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July 1951

Progress Report RS-12

SOME FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL PARTICIPATION  
IN TWO RURAL AREAS OF WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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SOME FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL PARTICIPATION  
IN TWO RURAL AREAS OF WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

By C. Paul Marsh and Selz C. Mayo \*

INTRODUCTION

Organizing voluntarily to meet a specific need is an important characteristic of American rural life.

There are three ways by which people may try to meet their needs. Cooperation is one of these three means of meeting recognized needs. Such cooperation may take several forms, one of which is that of an organization designed to meet the needs of a specific group of people or the needs of an entire community.

Rural society is generally characterized by an increasing number of formal organizations. Many of these newer organizations are specialized rather than general in nature -- that is, they are designed to serve small segments of the people in the rural community. A great many of these newer organizations are sponsored by groups and agencies outside the community and, consequently, they are planless as far as the entire rural community is concerned. And, in some cases the fact of organization and the structure of the organization are more important to the sponsoring group or agency than the functions and accomplishments in the community.

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A major part of this report is a revision of a thesis submitted by C. Paul Marsh to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Agriculture and Engineering of the University of North Carolina in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Rural Sociology.

More and more these organizations are appealing to segments of the population with specific characteristics. They may cater to rural girls of a specific age; or the appeal may be to farm boys of a slightly different age. A particular farm organization may accept as members only farm owners; while another similar organization may accept interested rural nonagricultural people as well as farm owners. One such organization may consider as a member only the head of the household who pays the dues; while another may count the entire family as members. Such a list could be expanded almost indefinitely. But, even a casual review of many rural communities will reveal a very large number of organizations.

In the final analysis, however, the very existence of any organization depends upon the number of people who participate and the extent to which these people participate in the organization.

#### PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study shows certain variations in the extent to which rural people participate in voluntary formal organizations and develops a technique whereby rural people may better understand their own social participation.

The following assumptions were made by the authors at the very beginning of this study of the extent to which rural people participate in formal organizations: (1) Development of individual personality as well as development of a community is dependent, in no small degree, upon participation in organized activities. (2) Organizations are important means by which the individual gains new knowledge necessary for his own adjustment. Organizations also serve as the means of distributing knowledge which has application to adjustments on a community-wide basis. (3) Extensive citizen participation in social affairs is

absolutely necessary in an adequately-operating democracy. The foundation of this democracy is laid as the individual participates in activities for which there are rules in his local community.

The specific purposes of the study as reported in this report are as follows:

(1) To determine the extent to which rural people participate in voluntary formal organizations. (2) To determine the effect that certain factors have on the intensity of participation. (3) To develop a simple technique which may help rural people in their efforts to obtain a more balanced life in their own community.

#### DATA, POPULATION, AND METHOD

Nearly fourteen hundred people, ten years of age and over, in 435 families were interviewed in two rural community areas in Wake County, North Carolina during the summer of 1948.

Two community areas in Wake County, North Carolina were selected for this study of social participation. The data were obtained during the summer of 1948. One of the communities is an open-country area and is located about eight to ten miles north of Raleigh. The second community area is located about eight to ten miles east of Raleigh. This community consisted of two well-defined parts: (a) a small incorporated village and (b) the surrounding area in which the families identified themselves with the group which included the village.

All families in the two community areas were included in the study. The data were obtained, in the main, from the female head of the household. In many instances and wherever feasible, the male head as well as other members of the family were present at the interview. The intensity of the social participation behavior in formal organizations was obtained for each individual ten years of

age and over.

The data on the intensity of social participation refer only to formal organizations. Informal activities such as parties, visiting, movies, etc. were not included in these data. Participation activities in political parties were excluded also. A formal organization for purposes of this study was defined as: "some active grouping, usually but not necessarily in the community or neighborhood, such as a club, lodge, business or political, or professional or religious organization, labor union, etc.; sub-groups of a church or other institution are to be included separately provided they are organized as more or less independent entities. An organization that has independent integrity is one that has a membership, receives contributions, and operates through committees and officers." <sup>1/</sup>

The social participation scores in formal organizations were obtained by means of the Chapin Scale. <sup>2/</sup> In this scale weights are assigned to various activities within an organization as follows: Membership = 1; Attendance = 2; Contributions or dues = 3; Committee membership = 4; and Officer = 5. The total social participation score for an individual is obtained simply by summing the weights assigned to each activity-category in all organizations with which the person is affiliated.

#### TENURE AND PARTICIPATION

Owners participated more intensively than tenants and tenants participated more intensively than sharecroppers. <sup>3/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> F. Stuart Chapin, Social Participation Scale, 1937. University of Minnesota, 1938.

<sup>2/</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3/</sup> Owners are farmers who own all or part of the land they farm. Tenants are farmers who rent the land they farm but furnish their own equipment and management. Sharecroppers also farm someone else's land but they furnish neither management nor equipment.

Among all agricultural people on farms, average participation scores were highest for owners, next highest for tenants, and lowest for sharecroppers. <sup>4/</sup>

The differences between the three groups were not large, however. The score of the owners was only nine per cent higher than that of tenants, and the score of tenants was only five per cent higher than that of sharecroppers.

From this it appears that there was little difference between the participation of owners, tenants, and sharecroppers in formal organizations. It must be remembered, however, that Negroes, who had much higher scores than whites, were concentrated in the lower tenure groups. The relationship between participation and land tenure is brought out more clearly when the races are considered separately.

Within both the Negro and white groups, owners had higher scores than tenants, and tenants had higher scores than sharecroppers; but the pattern within the two racial groups was not the same. Among whites, the average score of owners was 22 per cent higher than that of tenants, and the average score of tenants was 51 per cent higher than that of sharecroppers.

In the Negro population, however, while the average score of owners was 39 per cent higher than the score of tenants, the tenant score was only three per cent higher than that of sharecroppers. In short, there were important differences between the scores of all three tenure groups in the white population, but among Negroes there was very little difference between the scores of tenants and sharecroppers, though there was an important difference between the scores of owners and the two lower tenure groups.

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<sup>4/</sup> 95.6 per cent sharecroppers; 4.4 per cent farm laborers.



Differences between tenure groups varied by level of living index as well as by race. Among Negroes with a low level of living index, 0-9, the pattern was about the same as in the total Negro group. Among whites in this low level of living group, however, the pattern was very different from that in the total white group. Here the average score of tenants was higher than that of either owners or sharecroppers. There was little difference between the scores of owners and sharecroppers.

Among both Negroes and whites in the intermediate level of living group, 10-19, <sup>5/</sup> the patterns, with one exception, were similar to the patterns in the total group. There was an important difference between the scores of Negro tenants and sharecroppers as well as between owners and the two lower tenure groups. In this intermediate group, the score of owners was 38 per cent higher than that of tenants; while the score of tenants was 24 per cent higher than that of sharecroppers. Among whites in the same level of living group, the score of owners was 43 per cent higher than that of tenants, and the tenant score was 59 per cent higher than that of sharecroppers.

It may be concluded, then, that there was an important relationship between land tenure and participation in formal organizations, but that this relationship varied by race and level of living. Generally, owners participated more intensively than tenants, and tenants participated more intensively than sharecroppers.

White owners participated more intensively than white tenants, and white tenants participated more than white sharecroppers, except in the lower level of living group. In this group, tenants participated more intensively than either owners or sharecroppers.

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<sup>5/</sup> No tenants or sharecroppers had a level of living index above 19.

In the Negro population, owners participated more intensively than tenants and sharecroppers, but, except in the intermediate level of living group, there was little difference between the participation of tenants and sharecroppers. Even among Negroes with a level of living index above ten, the difference between tenants and sharecroppers was not nearly as great as that between owners and the two lower tenure groups. This was quite different from the pattern in the white population where there was an important difference between the participation of tenants and sharecroppers, as well as between these groups and owners.

#### LEVEL OF LIVING AND PARTICIPATION

The higher the level of living the more intensive was the participation in formal organizations.

There was an important relationship between level of living <sup>6/</sup> and participation in formal organizations. With a few exceptions, the higher the level of living the higher was the participation score.

In the total population, participation scores went up as the level of living went up. This was not a uniform straight line increase, however. The average scores increased very gradually from the lowest level of living group, 0-4, up to the middle group, 10-14, while from this group up through the highest group, 20-24, there was a much sharper increase. The average score of the middle group was only 1.3 points, or eleven per cent, higher than that of the lowest

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<sup>6/</sup> Level of living refers chiefly to the possession and consumption of goods and services. A level of living index based on the possession of such goods as automobile, radio, electric lights, running water, telephone, and mechanical refrigeration was obtained from every family. A top index of twenty-four was possible, and the indexes of the families ranged from zero to twenty-four.

group, but the score of the highest group was 7.3 points, or 56 per cent, higher than that of the middle group.

In considering the total population, it must be remembered that all the Negroes, who had much higher participation scores than whites in corresponding level of living groups, had level of living indexes below fifteen. The fact that there was little difference between the scores of the three lowest level of living groups may be accounted for chiefly by the concentration of Negroes in these level of living groups.

The pattern among open-country residents was even more irregular, largely because of this concentration of the Negro population in the lower level of living groups.

Among both whites and Negroes, the relationship between participation and level of living was much more clear-cut and consistent than in the combined racial groups. In both groups, participation scores went up consistently as level of living went up. Among all whites, the average scores increased 278 per cent, from 5.4 to 20.8, from the lowest to the highest group. This was a consistent straight-line increase. Among white open-country residents, also, there was a consistent relationship. Here the scores increased 194 per cent from the lowest to the highest level of living group.

No Negro family had a level of living index above fourteen but within the Negro group, also, participation scores increased as level of living index increased. In the 0-4 group, the average score was 13.9; while in the 10-14 group, the average score was 42 per cent higher, 19.7. When five intervals are used, the average scores increased 88 per cent, from 10.7 in the lowest group to 20.1 in the highest group.

In the total white nonfarm population, the range of scores was wider than in any other group. The average scores increased from 2.0 in the lowest group to 22.2 in the highest group.

Among open-country white nonfarm residents, however, the pattern was not so consistent. Here the scores increased through the 10-14 group, then decreased slightly in the 15-19 group, and increased again in the 20-24 group.

This irregular pattern can be explained in part by the very different participation patterns that existed among nonfarm whites within the two open-country areas. In the open-country community, the scores increased sharply from the lowest to the middle group and then decreased in the two highest groups.<sup>7/</sup> In the open-country area of the village-centered community, the scores increased gradually through the second highest level of living group, and then increased sharply in the highest group. As the average scores of nonfarm whites was much higher in the open-country community, the decrease from the 10-14 to the 15-19 group was great enough to bring the score for the combined areas down also.

In the Negro nonfarm population, there was little difference between the participation of the various level of living groups.

Among agricultural people on farms, the participation pattern was similar to that in the total farm population. Among both whites and Negroes the scores went up consistently as level of living went up.

Within land tenure groups, however, the pattern varied. Among both Negro and white owners participation scores went up consistently as level of

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<sup>7/</sup> A similar pattern existed within other white groups in the open-country community.

living index went up, but in the other tenure groups this was not the case. There was no consistent pattern by level of living index within the tenant or sharecropper and laborer group. This was true for both Negroes and whites.

In summary, then, generally, the higher the level of living the more intensive was the participation in formal organizations. The exceptions to this generalization were found among Negro nonfarm residents and among both Negro and white tenants and sharecroppers. In these groups there was no clear relationship between participation and level of living.

#### RACE AND PARTICIPATION

Negroes participated in formal organizations more intensively than white people.

The average Negro score was 26 per cent higher than the average score of all white people and 49 per cent higher than that of the whites who lived in the open country <sup>8/</sup> as may be seen from the following scores:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Open Country</u>
White	13.1	11.1
Negro	16.8	16.5

In these total groups, then, Negro scores were definitely higher than white scores. However, the difference in the scores of the two races varied within residence and occupational <sup>9/</sup> groups. The Negro scores were much higher

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<sup>8/</sup> The village participants have been eliminated here and in some other comparisons of racial groups because of the preponderance of white people in the village and the large difference between the scores of villagers and residents of the open-country area. Of the 319 participants in the village, 309, or 97 per cent, were white. The mean score of the white village residents was 17.4, 57 per cent higher than that of the open-country white residents, 11.1.

<sup>9/</sup> Occupation refers to major source of income of the head of household.

than the white scores in the farm population and in the agricultural population, but among the nonfarm people and the nonagricultural people there was much less difference between the scores of the two races.

Among farm residents, the average Negro score was 51 per cent higher than the white. Among nonfarm residents, however, in the total group the white score was 17 per cent higher than the Negro, but in the open-country nonfarm, the Negro score was 11 per cent higher than the white:

	<u>Farm</u>	<u>Total Nonfarm</u>	<u>Open-country Nonfarm</u>
White	11.1	15.6	11.1
Negro	16.8	13.3	12.3

Most of the difference between the participation of whites and Negroes, then, was among those who lived on farms. However, within the farm population these differences varied by occupation.

There was a much wider difference between the participation of farm Negroes and whites who were engaged in agriculture than between those engaged in nonagricultural work. Among those engaged in agriculture, the average Negro score was 61 per cent higher than the white, but among those not engaged in agriculture the Negro score was only five per cent higher:

	<u>Farm Residents</u>	
	<u>Agricultural</u>	<u>Nonagricultural</u>
White	10.5	12.5
Negro	16.9	13.1

There was little difference between the participation of the two races in either occupational group among nonfarm people. In only one group was the difference as much as one point.

Since most of the difference found so far has been within the group living on farms and engaged in agriculture, the question of differences within land tenure groups comes up. Did these same differences exist within the land tenure groups?

When this agricultural population on farms is analyzed by land tenure groups, even greater differences are revealed. Among owners, the average score of Negroes was 87 per cent higher than that of whites. In the tenant group, the Negro score was 64 per cent higher, and among sharecroppers, the Negro score was more than twice that of the white scores.

Participation was related to level of living, and Negroes had a lower level of living than whites. No Negro household had a level of living index above fourteen, but almost half the white population lived in households with indexes of 15-24, and eliminating the white people with a high level of living brings out the differences between the races more sharply. In the total group with a level of living index below fifteen, the Negro score was 67 per cent higher than that of whites and in the open country it was 75 per cent higher. In the farm population the Negro advantage was 83 per cent in the lower level of living group. In the nonfarm group, with indexes below fifteen, the Negro score was 18 per cent higher in the total and 23 per cent higher in the open country:

	<u>Farm</u>	<u>Total Nonfarm</u>	<u>Open-country Nonfarm</u>
White	9.2	11.3	10.0
Negro	16.8	13.3	12.3

Evidently, then, unless level of living is taken into consideration, part of the difference between the participation of Negroes and whites is concealed by the fact that the level of living of the two races differs widely.

A further analysis by level of living gives additional evidence of this and reveals another important difference; namely, the lower the level of living the greater the difference between the participation of Negroes and whites. (Table 1)

Table 1. Average Participation Scores of Persons Living in Households With a Level of Living Index below Fifteen, by Race, Level of Living Index, and Area, Wake County, North Carolina, 1943.

Race and Level of Living Index	Total	Open Country
Total	13.0	13.0
White	9.9	9.4
Negro	16.5	16.5
0 - 4	11.8	11.4
White	5.4	5.4
Negro	13.9	13.6
5 - 9	13.0	13.0
White	7.9	7.9
Negro	16.3	16.4
10 - 14	13.1	13.8
White	11.7	11.2
Negro	19.7	19.7

In the groups in which there were enough individuals for comparison to be made, the average Negro score was higher in each level of living group by the following percentage:

Index	Total	Open Country	Farm	
			Total	Agricultural
0 - 4	156	152	137	272
5 - 9	106	108	116	100
10 - 14	68	76	61	106



In summary, then, Negroes participated in formal organizations more intensively than whites. This was especially true in the agricultural populations on farms where Negroes in all tenure groups and level of living groups participated much more intensively than whites in corresponding groups. The differences were not large in the nonfarm and in the nonagricultural population.

In all groups, the Negroes participated more intensively than white people with a similar level of living. This was especially true in the lowest level of living groups. As level of living went up, the differences between the participation of Negroes and whites went down.

#### RESIDENCE AND PARTICIPATION

Participation was related to place of residence but this relationship was very different within the two communities.

People who lived in the village participated in formal organizations more intensively than other nonfarm people. This was especially true among nonfarm whites, of whom 309, or 70.7 per cent, lived in the village. This difference is brought out by the following average scores of white nonfarm residents:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Agricultural</u>	<u>Nonagricultural</u>
Total	15.6	14.7	15.7
Village	17.4	15.1	17.7
Open country	11.1	9.1	11.3

Because of the wide differences between the scores of village and open-country residents, two classifications of nonfarm participants are used in comparing farm and nonfarm participation: total nonfarm (including both village and open-country residents) and open country nonfarm.

When the village residents as well as the open-country nonfarm residents were included, the nonfarm score was higher than the average farm score. This was true in the total population and in all white groups.

However, among open-country residents, the pattern was not so clear and consistent. When the two open-country areas were combined, there was little difference between the scores of farm people and nonfarm people, but within each area there were wide differences between the participation of the two groups. In the open-country area of the village-centered community, farm residents participated much more than nonfarm residents, but in the open-country community, just the reverse was true.

Among all open-country residents the farm score was 18 per cent higher than the nonfarm. In the village-centered open-country area, however, the average farm score was 73 per cent higher than the nonfarm, while in the open-country community the nonfarm score was 27 per cent higher than the farm, as may be seen from the following average scores:

	Open Country		
	Total	Village-centered Community	Open-country Community
Farm	13.6	14.0	12.6
Nonfarm	11.5	8.1	15.9

In the total open-country area, there was no difference between the scores of nonfarm whites and farm whites. This does not mean, however, that these scores were the same within the two open-country areas. Here, as in the combined racial groups, the farm score was higher in the open-country area of the village-centered community, while the nonfarm score was higher in the open-country community.

	Open-country Whites		
	Total	Village-centered Community	Open-country Community
Farm	11.1	12.4	8.7
Nonfarm	11.1	8.9	14.4

This same pattern existed within the agricultural and nonagricultural groups of the white open-country residents. There was little difference between the participation scores of farm and nonfarm people in the combined areas, while the farm score was higher in the village-centered open-country area and the nonfarm score was higher in the open-country community.

This was also true within the level of living groups in the white population. In the combined areas, the average score of nonfarm residents was slightly higher (9 per cent) than the average farm score among participants with a level of living index below 15. In the group with a level of living index of 15 and above, the farm score was 6 per cent higher than the nonfarm. In both level of living groups, the scores of farm residents was higher in the village-centered open-country area (by 54 per cent in the lower group and 28 per cent in the higher group) and the nonfarm scores were higher in the open-country community (by 74 per cent in the lower group and by 50 per cent in the higher group).

Among Negroes, the pattern of participation by residence was about the same as among whites. In the village-centered community, farm people participated more intensively than nonfarm people, while in the open-country community just the reverse was true. In the village-centered community, however, the farm score was so much higher than the nonfarm that in the totals, also, the farm score was higher. This may be seen from the following scores of the open-country Negro population:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Village-centered Community</u>	<u>Open-country Community</u>
Farm	16.8	15.9	18.7
Nonfarm	12.3	4.3	22.2

Here the total farm score was 37 per cent higher than the nonfarm, while in the village-centered open-country area the average scores of farm residents was more than three times as great as the nonfarm. In the open-country area the score of nonfarm participants was 19 per cent higher than the farm score.

The same pattern existed within Negro occupational and level of living groups. The farm score was higher in the total group and in the village-centered community, but in the open-country community the nonfarm score was higher.

In summary, then, village residents participated in formal organizations more than open-country residents and residence was definitely related to participation in the open-country. The pattern of participation by residence was very different within the two open-country areas, however. In the village-centered community farm residents participated more intensively than nonfarm residents, but in the open-country community nonfarm residents participated more intensively than farm residents.

#### AGE AND SEX IN SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Social participation was much lower for people in their twenties than in the earlier years. Participation gradually increased to the highest point between 45 and 60 years of age, and became much lower during the older years of life.

The data in this study show that there are definite age and sex profiles of the intensity of social participation. The following is a description of the phases

on the total age profile: (1) The average individual social participation score was higher in the 15-19 age class as compared with the younger group 10-14 years of age. (2) The scores decreased sharply at about twenty years of age and the low point for the entire age structure came in the ten years between twenty and thirty years of age. (3) After approximately thirty years of age the scores gradually increased. The high point for the entire group was reached in the 55-59 age class. (4) The older age groups, above 60 years of age, had markedly lower scores than the age class with the highest scores.

Females participated more intensively than males in every age group under 55 years of age. There is some evidence that the peak in participation was reached about ten years earlier for females than males -- 45-49 for females and 55-59 for males.

This sex difference was fairly great and was consistent for the white population. Among Negroes the pattern was not nearly so clear or definite. However, in every age group above 15-19, the Negro scores were higher than the corresponding scores for the white population.