TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION: LIMITS AND SCOPE OF THE NATIONAL ANTICORRUPTION SYSTEM IN MEXICO

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Abstract. *The issue of public policy on accountability, transparency, and access to public information has now become a trend in most countries of the world. Among one of its objectives when evaluating institutions and public servants by their administrative and governmental decisions is to decrease corruption. Mexico is already a formal democracy, but the quality of its governments is still very low. Although these have been elected by the citizens, they continue without being accountable. In this paper, we analyze as a case study the State´s last recourse to repair what bad management and privileges caused: the national anticorruption system, its formation, and operation. We enunciate the limits and scope it faces.*

Keywords: *Governance, Public Policy, democracy, accountability, government innovation.*

Introduction

Debating on transparency in governance refers not only to establishing a barrier against corruption and abuses of power but also ensures, as a basic right of every citizen, the receipt of information about what governments do with their tax money. It is the right of a tax paying citizen – and a constitutional, fundamental right – to have access to such information.

One of the concepts linked to transparency is the rendering of accounts, which is an imperfect translation of the term "accountability". Applied to the public issue, we understand it as a system that on the one hand obligates public servants to report in detail their acts and their results and, on the other hand, provides citizens with mechanisms to monitor the performance of public servants (Hofbauer and Cepeda 2005).

Transparency indicates that the information published by governments must be of quality (truthful, clear and timely), consistent (with the possibility of being comparable with other related information), accessible, comprehensive, relevant, and reliable.

Transparency is a part of accountability – the word means 'information being published for public verification' – and access to information allows seeing, understanding, and obtaining information. While accountability goes beyond the principle of transparency, it is a process that contextualizes the information and has a mandatory methodology for the management and administration of public funds, and non-compliance with that action will lead to punishment. (Garcia 2015).

Accountability is the obligation of the representatives in power, both politicians and public servants, to keep the information they generate available to the public, because in principle the latter is of a public nature. Society has the right to see the proof of their acts and decisions made in accordance with their obligations (Ramírez 2014).

During the 1990s, the need for greater transparency and better accountability was increasingly demanded and required throughout the world. The contemporary democratization and politicization of societies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa was one of the reasons why this demand was strengthened. Democratically elected governors and their public management practices were subjected to intense vigilance, through various institutions and practices that helped in controlling the abuse of power and ensuring that rulers comply with transparency, honesty, efficiency, and effectiveness. This came through the mandate given by the citizens, who through a democratic exercise chose them as their representatives.

In Mexico, after several decades of struggle and negotiations, we can observe an electoral democracy that gives victory to those who win the elections. Years of comprehensive efforts have been made in ensuring that votes are transparent, however other central aspects of representative democracy have been neglected – most importantly the issue of how to ensure that democratically elected rulers fulfill their mandate with complete responsibility and without corruption (Ugalde 2002).

Since the Constituent Assembly of 1917 in Mexico, the idea of "accountability" has been a part of parliamentary debates but in a limited way. According to the records of the Chamber of Deputies, the concept of "accountability" does not appear explicitly in the Mexican Constitution, however several amendments to this law have led to the formation of a system oriented towards that purpose, (Ugalde 2002; Lopez and Merino 2009).

Over the past decade and a half, Mexico has signed several international agreements with innovative mechanisms in order to fight corruption. These agreements have the primary objective of fighting corruption among countries, along with agendas that seek to harmonize standards and control measures. However, the levels of perception of corruption have increased, and attempts to reduce them have been unsuccessful. In 2014 Mexico obtained a rating of 35 points out of 100 and 103rd place out of 175 countries according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

These data are consistent with the World Bank, which reproves Mexico with a score of 39 (out of 100) on indicators of corruption control, and places it in 127th place – that is to say, one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Casar 2015).

On 21 April 2015, the National Anticorruption System was approved by the Senate and Deputy Chambers, which has the mission of coordinating the fight against corruption among local and federal authorities and articulating institutional efforts so that, by increasing transparency and accountability, it can strengthen the confidence of citizens in public institutions. It also seeks to prevent, detect, and punish administrative irresponsibility and acts of corruption and, in addition, designs and implements anticorruption policy.

This research aims to understand the National Anticorruption System of Mexico in terms of: reforms in its regulatory framework; how its institutions were necessary in its regulatory framework; and its limits and scope. This is based on a case study analysis of its efforts to fight corruption in a country of "recent democracy" within the context of a newly elected government (1 December 2018 to 30 September 2024), and a political change after more than 70 years.

Some contributions on the concepts of: accountability, transparency, access to information, and corruption.

There are several ideas about the origin of accountability. One version mentions England and its "responsible" government, another is the system of checks and balances of the American Constitution of 1789 (Emmerich 2004). However, the truth is that accountability is a global concept that accepts classifications according to various criteria. For example, it can be classified according to the subject, and given various tiers including the legislative, governmental, bureaucratic, judicial surrender, and military.

Among some experts in this subject Guillermo O'Donnell (2000) contributes on the horizontal and vertical division of accountability. Mc Lean (1996) mentions that accountability is a requirement for representatives to account and respond to those represented on the use of their powers and responsibilities, act in response to criticisms or require-

ments that are pointed out, and accept responsibility in case of errors, incompetence, or deception. As Aguilar (2002) mentions, account should be obligated to be available, and be required to report compliance with responsibilities. John Ackerman (2009) mentions that accountability is a proactive process through which public servants inform, explain, and justify their action plans, their performance, and their achievements, and are subject themselves to the penalties and rewards thereon. This argument is complemented by Schedler (2008) with respect to accountability as "The right to receive information and the corresponding obligation to disclose all necessary data, but [it] also implies the right to receive an explanation and the corresponding duty to justify the exercise of power". Jerry L. Mashaw (2008) defends the idea of conceiving it as an "accountability system" integrated by the formulation of the following six questions: Who? Whom? How? By what process? What criteria and what effect? Whose purpose is to help the understanding of accountability?

Transparency is a deliberate policy of the State to systematically produce and use information as a strategic resource which is designed to facilitate and provide content for people participation in public affairs. A transparent system is, literally, one in which there are no obstacles to see and know; one in which anyone can observe what decisions the government is making, what resources it is using, how it is using the means at its disposal, and what results it is obtaining (López et al. 2009).

On the other hand, transparency is the element through which governments can account their actions. Even when access to information is an essential component of transparency, it is limited to the possibility of the population to obtain information. A transparent government will document its actions and decision-making processes. It also generates, systematizes and manages information in the light of public auditing as part of a broader vision of building trust between government and society (Pérez).

This is a way to contextualize the existence of these concepts over time. They are modified over the years in the way that they refer to the government, and in their obligations to their constituents. However, these concepts already existed in the conditions of governing of yesteryear in many countries including Mexico. They were characterized by the removal of transparency and accountability, where the ruler enjoyed all manner of impunity and was granted the grace to propose and dispose according to his will. The lot of the governed forced to comply with a series of obligations, including the payment of taxes, was to accept this form of disposition of resources, and this form of decision making (Kurczyn 2017).

In Mexico, corruption is presented as a systemic problem embedded in the institutional apparatus of the country. It found fertile ground in informal practices derived from the central control exerted by the executive power over the Legislative and Judicial Powers as well as local governments. This control was exerted on the loyalties and complicities that form the functional basis of the political system, and through a bureaucracy that took advantage of hidden areas in the use and abuse of State resources, (Dussauge 2010; Fernandez 2018).

The democratizing process experienced in the last quarter of the twentieth century has modified access to power schemes, giving way to greater political plurality. Economic

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deregulation reforms and administrative decentralization processes were launched. On the part of the State, the modernization of public management was promoted through new institutional schemes focused on budget transparency, accountability, oversight and the fight against corruption. Mexico has an active participation in the international strategies that commit us to promote actions to tackle this phenomenon, (Fernandez 2018).

National Anticorruption System (NAS)

Regulatory framework

The advances in the legal framework and the institutional framework over 40 years of struggle against corruption in a public way are undeniable. Many of the advances of the national regulatory framework have been the result of the international pressures exerted by the agreements in the field of 'Fight to Corruption' of which Mexico is a part and are:
1. The Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
2. The Inter-American Convention against Corruption of the Organization of American States (OAS);
3. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

All these conventions are international obligations undertaken by Mexico, as they are signed by the Federal Executive and ratified by the Senate.

The changes in national regulatory framework

In 1982 the Secretariat of the Comptroller General of the Federation (SECOGEF) was created; in 1994 the Secretariat of the Comptroller and Administrative Development (SECODAM); in 1999 the Superior Audit of the Federation (ASF); in 2000 the Federal Court of Fiscal and Administrative Justice; in 2002 the Federal Law on the Responsibilities of Public Servants and the Federal Institute of access to Public Information (IFAI); in 2003 the Secretariat of Public Administration (SFP); in 2008-2012 the National Program on Accountability, Transparency and Fighting Corruption; in 2012 the Anti-Corruption Law on Public Procurement; in 2014 the Special Prosecutor for Matters Related Acts of Corruption Crimes of the PGR; and in 2015 the National Anticorruption System. In 2018 the Attorney General's Office (PGR) disappeared and the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic was created (FGR). An autonomous justice body was created in January 2019, appointing the first Attorney General of the Republic (Alejandro Gertz Manero).

The Constitutional Reform of 7 February 2014 added reforms on various provisions of Article 6° of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico in matters of Transparency. This reform expanded the catalogue of subjects or institutions which are obligated to make their information transparent. The reform includes, for example, the obligation to make public the information of political parties, trade unions, autonomous bodies, trusts and public funds. It strengthens the guarantor agency at the federal level

and lays the foundation to create autonomous local agencies throughout the country. It also recognizes and promotes access to information as a fundamental right for the development of Mexican democracy. Another great effort that was achieved in favor of transparency was on 4 May 2014, the day on which the General Law of Access to Public Information was published.

On 27 May 2015 the Official Gazette of the Federation published the decree by which various provisions of the Political Constitution to Fight Corruption were amended. Among these reforms, four stand out. The first is the creation of the National Anticorruption System in article 113 of the Constitution. The second is the recognition of the power that Congress must issue laws that establish the bases of the National Anticorruption System. The third establishes the responsibilities of public servants and individuals who commit acts of corruption. And, finally, the fourth reform expands and strengthens the powers of control of the Superior Audit of the Federation.

With the creation of the National Anticorruption System, a series of secondary laws were published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on 18 July 2016, of which four were new laws and three were reformed.

Those laws are:

1. General Law of the National Anticorruption System. This law was created to establish bases for coordination between the Federation, the states, municipalities, and the City Halls of Mexico City for the operation of the NAS.
2. General Law on Administrative Responsibilities. This is also a new law, which establishes the powers of the government orders to establish the responsibilities and obligations of public servants, and sanctions which they incur as a result of acts or omissions.
3. Organic Law of the Federal Court of Administrative Justice. This law was created to establish the integration, organization, attributions, and functioning of the Federal Court of Administrative Justice (FCAJ). In addition, this Law establishes that the FCAJ is a jurisdictional body with the autonomy to issue its rulings and with full jurisdiction. The FCAJ is part of the NAS.
4. Law on Control and Accountability of the Federation. This Law was created with the NAS and contains everything related to the review and inspection of the Public Account. This law strengthens the role of the Superior Audit of the Federation.
5. Organic Law of the Attorney General. This law was reformed to establish the functions and powers of the Specialized Prosecutor's Office in matters of crimes related to corruption.
6. Federal Criminal Code. This law was reformed to harmonize the penal code with the NAS. This reform included a title to the Code of Crimes for acts of corruption.
7. Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration. This Law was reformed to establish the role of the Ministry of Public Administration as a fundamental part of the fight against corruption. In addition, it establishes the functions of this Ministry as part of the Coordinating Committee of the NAS.

With the modifications in the Mexican Constitution, there is a high level of concern on the part of the State to focus on reforms which are aimed at fighting corruption and strengthening the organs of law enforcement.

Public servants are agents of the State that intervene in the development of the public function whether in the executive, legislative, or judicial spheres, or within any of the different autonomous constitutional bodies. The acts of corruption which many of them have incurred have always provoked alarm in society, as it is unacceptable that an activity of the State aimed at satisfying collective welfare is carried out by dubious and dishonest subjects (Herrera 2016).

Fighting corruption is a priority of the current government, because corruption made their efforts ineffective in fighting poverty and inequality. It has undermined their ability to promote economic growth, and has become one of the main causes of the spread of drug trafficking, organized crime, and insecurity in our country today. Corruption is therefore an obstacle to development (Herrera 2016).

Functioning

The National Anticorruption System (NAS) aims to establish principles, general guidelines, public policies, and procedures for coordination of the authorities at all levels of government in the prevention, detection, and punishment of administrative offenses and acts of corruption, as well as on the supervision and control of public resources. It is an effort that aims to establish, coordinate and evaluate policy on this matter. All the functions of the NAS are described in the General Law of the National Anticorruption System.

The National Anti-Corruption System is integrated by:
1. The members of the Coordinating Committee (1.A representative of the Citizen Participation Committee, who will chair it; 2. The head of the Superior Audit Office of the Federation 3. The head of the Special Prosecutor for Fighting Corruption; 4. The head of the Ministry of Public Administration; 5. A representative of the Council of the Federal Judiciary; 6. The President of the National Institute of Transparency, access to Information and Protection of Personal data, and 7. The President of the Federal Court of Administrative Justice).
2. The Citizen Participation Committee; (Which is composed of five honourable and prestigious citizens who have stood out for their contribution to transparency, accountability, or the fight against corruption).
3. The Governing Committee of the National Audit System is presided over in a dual manner by the Superior Auditor of the Federation and the head of the Ministry of Public Administration, or by the representatives who have been respectively designated for this position.
4. The Local Anticorruption Systems are formed by a Local System for each state of Mexico and must have integration and attributions equivalent to those of the National Anticorruption Systems.

The National Audit System consists of conducting audits, supervision, and monitoring the management of public resources. The Council of the Federal Judiciary is the authority belonging to the judicial system that performs tasks of inspection, monitoring, and evaluation of the judicial career in Mexico, to prevent and fight any act of corruption that may arise within the delivery of justice. As a part of it, the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data is an autonomous constitutional body responsible for the "effective exercise and respect of the rights of access to information and protection of personal data."

The Federal Court of Administrative Justice is the structure responsible for resolving disputes that arise between the federal public administration and citizens. It is the highest jurisdictional structure in Mexico in administrative and fiscal matters. Thus, in accordance with the NAS, this court will punish public servants for serious administrative offenses.

The Special Prosecutor in the Fight against Corruption has the function of investigating and prosecuting crimes related to acts of corruption of federal competence, as well as any other crime committed by a federal public servant in the performance of their employment, position or commission

It can be seen, then, that the National Anticorruption System is also made up of other systems for its functioning, such as the National Transparency System, Accusatory and Oral Criminal System, National System of Oversight, and Local Anticorruption Systems.

Another fundamental aspect is the National Digital Platform. This platform is also regulated by the General Law of the National Anticorruption System, and its main objective is to establish specific information such as patrimonial, interest, and tax declarations of public servants. Also, the digital platform plans to contain all the information on tenders and procurement procedures. In the same way, the list and the names of public officials who previously have been subjected to an administrative procedure and imposed any sanctions will be established.

The Local Anticorruption Systems are established by each state in order to coordinate the local authorities competent in the prevention, detection, investigation and punishment of administrative responsibilities and acts of corruption. There are 32 state systems, each of which has instances formed by state public entities, as well as its secondary legislation in the matter, which must be in harmony and equivalence with the National Anticorruption System.

Of the 32 states, progress was displayed in adapting its regulatory framework at a high score of 97%. Out of the 288 pieces of legal machinery designed to be harmonized with respect to the national model throughout the country, only 8 remain to be issued (25 January 2019). On this matter, it should be mentioned that no state is pending to make the adjustments to their local constitution or publish the law that establishing the design of its local anticorruption system.

Regarding the formation of the operational structure of local anticorruption systems, we have the following table:

The forming of the operational structure of local anticorruption systems.

Body / Agency	Federal entities			
	constituted		*missing*	
Selection Committee	30	94%	2	6%
Citizen Participation Committee	29	91%	3	9%
Coordinating Committee	28	88%	4	12%
Executive Secretary	24	75%	8	25%
Anticorruption Prosecutor	29	91%	3	9%
Judge TJA	30	94%	2	6%

Information updated as on 8 March 2019, NAS Executive Secretariat.

The financial aspect emphasizes that, for 18 January 2019, 75% of the states already had a budget for the Executive Secretaries of their anticorruption systems, pending resource for this category of spending only 8 states (Pacheco 2019)

Limits and Scopes

The limits of the National Anticorruption System include:
- The Human resources that make up the NAS – it will be necessary to work on their training and the selection mechanisms appropriate for their functions.
- The methods, systems, and resources in general with which it functions in different institutions in order to check whether they are suitable for fighting against corruption
- The difficulty in strengthening the institutional capacities of the 32 states and municipalities.
- The problems with the formulation of indicators and mechanism to evaluate policies and to ensure proper function of the NAS.
- That the NAS is considered a centralist scheme of subordination of governments and legislatures.
- Citizen participation, or social apathy, as Mexico does not have a civil society participation system in the political sense. After being ignored for 70 years and more, the country does not have the mechanisms to have a citizen chapter or civil society interested in public affairs.
- The inertia of being considered one of the most corrupt countries in the world.
- The inequality in infrastructure and the social capacity for the installation and consultation of local anti-corruption systems (internet access is not yet present across the entirety of the country, as an example).
- The Simulation of compliance with the processes.

The scope of the NAS is:

- To meet international requirements and standards when implementing the direct intervention of citizens.
- To empower existing institutions with new areas and functions.
- To orient not only to the pubic-political sector but, very importantly, to individuals and corporations in the private sector who contract with the government.
- To impose sanctions on businesses, stipulating that any conduct contrary to the Law committed by companies will receive severe penalties.
- To use a National Digital Platform to connect various electronic systems in order to establish comprehensive policies and measurement methodologies so that the regulatory authorities have access to systems.
- To coordinate social activists and authorities at different levels of government, in order to prevent, investigate and punish corruption. A coordinating committee headed by a citizen is created, which also has a citizen participation committee.
- To involve civil society to participate as a proponent, promoter, observer and complainant, as well as an assisting in the definition of public policies in this area.
- To use several mechanisms at the disposal of the NAS to seek to prevent acts of corruption. These include: Codes of Ethics, Protocols of action, and Mechanisms of self-regulation.
- To maintain the comprehensive view on the subject that the NAS has.
- To have a timelier inspection of the Superior Audit of the Federation.
- To ensure that the issue of the fight against corruption has priority in the government agenda
- To ensure that the discussion of accountability and transparency in managing public resources has been inclusive, incorporating greater responsibilities in state and municipal governments.
- To enable the actions of the governors and public servants to be controlled by social audit.
- To ensure that society can evaluate the performance of their governors and decide with their vote, and maintain the continuity and permanence of a system of government.

Conclusions

1. Mexico is a country that is constantly changing and has transitioned from a hegemonic party system to multiparty political movements and coalition parties, which have achieved success for the first time in its history and introduced a leftist president.

2. The National Anticorruption System represents the latest effort by the state that brings together all the strength of its institutions to fight against corruption. Although at this time, corruption is considered an endemic phenomenon that extends its effects in various ways affecting society from the social and economic spheres to the private, public and political. The NAS represents a call to the hope that this can

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change and leave behind the wrong way to build in favor of a new one that benefits the majority and is sustainable.

3. Mexico needs to promote a culture of service, co-governance, and government as a convergent in networks of cooperation between activities to recover the spirit of the public.

4. It is necessary to bring together trained intellectuals and highly skilled workers for innovation and to fight incompetence.

5. The institutions that comprise the National Anticorruption System must not be prey to political interests, and the delay in the implementation of the same – at the federal and local level – and in the appointment of the Attorney General and other bodies must be avoided as it stems from the political class that would see its interests damaged. Do not doubt that some of these personalities are part of the system and that they try to boycott their tasks, and remember that this political class has been in power for more than 70 years.

6. It is necessary to ensure the funding sources of the bodies and institutions forming the National Anticorruption System.

7. It is necessary to work on establishing the instruments that ensure the promotion of a National integrity policy, creating competent capacities in the state and municipal governments.

8. The construction of its National Anticorruption System took nearly 40 years in Mexico. We hope that its optimal operation will take less time to produce results, and optimistically that we can witness the change in the way the country progresses towards development.

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Skaidrumas, atskaitomybė ir galimybė gauti informaciją: Nacionalinės antikorupcijos sistemos Meksikoje ribos ir apimtis

Anotacija

Viešosios politikos klausimai ataskaitų teikimo, skaidrumo ir prieigos prie viešosios informacijos aspektais dabar kaip niekad aktualūs daugelyje pasaulio šalių. Be to, daugelyje iš jų, siekiant sumažinti korupciją, institucijų ir valstybės tarnautojų administracinių bei valdžios sprendimų vertinimas tapo vienu iš pagrindinių tikslų. Nors Meksikoje jau oficialiai pripažįstama demokratija, valdžios darbo kokybė vis dar yra labai prasta, ypač pasigendama atskaitomybės ją išrinkusiems piliečiams. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas naujausias valstybės siekis ištaisyti tokį valdymą ir jo priežastis: nacionalinę antikorupcijos sistemą, jos formavimą ir veikimą, išryškinant šios veiklos ribas ir apimtį.

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