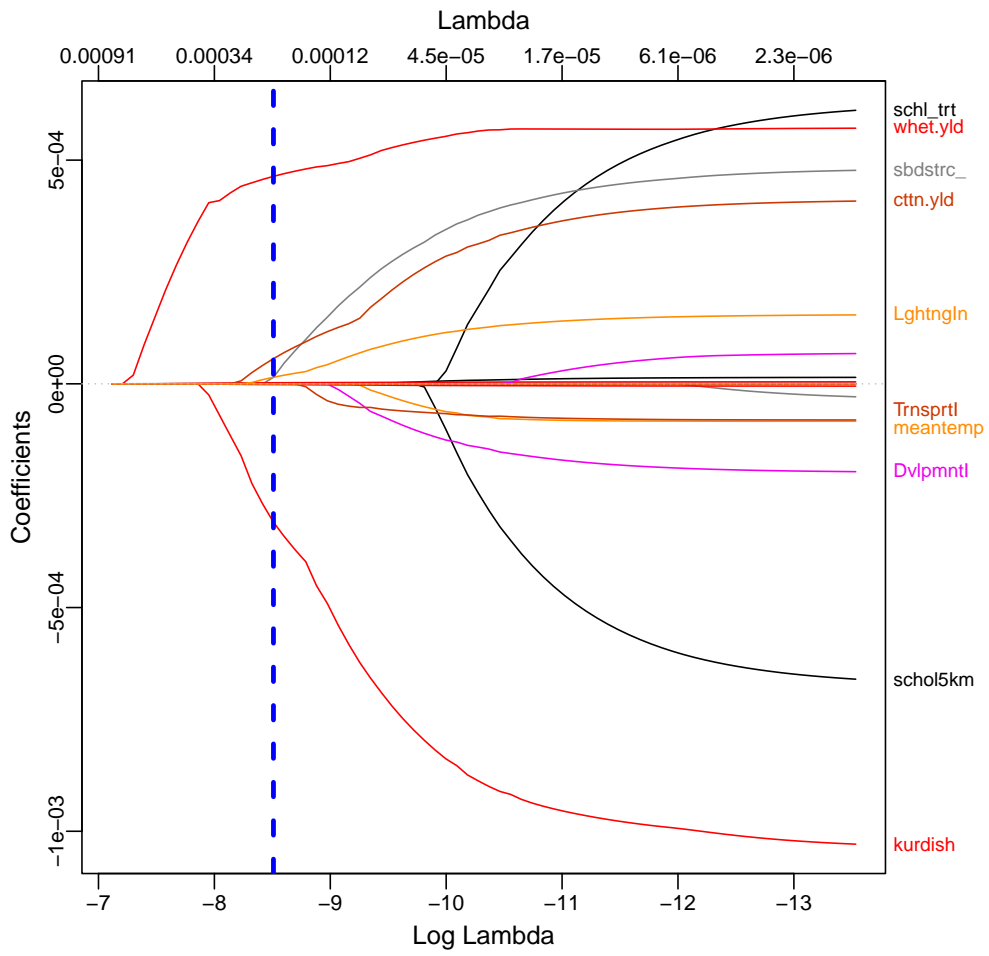


Figure 2: LASSO estimation using petitions written in 1928.

Table 1: Probability of sending a petition

	DV: Petition					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
School (village) X post	-0.001 (0.001)			-0.003 (0.003)		
School (within 5 kms) X post		-0.0004 (0.001)			-0.002 (0.002)	
School (sub-district) X post			0.00002 (0.0004)			0.00001 (0.001)
Village Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Village FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cluster	Village	Village	Village	Village	Village	Village
N	135,837	135,837	135,837	135,837	135,837	135,837
R ²	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.281	0.280	0.281

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

5 Conclusion

The “failure” of the early Republican teachers in connecting the population with the Ankara government can be partly seen from the same inspection report that we have mentioned earlier in the paper. In the same report, Türkan Baştuğ, writes:

I was struck by the fact that some of the teachers in district, municipality, and village schools seemed to have been forgotten by the ministry for years, as if they had been sitting in the same places for ages and had become deeply integrated into their communities. Unfortunately, these teachers, who do not possess any cultural means, have, over time, become more like the local residents due to their extensive interaction with the local community, losing their initial identity and cultural distinctiveness, and ultimately losing their sense of enjoyment in life.

As a solution to this issue, it would be appropriate for teachers working in villages to be transferred to more developed cities after one or two years, and for newly graduated young teachers to be sent to rural areas.⁸

Indeed, studies in the field of development have found that teachers hired on a contract that is renewable based on their performance as opposed to appointed, civil servant teachers are more effective in improving the quality of education in across developing societies (Atherton and Kingdon, 2010; Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2007). These findings in modern developing context align with the findings in Republican Turkey; the top-down efforts, without proper incentives within the communities where they are launched, does not lead to the desired effects.

More generally, the results suggest that the presence of primary schools in distant villages do not enhance state capacity as measured by civic engagement through petitions. Instead, areas that are predominantly Turkish as opposed to areas with Kurdish ethnic minorities

⁸BCA 490.1.0.0/618.28.1

experience higher probability of civic engagement; this may be a result of language barriers or perceptions of ethnic biases that prevent villagers in these areas to initiate petitions. Teachers, despite our expectation that could assist villagers in overcoming these barriers, they might have indeed become embedded in their communities and themselves deterred by structural challenges that they become passive in their engagement with the central authorities.

Moreover, these findings have broader implications for the behavioral legacies of institutions, policies, and processes. Early forms of citizens' political participation shape institutions, form the basis for political awakening and improve organizational skills of individuals (Carpenter and Moore, 2014), some with durable consequences on subsequent political activity (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Szymanski, 2003). The slow transformation of such institutions may be the result of the difficulties that top-down policies encounter, as the results of this paper suggest.

Lastly, this paper used petitions as measures of civic engagement. Arguably, the petitions system was well regarded and well functioning in Republican Turkey, making it a suitable measure for civic engagement. Our study contributes to a growing research agenda in political science, one that uses petition data to understand historical civic participation, mobilization, and political activity (Carpenter and Schmeer, 2015; Lueders, 2022). However, future research should consider the structural conditions and biases in the petition system that might have further deterred teachers from utilizing their tools.

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