

Who is Indigenous in Latin America?

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Abstract :

We use two innovative nationally representative surveys of Mexico and Peru to compare estimates of indigenous populations and patterns of indigenous classification based on alternative measures of indigenous identification. The indigenous population of Mexico and Peru is the largest in the Western Hemisphere by official counts but our preliminary analysis reveals wide variation in indigenous classification depending on the measure used, especially in Peru. Although indigenous people officially constitute 27 percent of the Peruvian population, fully half of Peruvians are indigenous by one of our most expansive measure but less than 5 percent by the most restrictive one. We also find that differences in classification as indigenous depends on rural/urban condition, socioeconomic status and interestingly, skin color. For example, self-identification in an indigenous ethnic group (Quechua, Nahuatl, etc.) compared to self-identification based on indigenous language fluency occurs mainly among among younger, more urban, and lighter peoples, with some notable variations across country.

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Extended Abstract:

National censuses of the 19 Latin American countries estimate the indigenous population of the region at 40.3 million people (23.3 million in Mexico and Peru) or 7.3 percent of the region's population (Telles and PERLA 2014). For the first time, nearly all Latin American Censuses (except Cuba and the Dominican Republic¹) identify the indigenous. However, Censuses use almost as many definitions of indigenous as there are countries in the region. This reflects the lack of consensus on precisely who is indigenous. We contend that the indicator used, the wording of the ethno-racial question, the response categories used and who does the classifying (e.g. self or interviewer) may greatly affect indigenous population estimates and the extent of variation depends on particular countries. A notable example is Bolivia, which was considered the only Latin American country with a majority of indigenous population. However, the indigenous population in that country unexpectedly dropped from 62 percent in 2001 to 42 percent in 2012, which is unlikely to be the result of demographic changes or even changes in indigenous identity (if anything, Bolivians expected an increase) but perhaps to changes in the wording and the response categories used. While Censuses seek to get "accurate" estimates of the indigenous populations, we argue that indigenosity, like ethnic identity generally, is polysemous with no clear boundaries or consensus definitions.

This may be particularly true in Latin America, where ethnic and racial identities are particularly fluid, despite attempts at creating a common definition (Telles 2004, Villarreal 2014). For indigenous classification, one may use self-identity, as the United Nations (through Convention 169) advises or language fluency, which has been the primary indicator for classifying the indigenous in the 20th century (Loveman 2014). Indeed those two criteria are concurrently used in Mexico (Villarreal 2014). Language fluency is arguably a more direct indicator, reflecting indigenous cultural traits, though increasingly fewer Latin Americans speak indigenous languages. Today, many Spanish monolinguals (perhaps increasingly so) may identify as indigenous, Quechua, Maya, etc. and perhaps maintain indigenous customs and traditions.

Moreover, self-identity itself may vary widely depending on the census question and response categories used. Identifying as "indigenous" is especially low in some countries because the term (like *Indio* or *Indian*) has been traditionally stigmatized while terms that refer to one's particular ethnic group or tribe (e.g. *Quechua*, *Maya*) are often more acceptable. De la Cadena's (2003) aptly titled book *Indigenous Mestizos* captures the fact that many people identify as mestizo though they hold indigenous traits, are perceived as indigenous or switch their identification to indigenous in particular situations. Alternatively, one may use classification by others (such as by the interviewer), as is commonly practiced in everyday interactions.

As several authors have shown, American Indian identities in the US (Nagel 1998, Eschbach, Supple and Snipp 1998, Campell 2007) are also quite fluid and have changed in past decades due to new population sectors now identifying as such. Which population sectors are considered indigenous may also vary depending on how indigenous identity is defined or measured. Using a new data set, we examine for the first time the extent of variance in population estimates based on different, widely used, measures of indigeneity. In addition, we study how distinct measures differentially affect subsectors of the population and how they differ cross-nationally.

¹ There are arguably no indigenous people in these Caribbean countries.

Data and Methods

With data collected by the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), we examine these distinct dimensions of indigenous identity in Mexico and Peru. PERLA included an extensive battery of survey items examined indigenous classification by varying the questions, categories and methods of capture. The Mexican PERLA sample is nationally representative and includes 1,000 nationally age 18 and older and an oversample of 500 indigenous Mexicans. In Peru, the sample consists of 1500 nationally representative adults. (In our extended analysis, we also use a PERLA-designed ethnicity module in the 2010 and 2012 AmericasBarometer as supplementary data.)

In this preliminary analysis, we first report a bivariate table of estimates based on 12 alternative measures of indigenous identity, including self-identification using a set of mutually-exclusive ethnic/racial categories, identification in a particular indigenous ethnic group, language fluency, parents' and grandparents' language fluency, and interviewer's classification. As a second step, we use a multivariate regression analysis examining the discrepancies in indigenous identification among two of these measures, which have been used in censuses and surveys in the past. These measures are: Identification with specific indigenous ethnic group based on ancestors and customs (this is the question format used by the Peruvian Census) and fluency in an indigenous language (Table 2).

The dependent variable in Table 2 has four categories: (1) The respondent does not identify with an indigenous ethnic group nor speaks indigenous language, (2) Identifies with an ethnic group but does not speak the language, (3) Speaks the language but does not identify with an indigenous ethnic group, and (4) Speaks the language and identifies with an indigenous ethnic group. Given that the dependent variable is nominal, we use a multinomial logit model to examine factors associated with discrepancy in indigenous identification between the two criteria being compared. The model captures the association between predictors and each category of the dependent variable, using one category as baseline for comparison ("excluded category"). The parameter estimates capture the association between the predictor and the respective category of the dependent variable compared with the association with the excluded category. The predictors include: respondent's age, years of schooling, sex, skin color, household SES (based on a household asset index), urban residence, and parents' years of schooling.

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 shows the percentages of the Mexican and Peruvian national population that is classified as indigenous using various criteria with the national samples. Depending on the measure used, we find that the indigenous population varies from 8.8 percent of the national population using interviewer classification (D in Table 1) to 27.6 percent using grandparent's language (L) in Mexico. The variation is substantially greater in Peru, from 4.7 of the population self-identify as "indigenous" when using a set of 5 mutually-exclusive ethnic/racial categories (A) to 49.8 percent using grandparent's language (L), a ratio of 10:1.

In Mexico, the percent identifying as indigenous when options indigenous, white, black, mulatto or mestizo are given is fully 12.4 percent of the population, suggesting that "indigenous" is a fairly acceptable term in that country. From another perspective, about twice as many Mexicans identify in an indigenous ethnic group based on their ancestry and customs (22.2 percent) compared to as "indigenous" when indigenous, white, black, mulatto and mestizo categories are offered. This compares to a ratio of 5:1 in Peru (23.5

and 4.7 percent). These results show a particularly strong reluctance to self-identify as “indigenous” in Peru even if a large proportion of the population acknowledges indigenous ancestry and custom. This finding is consistent with de la Cadena’s (2003) study of Peru and with Yashar’s (2005) comparative analysis showing Peruvian exceptionalism as a “indigenous country without indigenous people” among five indigenous societies. (We will show in the full analysis using AmericasBarometer data that the Peruvian case is exceptional compared to a larger range of Latin American countries.)

At the other end, measurement according to grandparent’s language (L) yields an especially large indigenous population for Peru compared to Mexico. Although one may argue that such a measurement reaches beyond usual conceptions of indigenous classification, the question is not that far-fetched considering that the recent Uruguayan and Argentine Census classify the indigenous on whether respondents have any indigenous ancestry. Our examination of the indigenous language items reveal that fully 42.5 percent of Peruvians at least partially understand an indigenous language (F) and 23.4 percent are fluent indigenous language speakers (C). This compares to considerably lower numbers of 20.9 and 16.2 percent in Mexico. The language figures also reveal a more rapid indigenous language loss over the last three generations in Peru compared to Mexico. These results also reveal that 75% of Peruvians identifying as indigenous speak an indigenous language compared to only 57% in Mexico. This shows that Mexicans are more likely to identify as indigenous even though they do not speak the language.

A notable comparison is between self and other-classification (A and D). More persons identify as indigenous than are perceived as indigenous in Mexico while the opposite is true in Peru. Although self-identification has become the standard practice of indigenous classification in surveys, in practice other-classification as indigenous is crucial for understanding social interactions and discrimination since it provides a more direct measure of how people are perceived by others and is only weakly correlated with self-identification. Surely, interviewer-classification reflects only one particular view of other-classification.

Our preliminary multivariate analysis in Table 2 focuses on discrepancies between self-identification in an indigenous ethnic group and indigenous language fluency (A and C in Table 1). The full analysis will examine other key discrepancies as well, including between self- and interviewer-classification, and between identification in an indigenous ethnic group and identification as indigenous versus black, white, mulatto or mestizo.

Table 2 examines the factors that shape identification with an indigenous ethnic group without speaking an indigenous language, as well as fluency in an indigenous language without identifying as part of an indigenous ethnic group (we also consider the “consistent” situations i.e. individuals who both identify as indigenous and speak the language, and those who do not identify as indigenous and do not speak the language). The analysis reveals that Peruvians and Mexicans in rural areas are more likely to speak an indigenous language but not identify in an indigenous ethnic group. Darker and more educated Mexicans and older and Peruvians were also more likely to speak an indigenous language but not identify in an indigenous group. In Mexico, people who identify in an indigenous ethnic group are primarily urban – they are much more likely to be urban than those who speak an indigenous language, which is not surprising. However, they are also more likely to be urban than those who neither speak an indigenous language nor self-report as indigenous. This suggests the reemergence of indigeneity as a source of identity in spite of not speaking an indigenous language in urban areas. Mexicans who identify in an indigenous ethnic group but do not speak the language are slightly lighter than those who speak an indigenous language. In Peru, this group is also much more likely to be urban, and they are younger than any

other group. Persons that would be consistently classified as indigenous using both measures –indigenous ethnic identification and language— are more likely to be rural, darker and lower-SES in both countries.

Preliminary Discussion and Conclusion

We find vast differences in estimating the indigenous population in Mexico and Peru depending on the measure used. Estimates of the indigenous population may vary from half of the Peruvian population to less than one-twentieth depending on the question asked. In Mexico, the indigenous population would range from about 9 to 28 percent, based on our data. In both countries, living in a non-urban area is the variable most likely to determine whether one self-identifies in an indigenous group and speaks an indigenous language. Results using various status indicators (schooling, parents' schooling and wealth) suggest that persons who speak indigenous language and identify in an indigenous group are more likely to be of lower status. Our results for skin color are notable and suggest that the core group in indigenous classification, i.e. those that are indigenous by any classification, tend to be darker in both countries.

We have emphasized the comparison of Mexico and Peru, which reveal distinct patterns of indigenous classification. We have shown substantial cross-national differences in the range of estimates and in the determinants of those differences. The findings indicate that identifying as "indigenous" is especially low because it has been traditionally stigmatized, but that is especially true in Peru. Among those who identify in an indigenous group, more educated persons are also more likely to speak an indigenous language in Mexico but in Peru, that less educated of similar persons are more likely to speak an indigenous language. Also in Peru, older persons and those raised with parents having more schooling are more likely to identify in an indigenous ethnic group and speak the ethnic language. In Mexico, such persons are likely to have more assets than persons who identify in an indigenous ethnic group but do not speak an indigenous language. Our preliminary analysis also supports the idea that that may be changing for Mexicans that would not traditionally be seen as indigenous (more rural and least educated but especially defined by their language).

We have sought to decenter analysis of indigenous classification from the U.S. story by examining the case of two Latin American countries, which have the largest indigenous populations in the Western Hemisphere. But there certainly are similarities with the U.S. case such as a growing identification as indigenous and the fluidity of this category. We expect to draw upon the rich U.S. literature to see if the trends are different from that resurgence in the US, which is well documented but our approach (using different measures) is novel, though cross-sectional. Our evidence extends the comparison to Latin America and two distinct countries and with our innovative data, we are able to expand our understanding of indigenous identity, which will continue to challenge our views about Indians and about race/ethnicity generally.

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Table 1. Percent Size of Indigenous Population in Mexico and Peru using Alternative Measures

	MEXICO	PERU
A. Self-Identification in an Indigenous Ethnic Group using Peruvian Census format	22.2	23.5
B. Self-Identification as “Indigenous” using America’s Barometer (AB) format	12.4	4.7
C. Speaking Fluency in Indigenous Language	16.2	23.4
D. Interviewer Classification as Indigenous using AB format	8.8	6.3
E. Indigenous First Language	12.5	11.4
F. Some ability to understand Indigenous language	20.9	42.5
G. Indigenous mother	16.7	31.7
H. Indigenous father	16.5	29.0
I. Mother Speaks/Spoke Indigenous Language	15.2	38.4
J. Father Speaks/Spoke Indigenous Language	16.1	36.8
K. At least one parent Speaks/Spoke Indigenous Language	18.2	42.7
L. At least one Grandparent Speaks/Spoke Indigenous Language	27.6	49.8

Source: 2010 PERLA Nationally Representative Sample Surveys of Mexico and Peru

Note:

A: Peruvian Census Format: Based on your ancestors or customs, do you consider yourself of [list of specific indigenous groups + black, white, mulatta, mestiza, other] origin?

B: AmericasBarometer Format: Do You Consider Yourself mulatta, black, indigenous, mestiza, white, other?

Table 2. Multinomial logit model predicting discrepancy between self-identity in indigenous ethnic group versus indigenous classification based on indigenous language speaking fluency. Mexico and Peru 2010¹.

VARIABLES	MEXICO				PERU			
	Neither indigenous ethnic ID nor indigenous language	Indigenous ID but no Indigenous Language	No Indigenous ID but indigenous Language	Both indigenous ID and language	Neither indigenous ethnic ID nor indigenous language	Indigenous ID but no Indigenous Language	No Indigenous ID but indigenous Language	Both indigenous ID and language
Age	0.007 (0.008)		0.019 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)	0.024*** (0.008)		0.042*** (0.010)	0.025*** (0.010)
Years of Schooling	-0.012 (0.034)		0.116** (0.051)	0.008 (0.050)	-0.002 (0.033)		0.026 (0.041)	-0.021 (0.039)
Parents Years of Schooling	-0.008 (0.033)		0.053 (0.049)	-0.014 (0.055)	0.055** (0.026)		-0.057 (0.036)	-0.086** (0.035)
Urban	-0.843** (0.335)		-1.537*** (0.455)	-1.514*** (0.405)	-0.629** (0.263)		-0.944*** (0.320)	-0.982*** (0.303)
Male	-0.282 (0.229)		-0.070 (0.353)	-0.370 (0.326)	0.014 (0.184)		0.094 (0.247)	-0.033 (0.235)
Skin Color	-0.034 (0.085)		0.235* (0.124)	0.373*** (0.119)	-0.032 (0.069)		0.058 (0.091)	0.088 (0.087)
Household SES	0.299** (0.146)		-0.152 (0.220)	-0.887*** (0.202)	0.129 (0.123)		-0.037 (0.165)	-0.183 (0.158)
Constant	2.589*** (0.692)		-2.592** (1.044)	-1.515 (0.986)	1.305** (0.657)		-1.118 (0.862)	0.276 (0.814)
Observations		804					1,410	

1 Category of dependent variable “Indigenous ethnic group identification but no fluency in indigenous language” omitted and used as baseline for comparison.

Source: PERLA Nationally Representative Sample Surveys of Mexico and Peru