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Decomposing inequality and obtaining marginal effects

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Abstract. This article describes a user-written command, `descogini`, that decomposes the Gini coefficient by income source and allows the calculation of the impact that a marginal change in a particular income source will have on inequality. `descogini` can be used with `bootstrap` to obtain standard errors and confidence intervals.

Keywords: `st0100`, `descogini`, Gini, Gini decomposition by income source, inequality

1 Introduction

The Gini coefficient is widely used to measure inequality in the distribution of income, consumption, and other welfare proxies. Decomposing this measure can help you understand the determinants of inequality. The techniques used more often decompose inequality either by subpopulations or by income source. This article describes a user-written command, `descogini`, that decomposes the Gini coefficient by income source and allows the calculation of the impact that a marginal change in a particular income source will have on inequality.

There are other user-written commands available for Stata that decompose inequality. For example, `ineqdeco` and `ginidesc` decompose inequality by subpopulation groups, whereas `ineqfac` does so by factor components of total income. `descogini` complements the commands that do subpopulation decompositions and is an alternative to `ineqfac`. The main difference between `ineqfac` and `descogini` is that `descogini` allows the estimation of the marginal effects that every income source has on inequality by using the approach proposed by Lerman and Yitzhaki (1985). Furthermore, this command can be used with `bootstrap` to obtain standard errors and confidence intervals.

2 Framework

Extending the results of Shorrocks (1982), Lerman and Yitzhaki (1985) show that the Gini coefficient for total income inequality, G , can be represented as

$$G = \sum_{k=1}^K S_k G_k R_k$$

where S_k represents the share of source k in total income, G_k is the source Gini corresponding to the distribution of income from source k , and R_k is the Gini correlation of income from source k with the distribution of total income ($R_k = \text{Cov}\{y_k, F(y)\} / \text{Cov}\{y_k, F(y_k)\}$, where $F(y)$ and $F(y_k)$ are the cumulative distributions of total income and of income from source k).

As noted by Stark, Taylor, and Yitzhaki (1986), the relation among these three terms has a clear and intuitive interpretation; the influence of any income component upon total income inequality depends on

- how important the income source is with respect to total income (S_k);
- how equally or unequally distributed the income source is (G_k); and
- how the income source and the distribution of total income are correlated (R_k).

If an income source represents a large share of total income, it may potentially have a large impact on inequality. However, if income is equally distributed ($G_k = 0$), it cannot influence inequality, even if its magnitude is large. On the other hand, if this income source is large and unequally distributed (S_k and G_k are large), it may either increase or decrease inequality, depending on which households (individuals), at which points in the income distribution, earn it. If the income source is unequally distributed and flows disproportionately toward those at the top of the income distribution (R_k is positive and large), its contribution to inequality will be positive. However, if it is unequally distributed but targets poor households (individuals), the income source may have an equalizing effect on the income distribution.

Lerman and Yitzhaki (1985) show that by using this particular method of Gini decomposition, you can estimate the effect of small changes in a specific income source on inequality, holding income from all other sources constant. Consider a small change in income from source k equal to ey_k , where e is close to 1 and y_k represents income from source k . It can be shown (see Stark, Taylor, and Yitzhaki [1986]) that the partial derivative of the Gini coefficient with respect to a percent change e in source k is equal to

$$\frac{\partial G}{\partial e} = S_k(G_k R_k - G)$$

where G is the Gini coefficient of total income inequality prior to the income change. The percent change in inequality resulting from a small percent change in income from

source k equals the original contribution of source k to income inequality minus source k 's share of total income:

$$\frac{\partial G / \partial e}{G} = \frac{S_k G_k R_k}{G} - S_k \quad (1)$$

3 The descogini program

3.1 Syntax

```
descogini varlist [if] [in] [, d(#) bar]
```

3.2 Options

`d(#)` allows the user to specify the number of decimal places to be reported in the table of results. The default is `d(4)`.

`bar` includes a vertical bar before each field to facilitate the creation of a table of results in Microsoft Word.

3.3 Description

For the command to work properly, the variable that captures total income must be included first, followed by the income source variables. The order in which the income source variables are included in the syntax of the command is not important for the consistency of the results, and in fact, as shown in the examples below, you may include only a partial list of the income source variables.

The estimates of S_k , G_k , R_k , G , and the marginal effects obtained from (1) are all available after `descogini` is run. The marginal effects are saved as a vector `e(b)`, whereas the rest of the results are scalars under the following names: $S_k = \text{sname}$, $G_k = \text{gname}$, $R_k = \text{rname}$, and $G = \text{gtotal}$, where *name* is the name of each income source variable. `bootstrap` can be easily applied to obtain standard errors and confidence intervals for any of these estimates.

4 An example of Gini decomposition by income source

The following example illustrates the use of `descogini` and presents an interpretation of the results. Total income can be disaggregated in multiple ways, depending on the characteristics of the information and on the question that you are trying to answer. In this example, total income from household data is divided into three sources: farm income (`farminc`), off-farm income (`ofarminc`), and income from remittances and government transfers (`transinc`). The output obtained from using `descogini` is the following:

```
. use desco
(Data for examples of descogini)
```

```
. descogini totinc farminc ofarminc transinc
```

Gini Decomposition by Income Source

Total Income Variable: totinc

Source	Sk	Gk	Rk	Share	% Change
farminc	0.6225	0.7374	0.9428	0.8207	0.1982
ofarminc	0.1929	0.6577	0.5502	0.1324	-0.0605
transinc	0.1846	0.3793	0.3535	0.0469	-0.1377
Totalincome		0.5273			

For brevity, let us look at the results of just two of the three income sources. The results of farm income show that a 1% increase in that income source, all else being equal, increases the Gini coefficient of total income by 0.198%. Farm income is unequally distributed (0.737), and the Gini correlation between farm income and total income is high (0.943), indicating that farm income favors the rich more than any other income source. On the other hand, off-farm income has a slight equalizing effect on the distribution of total income. This finding shows that a relatively high source Gini (0.658) does not imply that an income source has an unequalizing effect on total-income inequality. An income source may be unequally distributed yet favor the poor, as is the case for off-farm income. For detailed examples of Gini decomposition by income source, see Stark, Taylor, and Yitzhaki (1986); López-Feldman, Mora, and Taylor (2005); and Taylor et al. (2005).

As mentioned earlier, `descogini` allows the estimation of bootstrapped standard errors and confidence intervals. Assume that we are interested only in the standard errors of the farm income Gini and in the marginal change in inequality due to a 1% change in farm income. These answers can be obtained in the following way:

```
. set seed 1234567
. bootstrap "descogini totinc farminc" Gfarm=gfarminc Mgfarminc=_b[mgfarminc]
command: descogini totinc farminc
statistics: Gfarm = gfarminc
            Mgfarminc = _b[mgfarminc]

Bootstrap statistics      Number of obs =      185
                        Replications =      50
```

Variable	Reps	Observed	Bias	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]		
Gfarm	50	.7373723	-.0124623	.0359332	.6651617	.8095828	(N)
					.6646934	.7848438	(P)
					.6690543	.7929884	(BC)
Mgfarminc	50	.1981957	-.0019509	.0193368	.159337	.2370545	(N)
					.1618218	.2267272	(P)
					.1707874	.2476358	(BC)

Note: N = normal
P = percentile
BC = bias-corrected

To guarantee reproducibility of the results, `set seed` must be used. All the options of `bootstrap` (see [R] `bootstrap`) are available when bootstrapping `descogini`.

Finally, since the estimates of marginal effects are saved in the vector `e(b)`, we can easily bootstrap them all at the same time:

```
. set seed 1234567
. bootstrap "descogini totinc farminc ofarminc transinc" _b
command:      descogini totinc farminc ofarminc transinc
statistics:    b_mgfarm~c = _b[mgfarminc]
               b_mgofar~c = _b[mgofarminc]
               b_mgtran~c = _b[mgtransinc]

Bootstrap statistics                                Number of obs    =      185
                                                    Replications      =      50
```

Variable	Reps	Observed	Bias	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]		
b_mgfarminc	50	.1981957	-.0019509	.0193368	.159337	.2370545	(N)
					.1618218	.2267272	(P)
					.1707874	.2476358	(BC)
b_mgofarminc	50	-.0605021	.0006287	.0168256	-.0943144	-.0266899	(N)
					-.0906175	-.0285774	(P)
					-.0906175	-.0069495	(BC)
b_mgtransinc	50	-.1376936	.0013222	.0158715	-.1695885	-.1057987	(N)
					-.1674831	-.1117099	(P)
					-.1701275	-.1168307	(BC)

Note: N = normal
P = percentile
BC = bias-corrected

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6 References

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