Measuring Group Inequalities*

The previous chapter has been devoted to making two points. First, in Peru ethnic identities are complex and fluid, with divergences between subjective and objective perceptions. Second, they matter. They matter, because people find that they matter, as part of identity, but also as a source of disparate life experiences. Prejudice and discrimination are unpopular realities to admit to in Peru, but they do exist.

With this depth of understanding we now need to evaluate the degree of group, or ‘horizontal’, inequality and its forms. It will be clear that to do this in a clean straightforward statistical sense is impossible. But we need to try to give a quantitative sense, and this is the task of this chapter, where we abstract from the complexities we have developed rather fully, to investigate the best proxies we can find for group-ethnic identity in Peru. First, we comment more deeply on the problem of ethnic markers. Second, we present our evidence on socioeconomic and political horizontal inequalities. Then we explore people’s perceptions of horizontal inequalities, drawing again on the results of our survey and the follow up interviews. Finally we conclude. We show that despite the ambiguities of measurement and the degree of fluidity, felt grievances of an ethnic nature clearly exist.

The effort of measurement is important, despite its difficulty. This is not only because it can reinforce our case on the salience of ethnicity, but also because, based on that case, one clear policy implication of our analysis will be that inequalities between groups need to be monitored as part of a responsible development policy, and targeted with specific actions. Such a policy needs data to implement it, and simply improving such data may need to be part of the policy recommendation.

*As explained in the Preface, Adolfo Figueroa is co-author of this chapter.
Ethnic Markers

After the discussion of Chapter 2, it will be evident that it is difficult to produce adequate ethnic markers, given the fluidities and ambiguities we have described and the way people's views of their own and others' ethnicity varies, over time and in different contexts. Even the language of markers becomes part of the problem: one might think, for example, that 'white' had a clear meaning, but in Peru the word contains a mixture of racial and cultural elements. Thus someone who by his or her parentage and skin colour and features would appear to be mestizo, might well be called, and call him or herself, ‘white’, based on cultural characteristics.

The usual candidates for ethnic markers include race, language, religion and place of origin. In the case of Peru, data on race are mostly unavailable or unreliable. The usual way to measure race is to use self-identification of the individual. In our survey, reported in the previous chapter, we used self-identification, precisely because we were interested in people's perceptions of identity. But as an objective measure, this method has proved to be unreliable in a hierarchical society, because people tend to hide the stigma of not belonging to the dominant group, in our case being 'non-white'. It is possible to circumvent this problem with sophisticated methods, as shown in the case of Brazil (Lovell 1999, Silva 1992); however, these methods have not been used in Peru when data on race have been collected, as in the 1940 Census or the 2001 National Household Survey (ENAHO).

We have seen that language is only a partial marker of ethnicity in Peru, despite the fact that it is the most commonly used marker. As discussed in Chapter 2 above, indigenous languages are spoken by a subset of descendants of indigenous populations. Spanish is the common language even in regions where well-developed pre-colonial civilizations existed, such as the Chimu in the north. Today, not all indigenous populations speak indigenous languages. In addition, other minority ethnic groups, such as Africans, Asians and Europeans, all speak Spanish. Hence, language is a poor ethnic marker in Peru. Further, religion cannot be used as a social marker in a country that is largely Catholic (about 95 per cent of the population), and in which Catholicism cuts across almost all ethnic groups.

We are thus left with place of origin, for which we think a good case can be made. In Chapter 5 below we describe the historical process that led to a physical separation of indigenous and white/mestizo: today, migration has enormously confused the issue, but by using place of birth, not residence, we can at least partially compensate. Further, the