

# Theoretical Proposal of Taxonomy of Ibero-American Universities from the form of Appointment of the Rectors

## Propuesta teórica de taxonomía de universidades iberoamericanas a partir de la forma de nombramiento de los rectores

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## Summary

The university is faced with tensions and demands resulting from the transformations that society demands. The new public management (NGP) imposes new paradigms as far as university administration is concerned. Concomitantly, the international rankings of universities establish standards and classifications, placing the focus on access to information that should be available to interest groups. This work has been proposed as a central purpose, to describe the ways of appointing the rectors in Latin American universities, with the purpose of elaborating in theoretical terms a taxonomy that allows to differentiate and classify the universities of the region, opening the discussion on what is the most appropriate mechanism to provide the position of the highest university authority. The information used for this study was obtained from a primary source: the database of universities in Latin America; which consists of the Laws, decrees, statutes, regulations of election of authorities among others that regulate 1080 institutions of the Ibero-American region. This information establishes a taxonomy of four types that attempt to simplify and demonstrate the different forms of organization of the institutions. These allow to describe the degree of participation of the interest groups in the process of appointing the rector. The proposed taxonomy confirms the existence of dissimilar mechanisms for appointing the rector and that these are dependent on the type of ownership of the institution.

**Keywords:** University Governance; Election Rectors; Interest Groups; Complex Organization Management; Universities.

## Resumen

La universidad se ve enfrentada a tensiones y exigencias producto de las transformaciones que le exige la sociedad. La nueva gestión pública (NGP) impone nuevos paradigmas en lo que a administración universitaria se refiere. Concomitantemente, el foco de muchas investigaciones se ha colocado en la gobernanza de las universidades, dado que se ha estimado que ella es central en el éxito de estas instituciones. A partir del contexto precitado, este trabajo se ha planteado como propósito central, describir las formas de nombramiento de los rectores en las universidades iberoamericanas, con la finalidad de elaborar en términos teóricos una taxonomía que permita diferenciar y clasificar a las universidades de la región, abriendo la discusión sobre cuál es el mecanismo más adecuado para proveer el cargo de la máxima autoridad universitaria. La información utilizada para este estudio se obtuvo a partir de una fuente primaria: la base de datos de universidades de Iberoamérica; la cual consta de las Leyes, decretos, estatutos, reglamentos de elección de autoridades entre otros que regulan a 1080 instituciones de la región Iberoamericana. Con esta información se establece una taxonomía de cuatro tipos que intentan simplificar y evidenciar las distintas formas de organización de las instituciones. Estas permiten describir el grado de participación de los grupos de interés en el proceso de nombramiento del rector. La taxonomía propuesta constata la existencia de disímiles mecanismos de nombramiento del rector y que estos son dependientes del tipo de propiedad de la institución.

**Palabras clave:** Gobernanza universitaria; Elección Rectores; Grupos de interés; Gestión organizaciones complejas; Universidades.

## Introducción

In recent years, the university as an institution has been strongly subdued by a new regulatory drive; This trend is driven by the so-called New Public Management (New Public Management), a theoretical framework that has led to the rise of a new paradigm of regulation and evaluation for public institutions, which also influences the university, contrasting with the idea Classical and historical, which understood it as an autonomous institution, academically and administratively, in conjunction with a state that until then guaranteed resources and freedom of action (Jarvis, 2014).

In particular, one of the elements through which the New Public Management (NGP) exerts its influence on the university is through the accreditation systems, which in the case of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), have been applied since the 80's, mainly in Europe and North America. The same has happened in Latin America more recently, implying a series of standards to be met by universities to satisfy an expected level of quality (Ferlie, Musselin and Andresani, 2009).

Along the same lines, higher education financing systems have been transformed from a source of income dependent on public taxes, towards a system dependent on the payment of fees by students (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011)

In Europe, the NGP has also materialized with its educational integration system, the Bologna agreements have profoundly changed the rules of the game for higher education institutions, generating a series of regulations and standardization of management indicators based on their objective of Allowing an expeditious flow of students and workers between the countries of the European Union (de Boer & File, 2009; Dobbins & Knill 2009), these new common standards for the universities of Europe, have transformed them into an institution whose predominant idea is to produce services in a competitive market (Olsen, 2007).

All these elements make studies on the government of the university necessary, from different perspectives; for example, Dobbins, Knill & Vögtle (2011) raise the need to focus on institutions that implement new governance models, where “more is done with less”. At this level, the way in which it interacts with interest groups, particularly with the State, which distances itself from the relationship with the university, assuming a role of mere supervisor (Christensen, 2011), changes.

In this scenario, governance is transformed in the universities (Ganga-Contreras Viancos & Leyva, 2016), generating greater degrees of budgetary autonomy, evaluations of their performance and competition between institutions (Dobbins, Knill & Vögtle, 2011). Regarding its governance structure, it implies changes in the composition of its boards of directors; as stated by Degn & Sørensen (2015): there is a trend in the reduction of the composition of its internal members associated with the academy (Academics, Students and officials) and the number of interest groups outside the institution is increasing , especially those that allow the capture of resources.

Regarding university classifications, there is a multiplicity of taxonomies and typologies of these higher education houses (Ganga and Viancos, 2018; Bustos-González, 2019). The motivations for creating these classifications are explained by Ortega and Casillas (2014), firstly, reasons of public policies in the allocation of resources, secondly, promotional or informative purposes, and finally, research purposes. This generates a hierarchy of higher education institutions. In this sense, taxonomies are used with a multiplicity of purposes that are similar to those used by university rankings (Brunner, 2009).

However, there is a multiplicity of efforts to conceptualize those previously mentioned, a notable one is the exercise by Muñoz and Blanco (2013) who propose a taxonomy for the universities of Chile based on a factor analysis that takes quantitative variables and classifies the universities in five types (research, mass, accreditation, elitist and non-elitist).

Previously, the work of Professor José Joaquín Burnner for universities (2011), raises universities according to governance regimes, from the bureaucratic and collegiate as the most traditional, to new entrepreneurial trends and the stakeholders most associated with the new challenges facing universities.

The most recent exercise is carried out by Bustos-González (2019) who classifies the universities according to their results among research universities, teaching universities that do

research and teaching universities; finding that there is no positive correlation between institutional size and research performance.

Regarding the taxonomies of universities, regarding their governance, the typologies of the role of the bureaucratic, political and managerial rectors (Acosta, 2009) and of legitimacy of the university government (Bernasconi & Clasing, 2015) can be highlighted.

The rectors, as they are commonly called the top managers of higher education institutions, are under constant pressure from internal interest groups, call them students, academics and non-academic officials; each with their own motivation and interests towards the institution.

On the other hand, it also receives pressure from external interest groups, government authorities, owners of the institution, alumni, companies, social organizations, etc. (Caballero, Garcia & Corredoira, 2007; Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008; Ganga-Contreras, Quiroz & Fossatti, 2016; Brunner & Ganga, 2016), who also have their own idea of what the institution should do. In this order of things, the importance of the rector's leadership emerges as an imperative of Latin American universities, emphasizing the respective styles and the positive results associated with efficiency and effectiveness in strategic processes, even over the role of the highest collegiate body (Ganga, Rodríguez, Navarrete & Pedraja, 2018).

On the other hand, it has been shown that the forms of appointment of the rectors have a direct relationship with the concept of autonomy of the universities (Ganga-Contreras and Viancos, 2018b), understanding the concept of autonomy as self-government of the academy that takes its own decisions for the institution. In this line of analysis, Choi (2019) suggests that autonomy requires a balance between efficiency in its management and adequate satisfaction of the demands for public goods that are demanded of it by stakeholders.

From another perspective, in the study of the concept of university governance De Boer, Enders & Schimank (2007) state that it is possible to study from five dimensions, which are useful to also explain the phenomenon of the appointment of the rector and autonomy in the university.

First, state regulation is essential to understand the rules and regulations when establishing requirements for rector candidates. In the event, that they are directly elected or appointed by an owner or controller. At the same time, this is relevant because they define the way in which the authority will be named and who participates in that determination.

Second, the dimension, "alignment of interest groups" refers to the capacity of the institutional power to be guided by the influence exerted by the interest groups and therefore affect decisions.

Thirdly, "academic self-governance", understood as the power of academics in decision-making and in the appointment of the rector.

Fourth, the dimension of "administrative self-governance", the organizational culture within the institution and its different actors that influence decision-making, in this case it is relevant if the determination of the appointment passes through internal agents of the institution.

Finally, the dimension associated with "resource competence", in this logic, the determination of the appointment of a rector may be associated with the belief that a potential top manager generates more fundraising for the institution or prestige.

Another interesting research to cite is that of Professor López Zarate (2011), who describes the situation in Mexico, from autonomous public universities. It is striking the differences that occurred within the system itself and the conceptualization of democracy. In the elections, only members of the internal community are asked to participate, and in extreme cases,

universal voting without weight (One student one vote, one academic one vote, one official one vote). Regarding this, the idea of the university as a small republic where fundamentally internal members of the organization have the right to vote is striking.

In this context, the different types of appointment of the university's executive authority and who has decision-making power in their appointment, is tremendously significant, when it comes to staying in office or seeking reelection. Depending on the form of appointment, the conditions could be created to generate populist behavior.

The preliminary information provided justifies a work of this nature, whose central objective aims to describe the different ways that universities have to appoint their respective rectors and, from there, generate a theoretical taxonomy, in order to guide researchers, academics, students and the general public, regarding what type of appointments exist in Latin America, at the same time, provoke a debate regarding the most appropriate method to provide the highest executive authority of these houses of studies.

In addition, it is estimated that the behavior of the different systems within the Ibero-American region will be more clearly understood, since universities with different types of mission (private, confessional and public) are included, from countries that internally have different ways of determining how the top manager is appointed.

## Method

This is a descriptive documentary study that uses secondary sources of information, based on the legislation that regulates the forms of election of the highest executive director of higher education institutions. This includes higher education laws, institution building laws, university statutes, rector election regulations, and scientific articles that address the issue of concern.

The universe of institutions was established considering Scimago's Iber 2015 ranking, which includes 1,641 institutions from all countries (period 2009-2013) that are part of the Ibero-American region with at least 1 document (articles, reviews, conference letters, etc. ), which are in the Scopus database in the last 5 years prior to the ranking (SCImago Research group 2015). Of the total of institutions, 1080 information was found, all of which are included in the analyzes to be carried out.

Likewise, the number of universities was identified by type of entity, according to the origin of the property of the university, thus separating between public universities, secular private universities and confessional private universities (where their controllers are religious congregations).

From the collected information, a typology of the ways of electing the rector was constructed in theoretical terms, considering the analysis of the texts and the existing bibliography.

## Results

### Countries and number of institutions analyzed

As can be seen in Table N ° 1, in order to carry out the theoretical proposal of the corresponding categories of the presented typology, 1080 universities from a total of twenty-seven countries were analyzed. As expected, the highest percentage of institutions belong to Brazil, with practically 26%, followed by Mexico with a little more than 16% and Colombia, with a percentage close to 12%; In fourth place, there are three countries with around 7%. Another fact to highlight is the existence of 8 countries in which a single university was analyzed.

**Table 1.**  
*Countries and universities covered in the study.*

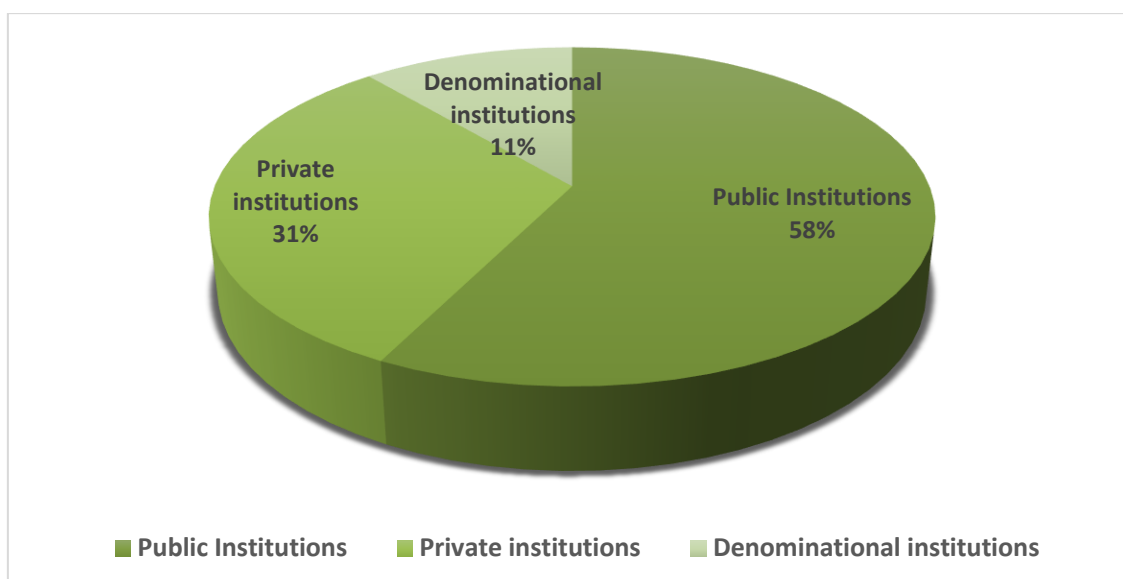
Countries	Universities included in the study	Percentage of total institutions
Andorra	1	0,09%
Argentina	79	7,31%
Belize	1	0,09%
Bolivia	10	0,93%
Brazil	278	25,74%
Chile	56	5,19%
Colombia	124	11,48%
Costa Rica	11	1,02%
Ecuador	45	4,17%
El Salvador	4	0,37%
Spain	78	7,22%
Guatemala	3	0,28%
French Guiana	1	0,09%
Guiana	1	0,09%
Honduras	4	0,37%
United States Virgin Islands	1	0,09%
Jamaica	1	0,09%
México	174	16,11%
Nicaragua	6	0,56%
Panamá	7	0,65%
Paraguay	5	0,46%
Perú	73	6,76%
Portugal	62	5,74%
Puerto Rico	1	0,09%
Dominicana República	6	0,56%
Uruguay	1	0,09%
Venezuela	47	4,35%
Total	1080	100,00%

**Source:** Own design, based on Scimago ranking and university statutes.

It should be noted that this is in line with the distribution of institutions that includes Scimago, with the substantial difference of Cuba that has some 42 universities in Iber 2015, but in none of them could information be collected on how the top director of the institutions is appointed. In other cases such as Peru and Chile, information on the appointment of its top manager was found in all the institutions that appear in the ranking.

### **Institutions according to type of property**

When performing the analysis by type of property, it was found that the largest number of universities are public (626 houses of study), followed by private ones with 335 and finally the confessional universities reach 119 (see figure No. 1).



*Figure 1.* Study institutions according to type of property

**Source:** Own design, based on Scimago ranking and university statutes.

#### Types of universities

##### a) Universitocratic

This is the name given to all those institutions where the university community, including at least academics, students and non-academic officials, vote for the election of the rector either directly, or through a collegiate body where they are represented. For this typology, the weightings that may exist are not considered, therefore, the very possibility that everyone participates in the vote already classifies the universities in this category. In some cases, the participation of graduate students and other external members of society would also be considered.

##### b) Academic-academic

All those universities where only the academics choose among themselves who will be the highest authority will be classified in this category. Such a choice prevails the idea that academics should be autonomous in their chairs and in the work of the university. However, it does not imply that all academics participate in the election, but that there is no other interest group that is part of the vote. On the other hand, hierarchization could imply different weightings of the academic vote.

##### c) Designative-collaborative

In this condition are those entities where there is a consultation or participation of the internal community, who make known the preferences they have for candidates or the characteristics that future rectors must have. After this round of consultations, which can be with a choice between the community, the controller of the institution -usually the owner of the institution or his representative or a representative of the government in the case of public entities- elects from of the shortlist of candidates regardless of the one with the highest vote in your case, or the most support. This situation occurs mainly in Catholic universities (which generally uses a search committee), as well as in certain universities in Brazil, where there is an election and from the short list the university controller (governor or other authority), designates the person you deem most pertinent.

##### d) Designative-directive

In the latter case, it is the owner of the institution who determines, without any restriction, who is the top manager of the institution. This in particular is the most common method of management available in private universities.

## Discussion

The classification of higher education institutions, according to the type of appointment of the highest executive authorities, allows ordering the diversity existing in the Ibero-American region.

Institutions traditionally have strong pressure from different interest groups, particularly in Ibero-American universities; This occurs fundamentally from internal groups, call them academics, officials and students (Brunner, 2014). However, the transformation brought about by the new public management implies changes in the governance models of the universities (Kehm, 2014), these mutations are giving more and more emphasis to interest groups outside the university, taking power away from the internal groups and demanding results from the university based on indicators (Brunner, Labraña, Ganga and Rodríguez-Ponce, 2019). This involves a change in the fundamental decisions for the institution, such as the appointment of one-person authorities.

The new organizational context has brought with it the need for university authorities to make decisions based on indicators, which are those that evaluate rankings and classifications, leaving aside all those elements that cannot be quantified (Lynch, 2015).

The rankings have an impact on the way of acting of the institutions, both positive and negative, there are authors who have argued that they can produce unwanted effects that imply a destruction of the concept of university (Kehm, 2014). In this same perspective of analysis, Perez, Chiappa, and Guzmán-Valenzuela (2018) argue that these instruments end up favoring universities that are already in good positions, to the detriment of houses of studies with lower levels of development. Apart from these arguments, what is feasible to observe today is that the interest groups, both internal and external, take this information provided by the rankings and classifications, as an input to take into account whether the rector's management is good or poor (Ramírez & Tejada, 2018). In this way, the way of acting of the university authorities is strongly influenced by the classifications and their results (Acosta, 2016). These situations present in institutions reflect the tension between the idea of leadership in the university and the reforms of the new public management (Ekman, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2017).

From the foregoing, it could be conceived that in the future changes in the governance of the universities of the region will be promoted, including in them the forms of appointment of the respective authorities; hence the relevance of trying to achieve a classification of these entities, based on how the highest executive authority is generated, an exercise that allowed the identification of four large groups:

In a preliminary general analysis of the respective statutes and attending to the proposed typology, it was found that in the first type of universities (Universitocratic) it is found mainly in public institutions.

In the case of the second group (Academic), it only occurs in Chilean universities (Diario Oficial, 1994), but this is in between said given the recent changes in higher education in Chile (Ganga and Viancos, 2018b).

In relation to the third type (Designative-collaborative), they are found mainly in some Catholic confessional universities, and in certain Brazilian houses of study.

Finally, the Designative-directive occurs mainly in private universities in the region. The next task to be assumed is to carry out a detailed review by each country, to proceed to the classification of each of its universities. The predominance of certain typologies of choice in some countries is one of the elements expected to be found when classifying the respective educational entities; However, given that most of them are public and that certain countries in the region allow



a university government where their internal interest groups have the autonomy to choose the rector, it is expected that this will be more common in this type of university.

In this sense, governing oneself without interference from external interest groups could pose a threat to the missionary purpose of the institutions, since the focus is on meeting the needs of internal interest groups (academics, students and officials). and not in serving society, generating new knowledge. In the case of private universities, it is expected that the prevalence of the direct and collaborative designation typology will be ratified.

On the other hand, from this study it will be necessary to evolve to explain deeply the causes of each typology and why the legislation and the institutions themselves opted for these forms to elect the maximum director of the institution.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the sample that was selected only represents 1080 existing universities in the region, contrasting with the 4,220 universities that exist in Latin America (CINDA, 2016); however, it represents the majority of the institutions that produce research in the region. This data is useful for us to raise the discussion of whether we want the universities of the region to produce knowledge (Altbach, 2008; Abramo & D'Angelo, 2018) and from this, what would be the best method of appointment of rector that involves a improvement in your results.

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