

## **The representation of the teaching faculty in the university government Is there alternation?**

Matilde Rissi<sup>§</sup>  
Mario Guillermo Oloriz

National University of Luján Argentine Republic. Crossing National Route no. 5 and Constitución, Luján, Province of Buenos Aires, Republic of Argentina. ZC. 6700. (moloriz@unlu.edu.ar).

<sup>§</sup>Corresponding author: mrisi@unlu.edu.ar.

### **Abstract**

The exercise of the representation of a certain sector in the government bodies has motivated numerous studies regarding the legitimization of the will of the voter by the representative, as well as respect for the will delegated to those representatives. In the particular case of the National Universities of the Argentine Republic, university co-government and unrestricted admission are two of the principles of university autonomy that are defended and sustained with greater force in the pronouncements of all the faculties that make up said co-government. However, this highly democratic system, although it is of a meritocratic nature given that the weight of representation by faculty is not equal because of the premise that the greatest weight in decision-making should fall on those who would be more prepared for it, the way in which the representation of the faculties is exercised and the renewal of those who exercise it could deteriorate or alter the purpose pursued by whoever occupies that place in representation of the interests of a sector of the university community. In this work, the representation of the teaching faculty in the superior council of a sample of six Argentine national universities, between 2011 and 2017, is analyzed, inquiring about how this representation occurs and is maintained between the different electoral processes. It is concluded that there is a tendency towards a greater repetition of those who exercise the representation in the largest universities or in some of the territorial regions with which the National University System is formed. At the same time, a strong male predominance was found both in the representation with the character of incumbent in the superior council and in the repetition rate in the function.

**Keywords:** co-government, election, renewal.

Reception date: June 2022

Acceptance date: July 2022

In the Argentine Republic, the Higher Education Law (LES, for its acronym in Spanish) (Law No. 24.521, 2016) establishes that, in the case of publicly managed universities, the government of these institutions is responsibility of the collegiate government bodies and of the individual authorities. ‘In the Argentine University, an issue to which, in general, little attention has been paid is that of the composition of collective decision-making bodies’ (Vega, 2010). National universities, in accordance with the autonomy enshrined in the Argentine National Constitution and regulated by the LES, have the power to establish in their statutes their own government bodies, their attributions as well as their composition as long as certain limits are respected; that is, that the rule ensures that: the teaching faculty exceeds 50% of the representation, that the student faculty is represented by regular students who have passed at least 30% of the total subjects of the study plan, that the non-teaching staff has representation and that the deans or equivalent authorities are ex officio members of the superior councils, in turn, it leaves the participation of the faculty of graduates to the decision of each institution.

Within the collegiate bodies or traditional government bodies of these institutions are: the university assembly, the superior council and the governing boards of faculties or departments, depending on the academic structure of the institution. Although it is true that the university assembly constitutes the supreme body of the university, it is also true that it meets very sporadically, usually once a year or when it is convened at the request of the rector or the superior council. Because of this, the superior council is the body that has the greatest significance in university life, because ‘it is the body with the most complex functions, since it has three types of functions: normative, directive-executive and jurisdictional’ (Vega, 2008).

Due to the complexity and wealth of topics that these councils deal with in their sessions, they should meet regularly, in most universities usually every 20 days. Although, in most university institutions, the minimum periodicity of meetings that must be held during a period of government is explicit, ‘the duration of the meetings or the many other activities that the councilors also develop are not written’ (Kandel, 2005). It is important to consider that the exercise of the positions of representation in the collegiate bodies is of a non-remunerative nature; that is, those who exercise them do not receive any salary for representing their faculty.

‘Rewards for participating are directly linked to the ability to access certain information and networks of relationships that would not otherwise be obtained’ (Kandel, 2005). As Dr. Roberto Vega expressed, ‘a first look tending to identify potential groups of agents with influence arises from the formation by faculties and their participation in the government bodies’ (2010), in this way, the teaching faculty constitutes as the most relevant, considering that it has been this faculty the one that over the years has been part of the university government without its majority participation having been questioned. It is worth mentioning that teachers not only make up the government bodies representing the faculty, but also do so from the exercise of elective positions of an individual nature, such as deans, directors of centers or institutes and in several cases, rectors or vice-rectors.

In some institutions, as already mentioned in the work ‘the participation of the Individual authorities in the collegiate university bodies’, the representation of the faculty is increased to a point in which ‘a conflict of representation clearly appears given that representations are

intermingled' (Rissi and Oloriz, 2017). The university co-governments, imperatively, are those that arise from the elections that are held in each national university of public management, since, as in most of Latin America, these institutions have an electoral system of a democratic nature. These electoral processes are one of the main manifestations of university autonomy for those of us who are part of the university community.

Within this order of ideas, one of the aspects to take into account is that 'the rulers are elected, but that does not mean that anyone can be a ruler' (Przeworski, 2019), since, for the teaching faculty, only the professors who have the status of ordinary are in a position to exercise the right to vote and, in turn, to representation, in other words, teachers who have not acceded to the position by public competitive examination will not be able to exercise university citizenship, even if they have held their interim position for years. Consequently, and in line with the author Przeworski, it can be insinuated that 'voting does not necessarily mean choosing. The mere fact that an event called election becomes a reality does not imply that people have the option to select their rulers', since the right of representation is conferred by the act of choosing.

However, it cannot be overlooked that the very purpose of the repetition of the electoral processes, every certain period of time, underlies the principle of rotation of the members of the government bodies, this being a fundamental element of representative democracy (Innerarity, 2018). As a counterpart, one of the aspects to consider is that, if the teaching faculty is the one with the greatest representation, the shortage of regular teachers, or in a position to choose and be elected, constitutes 'a central problem from the political point of view' (Unzué and Emiliozzi, 2006). Understanding that the highest decision-making entity is considered to be of a strategic level, and that, in the state university, this level is composed, among others, by the superior council and that the right of representation is conferred through the act of choosing (Vega, 2010), in pursuit of this, we will delve into the study of the renewal of the representation of the teaching faculty in said collegiate bodies.

## **Development**

Contrary to the provisions of Law No. 27.275 (2016), which regulates the Right to Access to Public Information, whose purpose is to 'guarantee the effective exercise of the right of access to public information, promote citizen participation and transparency of public management', national universities usually only disclose the list of current superior councilors, leading to the fact that it is almost impossible to access the names of previously elected councilors. Although many of these institutions have put a section referring to institutional transparency on their websites, this information does not appear publicly, and in the case of universities that have electronic digests, this can often only be accessed by the staff of the same institution through an access code.

To this scenario it should be added that, in accordance with the autonomy granted to publicly managed universities, it is through its Statute that each institution establishes how its government bodies are integrated, this causes a high heterogeneity in terms of the integration of these collegiate bodies in the national university system. To this complexity it must be added that not in all universities the duration of the term of office of the superior councilors coincides, which further increases the plurality of factors that must be considered for the study that is intended to be

conducted. In order to carry out this research, and in line with studies that were carried out previously, the superior councils of the Argentine National Universities, of public management, were chosen as a unit of analysis.

The work was carried out with a ‘discretionary sample that has the characteristic of representing the different dimensional categories in which we divide the Argentine higher education system’, Rissi *et al.* (2018) in order to work with data that are comparable to each other and as was done in previous studies, it was decided to study the teaching appointments in the superior council resulting from the last three elective processes, prior to 2017. Therefore, the sample of national universities was formed considering the diversity of size of these educational institutions, thus including ‘new, small, median and large’.

For this classification, the criterion applied was that detailed in the manual of conceptual and operational definitions of the university information department, under the authority of the Secretariat of University Policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of the Nation (DIU, for its acronym in Spanish), where it is established that a university is classified as new if, up to 2017, no more than 12 years have elapsed since its creation, those that have up to 10 000 regular students are considered as small, those whose student body ranges between 10 001 and 50 000 students are considered medium, and those who have more than 50 000 regular students are considered large. It was also identified in which regional council for higher education planning (CPRES, for its acronym in Spanish) each university in the sample participates, depending on the geographical location of its headquarters.

By virtue of the above, in methodological terms, the results concerning the three electoral processes prior to 2017 of the six national universities that made up the sample were surveyed. It is worth mentioning that by forming the sample with an institution categorized as ‘new’, the Arturo Jauretche National University, it has only had two electoral processes up to 2017. Table 1 shows the list of institutions that made up the sample, as well as the electoral processes that were considered in this study.

**Table 1. Elections of councilors contemplated in each institution.**

National University of	Acronyms	Election years		
		1	2	3
Luján	UNLU	2011	2013	2015
Comahue	UNCO	2002	2010	2014
San Luis	UNSL	2010	2013	2016
Sur	UNS	2012	2014	2016
Córdoba	UNC	2012	2014	2016
Arturo Jauretche	UNAJ	-	2015	2017

There is a relationship between the size of the institution and the participation of women in collegiate bodies (Rissi, 2018).

Before continuing with the analysis, and considering the data in Table 1, it should be clarified that, in the particular case of the UNCO between the first election considered and the second, a more than considerable time has elapsed given that ‘extreme left groups prevented the election of the rector in the National University of Comahue for more than one period’ (Pérez, 2017). In terms of

homogenizing the information with which the work was done and given the heterogeneity of the compositions of the superior councils of the national universities, the teaching faculty has been considered as a ‘whole’ without taking into account the different subdivisions that it can have in each institution; that is, professors, assistants, incumbents, adjuncts, etc, all from the representation of the faculty they exercise, without considering their category.

Something similar happens with respect to the number of incumbent and substitute councilors in that government body, so it was decided to carry out the study through the ‘renewal rate’, since the ‘representation of the teaching faculty in the superior council’ is being studied, regardless of the category of the teacher or the number of representatives that make up the representation, in the same way as it was done in previous works. Authors such as Rissi and Oloriz (2017). Within this order of ideas, the institutions under study were grouped according to the categorization by their size, according to the criterion defined by the DIU.

As can be seen, in Table 2, for the total number of councilors of the teaching faculty (incumbents and substitutes), the renewal of seats in the superior councils is greater than 50%. Now, it can also be observed that, in the case of the institution mentioned as large (UNC), the retention of seats is higher than for the rest of the categories, while for the university classified as new (UNAJ), the retention of positions is very low.

**Table 2. Renewal rate of seats of the superior council, according to the size of the institution.**

Size of the institution	Renewal rate of seats	Retention rate of seats
Large	58.97	41.03
Median	61.72	38.28
New	91.67	8.33

If the arithmetic mean is considered, even if this is not an inherent value of the variable and can be influenced by the extreme values, mentioned above, it can be highlighted that the average of rotation of superior councilors is approximately 70%. It should be considered that this situation occurs for the total number of superior councilors of the teaching faculty. On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that it is the incumbent superior councilors who exercise the representation of the faculty assiduously and that, on the other hand, given the place they occupy on the list, it is they who win the votes of the electors. For the above, the same analysis was conducted, but only considering the incumbent councilors.

In the table above, Table 3, it is observed how the situation has changed with respect to that shown in Table 2, since the rotation rate of those who have the representation of the faculty as incumbent is notoriously lower than that observed for the total of representatives of the faculty. In other words, we can say that ‘in the public sector, it is usually a zero-sum game, since the increase in the power of one means the reduction of the power of the other’ (González, 2010).

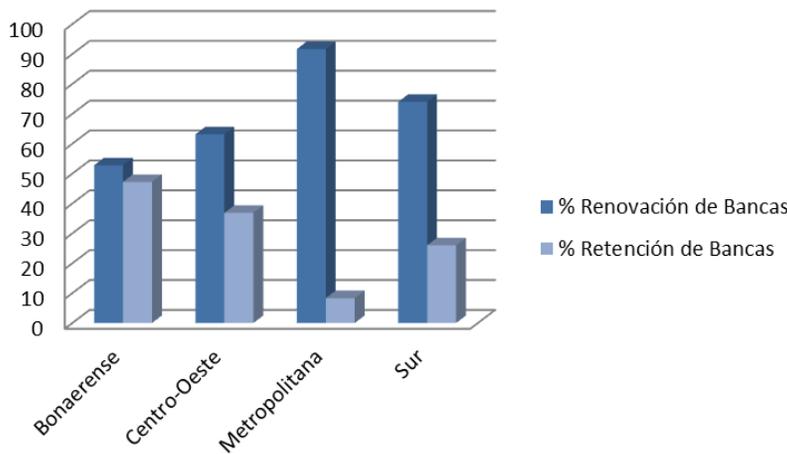
Table 3 clearly shows how in the National University of Córdoba, classified as large, the retention rate of incumbent seats is higher than that of rotation. In the same order, it can be said that in the case of institutions classified as median, the rotation rate and the retention rate are equal, around 50%.

**Table 3. Renewal rate of seats of incumbent superior councilors, according to the size of the institution.**

Size of the institution	Renewal rate of seats	Retention rate of seats
Large	46.15	53.85
Median	50.6	49.4
New	83.33	16.67

When working with grouped data and averages, considering the characteristics of the sample, we overlook some relevant issues such as, for example, that in the group of medium-sized universities, it is the National University of the South the one that has the highest rate of retention of seats with 69.44%, followed by the National University of Luján with 66.67%. Although the substitutes, as the name implies, only substitute the incumbent members in case of absence, these elected representatives cannot be left out in the analysis. When studying them in a particular way, it is observed that, for this group of representatives, the renewal of seats in the new institution is 100%.

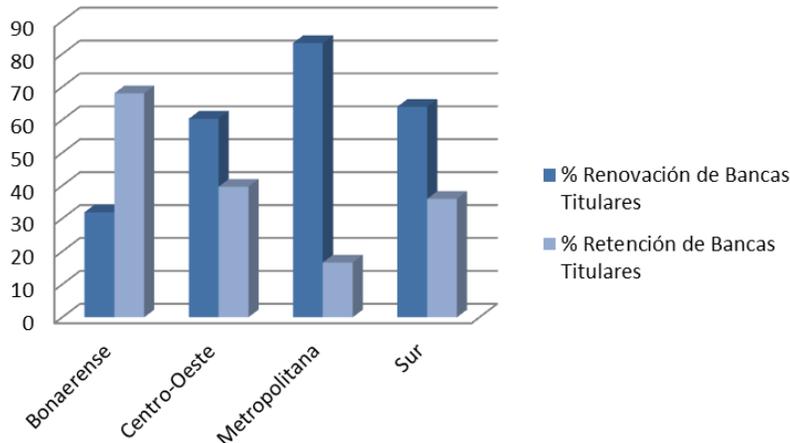
In the case of the large university, while for the incumbents the retention rate is higher than 50%, for the substitutes it is only 28.20%. As for the medium-sized institutions, the retention rates of banks range between 16% and 39.21%, with UNCo and UNSL being at these extremes. As has been indicated, the analysis was also conducted considering the location of each institution in the national territory. For this purpose, the CPRES in which each institution under study participates was considered (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Renewal rate of seats of the superior council, by region of the CPRES.**

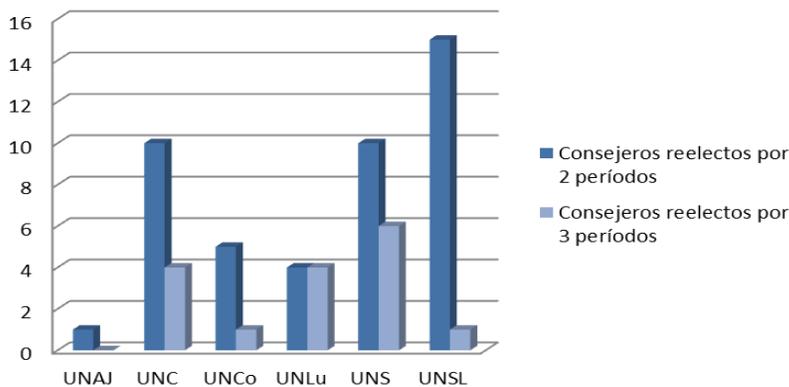
Figure 1 shows that, for the last three regions represented in this chart (Center-West, Metropolitan and South), the renewal rate of councilors of the teaching faculty in the superior councils is higher than the retention rate. These three regions have, on average, a rotation of 70% of their superior councilors. In the particular case of the Buenos Aires region, although this phenomenon is repeated, it is observed that the re-election rate is 47.22%, being the region that has the smallest difference with respect to the rotation rate for the total of councilors. Keeping the criterion adopted when grouping by size of the institution, the renewal rate was analyzed only for incumbent councilors.

In Figure 2, it can be seen that for all the regions under study, the retention rate of seats has increased when considering only the incumbent representatives. In the particular cases of the Center-West, Metropolitan and South regions, although the difference remains in favor of the rotation rate, it decreased from 26.31% to 20.67%, 83.33% to 66.57% and from 48% to 28%, respectively for these regions. In the case of the Buenos Aires region, the re-election rate of the incumbent superior councilors is 68%.



**Figure 2. Renewal rate of seats of incumbent superior councilors, by region of the CPRES.**

Delving into the study of the phenomenon, it was inquired about the number of times these councilors were re-elected, perpetuating themselves, in this way, in the university co-government. For each institution, the repetition of representatives between electoral processes was analyzed to count the number of consecutive periods of permanence in the position. Figure 3 shows that, in most of the educational institutions that make up the sample, the councilors who are re-elected have remained in the position for two terms. A particular case is the National University of Luján, in which there is the same number of councilors who have been re-elected in two and three terms. Clearly, it is an institution with a very high rate of re-election of the representatives of the teaching faculty in the superior council.



**Figure 3. Number of superior councilors re-elected, for the total sample.**

On the other hand, the UNAJ has the particularity that, although it has only gone through two elections up to 2017, article 46 of its statute establishes that superior councilors may only be re-elected once, which introduces a limitation to indefinite renewal. Understanding that ‘a high degree of concentration of the preferential vote in a few candidates, since voters normally choose according to the experience of the candidate and the position they occupy on the list’ Carrasco (2018), it was inquired about how this group of ‘re-elected’ superior councilors is characterized.

When analyzing the councilors re-elected for two consecutive terms, it is observed that, in the National University of San Luis, there have been 15 councilors who kept their seat, this institution is followed by the National Universities of Córdoba and Sur, with 10 re-elected councilors, the National University of Comahue with five, the National University of Luján with four and the National University of Arturo Jauretche, as we have mentioned before, with only one re-elected councilor.

Regarding the superior councilors who have been elected in the electoral processes, it is noted that the UNS is still the one that heads the institutions with the lowest rate of renewal of seats; that is, six of its councilors have been re-elected in the three elections considered in this study. The UNC and the UNLu are in the middle position with four re-elected representatives and the UNCo and the UNSL are at the bottom end with a single person re-elected.

Finally, in line with previous studies, it is observed that the lists of candidates are usually headed by men and these in turn are re-elected more frequently. Of the total number of superior councilors re-elected, for the three terms, 75% are male.

At the same time, if the total representation by gender of the faculty is considered, without differentiating incumbents from substitutes, in the case of men, 78.12% occupied the status of incumbent councilors, while for women, their average participation of 25% is distributed equally between incumbents and substitutes. By way of closing, it is interesting to take what was mentioned by the journalist Villazón (2013,) since he states that ‘in some institutions, although there is no question of lineage, the same candidates are always remain’.

## Conclusions

In this paper, the composition of the superior council of six higher education institutions of public management of the Argentine Republic was analyzed, considering the three electoral processes prior to 2017, in order to study the renewal rate of the representation of the teaching faculty in that government body. It has been found that the lower rate of renewal of incumbent councilors would allow to formulate as a hypothesis that the renewal occurs, to a greater extent, by entering the position of councilor as a substitute. This is based on the fact that the higher renewal rate occurs for the positions of substitute compared to that observed for the case of the incumbents.

When considering only the incumbent superior councilors, always on the sample under study, it was found that the repetition rate of councilors reaches 40%, while for the substitutes the same rate decreases to 14%. When conducting the study by institution size, it was found that the larger the institution, the retention rate of seats tends to increase, while for the institution classified as new, this trend is totally reversed.

Regarding the analysis by regions of the national territory, when considering the region of the CPRES to which each university belongs, it was found that for the Center-West, Metropolitan and South regions, the renewal rate of seats is higher, in other words, the number of those who access the position without having been serving as a councilor is greater. This proportion is inverse when observing the institutions of the Buenos Aires region, since the proportion of those who remain in their positions is higher than that of new councilors.

Making a particular analysis of councilors who were re-elected, it was observed that the average number of teacher representatives who retained their seat on two occasions is 7.5%, with a total of 15 seats retained, for the set of institutions, while the average of the re-elected councilors in the three elections is 2.6%, with a total of six seats retained. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the superior councilors who are re-elected are mostly male.

As a corollary, it can be concluded that, in electoral processes, it is the voters themselves who can ratify or rectify their support for the candidate, however, if the vote occurs, but it does not entail a renewal of representation, according to certain theoretical proposals, we could not be talking about a democracy in its essence, since 'the heart of democratic impoverishment is in the flawed relationship between rulers and ruled'.

### Cited literature

- Carrasco, D. M. 2018. Las listas electorales desde una perspectiva de derecho comparado. *Rev. Chilena de Derecho y Ciencia Política*. 9(1):9-44. Doi: 10.7770/rchdyep-v9n1-art1480.
- González, E. A. 2010. El poder en las organizaciones. ¿De eso no se habla? Publicado en la *Rev. Enfoques*. (Ed.). La ley. 43-49 pp.
- Innerarity, D. 2018. Comprender la democracia. La democracia presupone una ciudadanía que comprende y observa críticamente la política. ¿Estamos en condiciones de hacerlo? 1<sup>ra</sup> (Ed). Gedisea, SA. Barcelona. 80-92 pp.
- Kandel, V. 2005. Formas de gobierno en la universidad pública: reflexiones sobre la colegiación y la democracia. En *estudios sobre políticas universitarias en américa latina*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO. 279-282 pp. <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/becas/20110124083718/7kandel.pdf>.
- Ley N° 27.275.2016. Honorable Congreso de la Nación. Ley de derecho de acceso a la información pública. Boletín Oficial N° 33.472. República Argentina. <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/265000-269999/265949/norma.htm>.
- Pérez, L. A. 2017. La educación superior Argentina. Diagnóstico y prospectiva. Buenos Aires, Argentina. Eudeba. 70-87 pp.
- Przeworski, A. 2019. Por qué tomarse la molestia de hacer elecciones. Pequeño manual para entender el funcionamiento de la democracia. Siglo Veintiuno Editores. 54-78 pp. ISBN: 978-987-629-895-7.
- Rissi, M. y Oloriz, M. G. 2017. La participación de las autoridades unipersonales en los cuerpos colegiados universitarios. Comunicación presentada en XVII Coloquio Internacional de Gestión Universitaria, Mar del Plata. ARG. 22-24 pp. ISBN 978-987-544-804-9.
- Rissi, M.; Oloriz, M. G. y Ferrero, E. L. 2018. Relación entre el crecimiento del sistema universitario nacional y la participación de las mujeres en los cuerpos colegiados. Comunicación presentada en XVIII Coloquio Internacional de Gestión Universitaria, Loja. ECU. 22-24 pp. ISBN:978-85-68618-05-9.

- Rissi, M.; Oloriz, M. G. y Ferrero, E. L. 2018. Existe relación entre el tamaño de la Institución y la participación de las mujeres en los cuerpos colegiados. Congreso Internacional de Escritores: literatura, poética y ciencia. Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, México.
- Rosanvallon, P. 2015. Tenemos democracia electoral, pero no de ejercicio. Diario. Buenos Aires Argentina. 12 p. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-287172-2015-11-29.html>.
- Unzué, M. y Emiliozzi, S. 2006. La escasez de profesores. Diario. Buenos Aires Argentina. 12 p. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/universidad/10-66086-2006-04-26.html>.
- Vega, R. I. 2008. La Universidad Argentina: Una institución en crisis. Rev. FACES de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales de la Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata. 2(2):102-110.
- Vega, R. I. 2010. Decisiones en la Universidad Pública. Buenos Aires, EUDEM. 17-45 pp.
- Villazón, J. 2013. Los mismos partidos políticos los mismos candidatos de siempre. Infórmate. Salta publicado en la sección de Política. <https://informatesalta.com.ar/contenido/39347/los-mismos-partidos-politicos-los-mismoscandidatos-de-siempre>.