

**AUTONOMOUS CONSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN MEXICO THE  
FRAGMENTED FOURTH POWER****LUCIO DOMÍNGUEZ NÁREZ**<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8532-0809>[luciodomnar@hotmail.com](mailto:luciodomnar@hotmail.com)*Universidad Juárez Autónoma De Tabasco (UJAT)***YAZMIN ISOLDA ÁLVAREZ GARCÍA**<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0587-0406>[luciodomnar@hotmail.com](mailto:luciodomnar@hotmail.com)*Universidad Juárez Autónoma De Tabasco (UJAT)***ABSTRACT**

The figure of the Autonomous Constitutional Organizations (OCA), emerged in Mexico, within the framework of the establishment of the neoliberal model at the beginning of the eighties of the twentieth century. Although the emergence of the OCA is due to a decentralization and deconcentration of the Federal Public Administration, however, its origin protected in the constitutional text, endows it with the necessary elements that equates it to the same level of supremacy of the traditional powers, establishing itself as authentic counterweights, which pay for democracy, transparency and accountability. Based on the foregoing, it is proposed that OCA be recognized as a fourth atypical power, which has particularities such as being fragmented into various organisms.

Keywords: Autonomous Constitutional Organizations, division of powers, transparency, accountability, democracy, fourth fragmented power.

**Introduction**

This article is a work of dogmatic and doctrinal research, which analyzes and studies the Autonomous Constitutional Organisms in Mexico and tries to subtract it from the process of decentralization and deconcentration of the Federal Public Administration and possess it as a fourth power fragmented in various organizations. To this end, the first three OCAs created in the Mexican State are described. Subsequently, the figures of autonomous constitutional bodies in Colombia and Ecuador are taken up again in order to take them from models to rethink the OCA in Mexico as a fourth power. In another

section, the relationship of the OCA with the three powers of the union is analyzed and how the first strengthen the second and constitute real and effective counterweights of the same. A brief description of the main systems and models of division of powers in the Western world is made, in order to establish that there has always been a tendency to modify and evolve the doctrinal concept of the traditional division of powers of Montesquieu. An analysis is made of how the OCAs guarantee transparency and accountability, which are elementary presuppositions of modern democracy. In a penultimate section, it is described why it is considered that the OCAs should be considered as a fourth power fragmented into various organizations. Finally, the conclusions reached in this article are set out.

### 1. Origin of OCAs

The figure of the Autonomous Constitutional Organisms (OCA), arise in Mexico, within the framework of the establishment of the neoliberal model, which began to be established since the six-year term of the former president of the republic Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988) which has been in force until the year of 2018, with the end of the six-year term of former President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), since from 2018 to the present who assumes the ownership of the executive power in Mexico is Andrés Manuel López Obrador – who was elected president of the republic for the period 2018-2024 – taking the Mexican State a turn in its program and critical route of government, since it is inscribed in the welfare state.

On the other hand, the OCAs in Mexico were initially designed as a reengineering of the Federal Public Administration (APF), which obeyed a deconcentration and decentralization of the same, particularly of those State entities whose task is to develop the technical and specialized part of the administration.

In this regard, on April 1, 1994, the reform of article 28 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States entered into force, by which autonomy was granted to the Bank of Mexico (BANXICO) with a priority mandate to maintain the purchasing power of the national currency.

Constitutional autonomy was later granted to the Federal Electoral Institute in 1996 (now the National Electoral Institute, INE) and the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in 1999.

### 2. The OCAs in the Constitutions of Mexico, Colombia and Ecuador.

The treatment of these autonomous bodies in the Mexican Constitution is very particular, since there is no title or a section or article that conceives and defines them, as is the case in the Constitution of Colombia since 1991 in its article 113, which establishes: They are branches of public power, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. In addition to the organs that compose them, there are others, autonomous and independent, for the fulfillment of the other functions of the State. The different organs of the State have separate functions but collaborate harmoniously for the realization of their aims.

For we can observe that the articles that give constitutional foundation to the OCA are both in the dogmatic part of the constitution and in its organic part. An example would be the Bank of Mexico

that is regulated in article 28 paragraph 6 and the National Electoral Institute that is based on article 41 fraction V section A.

This criterion can be found in state constitutions, the exception being the Political Constitution of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza, which establishes in its article 26:

The Public Power of the State as a constitutive, concrete and dynamic expression of sovereignty, emanates from the people and is instituted for their benefit in a framework of respect for the dignity, equality and free development of the human being, their fundamental rights and their constitutional and legal guarantees.

The people, in whom resides essentially and originally the sovereignty that formally deposits in this Constitution, shall always have the right to elect or appoint, in accordance with the laws, their representatives in the public powers of the state and of the municipalities and of the autonomous public bodies, which will exercise their functions in accordance with the principles established by the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States. this Constitution and other applicable provisions.

As Marco Antonio Zeid points out, this is an advanced article standing even above the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (CPEUM), by virtue of which it grants sovereignty (which falls on the people) the responsibility of electing or appointing the representatives of autonomous public bodies.

Mexican legislators have been limited in the issue of creating a chapter or title in the federal constitution for the OCAs, much less that these bodies be appointed by sovereign will. This has caused the lack of recognition for the OCA to be erected as a fourth power within the presidential system. Because of this legislative limitation, there is doubt that perhaps it is an inability of legislators not to know or understand these bodies in depth and a widespread fear that by providing the OCAs with these elements they will be recognized as a fourth power that would reduce political power from the three existing powers.

Now, just as Colombia has taken the step to group the autonomous bodies together with the three powers, we find that in Ecuador its form of government is made up of five state powers: Executive, Legislative, Judicial, Transparency and Social Control, so its constitution recognizes in its article 204 that:

The people are the principal and first supervisor of public power, in exercise of their right to participation. The Transparency and Social Control Function is to promote and promote the control of public sector entities and agencies, and of natural or legal persons in the private sector that provide services or develop activities of public interest, so that they carry them out with responsibility, transparency and equity; (therefore) encourage and encourage citizen participation; protect the exercise and enforcement of rights; and prevent and combat corruption.

The Transparency and Social Control Function will be formed by the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control, the Ombudsman's Office, the Comptroller General of the State and the superintendencies. These entities shall have legal personality and administrative, financial, budgetary and organisational autonomy.

It is worth mentioning that this constitution uses the figure of decentralized autonomous governments to establish the territorial organization of the state, having this denomination the rural parish councils, the municipal councils, the metropolitan councils, the provincial councils and the regional councils.

### 3. The Division of Powers in the West

The concept of rethinking a new division of powers in the Western world is not new, even when John Locke writes about the two powers on which England must base its government (the executive and legislative) it is known to be incomplete and years later Montesquieu innovates this basic division by the traditional one known to all.

From the Westminster system in England which is a form of parliamentary democratic government composed of 10 elements or guidelines, through the German system after the experience that country had with Adolf Hitler which resulted in a parliamentarism limited to the solution of the chamber and a half, or like the Swiss who on the one hand reject that the executive power is concentrated in a single person and believe what is known as the Federal Council, a collective composed of seven people, while opposing a direct popular election and the two chambers presenting a vote of no confidence; all have a common denominator: to rethink Montesquieu's traditional doctrine of division of powers. Bruce Ackerman proposes for the United States of America a new Trinitarian formulation: parliament, plus the people plus a constitutional court.

### 4. The OCA and the Constitutional Powers in Mexico.

Article 49 of the Mexican Constitution recognizes that:

The Supreme Power is divided for its exercise in three: The Executive, Legislative and Judicial.

Two or more of these powers may not be assembled in a single person or corporation, nor may the legislature be vested in an individual, except in the case of extraordinary powers to the Executive of the Union, in accordance with the provisions of Article 29. In no case, except as provided in the second paragraph of Article 131, shall extraordinary powers be granted to legislate.

Although OCAs have a constitutional origin, the treatment given to them is that of specialized institutions, with one or more types of autonomy, whether technical, budgetary, operational, management and/or decision.

However, its impact in terms of its effectiveness and scope of influence and power has served to a greater or lesser extent as a counterweight to the three traditional powers, so that these autonomous bodies have begun to be seen as a fourth factual power, which it seems, in the Mexican case, was not foreseen. or at least it was not its *raison d'être*, since we remember, that these institutions arise in response to the precise indications of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) among others, which in case that concerns us, has its beginning with the Washington Consensus in the eighties of the last century, which proposed a mixed economy promoting and consolidating democracy and capitalism on the one hand and the decentralization of power and the deregulation of the economy as the basis of the neoliberal model.

However, the entry on the scene of the autonomous constitutional bodies brought with it a very interesting phenomenon, and that is the fragmentation of power, which impacted more on the executive branch, who traditionally coupled with their legal responsibilities had a very wide margin of maneuver, which were not questioned by anyone, on the contrary there was a tacit consensus that this should be the case. which generated a feeling of legitimacy despite the fact that these attributes were not contemplated in the Mexican constitution, this was called metaconstitutional powers of the President of the Republic and was understood as an unwritten agreement of the exercise of power in Mexico. At least, this figure was consolidated from 1946 until 2000 when the Institutional Revolutionary Party was uninterruptedly in power.

For its part, the legislative power, with the arrival of the OCA, has been consolidating its control function, provided for in the classic doctrine of the division of powers. It is these functions of control in the presidential system of government, as in the case of the Chamber of Deputies whose exclusive power is to be an organ of accusation and to constitute itself as a sentencing jury that guarantees the counterweight mechanism that contributes to the consolidation of the division of powers.

In the specific case of the legislative branch versus the executive branch, the former acts as a counterweight by having the power to modify and/or approve the draft budget sent by the head of the executive branch. However, on the one hand, the Chamber of Deputies must link its powers with the sovereign, that is, its decisions must have a basis of consensus and legitimacy with the needs and requirements of the people and this must express its will which must be taken and applied to the highest tribune of the nation, it is what Bruce Ackerman points out as limited parliamentarism, with Italy being the country that has developed greater control of its constitutional processes of this type.

For its part, the Chamber of Senators, who represent the interests of the states, must seek the cohesion that sustains the federal pact, and the equitable distribution of wealth and prerogatives, which impact on the benefit and development of each state. Historically, there has been a gap in this distribution of wealth, with the states to the north and northeast of the republic benefiting the most from the decisions of the Senate and those in the south southeast living in constant displacement and marginalization, so it is not uncommon for this region to find the highest rates of extreme poverty.

In the current federal administration, it is about balancing the balance and it has been a priority of the chief executive to promote the development of the states of the southeastern region of the country through social public policies with at least nine social programs, which although it is true is implemented throughout the country. It is also true that they have greater emphasis on the poorest states that generally belong to the region in question.

#### a) OCAs and Transparency and Accountability: Mexico Case

In the case of Mexico, where despite the Mexican constitution of 1917, which is very liberal and social, its political actors have a conservative vocation with longing to be governed by a monarch, that is why it is very prone in these lands that rulers and legislators behave like caciques who administer their private quinta and therefore do not want to leave power. Forging true dictatorships, although it has the habit of disguising itself as political pluralism and is confused with democracy and alternation in power.

However, Mexico is not an isolated country, it has inserted itself into the neoliberal and globalized world, and for this, it has had to adjust its internal route of government, from the creation of autonomous bodies, to transparency and accountability. These last two caused much expectation: since, by decree, in December 2002, the Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Public Government Information was issued, which instructed the creation of procedures and institutions so that anyone could request information and access government documents.

That institution was initially called the Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI), which was created in the six-year term of former President Vicente Fox Quezada (who came from the National Action Party, a government that generated many expectations and ended with a forceful collective disenchantment with the meager achievements and for preserving not only the archaic institutions of the PRI governments, but I retain the ways of exercising the power established by them).

His successor, former President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa (PAN: 2006-2012) a few days after coming to power and without consulting the people of Mexico, declares war on organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, generating bloodshed and death (an official figure of more than 71 thousand deaths is recorded in six years) his government was very opaque in the way it administered power, and that had a negative impact on transparency and accountability, despite the fact that Mexico is part of the international organization Open Governments.

Despite the above, the IFAI remained and made significant progress. Today the IFAI bears the name of National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI) and is an autonomous constitutional body that guarantees compliance with two fundamental rights: access to public information and protection of personal data.

The autonomous constitutional bodies had their greatest splendor in the six-year term of Enrique Peña Nieto, because he found in them the perfect battering ram to promote his structural reforms, particularly in those of an economic and energy type, which was called "pact for Mexico". There were 11 structural reforms that pursued three major objectives: 1) to raise the country's productivity to boost economic growth, 2) to strengthen and expand the rights of Mexicans and, 3) to strengthen the democratic regime and freedoms.

These 11 structural reforms were in the areas of: labor, economic competition, telecommunications, financial, finance, political-electoral, educational, social security, energy, transparency and the National Code of Criminal Procedures.

That is why, with the arrival to the federal executive power of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (nominated by Morena, a moderate leftist political party) comes a new vision of the exercise of power: for the good of all first the poor, resuming the government program based on the welfare state, which was promoted by former President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (1934-1940) and which had its conclusion with Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), who, as we have already seen above, gave a neoliberal turn to public policies.

As can be seen in the National Development Plan 2019-2024, the guiding axes revolve around the fight against corruption and the fight against poverty and oppose neoliberalism by maintaining that the market does not replace the market. From this vision and taking into consideration that the OCAs

have a certain genetics that link them to neoliberalism, as well as their few tangible results for the benefit of ordinary Mexicans, the current government does not look favorably on these organizations, which, based on its austerity policy, represent a very onerous cost. both for the payment of salaries of the public servants who make them up and the budgetary pressure to fulfill their tasks; Their lack of accountability and self-regulation also mean constant criticism.

However, the current government is aware and sensitive to the fact that these autonomous constitutional bodies provide an important political counterweight that contributes to the strengthening of democracy in all its aspects. Therefore, an optimization of public spending must be considered and the efficiency of human resources and the effectiveness of institutions must be promoted.

There are currently ten autonomous constitutional bodies, namely:

- 1.- National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE).
- 2.- National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI).
- 3.- National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).
- 4.- National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).
- 5.- Bank of Mexico (BANXICO).
- 6.- Federal Economic Competition Commission (COFECE).
- 7.- Federal Institute of Telecommunications (IFT).
- 8.- National Electoral Institute (INE).
- 9.- Attorney General's Office (FGR).
- 10.- National Human Rights Commission.

For some authors, as a whole, these OCAs represent a kind of fourth estate fragmented into various organizations.

#### b) OCA: Fourth Fragmented Power

By having its origin and support in the federal constitution empowering them to autonomy, that is, that they do not belong to any of the three existing powers and recognized in article 49 of CPEUM, it expressly and truly endows a new constitutional design of division of powers in the Mexican State from a reengineering of the federal public administration, whose activity, being predominantly technical and specialization above the political debate, have the power to limit or stop, constituting a real counterweight to the other powers, which is a necessary requirement to consider it more seriously and deepen the study, of whether the OCA in Mexico are a fourth power fragmented into several organizations.

It could be thought that, of the three existing powers, the executive branch is the one that most suffered the counterweight by virtue of the fact that it was stripped of its technical and specialized activity. However, this is not so, because by freeing the executive branch of these responsibilities directly and immediately, it pays for transparency, impartiality and independence and invests it with legitimacy, which is a very precious currency when it comes to obtaining consensus and dissent in decision-making that involves the other two powers.

Why is he reluctant to consider the OCAs as a fourth estate? In the first place, because the ownership of them does not rest in a single person as it happens in the executive, or in chambers or assemblies as it happens in the legislative, and secondly, they do not have a hierarchical structure as found in the judicial power. They are therefore considered as organic structures with constitutional design where the main positions are no longer appointed by the head of the Federal Executive, but by the Chamber of Senators or Deputies, through a list of candidates sent by them.

Another point against it is the absence of media control, and that the mechanisms of communication and interaction between the OCAs and the three recognized powers are not yet well defined. There have been voices that question their lack of accountability, although by constitutional mandate they are obliged to provide anyone who requests it, the information they require from their ordinary work and in some extraordinary cases. It also points out the lack of democratic legitimacy, since its holders are not elected by popular will of the citizens through electoral processes, and finally, it is criticized for the onerous growth of the government apparatus.

Now, the points in favor of considering the OCA a fourth power are that they arise from a constitutional mandate, and therefore enjoy the same supremacy as the three traditional powers. Having technical, budgetary, operational, management and decision-making autonomy, it places them in a privileged position of counterweight to the executive, legislative and judicial branches. It reduces the meta-constitutional powers of the President of the Republic, strengthens the decision-making capacity of the legislative branch, and encourages the judiciary to specialize in an efficient and humane administration of justice that guarantees the correct application of justice.

Finally, the OCAs pay for democracy, and although it sounds paradoxical, because they are accused of not being accountable, transparency, accountability, efficiency of their members and the effectiveness of their institutions.

## Conclusion

The Autonomous Constitutional Bodies arise from two factors that influenced the institutional design of the Mexican State. The first factor is due to abide by the guidelines of international organizations that promote the neoliberal economic model, the free market that demands from its members a consolidated democracy, transparency and accountability. The second factor was to decentralize and deconcentrate the federal public administration, offloading the technical and specialized responsibilities that were administered by the Executive Branch, as happened with Banxico, considered the first autonomous constitutional body created in 1994.

Mexico is a country with interesting contradictions, on the one hand, its constitution of 1917 was considered at the time, an advanced liberal constitution, for raising to constitutional rank social rights



such as education, health, labor rights among others. However, its rulers and popular representatives are prone to conservatism, to such an extent that they have subjected the constitution to multiple reforms, which have substantially modified the original spirit of the constitution.

In this context, the OCAs emerge as entities that enjoy a constitutional supremacy comparable to the powers recognized by the constitution, which are not subject to any of these three powers, enjoying technical, operational, budgetary, management and decision-making autonomy, which makes them a counterweight to the three powers: executive, legislative and judicial; Since these organizations promote their quality, efficiency and innovation, through the design of solid, reliable, timely and transparent evaluation systems that contribute to the consolidation of democracy.

However, OCAs are subject to criticism. First, because there is not a single face that is at the head of these organizations, secondly, because there is no hierarchy between them and thirdly they accuse him of not being accountable to anyone. Therefore, what is proposed is that Mexican legislators be encouraged to take the step to adapt the constitution in such a way that the OCAs are grouped in an exclusive title of them and that the people are given the power to freely elect their holders, as in the constitution of the state of Coahuila de Zaragoza.

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