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Research Note

Profile and Life Span of the PKK Guerillas

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This study attempts to explore the span of a life in a specific terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). It suggests the following: The average lifespan of a person in the PKK is about two-and-a-half years (i.e., not a very long one). Females join the PKK at a younger age (about 1.4 years) and die at a younger age (about 1.4 years) compared to males, but their lifespan is not any different than that of males. The age at which a PKK member joins the organization, and the age at which (s)he dies varies by year. The age at which a PKK member joins the organization, and the age at which (s)he dies varies by where (s)he comes from. Still, another interesting observation is that the average lifespan of a PKK member varies by where (s)he comes from.

Terrorism is a crime against humanity. It is usually assumed that the victims of terrorism are only the innocent people (e.g., the people who suffered during the attacks on 11 September 2001, in New York; on 23 November 2003 in Istanbul; on 11 March 2004 in Madrid; or on 7 July 2005 in London). However, terrorists themselves might also be considered victims since there is always a possibility that they would be killed, while they are in action. As any other forms of crime, terrorism can also be considered as a social problem affecting

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both its victims and its perpetrators and therefore, it is important to study the detrimental effects of terrorism on both sides.

Although much is known about the effect of terrorism on its victims (i.e., the number of casualties [e.g., about three thousand people killed on 11 September 2001], financial costs, and the fear it causes), much less is known about its effect on its perpetrators. For example, what is the risk of death and life hazards of an ordinary terrorist? What could have an ordinary terrorist done with his/her life instead of being a terrorist? How does the quality of life in a terrorist organization compare to a normal life in a conventional society? These are a few of the questions that might be studied to understand the effects of terrorism on terrorists themselves.

This study attempts to answer a related question: What is the life span of a terrorist in a specific terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)? In this regard, we first present a short summary of the PKK (i.e., its history, structure, and strategy). Next, the data and methods of analyses are described. Then, the results of the analyses are presented and discussed. At the end, a couple of questions are offered for future research.

History, Strategy, and Structure of the PKK

The PKK was founded by a meeting of Abdullah Öcalan and his associates in Diyarbakir, Turkey on 27 November 1978. This meeting is more commonly known as the First Congress of the PKK. In its Statement of Foundation, the PKK made reference to the liberation of Kurds scattered in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq, and the formation of "Greater Kurdistan" (see Figure 1) in the region as its long-term objective.[1]

In this statement, the PKK mentioned that it adopted Mao's "Protracted War Strategy" and Marxist–Leninist ideology. Mao's protracted war strategy insists that the guerilla is only an interim phase of the struggle. It enables the insurgents to build a regular army which, eventually, will win the war through conventional warfare.[2] Mao's strategy also attaches great importance to the popular support from the population and the guerilla warfare strategy. The PKK made clear in its statement of foundation that it adopted a party-front-army approach as its organizational structure and it has chosen "guerilla warfare" as its main activity.

The PKK made itself public eight months after its foundation, on 31 July 1979, through an attack on a parliamentary member, Mehmet Celal Bucak. This was an attempt by the PKK to attract the Kurdish population's attention and gain their support. In order to reach its goals, the PKK sent its selected members to Palestinian camps to get military training. The first group of terrorists who arrived in Palestine started their training under the supervision of Palestinian instructors in September 1979.[3] The PKK continued to send its members to Palestinian camps for training until it established its own camps in the Bekaa Valley in Syria. Having completed its military cadre, the PKK declared the foundation of its first guerrilla army, named the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARGK), through very sensational simultaneous attacks on two gendarmerie stations on 15 August 1984 in the Semdinli and Eruh districts of Turkey. Kalkan[4] stated that these two stations were intentionally selected, because they were small enough to succeed and would represent the PKK's war zone. These attacks made a huge impact on the public, the government, and other countries. The PKK still argues that these attacks had a determinant impact on making the international community aware of the Kurdish Problem. Since its foundation, the PKK declared a cease-fire and withdrew from Turkey's soil several times. But, it has never dismantled its armed wing. Today, it still believes that its power comes from its guerillas.

Figure 1. The Kurdistan that the PKK allegedly aims to establish.
Source. http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2007/12/independentstate1825.htm

The sensational attacks of the PKK against the civilian population and military forces attract great media attention. The public and the academic community are both quite knowledgeable about the life hazards emanating from these attacks. However, less is known about the effects of counterterrorism operations by security forces on the PKK's military wing, the guerillas.

The Life Span of Terrorist/Insurgent Organizations

There is scarce literature on the life span of both terrorist organizations and terrorists. Existing studies mostly focus on the life span of terrorist/insurgent organizations, not the individual terrorists/insurgents. The main reason for the lack of literature on such studies is the difficulty to obtain reliable longitudinal data on terrorist/insurgent organizations and individual terrorists/insurgents. Especially, there is little information regarding the terrorists'/insurgents' activities, such as when they joined the organization or when they were killed.

Rapoport's study[5] is one of the well-known studies concerning the life span of terrorist organizations. He suggests that 90 percent of terrorist organizations do not survive beyond

their first year of operation and among those that survive fewer than 50 percent would survive over 10 years. Harmon[6] finds similar results and suggests that the average life span of the twentieth-century terrorist groups is as little as three to five years. The study of Blomberg et al.[7] is one the very first studies using a survival analysis technique to investigate the life span of terrorist organizations. Their study points out three important findings. First, religious terrorist organizations live longer than the other terrorist organizations with left-wing, right-wing, and nationalist ideologies. Second, large terrorist organizations conducting a diversified mix of terrorist attacks survive longer. Third, the terrorist organizations based in the Middle East and North Africa live longer than the terrorist organizations based in other regions.

Concerning the ideology, contrary to the study of Blomberg et al.,[8] Gur,[9] Wilkinson,[10] Crenshaw,[11] and Rapoport[12] found that separatist/nationalist terrorist organizations, which have popular support and a distinct ethno-nationalist base, justify their violence and live longer than the others. Wragg[13] points out some additional factors affecting the survival of terrorist organizations and suggests that the arability of a large number of potential recruits, external financial support, and safe havens in neighboring countries influence the life span of a terrorist organization. Furthermore, he draws attention to the targeting strategy of terrorist organizations and suggested that a selective terrorism strategy might enhance the lifespan of a terrorist/insurgent organization. That is, to extend their life span, terrorist organizations must refrain from "blind terrorism," which is indifferent to innocent civilians and kills whoever is present in the target scene.

According to the study of Cronin,[14] which was published by the United States Institute of Peace, there is a strong relationship between participation in negotiations and the longer group life spans. The mean life span among groups that have negotiated over their fundamental goals was between twenty and twenty-five years, while the figure for terrorist group life spans overall was only five to nine years. Thus, from the perspective of a group, the first prerequisite for negotiations is to survive. All else being equal, terrorist groups tend to die young. In her study, Jordan[15] compares the life span of organizations that have experienced decapitation with the other counterparts that have not. She suggests that decapitated groups have a lower rate of decline than groups that have not had their leaders removed. Moreover, the findings show that decapitation is more likely to have counterproductive effects in larger, older, religious, and separatist organizations. Ross and Gurr[16] provide some insights on the members of terrorist organizations and drew attention to their commitment to their organizations and political goals. They suggest that some terrorist organizations fail because of their members' waning commitment to the organization and its goals.

All these authors and researchers have made a great contribution to the literature and shed some light on this issue. However, there are very few quantitative studies specifically on the life span of the members of terrorist organizations. Some authors mentioned the average life span of the members of terrorist organizations; however none of their studies are based on research or data. For instance, the South Asia Terrorism Portal reports that the average active life span of a Kashmiri terrorist has been variously estimated to be between 6 and 12 months of membership. Matur,[17] a Turkish writer who interviewed dozens of active and the former PKK militants, mentions the average of the life span of the PKK militants as being 3 years of membership.

Therefore, the main goal of this study is to investigate the average life span of a PKK member. The data for the study comes from the PKK's two online websites (i.e., www.hpg-sehit.com and www.hpg-online.com). The PKK publishes basic information about its "martyrs" on these websites. More specifically, in addition to the real and code

names and photos, it is possible to find the following information on the websites from which 2,514 dead guerillas' personal information was downloaded:

The date of birth	*Place of birth*
Date of joined the PKK	*Place joined the PKK*
Date died	*Place died*

As mentioned in the manifesto of the PKK in 1978, one of the main political goals of the PKK is to create an independent Kurdish state by carving territory out of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria where the Kurds live on. The primary aim of the study is also to investigate whether there are any differences among guerillas given their provinces of origin in Turkey and other countries. Is the life span of the PKK guerrillas similar regardless of their province or home country? Or, do some PKK guerrillas from a certain province or country live a longer/shorter life than their comrades? If the study finds any significant differences in terms of life span among the provinces or countries, this would point to discrimination in deploying PKK guerillas. For instance, if some guerrillas live longer than others, it would mean that some of them are deployed to more favorable areas than their comrades. This unfair and discriminative policy could also destroy the trust within the PKK and commitment to the organization. As Ross and Gurr[18] suggest, the waning of commitment to the organization could lead to the failure of the organization.

A secondary purpose of this study is to examine whether there is any difference(s) among the groups in terms of the individual members' age when joined the PKK. Do all the PKK members join the guerilla forces at a certain, similar age, regardless of their province or home country? Or, do some members from a certain province(s) or country(ies) join the PKK earlier/later than their comrades?

Methods

In this section, first, the data and the method of analysis are described. Then, the results are presented. The data come from two online websites (i.e., www.hpg-sehit.com and www.hpg-online.com). On these websites, the PKK publishes the names, the photos, and the other basic information of their "martyrs." More specifically, it is possible to find the name, the date and the place of birth, the hometown, and the date and place of the person joined the PKK, as well as the date and the place where (s)he died. In 2009, this information was downloaded ($N = 2{,}514$) from these websites and created the following variables: the gender (dummy, 1 = female), the year of birth, the year joined the PKK, the age joined the PKK, the year died, the age died, and the region (i.e., the terrorist's hometown).[19] In order to code the gender, the photo of the terrorist was used. The age joined the PKK is the difference between the year joined the PKK and the year of birth. The age died is the difference between the year died and the year of birth. Two of the variables in the original data have substantial amounts of missing values (i.e., the year of birth {15.9 percent}, the year joined the PKK {23.9 percent}). In order to assess whether values are missing at random or not, the value-missing variables were created for these two variables (1 = missing). Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the main variables, and bivariate correlations among the main variables and the value-missing variables.

Table 1 shows that the gender is moderately correlated with the year of birth and the age joined the PKK (negative), which means that females joined the PKK more recently than males, and that they joined the PKK at a younger age when compared to males. The correlations between the year of birth, the year joined the PKK, and the year died are quite

Table 1
Bivariate correlations

		X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
X1	Gender							
X2	Year of Birth	0.11						
X3	Year Joined PKK	0.00	0.83					
X4	Year Died	0.08	0.75	0.81				
X5	Age Joined PKK	−0.13	−0.54	0.02	−0.04			
X6	Age Died	−0.07	−0.49	−0.11	0.20	0.66		
X7	Year of Birth Missing	−0.03	na	−0.25	−0.29	na	na	
X8	Year Joined PKK Missing	−0.07	−0.50	na	−0.52	na	0.06	0.33
	Mean	0.1	1974	1995	1998	20	25	
	SD	0.3	8.9	5.7	8.1	3.7	5.9	

na = not applicable.

strong and positive (range from .75 to .83). These correlations show that those who were born earlier joined the PKK earlier, and those who joined the PKK earlier died earlier. It is a simple cohort effect (see Tables 2 and 3). The year of birth is substantively and negatively correlated with the age joined the PKK and the age died (i.e., .54 and .49). These correlations show that the younger generations joined the PKK and died at a younger age when compared to the older generations. The correlation between the age joined the PKK and the age died is also high (i.e., .66), as it is expected (i.e., those who joined the PKK at an older age are expected to die at an older age).

Both of the value-missing variables are negatively correlated to the year of birth, the year joined the PKK, and the year died. These correlations show that the PKK did not keep a good record of its members before, but improved their system later. The case-missing variables are positively correlated to each other (i.e., .33), but not very strongly. A closer examination of the data reveals an interesting point. Forty percent of the cases that are missing the year joined the PKK were born prior to 1961 (56 percent were born prior to 1966). But, 58 percent of the cases missing the year of birth joined the PKK between 1991

Table 2
Year of birth by year joined PKK

		Year of birth									
		–1955	1956–1960	1961–1965	1966–1970	1971–1975	1976–1980	1981–1985	1986–1990	1991–1995	Total
Year Joined PKK	–1985	10	31	27	3	0	0	0	0	0	71
	1986–1990	1	5	30	53	44	7	0	0	0	140
	1991–1995	3	3	28	95	313	222	9	0	0	673
	1996–2000	0	0	2	8	66	260	196	4	0	536
	2001–2005	0	0	0	0	13	68	173	40	1	295
	2006–	0	0	0	0	0	5	8	10	1	24
	TOTAL	14	39	87	159	436	562	386	54	2	1,739

Table 3
Year joined PKK by year died

		Year joined PKK						
		–1985	1986–1990	1991–1995	1996–2000	2001–2005	2006–	Total
Year died	–1985	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
	1986–1990	24	31	0	0	0	0	55
	1991–1995	23	104	343	0	0	0	470
	1996–2000	8	35	241	83	0	0	367
	2001–2005	1	7	103	239	66	0	416
	2006–	1	5	74	219	232	24	555
	TOTAL	88	182	761	541	298	24	1,894

and 1995. These percentages show that the PKK does not have the information relating to the year joined the PKK for its very old members. Perhaps, the year joined the PKK is not applicable for these members, since they are the founders of the organization, and therefore the information as to the year joined is missing for them. The percentages also show that the PKK does not have the year of birth information for a substantial proportion of its members who joined the PKK between 1991 and 1995. A plausible explanation for this may be the high density of clashes between the Turkish Military and the PKK during the second half of the 1990s, when these people most probably died. That is why the PKK could not keep a good record during the second half of the 1990s because of these clashes.

Analyses

Typically, lifespan estimates are done by survival analyses. However, there are not appropriate data to conduct a survival analysis. Therefore, an alternative strategy is followed. An alternative way to assess the lifespan of an average PKK member is (1) to estimate the age (s)he joins the PKK, (2) to estimate the age (s)he dies, and (3) compute the difference between these two estimates. If the data can be treated as a representative sample of the PKK members, then it can be computed reasonable estimates of the mean age that the PKK members join the organization and the mean age they die. And then their lifespan can be computed.[20]

Although there are substantial amounts of missing values, the data can be treated as a representative sample of the PKK members. The data includes the PKK members who died between 1974 and 2009 (a 35 year time span). The age of these people ranged from 13 to 85 when they died and their ages ranged from 13 to 45 when they joined the PKK. The earliest member who joined the PKK joined in 1975, and the latest member joined in 2007. The distribution of the ages at which the PKK members died approximates a normal distribution, but slightly skewed to the right. Its shape is very similar to the distribution of the age for the entire population, except its mean is smaller and its range is narrower. The distribution of ages at which the PKK members joined the organization also approximates a normal distribution, but less so. There is not any reason to believe that the PKK members who died between 1974 and 2009 are not representative of the entire population of the organization.

Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 2 support the argument that the data is representative of the PKK members. Tables 2 and 3 are cross tabulations of the year joined the PKK by the year of birth, and the year died by the year joined the PKK. These two tables show a cohort effect on the year the PKK members joined the organization and the year they died. In both

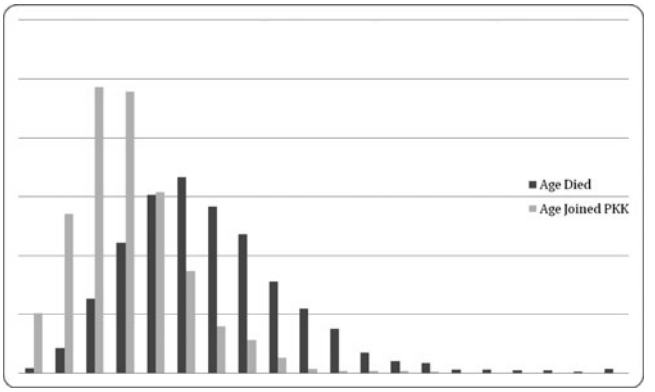

Figure 2. Distributions of age joined PKK and age died.

tables, the cells close to the diagonals have the most cases. Table 2 shows that, for instance, the most of those who were born between 1966 and 1970 joined the PKK between 1986 and 1995, and the most of those who were born between 1976 and 1980 joined the PKK between 1991 and 2000. And, Table 3 shows that the most of those who joined the PKK between 1986 and 1990 died between 1986 and 1995, and the most of those who joined the PKK 1991 and 1995 died between 1991 and 2000. In Table 3, cells above the diagonal are 0, by definition, because one cannot be killed as a terrorist before joining a terrorist organization. Distributions in these two tables are in accord with the expectations.

There are not any peculiarities about Tables 2 and 3 except two points worth noting. First, the number of the PKK members who joined the organization dropped from 295 between 2001 and 2005 to 24 after 2006 (see Table 2). This is because our data is truncated. We only have information on those who were killed before 2009. Probably, many more joined the PKK after 2006, but were not killed yet, and therefore we do not have them in our data. Second, the number of the PKK members killed fluctuates by year. Less than a hundred were killed before 1991, but 470 were killed between 1991 and 1995. The number of the PKK members killed steadily increased after 1991, with the exception of a small decline between 1996 and 2000. This fluctuation is more easily seen when the number of the PKK members killed is aggregated by year. About 21 percent of PKK members were killed in the years 1992-1995, about 31 percent were killed in the years 2005–2008, and the rest were killed in other years.

Figure 1 shows the distributions of the age joined the PKK and the age died. The distribution of the age died approximates a normal curve (mean = 25.1, SD = 5.9). It shows that about 98 percent of PKK members died before the age 39. But, there are those who survived until 85. Those who died at an older age are likely to be part of the leadership. The distribution of the age joined the PKK also approximates a normal curve, but less so; it is relatively more skewed to the right. It shows that an average PKK member joined the organization at the age 19.6 ($SD = 3.7$). The oldest join age is 40, but 99 percent of the PKK members joined before the age 31. Figure 1 shows that an average PKK member survives 5.5 years (i.e., 25.1–19.6 = 5.5).[21]

Further examination of the data showed that both the mean age a PKK member joined the organization and the mean age (s)he died has three correlates. First, gender is related to the age a person joined the PKK and the age (s)he died. Females joined the PKK (i.e., 18.1 compared to 19.7, $t = 6.42$) and died (i.e., 23.9 compared to 25.2, $t = 3.14$) at a younger

age than males did. Second, the mean age a PKK member joined the organization varies by the year (s)he joined ($F = 3.04$, *d.f.* = 32/1706, $p = .000$), and the mean age (s)he died varies by the year (s)he died ($F = 5.28$, *d.f.* = 34/2050, $p = .000$). Third, the mean age a PKK member joined the organization ($F = 7.74$, *d.f.* = 27/1681, $p = .000$) and the mean age (s)he died ($F = 1.65$, *d.f.* = 27/2027, $p = .019$) varies by the region (s)he comes from.

Within limits of data just described above, and assuming that it adequately represents the population of the PKK members, it was estimated that the mean age a PKK member joined the organization and the mean age (s)he died by means of the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) software as a heuristic. The research question does not necessarily require using the HLM technique. It is simply tried to estimate two means (i.e., the mean of age died and the mean of age joined the PKK) that vary depending on three categorical variables (i.e., gender, region, and year died/joined the PKK). Therefore, it is actually needed to run two three-way-ANOVAs with three predictors (i.e., gender, region, and year died/joined the PKK). However, numbers of cases in groups varied substantially and there were groups with a too small number of cases. For example, there were only 4 terrorists who joined the PKK in 1974, while 244 terrorists joined in 1992. Or, there were only 17 terrorists who joined the PKK from Malatya, while 461 terrorists joined from Mardin. Therefore, it is not possible to reliably estimate means and run significance tests using three-way-ANOVAs with the data. HLM software was used.

In their original forms, the year joined the PKK and the year died were two metric variables. We recoded the year joined the PKK into six categories: 1974–1984, 1985–1990, 1991–1993, 1994–1998, 1999, and 2000–2007. The sizes of these categories are not equal because of the peculiarities in the history of the PKK. The first category is the foundational years of the PKK. The years in the third category (i.e., 1991–1993) are known as the hey-day years; many of the terrorists joined the PKK in these years. The PKK's leader Abdullah Ocalan was arrested in 1999, and the number of joins dramatically increased in this year. Therefore, the fifth category is a single year (i.e., 1999). The first, third, and fifth categories were created because of these reasons. The second, fourth, and sixth categories are the remaining years.

The age died was recoded into four categories: 1974–1986, 1987–1998, 1999–2004, and 2005–2009. Similarly to the categories in the year joined the PKK, these categories are not equal for the same reason (i.e., peculiarities in the history of the PKK). The Turkish government declared a state of emergency in 1987 that lasted until the end of the 1990s. And the PKK declared a cease-fire in 1999, just after its leader was arrested, which lasted until 2004. Therefore, the second and third categories were created based on these two conditions. The first and forth categories are the remaining years.

Two HLM models were specified. In the first model, the age joined the PKK was the dependent variable, and the gender and the year joined the PKK were level-1 predictors. Region was the only predictor at the second level. In the second model, the age died was the dependent variable, and the gender and the year died were level-1 predictors. Again, the region was the only predictor at the second level. The results are presented in Table 4.

There are two models in Table 4. The dependent variable in the first model is the age joined the PKK and the second model is the age died. Both models have gender and different categories of years as independent variables. Table 4 shows that the mean age joined the PKK is 20.4 and the mean age died is 22.9, controlling for gender, the year joined the PKK/died and the regional differences. Females join the PKK (1.42 years) and die (1.30 years) at a younger age than males. In both models, level-2 variance components are significant (1.57 in model 1 and 1.13 in model two), which means the age joined the PKK and the age died vary significantly across regions. The year joined the PKK,

Table 4
Hierarchical linear regressions of age joined PKK and age died

Fixed effects								
	Model 1					Model 2		
	b	*t*-ratio	*p*			b	*t*-ratio	*p*
Intercept	20.44	17.51	0.00		Intercept	22.86	48.42	0.00
Female	−1.42	−4.38	0.00		Female	−1.30	−2.69	0.01
Year Joined	*(Ref. Cat.: 1974–1984)*				Year Died	*(Ref. Cat.: 1974–1986)*		
1985–1990	0.47	0.39	0.70		1987–1998	0.23	0.41	0.68
1991–1993	−0.98	−0.78	0.43		1999–2004	2.49	4.59	0.00
1994–1998	−0.97	−0.84	0.40		2005–2009	4.19	8.44	0.00
1999	−0.63	−0.52	0.60					
2000–2007	0.47	0.40	0.69					
Random Effects								
	Var	*df*	χ^2	*p*		Var	*df*	χ^2	*p*
Intercept	1.57	27	184.00	0.00		1.13	27	102.17	0.00
level–1	11.88					21.20			
Reliability Estimates of Level–2 Intercepts									
	0.83					0.71			

Table 5
Distributions of N,% of PKK members, estimated mean age joined PKK, estimated mean age died, and lifespan by regions

	N	%	Age joined PKK	Age died	Life span
Adiyaman	32	1.3	21.70	23.39	1.70
Agri	52	2.1	20.07	22.33	2.26
Bingöl	69	2.8	21.15	25.02	3.87
Bitlis	81	3.3	20.29	22.14	1.86
Diyarbakir	323	13.0	20.49	23.42	2.94
Elazig	94	3.8	21.50	23.83	2.33
Erzincan	23	0.9	21.32	22.47	1.15
Erzurum	60	2.4	20.59	22.16	1.57
Hakkari	87	3.5	17.96	20.47	2.51
Kars	25	1.0	21.99	23.87	1.88
Malatya	17	0.7	23.83	24.55	0.73
Kahramanmaras	64	2.6	21.61	23.59	1.98
Mardin	461	18.6	20.49	23.26	2.77
Mus	33	1.3	20.92	23.35	2.44
Siirt	54	2.2	18.89	23.13	4.24
Sivas	23	0.9	23.13	24.29	1.16
Tunceli	87	3.5	21.69	23.94	2.26
Sanliurfa	102	4.1	20.67	23.02	2.35
Van	98	4.0	19.38	21.56	2.18
Batman	96	3.9	19.41	23.22	3.81
Sirnak	141	5.7	18.55	22.60	4.06
Ardahan	21	0.8	22.02	25.79	3.78
Igdir	20	0.8	20.35	24.04	3.69
Metropol	40	1.6	20.16	22.75	2.59
Other	37	1.5	23.42	26.04	2.61
Iraq	29	1.2	19.79	22.43	2.64
Iran	83	3.4	19.41	21.16	1.75
Syria	225	9.1	20.39	23.56	3.17

specified as the six categories that were created, does not have a significant effect on the age joined the PKK. However, the year died, specified as the four categories that were created, significantly affects the age died. More specifically, the mean age died in the years 1999–2004 and 2005–2009 is significantly higher than the mean age died in the years 1976–1986. Finally, the reliability estimates of the level-two intercepts in both models are substantively high (.83 and .71), which means it could reliably be estimated the mean age joined the PKK and the mean age died for the level-two categories (i.e., regions). These estimates are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows very interesting findings. The estimated means of the age joined the PKK range from 17.96 (for Hakkari) to 23.83 (for Malatya). The estimated means of the age died range from 20.47 (for Hakkari) to 26.04 (for the other). There is a strong positive correlation between the estimates of the mean age joined the PKK and the mean age died ($r = .76$). The estimates of lifespan vary from .73 years (for Malatya) to 4.24 years (for Siirt).

The difference between these two values is 3.51 years, which is a substantive difference. The estimates of lifespan are positively correlated with the estimates of the mean age died ($r = .20$), and negatively correlated with the estimates of the mean age joined the PKK ($r = -.48$).

Overall, the analyses show that an average PKK member joins the organization at the age 20.44, controlling for the gender, the year (s)he joins, and where (s)he comes from.[22] An average PKK member dies at the age 22.86, controlling for the gender, the year (s)he dies, and where (s)he comes from.[23] Thus, the lifespan of an average PKK member is about two-and-a-half years. Females join the PKK and die at a younger age than males. In addition to the gender, the average age joined the PKK also varies by region, and the average age died also varies by the year died and by the region. The meanings and implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal was to estimate the average lifespan of a PKK member. It is not easy to estimate the lifespan of a terrorist, since the necessary data are often not available. Terrorist organizations do not make public the years their members join and die. It is not any different for the PKK either, except the PKK publishes basic demographic information of its "martyrs." There might be reasonable explanations to why they publish this information. Maybe they want to create a history of their own "the war of independence." Whatever the reason is, the information published on the PKK's websites is a valuable source. This information was utilized to answer an interesting question, which also has policy implications.

An alternative way was followed to estimate the lifespan of an average PKK member. Using the data available at hand, it was first estimated the age an average PKK member joins the organization. Then, it was estimated the age (s)he dies. It was made an important assumption before gathering these estimates. That is, the data adequately represents the PKK members. The distributions of age at which the PKK members joined the organization and then died encouraged these researchers. Both these distributions resembled any other distribution of age plotted against social phenomena (e.g., age crime curve). In the end, it was found that the average lifespan of a person in the PKK is about two-and-a-half years (i.e., not a very long one).

Delving into the data more, it was observed three important patterns. First, females join the PKK and died at a younger age than males (about 1.5 years). But, their lifespan is not any different than that of males. Second, the age at which a PKK member joins the organization, and the age at which (s)he dies varies by year. However, a significant variation on the age joined the PKK by the year joined the PKK vanishes once the gender and the region are controlled (see Model 1 in Table 4). Variation on the age died by the year died is still significant, controlling for the gender and the region; the mean age died is substantively higher in the years 1999 to 2009 than in the years 1975 to 1986. It is thought that the cease-fire that the PKK declared between 1999 and 2004 has had an effect on this observation.

Third, the age at which a PKK member joins the organization, and the age at which (s)he dies varies by where (s)he comes from. As it is expected, those who join the PKK at a younger age, die at a younger age. For instance, those from Hakkari join the organization at the age 18, on average. On the other hand, those who join the PKK from Malatya join the organization at the age 23.8, on average. It is still an interesting observation. Why do the PKK members from Hakkari join the organization at the age 18 while the PKK members

from Malatya join at the age 23.8? The difference between these two ages is substantive. It is not possible to answer this question using the data. Further research is needed.

Still, another interesting observation is that the average lifespan of a PKK member varies by where (s)he comes from. On the one hand, the PKK members who are from Siirt survive 4.2 years; on the other hand, PKK members from Malatya do not see the second year, on average. There are not any data to explain the reason for this difference. Are the PKK members who come from Siirt better fighters than those who come from Malatya? Or, are those who come from Malatya deployed to more dangerous missions than those who come from Siirt? These are two of the interesting questions that scholars might want to research in future.

Notes

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19. Most of the PKK members come from 23 provinces in Turkey, located in the East/South-East regions. Only 1.6 percent comes from the large metropolitan provinces of the West, and only 1.5 percent comes from the rest of the country. Also, 1.2 percent comes from Iraq, 3.4 percent comes from Iran, and 9.1 percent comes from Syria. Therefore, the hometown information was retained for those members who come from the 23 provinces of the East/South-East, and a "metropolitan" category for those members who come from large metropolitan provinces of the West and an "other" category for those who come from the rest of Turkey were created. Although they were more detailed hometown information for those who come from Iraq, Iran, and Syria, these cases were collapsed into three categories (i.e., Iraq, Iran, and Syria). See Table 5.
20. Another alternative strategy is simply to compute the difference between the year died and the year joined the PKK. However, the data is truncated on both sides. That is, it is not possible to be

killed as a terrorist before joining the organization, and therefore, for example, one who joined the PKK in 1991 cannot die in 1990. And, while it is possible to be killed after 2009, and many PKK members were killed after 2009, there is no information at hand on the PKK members who were killed after 2009. Then, in a sense, the PKK members were selected who joined the PKK in 1975 and survived 34 years or less, or the PKK members who joined the PKK in 1995 and survived 14 years or less, or the PKK members who joined the PKK in 2005 and survived 4 years or less. That is, the data is a sample of killed PKK members that was selected by the dependent variable. If it was computed lifespan by taking the difference between the year died and the year joined the PKK, the analysis would essentially be biased. Therefore, it was chosen to follow the other, indirect way to estimate the average lifespan of a PKK member.

21. Note that there are influential cases to the right of the figure that increase the average lifespan of a PKK member. However, when these cases are excluded (i.e., those who joined above 30 and those who died above 40), the average lifespan of a PKK member does not change much; it is 5.35.

22. That is, when gender and the year joined the PKK are at their reference categories (i.e., male and 1974–1984).

23. That is, when gender and the year died are at their reference categories (i.e., male and 1975–1986).