

RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES AMONG NICARAGUAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS*

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been assumed that a rural-urban origin shapes the attitudes of a person toward basic issues of society. Rural origins are associated with a more conservative vision of the family, more religious attachment and less radical attitude toward social change. The urban origin, in contrast, seems to be more associated with a liberal view of the family and religion and a more radical attitude toward social change.

The purpose of this study is to analyze rural-urban differences of university students from Nicaragua in relation to the three following sociological indicators:

- 1 — Family patterns, specifically the size of the family.
- 2 — Attitude toward religion, that is, religious affiliation and church attendance.
- 3 — Attitude toward political action. Political preferences will be analyzed in order to see how the rural and urban students compare in relation to extreme political positions, and how their attitudes toward overall social change are directed.

2. METHODOLOGY

Nicaragua had in 1970 five centers of advanced education with approximately 8,000 students. The population for the present study included the total student body of the five universities.

Random sampling procedures was used to select 15 per cent of the total student population. Lists from each university were obtained and organized in order to maintain a 15% sample representing the different groups of students: male-female, freshman-senior, from both urban centers and rural areas. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, 958 students were analyzed in the study.

Tabular analysis was used to determine the association between rural-urban origin and the variables representing family patterns, religious affiliation, religious attendance, attitude toward social change and political preference. The chi-square test was used to determine the significance of the association among variables.

Students from towns of 5,000 habitants or less were considered rural, from more than 5,000 were considered urban.

The size of the family was defined by the number of children of the same

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father and mother legally married.

Religious affiliation was defined as the religion chose by the respondent as his religion. The following categories were identified: Catholics, Protestants, Indifferents, Atheists and Others.

Religious attendance was examined as the frequency with which the student participated in the services of his religion. The following categories were identified: Each week, from time to time, Rarely, Never.

The political preference is understood as the level of approval by the student of the political philosophy of a determined political party. The following preferences were registered in the study: Preferences for traditional parties, for leftist parties, and no political preference.

The attitude toward social change is determined by the types of means the respondent believes must be used to accomplish the necessary changes in society. The following categories were identified: Radical attitude and Non-radical attitude.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The order in presenting the results of the study and its discussion will be the following:

1. Rural-urban origin and family size
2. Rural-urban origin and religion
3. Rural-urban origin and radicalism

3.1. *Rural-Urban Origin and Family Size*

To analyze family size among rural and urban students we have to note that in recent years the population has been expanding faster in Central America than in any other region in the world. Since net immigration to the Central American countries represents only a slight percentage of the population increase, the expansion has been due almost entirely to natural increase through an excess of births over deaths. As far as the Nicaraguan population is concerned, the sharp decline of high birth rates has resulted in a pronounced upward trend in its rate of natural increase. Nicaragua's annual rate of natural increase of population is 3.45, one of the highest in the world. The United States annual rate is 1.00 (2).

The parents of the university students represent a very selective minority of the Nicaraguan population, perhaps no more than one percent of the total population. Their more informed and involved approach toward family size could be an interesting indicator of how education can help to solve the problem of the population explosion in Nicaragua. Table 1 shows the size of the families according to national and students' rural-urban categories.

According to Table 1, the urban student's family is smaller than the rural. The rural student's family is smaller than the rural-national average, and the urban family, both national and student's, is smaller than the rural family in the same categories.

The reason for urban families being smaller than rural might be found in a higher degree of contraceptive information in urban areas, the economic pressure exerted on urban families, the careless attitude toward the number of children among rural residents, and, to some extent, the «machismo» phenomenon very deeply rooted among the rural people. Table 2 shows how «machismo» can be reflected through the number of children outside the family. Practically 45% of the parents of the university students have had one or more children outside their nuclear families. The other 55% of the students simply ignored whether their parents had children outside the family or not. The reality could be that a higher number than 45 percent of those parents have children outside the family. The urban father appears to be slightly less prone to have children outside the family than the rural. The urban parents' education as well as pressure exerted by society on the urban husband may be the reason for urban parents having less children outside the family than the rural ones.

3.2. *Rural-Urban Origin and Religion*

Nicaragua has traditionally been Roman Catholic. Leaving aside the Blue-

fields region (Atlantic coast) where the majority of the population is protestant and speak English, the rest of the country is 98% Roman Catholic. The national percentage, according to the last census (1963), is 95% Catholic.

Having this figure in mind, Table 3 shows the religious composition of the students' universe. Rural students still are more faithful to the Catholic Church than urban students, but in both cases their affiliation to the Catholic church is far below the national statistic. This finding suggests that the Catholic Church is dramatically losing the younger generation of university students. The students who leave the church generally go to the category of «indifferent and agnostic». Protestants have the larger number of members among the urban students. This may reflect the fact that Protestant churches have been working efficiently in education among urban communities. The work of the protestant churches in the rural areas seems to be more social than educational. This could be the reason for the low percentage of protestant rural students at University level.

As far as attendance at church is concerned, the statistical analysis (Table 4) shows a significant difference between rural and urban areas. Rural students seem to be more attached to their churches than the urban. Forty percent of the students in both rural and urban categories still go to church weekly, and another 30 percent go from time to time. The number of students who never go to church is rather small in relation to the total student population. The urban students who never go to church are twice as many as the rural students who never attend the church.

TABLE 1 - National and Respondents' Family Sizes by Rural-Urban Origin

Family Size	Rural-Urban Origin			
	National		Respondents'	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
	%	%	%	%
6 or more children	55	44	41	32
3 to 5 children	58	44	38	42
2 or less	7	12	21	26
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	105,802	62,748	264	603

Source: National data taken from the 1963 Census,
Students' data taken from the Survey on Nicaraguan
Campuses, 1969: Student Radicalism, (Masters thesis,
Solon J. Guerrero, New York University, N.Y. 1970)

TABLE 2 - Respondents' Rural-Urban Origin by Siblings Outside the Family,

Number of siblings outside the family	Students' Rural-Urban Origin		
	Rural	Urban	Total
	%	%	%
6 or more	9	11	10
3 to 5	16	14	15
2 or less	16	20	18
I don't know	59	55	57
	100%	100%	100%
	290	653	943

Chi square 1.44

Not significant at the .05 level

As an overall observation of the religious attitudes among the students it can be said that Nicaragua is experiencing the same social phenomenon present in other regions of the world. Urban areas are leaving organized religion and becoming more religiously indifferent. A more intellectual sophistication given by education, as well as economic pressure of the city, may be some of the reasons responsible for this religious phenomenon.

3.3. Rural-Urban Origin and Radicalism

A comparison between American radicalism and Nicaragua radicalism can be relevant at this point. Among students the American radicalism has been intellectually structured by Saul Allinsky (1). According to Allinsky's philosophy the American radical must accept both the democratic structure of society and the existing legal system as a given situation. When he rebels he accepts beforehand the sanction of the law. Through rebellion the radical demands the civil rights offered by democracy to all the citizens, without distinction to race, creed or social status. In his book, *Reveille for Radicals*, Allinsky says:

«The American radicals are found wherever and whenever America moves close to the fulfillment of its democratic dream (1)».

By contrast, the Nicaraguan radical considers the structure of society unacceptable. He believes that the existing legal order favors the interests of a particular social class. When he rebels, therefore, he tries to bring down the existing social order as the first step in his struggle to build a new order. The students' radicalism in Nicaragua, therefore, included violence when necessary in order to achieve its goals.

With the previous remarks in mind we will undertake the analysis of social radicalism among rural and urban Nicaragua university students.

TABLE 3 - Respondents' Affiliation Rural-Urban Origin by Religious

Religious Affiliation	Rural-Urban Origin		
	Rural	Urban	Total
	%	%	%
Catholics	77	73	75
Protestants	3	6	4.5
Indifferent	17	16	16.5
Atheists	1	3	2
Others	2	2	2
	100%	100%	100%
	305	651	965

Chi square 6.22

Not significant at the .05 level

The vast majority of Nicaraguan students (62%) show no interest in political parties. Among Argentinian students, by contrast, in 1958 (3) there were only 22 percent of the students without political preference, a number considered high at that time.

According to Table 5, rural students are less interested in politics than urban. The rural students line up more with traditional political parties (conservative) than with leftist parties. Urban students, on the contrary, are more leftist than traditionally oriented. (But Chi square shows that at the .05 level the differences in relation to political preference between rural and urban students were not significant).

The absolute majority of Nicaraguan students (95%) favors overall social change. The disagreement among the Nicaraguan students concerns the "means" to achieve social change. Two-thirds of Nicaraguan students favor a social change achieved through peaceful means, whereas one-third favor radical means. Rural students are slightly more radical than urban in relation to the use of radical means to achieve social change. Table 6 shows those urban-rural differences. (Although they are not significant at the .05 level).

4. SUMMARY

The study was conducted with data from the student body of the University of Nicaragua in 1972.

The purpose of the study was to compare the rural and urban university students in relation to some social indicators such as attitude toward social

TABLE 4 - Respondents' Rural-Urban Origin by Attendance to Church

Church Attendance	Rural-Urban Origin		
	Rural	Urban	Total
	%	%	%
Each week	40	39	39.5
From time to time	30	29	29.5
Rarely	24	21	22.5
Never	6	11	8.5
	100%	100%	100%
	284	631	815

Chi square 7.11

Not significant at the .05 level

change family patterns, religious affiliation and political preference.

Tabular analysis was used and the Chi square test to determine the level of significance of the relations among the variables.

In relation to family size there not significant differences between students' of rural and urban backgrounds. The fact of having siblings outside the family was not a significant difference either. There was a tendency, however, for rural males is to have more children outside the than urbans.

Even though the Catholic students show a perceptible attachment to the Church, their number is substantially lower than the national average. (Some 74% of the students are Catholic, vs. 95% of the national population.) Thus the Catholic Church may well be losing its more educated members. The high percentage of students with a radical attitude toward social issues, as well as the relatively high attendance at church, seems to indicate that the student universe in Nicaragua may hold divergent opinions between the social and religious values. It could be possible for the immediate future that the Church will find it very difficult to maintain its influence in religious aspects without committing itself in the social ones.

In spite of 95 percent of the students being favorable to overall social change, only 1/3 of the student body favors violent means to achieve this change. On the other hand the students as a whole are less interested in political parties than Argentinian students.

Among the students interested in politics those from rural areas identify more with traditional parties than students from urban areas. The «urbanos» tend to give more support to leftist political parties. The chi square test, however, showed no significant differences between the rural and urban students in relation to radicalism.

TABLE 5 - Respondents' Rural-Urban Origin by Political Preference

Political Preference	Rural-Urban Origin		
	Rural	Urban	Total
	%	%	%
Traditional Parties	20	23	21
Leftist Parties	14	18	15
No Political Preference	66	59	64
	100%	100%	100%
	305	653	958

Chi square 2.4330

Not significant at the .05 level

TABLE 6 - Respondents' Rural-Urban Origin by Radical Attitude Toward Social Change

Radical Attitude toward Social Change	Rural-Urban Origin		
	Rural	Urban	Total
	%	%	%
Radical Attitude	35	32	33
Non-radical Attitude	65	68	67
	100%	100%	100%
	269	616	885

Chi square .5708

Not significant at the .05 level

5. RESUMO

O presente estudo analisa as diferenças entre os estudantes de origem rural e os de origem urbana com relação a certos indicadores sociais, tais como tamanho da família, filiação religiosa e atitude para com as mudanças sociais. Foi utilizada análise tabular teste de Chi quadrado para determinar a significância da associação entre as variáveis estudadas.

Os resultados mostram que existem diferenças com relação às variáveis consideradas entre os estudantes de origem rural e os de origem urbana, porém estas diferenças não são significativas. A participação religiosa constitui uma exceção desta tendência geral. Nesta, os estudantes de origem rural são significativamente diferentes, com relação aos estudantes de origem urbana, que são menos afeitos à prática religiosa.

6. CITED LITERATURE

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