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**Abstract**

Although rectors of Mexican public universities play an important role in their institutions, we know very little about them. This article first describes the different election processes in Mexican public universities for selecting a rector. These varied processes reveal the ambiguity of the concept of 'autonomy' as applied to rectors, focusing on the role and possible influence of public authorities despite the formal prohibition of such interference in the law. Second, the article presents a typology of four typical career trajectories for rectors before they are elected, analyzing their educational, academic, professional, administrative, and political backgrounds. These different paths to the position of rectors in different types of institutions have implications for public policy and university autonomy. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Zarate, Romualdo Lopez, E-Mail: lzt@correo.azc.uam.mx