

GUIDE TO FORMING A COALITION GOVERNMENT

Jordi Matas Dalmases



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GUIDE TO FORMING A **COALITION** **GOVERNMENT**

Jordi Matas Dalmases

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Introduction*

Governing democratically, both at municipal and state levels, implies that those who legitimately achieve political power exhibit behaviour, develop attitudes, and transmit values that are deeply democratic. Coalition governments tend to strengthen these qualities, making it the form of government that best enables the most genuine essence of democracy to emerge.

Sharing governmental responsibilities with other political parties means committing to political pluralism, and thus to broadening the social base of government, being more sensitive to social demands, improving communication between those who govern and those who are governed, generating greater social interest in politics, and creating the basis for a culture of dialogue, trust, tolerance, and agreement. Coalition governments bring the executive and the legislature closer together, enhance the roles of parliament and the municipal plenary, enrich political debate, facilitate cross-party alliances, encourage more responsible and more constructive relationships between parties, and increase the co-responsibility, control, and transparency of government action.

The circumstances that comprise the negotiating scenario and that influence the formation of coalition governments also help reinforce the foundations of the democratic system: legal and institutional factors, and the need for qualified parliamentary or city council majorities to make important decisions; electoral regulations and the adoption of proportional systems that facilitate the parliamentary or council presence of minor parties; cross-party relationships and multi-party systems that activate parliamentary or council pluralism; intra-party dynamics, and the existence of

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internal democracy and organizational decentralization for the formation of coalitions at multiple levels of government; historical events and the impact of experience on political progress; motivating factors and the search for objectives that make the expression of the highest democratic values compatible with the desire to impact the government of the *res publica*, and cultural aspects and the consolidation of public opinion in favour of respect for diversity, solidarity, integration, consensus, and shared government. A governing coalition undoubtedly allows for greater democratic political education and the strengthening of social progress.

Knowing and respecting all the factors involved in political negotiations, setting government objectives with other parties, distributing political power fairly, establishing guidelines for the internal functioning of the government, communicating government action agreed upon by the members of the coalition requires a superior command of the art of politics. Governing in a coalition requires more effort, greater dedication, and a higher level of political expertise on the part of those in power. This *Guide to Forming a Coalition Government* explains the **three phases** that should be followed when negotiating a coalition government. The first phase consists of **identifying and considering the factors involved in the negotiating scenario**: the legal and institutional framework; electoral system and party system; parties and ideology; history, political culture, external factors, and personal relationships. In the second phase, one must **determine the principal objectives of the negotiation** for each of the political parties in the short- and medium term, to subsequently determine the coalition government that would best allow them to be achieved. Finally, the

Governing in a coalition requires more effort, greater dedication, and a higher level of political expertise on the part of those in power, but also allows for greater democratic political education and the strengthening of social progress

third phase requires specifying the **criteria for optimizing the distribution of political power** among the governing parties, and the **guidelines for internal functioning**, which are fundamental for the successful development of a power-sharing government.

SUMMARY TABLE

DEMOCRATIC VALUES OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS

- ① Commitment to political pluralism
- ② Broadening of the government's social base
- ③ More considerate of social needs
- ④ Improve communication between the government and the public
- ⑤ Generate greater social interest in politics
- ⑥ Create a political culture of dialogue, trust, tolerance, and agreement
- ⑦ Bring the executive and the legislature closer together
- ⑧ Enhance the role of the parliament and the municipal plenary
- ⑨ Enrich the political debate
- ⑩ Facilitate cross-party alliances
- ⑪ Make cross-party relationships more responsible and constructive
- ⑫ Increase co-responsibility, control, and transparency of government action

SUMMARY TABLE

PHASES IN THE FORMATION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT

- ① Identify and consider the factors involved in the negotiating scenario
- ② Determine the main objectives (short- and medium-term) of the negotiation
- ③ Establish criteria for the distribution of political power and guidelines for internal functioning

This guide aims to provide a systematized set of practical guidelines for the various phases involved in negotiating a coalition government. How they may be applied will depend upon the constituent elements of any specific political system and, more particularly, those of parliamentary systems. One should also bear in mind the territorial scope over which a negotiation will take place, since the political reality will differ considerably whether it is a state, regional, or municipal government, and with regard to the dimension of the state, region, or municipality.

Definition of a coalition government

A **coalition government** is one formed by members of different political groups, that is, it is a government of ministers and/or councillors who belong to different political parties, regardless of whether these parties have opposed each other in elections. A government

is not considered to be a coalition when it consists of one political party (a single-colour or single-party government) governing with the explicit and stable parliamentary or council support from one or more other parties with parliamentary or council representation, through what has been called a **legislative agreement**, even though these agreements also imply negotiations on which policies the government will pursue. Neither do sporadic agreements (explicit or implicit) between a governing party and other political groups with parliamentary or council representation constitute a coalition government. These **ad hoc agreements** on specific issues are typical of single-party minority governments that are unable to achieve stable or legislative agreements with other political parties.

Political parties that share government are co-responsible for all government action, but when support is external the party or parties outside government do not share co-responsibility. Distribution and effective exercise of departmental leadership by various political groups and co-responsibility for all government policies are two inherent aspects of power-sharing governments. Therefore, a clear distinction must be made between coalition governments, single-party governments with a legislative agreement, and single-party governments with ad hoc agreements.

SUMMARY TABLE

DEFINITION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT, AND LEGISLATIVE AND AD HOC AGREEMENTS

Coalition government	A government made up of members of different political groups, i.e., ministers or councillors who belong to different political parties (co-responsibility)
Legislative agreement	A government that has the external, explicit, and stable parliamentary or council support of one or more political groups that have parliamentary or council representation
Ad hoc agreement	A government that establishes sporadic external agreements (explicit or implicit) with different political parties that have parliamentary or council representation

phase 1 

**FACTORS
AFFECTING**
THE FORMATION
OF COALITION
GOVERNMENTS



The formation and the functioning of a coalition government are both highly conditioned by the elements comprising the legal and political context in which the negotiation takes place. The legal and institutional framework, electoral regulations and their effects on election results, the party system, relations between parties and the internal dynamics of party organization, the objectives pursued by the political parties, historical events, political culture and public opinion, external factors, and personal relationships are all variables that mark the course of a coalition government negotiation.

SUMMARY TABLE

FACTORS AFFECTING THE FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ① Legal and institutional framework | ⑥ Motivations and objectives of the parties |
| ② Electoral system and election results | ⑦ Historical events |
| ③ Party system | ⑧ Political culture and public opinion |
| ④ Inter-party relations | ⑨ External factors |
| ⑤ Internal party dynamics | ⑩ Personal relationships |

1. Legal and institutional framework

Understanding the institutional dimension is key to defining the starting point of a negotiation: the willingness to be part of a coalition government, and having the necessary parliamentary or council support to stimulate government action.

The institutional dimension differs in each country and according to the political level of government (state, regional, or local). Understanding it requires knowing how the “rules of the game” of **parliamentary systems** influence relations between parties and decision-making, and this includes: the investiture vote, the relationship between the executive and the legislature, forms of control over government, the functioning of parliament, the functions of different parliamentary groups, how parties vote in elections (e.g., whether or not they hold the party line), the majorities required to govern comfortably, the viability of minority governments, formal relationships between the government and the opposition, and between governmental structure and the administration, among other factors.

The institutional dimension relates to the rules of the parliamentary game

In the **investiture vote**, it is not only important to achieve the parliamentary or council arithmetic required to govern, but also to know whether the parties that vote yes will continue to support the government during its term. Investiture can be won with a simple majority, and that does not necessarily indicate the beginning of an unstable government, while neither does winning with

an absolute majority guarantee government stability. Therefore, political negotiating forces must pay great attention to the majorities required to guarantee a relationship of trust between the legislature and the executive that allows for stable government action and prevents legislative censure. Some of the facts that must be known include the majorities required to push through government initiatives, approve budgets, establish ordinary and organic laws, reform the constitution, win motions of censure or confidence, and so on. If these pro-government majorities are agreed upon at the beginning of the legislature, they will become evident through the vote.

When no single party wins an absolute majority in an election, there are two options: forming a majority coalition government, or forming a minority government. However, there are also parties that choose to govern in coalition despite winning an absolute majority (an oversized coalition), and there are also minority coalition governments. Depending on how the parliamentary system functions, when a coalition government is formed there are two possible scenarios: either the coalition government includes the party that has won the most seats, or a coalition government is formed by an alternative majority not including this party. While the first scenario may typically be more common, the second, more frequent in countries with a strong history of forming coalitions, also serves legitimate dynamics compatible with the essence of parliamentarianism, i.e., negotiation within the parliament or council of government majorities.

Although in practically all parliamentary systems an **absolute majority** is a clear objective of negotiation, it should be borne in mind that, from a formal point of view, this absolute majority does not have to be made up of parties that are in government (it can be obtained through so-called legislature agreements or ad hoc agreements for specific votes). Nor must this majority necessarily be

pro-government, as by managing abstentions and avoiding a majority in contra (simple for ordinary legislative activity, or absolute to avoid censure), governments can act with confidence and stability. Even so, governing in permanent negotiation with external political forces that have no government responsibilities is more difficult and generates greater instability. Therefore, whenever possible, parties will try to reach an agreement to form a coalition government with an absolute majority rather than form a minority government.

Parties will normally try to reach an agreement to form a coalition government with an absolute majority rather than face the possibility of having to form a minority government

Another possibility is that of an **oversized coalition government**, which is one that not only has an absolute majority of seats but, even if it loses one or more of its coalition partners, will maintain this majority. The concept is that maximising the usefulness of a coalition is incompatible with the presence in government of parties that are not needed for comfortable government action (an absolute majority), that complicate negotiations on government action, and that occupy areas of power. Also, there may be circumstances where the objective of negotiating a coalition government is to promote political initiatives that require larger majorities and extensive political consensus, and where these majorities must be concentrated within the government. The existence of a political culture favourable to agreement, of a situation of crisis, or of serious social conflicts which require political consensus or constitutional reform to be resolved, may lead to the formation of oversized coalition governments. These factors have sometimes led to the creation of so-called “grand coalitions”.

A grand coalition (or national unity government) is a government which has an absolute majority and in which either almost all political parties that have parliamentary (or council) representation or all

The political context can lead to the development of oversized or grand coalitions

the main parties on the parliamentary spectrum are present, or both. Grand coalitions require ideologically diverse parties, even those traditionally opposed, to agree on a programme for government. They are, therefore, rare in stable political environments, and are usually

formed in periods of significant political, institutional, economic, or social crisis, which is to say, in periods when the direct and explicit participation of all parties (or the major ones in terms of number of seats) is required to respond to very serious situations. Despite the ideological heterogeneity of the partners in government, grand coalitions are typically stable because their purpose is to overcome a major difficulty

and the opposition is either non-existent or very weak. However, once the specific objectives are achieved and the period of crisis is over, ideological differences and instability will emerge.

Another aspect of the legal and institutional framework is the **opposition**. It should be taken into account that the decision to form a certain coalition government also implies the formation of the opposition. This requires analysis of the opposition's influence on the government, especially when it is a coalition government, because any government, regardless of its political composition and the parliamentary (or council) arithmetic that supports it, is conditioned by the nature of its opposition. In general, governments want the opposition to be minority, multi-party, ideologically fragmented, non-institutionalized, without explicit leadership, passive, and responsible.

SUMMARY TABLE

TYPES OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

Minority coalition government	Government formed by two or more parties that do not have an absolute majority
Coalition government with absolute majority	Government formed by two or more parties that have an absolute majority and where all parties are needed to meet that majority
Oversized coalition government	Government formed by two or more parties which have an absolute majority and which will maintain this majority even if it loses one or more of the parties in the coalition
Grand coalition, or national unity government	Government formed by two or more parties which have an absolute majority and in which almost all of the parties and/or the main parties on the parliamentary or council spectrum are present

OPPOSITION TRAITS WHICH FACILITATE GOVERNMENT ACTION



SUMMARY TABLE

GOVERNMENT OPTIONS BASED ON PARLIAMENTARY OR COUNCIL ARITHMETIC

	Absolute majority	No absolute majority
1	Single-party government with an absolute majority	Single-party minority government
2	Oversized coalition government	Single-party government with legislative agreement (absolute majority or minority)
3		Single-party government with ad hoc agreements (absolute majority or minority)
4		Minority coalition government
5		Coalition government with absolute majority
6		Oversized coalition government

2. Electoral system and party system

Another key area of the negotiation scenario involves evaluating the regulations governing elections, examining election results, and analysing the party system within which the negotiation will take place.

The **regulatory framework for elections** affects the transformation of votes into political representation and, thus, each party’s negotiating strategy for forming a coalition government. Un-

derstanding the impact of the electoral system on the configuration of the party system and interpreting the parliamentary or council arithmetic allows us to reflect on the possibilities of forming part of a coalition government.

Electoral systems that favour greater parliamentary or council pluralism encourage the development of negotiating strategies and facilitate a coalition dynamic. A proportional **electoral formula** (which proportionally converts votes into seats), over a single **electoral district** or greater magnitude constituencies (i.e., where a large number of representatives are elected), with a low **legal electoral threshold** (or none), results in higher parliamentary or council pluralism, counters the establishment of large majorities and, therefore, favours the formation of coalition governments. On the other hand, a majority electoral formula (which strengthens the institutional representation of the electoral majority) in a single-member district (in which only one representative is elected) makes it easier for a party to obtain a large parliamentary or council majority, and makes the creation of a coalition government less likely.

The electoral system effects party systems and the formation of coalitions

Electoral systems have an impact on **party systems**, that is, on the institutional relations between parties in the parliament or council, and these relations will condition negotiations for the formation of a coalition government. Coalition governments proliferate in multi-party systems, where different political parties have parliamentary or council representation without any of them having an absolute majority of seats, and are scarce in two-party systems where one party is predominant; not only because of the arithmetic of representation but also because of parliamentary (or council) practices and the relationships between the executive and the legislature in a multi-party system. More competitive party systems facilitate the formation of coalition governments.

A single country may have different party systems and sub-systems, and **multi-level dynamics** will have clear consequences for the configuration of any given government coalition. Political and administrative decentralization creates different governmental arenas, and each may comprise specific party systems and, consequently, different types of governments and, in the case of power-sharing governments, multiple coalition pacts. In some countries, coalition governments are formed only at local or regional levels and not at the state level (coalition governments proliferate most in smaller territorial areas). Less frequent are countries that have coalition governments at the state level and not at regional or local levels. State-level coalition governments clearly influence the formation of coalition governments at smaller territorial levels.

These influences between coalition governments at different levels of government are related to the type of **internal organization of each party**. In parties with a very centralized organizational structure, there is less freedom for regional or local bodies to form different coalitions (especially if they jeopardize the party's strategy at the state level), while in more decentralized parties (or assemblies) there is more freedom for regional or local coalitions. However, the logic behind the action of parties at the local level (where, for example, personal relationships are very important) is not the same as that operating at state level, and it is very difficult to align them all and impose upon the lower levels the logic that the party adopts at the state level.

In any case, the experiences of governments in any particular territorial area, whether positive or negative, always serve as a reference for those in other areas.

SUMMARY TABLE

ELEMENTS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND THE FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS

	Facilitates the formation of coalition governments	Impedes the formation of coalition governments
Electoral formula	Proportional	Majority
District type	Single constituency	Single-member
District magnitude	Large	Small
Legal electoral threshold	Low or none	High (or none given the majority)

PARTY SYSTEMS AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Multi-party system	Several parties with parliamentary or council representation but none with an absolute majority
Two-party system	Two major parties with parliamentary or council representation where one has an absolute majority
Dominant-party system	One major party with parliamentary or council representation that has an absolute majority and others with minor representation

3. Political parties and ideology



Political parties are the main actors in the formation of government and, therefore, fundamental elements of the negotiating scenario. Game theories consider that political parties base negotiations on maximizing power, which is to say, on obtaining the maximum number of government positions, but it is also true that all parties wish to promote policies from within government that are as similar as possible to their ideological preferences or electoral programmes, and so they try to form coalitions with the minimal ideological distance between members.

Political parties base negotiations on maximising power to achieve the maximum number of positions in government and on minimising the ideological distance between their members in order to promote government action as close as possible to their ideology

The **ideological position** of political parties influences the negotiation of coalition governments. Negotiating participation in a government requires agreeing on specific government actions that aim toward a model of society, and this requires an ideological debate between parties and collaboration to find common ground. Naturally this debate would encompass all the ideological axes by which the parties are publicly defined and the current political environment. The emergence of new social conflicts and the need of parties to present possible solutions brings additional elements to inter-party relations and, consequently, leads to greater proximity or distance between them. Thus, what may be arithmetically possible is not necessarily politically feasible, and what is politically desirable is not always arithmetically possible.

Connections between parties and their positions on the ideological axes, such as the left-right axis or those of national identity or religion, generate a range of relations regarding electoral competition and ideological incompatibility that lead political parties with

parliamentary or council representation to exercise certain roles in the negotiation of a coalition government, beyond purely numeric questions. These partocratic roles conditioned by ideology may lead to the presence of parties that are not part of the negotiating process, parties with no interest in a power-sharing government, parties that are ideologically very well placed to form coalitions, anti-system parties, and pivotal parties that are essential to the negotiating process.

Pivotal or **hinge parties** hold the key to virtually all possible government coalitions. They will be found at the centre of negotiations, are almost always members of a government coalition, and are rarely in opposition. Their constant presence in government ensures a level of continuity in government policy and greater stability. Pivotal parties, which may be, from the point of view of parliamentary or council arithmetic, large parties or smaller parties, tend to be located in a central position on the main ideological axis, and avoid polarization or radicalization in their political discourse. They play a prominent role in negotiating the policies of coalition governments, and possess great negotiating capacity for the control of positions and political power, and the rewards they obtain in these negotiations are greater than those that would correspond to them in terms of their proportional parliamentary or council presence in the coalition government. They take a very pragmatic approach to negotiation, leaving programmatic and ideological aspects aside and instead focusing their strategies on gaining areas of political power.

What is
arithmetically
possible is not
necessarily
politically feasible,
and what is
politically desirable
is not always
arithmetically
possible

The opposite of pivotal parties are the **parties that always refuse to share power** with any other political party. Systematically

excluding themselves as possible actors in negotiations logically reduces the negotiating scenario, and the parties that behave like this are usually major parties that prefer to govern alone (even if in a minority) and fear that coalitional behaviour will have negative electoral consequences. There is a second type of party that also never participates in coalition governments, but unlike the previous type it is not because they choose to be excluded but because other political parties always seek to form coalitions that exclude them, and this makes them “invisible actors”. Finally, there are also **anti-system parties**, which are those with an ideology that opposes and questions the legitimacy of the political system. These parties, due to their ideological extremism, usually fall outside any coalition government and also limit the negotiating scenario.

Within this section on the roles of different parties in the negotiation process, the importance of **intra-party relations** must be stressed: the structure of parties; decision-making processes within organizations; levels of centralization and decentralization; the degree of control of party elites over the lower bodies, factions and the rank and file, and, in short, the extent to which the central bodies of the parties control the behaviour of sub-national agreements.

Within each party there are different hierarchical levels that may have different and even contradictory objectives when negotiating a coalition government: the leaders, those aspiring to form part of a government, parliamentarians and councillors, party leadership members, those working for the party, members, and supporters all have different priorities that can make internal consensus difficult and hinder the consolidation of a possible coalition. Some may consider it important for the party to enter government and obtain the leadership of one or more ministerial or council departments; others, meanwhile, may consider the possible negative electoral consequences of a pact with another party to be a priority, while others may regret the renunciation of particu-

lar policies included in their party's electoral programme. So, the internal criteria of parties on the advisability of participating in a coalition government are not always homogeneous.

In intra-party relations, it may occur that the coalitions considered to be positive from the perspective of the party elites are rejected by the base, although in most cases the base (rank and file) will accept the coalition agreements proposed by their leaders. More complicated is the rejection by the elites of possible coalitions accepted and approved by the base. Decisions on coalitions are basically made by the elites (a change of leadership will entail new coalitional behaviour), from the start of negotiations to the distribution of ministerial or council posts, but a lack of harmony between the leaders and the base causes the latter to distance itself from the party.

In terms of **internal organization**, a more centralized party will be stronger and more unified as a coalition partner, and even more likely to make ideological criteria prevail in the formation of a coalition. Centralized parties have a small decision-making elite that limits the influence of **political factions** on negotiations for the formation of a coalition government. If negotiations are swift, factions have little time to organize and position themselves before the rank and file or the general public, but if the process is prolonged not only are they able to establish clear positioning but also they can gain the support of interest groups close to the party.

SUMMARY TABLE

TYPES OF PARTIES AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Pivotal or hinge parties	Hold the key to almost all possible government coalitions, are at the centre of negotiations, take a very pragmatic approach, and are almost always members of coalition governments.
Self-excluding parties	Refuse to share government with any other party, prefer to govern alone (even in a minority), believe that coalitional behaviour brings negative electoral results, and limit the negotiating scenario.
Excluded parties	“Invisible actors” who do not participate in coalition governments because other parties always seek to form coalitions that exclude them, they limit the negotiating scenario.
Anti-system parties	Have an ideology that opposes and questions the legitimacy of the political system, refuse to be part of any coalition government, and limit the negotiating scenario.

To analyse intra-party decision-making processes, one must understand the internal structure (static vision) and how the party functions (dynamic vision). There are parties in which the decision that counts in forming a coalition government comes from the leaders. Others require that the leaders’ decision be ratified by a special conference of delegates, or that coalition agreements be ratified by party congresses before they are formalized.

SUMMARY TABLE

INTRA-PARTY DYNAMICS AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Internal hierarchical levels

Leaders, parliamentarians and councillors, members of the party leadership, those working for the party, party members or supporters may have conflicting coalitional goals.

Relations between the elites and the base

Coalitions desired by party elites may be rejected by the rank and file (mostly they are accepted), and it is very difficult for the elites to reject possible coalitions approved by the base.

Internal organization

More centralized means a more unified party in coalition negotiations, less freedom for regional or local bodies to make specific coalition agreements, and greater weight of ideological criteria in the formation of coalitions.

Political factions

If negotiations are swift, factions do not have time to organize and position themselves before the rank and file or general public, while if they are prolonged factions can take positions and obtain the support of interest groups close to the party.

4. History, political culture, external factors, and personal relationships

Time conditions the formation of coalition governments, since those involved in the negotiation conceive it as an ongoing process through which, beyond election results, relationships or distances are forged between political parties, ideologies, and projects. The weight of a country's political history decisively influences the configuration of its political system and party system, and the relationships between political parties and their coalitional behaviour. The past (historical time) also gives us insight into previous experiences of power-sharing governments, whether they have succeeded or failed, what have been the relationships between parties and political elites over time, how parliamentary or council institutions and practices have developed, what the relations between the governmental majority and the opposition have traditionally been, and so on.

The **political culture** and public opinion in a country or society also condition the negotiation of a coalition government. There are many factors that help to shape a particular political culture, and different ways in which parties create, reinforce, and change public opinion. It is true that public opinion is dynamic and changing, being highly contextual and reacting and adapting to political events, but it is no less true that it is a key aspect of the process of forming a coalition government. Pre-election and post-election surveys, by which questions are put to the public or the electorate on different coalition alternatives, help coalitional actors to develop more arguments to support their strategies.

Political culture, which is also changeable but far less so than public opinion, encompasses psychological orientations toward political objects and, in our case, toward coalition governments. In the

formation of a political culture, the actions of key players in the processes of political socialization are decisive, since they transmit social norms and values that help people internalize a certain political reality, and can influence the widespread rejection or acceptance of a coalition government. Consequently, the specific political culture impacts upon the criteria used by parties to assess the need and possibility of the formation of a coalition government.

A culture of compromise, negotiation, dialogue, consensus, pragmatism, solidarity, trust, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, and integration facilitates the creation of coalition governments, while a culture of division, polarisation, Manichaeism, suspicion, individualism, narrow-mindedness, nuanced negotiation, contradiction, superiority, and political arrogance hinders the formation of coalitions.

Societies with little political culture of compromise see coalition governments as “blackmail” between political parties rather than a willingness to collaborate in governmental duties. In these societies, negotiating a coalition government is interpreted as political and partisan weakness, as deception of the electorate, and an unjustifiable renunciation of political values, as it implies an obvious flexibility in the defence of certain policies. Additionally, if the coalition government does not include the party that has won the most votes and seats in the elections, then social rejection, in this type of society, will be accentuated. If these attitudes are deeply rooted, they put pressure on the parties and make it difficult to create coalition governments and, in some cases, lead to the creation of weak minority one-party states. Only in periods of strong institutional crisis or economic precariousness do these attitudes

A culture of compromise, negotiation, dialogue, consensus, pragmatism, solidarity, trust, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, and integration facilitates the formation of coalition governments

A culture of division, polarization, Manichaeism, suspicion, individualism, narrow-mindedness, nuance in negotiation, contradiction, superiority, and political arrogance makes it difficult to form a coalition

give way to favouring agreement between parties and the formation of coalition governments.

There are **external factors** that fall outside the scope of government activity but that affect relations between coalitional actors and the formation of coalition governments. In the configuration of sub-national (regional and municipal) coalition governments, factors occurring beyond the territorial scope of the political parties will frequently influence agreement strategies. Events originating within the state political system may influence regional and local sub-systems, and events occurring in a certain region or municipality, as if having a mimetic effect, will influence another or various municipalities, or generate a contrary effect following the failure of certain actions in nearby regions or municipalities.

There are other external factors that, while part of the dynamics of political systems, are not identified as strictly political elements. These include, for example, the media and economic lobbies. The media tend to push public opinion to favour one of the possible alternatives for government over others. Business organizations and trade unions may also play decisive roles while pursuing the best outcome to defend their corporate interests. The favourable or unfavourable opinions of particular social or economic elites may, respectively, encourage or discourage the formation of certain coalition governments.

The **personal factor** is also part of the negotiating scenario, and its influence will be greater as the level of government decreases, i.e., at local levels it is greater than at the state level. Although this is a difficult area to analyse, it should be borne in mind that person-

al influence does affect the negotiation and functioning of coalition governments.

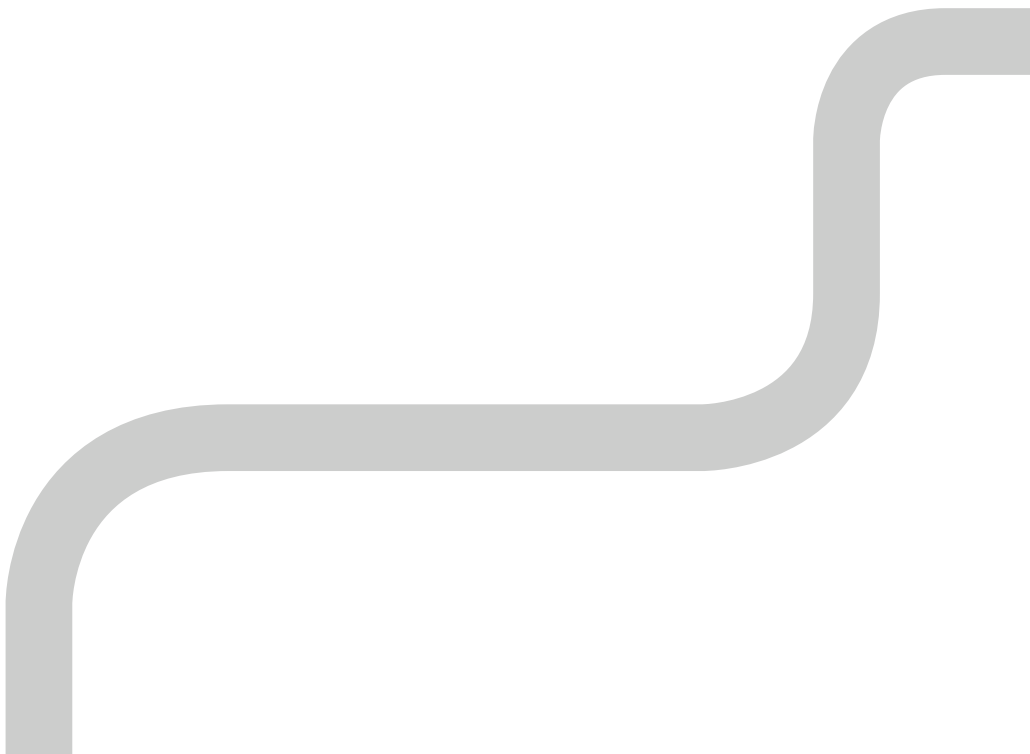
In the negotiation phase, not only must the characteristics and objectives of all political parties involved be known, but also one must foresee who will act as spokespersons and understand their skills in guiding agreements and formalizing the government coalition. A poor choice of negotiators makes negotiation difficult or impossible, while a good choice facilitates it and speeds it up. Excessive personal influence in the formalization of a coalition government leads to more ephemeral agreements and greater instability, but where political ideology, programmes, and parties hold greater weight in negotiations, agreements tend to be more durable.

The personal aspect also influences both the configuration of governments and decisions on who will form part of the executive. The government, as a collegial body, acts and responds in solidarity, and the individuals who make up the government condition its functioning to an extraordinary degree. The sharing of government tasks between particular individuals favours the stability or instability of the coalition, as personal as well as ideological differences will elucidate the degree of tension between parties within the same coalition.

SUMMARY TABLE

HISTORY, POLITICAL CULTURE, EXTERNAL FACTORS, AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

History	Political history influences the configuration of the political system and the party system, relationships between political parties, and their coalitional behaviour.
Political culture	Agents of political socialization transmit values that influence public rejection or acceptance of coalition governments. Non-coalition political cultures see shared governments as “blackmail” between parties, a deceit of the electorate, and as political and partisan weakness.
External factors	State political dynamics determine the formation of regional and local governments, and the media (creators of public opinion) and economic pressure groups (defenders of corporate interests) can condition the formation of certain coalition governments.
Personal relationships	In negotiations it must be known who are the spokespersons and what are their skills. In the configuration of government, it is important to select the most suitable individuals to form the executive. Personal influence increases as the scope of government decreases.



phase **2** 



OBJECTIVES OF NEGOTIATION

In the second phase of the negotiation of a coalition government, the main objectives of each of the political parties involved need to be identified as well as the best formulas to achieve them.

1. Short- and medium-term objectives

To identify the objectives of a negotiation, one must consider a dimension that is difficult to analyse: the motivational dimension. Many factors motivate the formation of coalitions and almost all of them are interrelated. However, there are four main objectives worth highlighting; two in the short term, and two in the medium term. The first two are the promotion of specific government policies (programmatic and ideological objectives), and the achievement of the maximum amount of power (control of power to influence politics). In the medium term there are two more objectives: government stability (comfortable, active, and lasting government action), and public acceptance of the government and success in future elections.

Initially, the parties negotiating a coalition government will wish to **implement specific public policies** (to minimize the distance between their ideology and the government programme) and **maximize control of areas of power** (by winning ministerial or council portfolios and internal political positions arising in different areas). The two objectives may not be equally important, as depending on the circumstances and context one of them may be prioritized over another. In party systems and political contexts where the ideological differences between the major players are small, power typically becomes the main motivation. Parties that are situated at the extremes of the main ideological axis give priority to

programmatic aspects; hinge or pivotal parties set ideological objectives aside and focus more on gaining control of areas of power. These two main objectives will vary according to the territorial scope (local, regional, or state). In a reduced territorial scope, such as the local, power is typically a less relevant motivation than pushing through specific policies (depending on the importance of the municipality), while in a larger scope such as the state, power is a higher motivation, since the benefits obtained by the parties would be greater. Both aspects (power and ideology) are always interrelated: parties want to enter government and control areas of power in order to influence the implementation of specific policies.

The medium-term objectives are government stability and electoral success. To assess **government stability**, the time factor must be considered: a government that lasts a long time is seen to be more stable than one that lasts a short time, although this idea employs the benefit of hindsight in the evaluation of stability. As we shall see below, some factors have been identified that condition the duration of a government. However, the time factor only tells us the duration of a government, not whether during that period it was characterized by stability or instability: time informs us of the quantity of government but not of its quality. A more precise analysis of a government's stability would assess the events that occurred between the time it was created and the time when it ended: its comfort in undertaking government action, the nature of its actions, public acceptance of the government, the reasons for the end of the government, and so on. All of these elements form part of the objective of stability, and would be evident in comfortable, active, and lasting government action.

Another medium-term objective is **social acceptance of the government and electoral success in future contests**. This means assessing whether coalition parties will achieve better or worse election results individually or jointly, and which parties would benefit

most from the formation of a coalition government. Forecasting electoral success or failure, which is naturally conditioned by the policies to be implemented, requires knowledge obtained through surveys of the electorate on the degree of public acceptance or rejection. Electoral impact will vary depending on the roles played by the parties within the coalition, since it is not the same to be the party leading the coalition, a party with less weight within the government, or a key hinge party for the formation of the coalition government. The demographic prediction of a loss of public support is one of the main causes of the breakdown of coalition governments.

The decision not to form part of a coalition government may also have negative electoral effects in the event that voters consider that, by this decision, the party in question is causing a situation of political instability or opening the way for other parties that will cause a negative turn to the ideological direction of the coalition.

Summarizing the above, the main objectives of the negotiation are to promote specific policies, to achieve control of areas of power, and government stability, which will lead to public acceptance and success in future elections. Naturally there may be other more singular objectives: to avoid single-party governments formed by major parties that systematically reject any type of coalition, to avoid the presence of a certain political party in government, to solve major economic or political crises (generating grand coalitions), to carry out constitutional reform, to share government with specific individuals, and so on.

SUMMARY TABLE

OBJECTIVES OF PARTIES NEGOTIATING COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Short-term objectives

Power: maximize control of areas of power (ministries, councils, and other political posts)

Ideology: minimize the ideological distance between the party and the government programme

Medium-term objectives

Stability: comfortable, active, and lasting government action

Public acceptance and election success: assessing the public reaction and future electoral impact

2. Types of coalition government

Classification of coalition government types helps those negotiating to more easily achieve the above objectives. It is a matter of discerning, among the various alternatives, which will best guarantee these objectives. The parameters we will use to classify coalition governments are the following: the number of political parties involved, their significance, and their ideology.

The **numerical criterion of political parties** that form part of a coalition government tells us the degree of fragmentation or pluralism of the government. The greater the number of parties in a coalition, the more difficult it is to reach an agreement, maintain cohesion within the government, and achieve the established objectives. To maximize the achievement of objectives, the number of political parties in a coalition must be minimized. In two-party coalition govern-

ments, the internal negotiation of government action and the distribution of areas of power is simpler, and therefore they tend to be the most stable. Multi-party governments, on the other hand, formed by more than two parties, are typically more ideologically heterogeneous, have greater difficulty defining government action and distributing power, and often lead to unnecessary growth in the number of political departments and positions of trust. Multi-party coalition governments (except for grand coalitions) are more unstable, and their instability increases with the number of parties in government.

The **role played by the parties** within the government is essential to understanding the internal dynamics of the coalition (promotion of policy and distribution of political power), and therefore an important factor in formalizing a coalition government. If we take into account the significance of the political parties in the coalition, evaluated through their parliamentary or council strength (number of ministers or councillors), there may be one party that dominates or there may be shared leadership. Thus, some coalition governments are internally unbalanced (with a dominant party), while some are balanced, with shared leadership. Coalition governments with a dominant party, according to its number of MPs or councillors, find the negotiation of government action and the distribution of areas of power easier. They tend to be more stable, and the more marked the differences between the dominant party and the rest, the greater the stability. On the other hand, balanced coalition governments, in which the difference between the number of MPs or councillors from each of the major parties in the coalition is small (or equal), experience greater instability. This is a simple result of the difficulty of negotiating government action and the distribution of power when leadership is shared.

The **ideology of the political parties** that form a coalition government is one of the main unifying elements, as it makes it easier for them to take government action to achieve a similar social model.

Where there are different axes of social conflict in a political system, one must understand the intensity of each (conditioned by the political context) to be able to assess its influence in the negotiation of a coalition government. The issues specifically related to the axes of conflict are those that most influence the negotiation of coalition governments, and those that end up distancing the government parties from those in opposition. Depending on the degree of ideological homogeneity or heterogeneity of the parties in a coalition government, there will be more or less political trust between them and, consequently, more or less difficulty in negotiating the government programme. In more ideologically polarized coalitions, negotiation of the government programme will be more detailed and, therefore, more difficult and conflictive. Ideological heterogeneity also complicates negotiation of the distribution of power which allows the implementation of the government programme. Consequently, ideologically diverse coalition governments tend to be more unstable, and if the ideological distance grows, the instability will also grow.

In conclusion, with fewer parties forming a coalition government, the ideological distance between government partners is reduced and the presence of a dominant party (by number of seats) becomes clear, and both the objectives of the negotiation and government stability are more easily achieved.

SUMMARY TABLE

TYPES OF COALITION GOVERNMENT
AND GOVERNMENT STABILITY

Number of parties	Two-party	More stable
	Multi-party	Less stable
Ideological distance	Homogenous	More stable
	Heterogenous	Less stable
Intra-alliance leadership	Dominant party	More stable
	Shared leadership	Less stable

phase **3** 

**DISTRIBUTION
OF POWER AND
GUIDELINES**
FOR INTERNAL
FUNCTIONING

As outlined above, the first task in negotiating a coalition government is to analyse all the factors that affect the negotiating scenario, while the second is to identify the objectives of each of the political parties involved in the negotiation and the best coalition formula to achieve them. The third phase requires understanding the criteria applicable to the distribution of areas of political power, and knowing the recommended models of internal functioning which must be established to ensure the proper development of the coalition and to prevent, solve, or alleviate possible internal crises.

1. Criteria for the distribution of political power

When considering the criteria for the distribution of political power, a distinction must be made between the quantitative aspects of power, which are more visible, and the qualitative aspects, which are more elusive and difficult to identify and negotiate. Both aspects are relevant when ministerial, departmental, or council appointments are made (how many and which), and when budgets and politically appointed positions within the administration are assigned.

1.1. Quantitative distribution of departments

The distribution of ministerial, council, or administrative department posts is one of the main motivating factors for the creation of a coalition government, and one of the most visible forms of the distribution of power among the parties forming a coalition government. There are two main discussions in this negotiation: how many departments will be led by each coalition party, and which departments will be assigned to each party. To clarify the former,

which is more quantitative and explicit, we must use criteria that are politically irrefutable and understandable to the general public, in terms of political fairness; more variables come into play in defining the latter aspect.

The **quantitative distribution of power** must follow objective criteria, numerical variables and, more specifically, the number of seats held by each political party. The **standard criterion** is to distribute departments in proportion to the number of seats that each party brings to the coalition. As well as being fair and acceptable to the electorate, this offers two apparently contradictory features: stability (it does not change while the parliamentary or council arithmetic of the member parties does not change), and flexibility (after an election or the departure of a coalition member it is easy to re-adjust to the new correlation of coalition party forces). The distribution of power is never reliant, except in cases of a perfectly equal number of seats, on the number of votes that the parties have won in an election, since the dynamics of the parliamentary system and the relationship between the executive and the legislature are based on a calculation of the majorities of seats and not of votes.

The roles played by each party within a government influence the internal dynamics of the coalition and, more specifically, the distribution of political power. Some political parties achieve a government presence far superior to their parliamentary (or council) strength, and others inferior. Pivotal or hinge parties typically control proportionally more ministerial or council departments than correspond to their size, as their centrality and capacity to add to different parliamentary (or council) majorities in government puts them in a privileged position for negotiating areas of power, which leads to their over-representation. It is also common to see smaller parties given a higher share of ministerial power than their parliamentary or council presence, either as a reward for their collabora-

tion in a government that they will not dominate, or because they are positioned in the ideological centre of the coalition, or because their entry into government (and the award of a single ministry, council, or department) implies obtaining a share of government power that is greater than the percentage of ministers or councillors that they contribute to the coalition. As regards under-representation, the arguments are the opposite of those above, since the over-representation of certain parties leads to the under-representation of others.

Finally, it should be noted that in an effort to facilitate the negotiation and the distribution of departments, coalition governments can tend to generate departmental inflation (more common as the number of coalition parties increases), which should be avoided.

1.2. Qualitative distribution of sectoral areas of government

The standard criteria for the **distribution of areas of government** (ministries or departments) are, firstly, the significance of the coalition parties (in number of seats) and, secondly, the different variables that can make this compatible with the preferences of each party.

A basic distribution can be made on the basis of the number of MPs or councillors from each party and, thus, the parties that dominate the coalition will be given first choice and will usually control the objectively most relevant portfolios or positions (pivotal parties, due to their leading role in negotiations, are an exception and are compensated with very relevant departments). Beyond this initial distribution, however, which prioritizes the dominant parties, the ministerial or departmental preferences of the other members of the coalition may not align, and these will have to be reconciled with the priorities of the dominant parties.

There are two types of **departmental evaluation**: objective and subjective. **Objective evaluation** uses the following criteria: the political significance and social impact of the policies developed by the department (e.g., Department of Economy, economic policies; or Department of Foreign Affairs, international policies); the department's budget allocation (considering that those that manage more resources are more significant, although budget volume, as we will see, is not an infallible indicator of political relevance); the number of positions of responsibility within the department (assess the possibility of appointing trusted individuals to specific positions to promote sectoral policies), and the number of civil servants in the department (placing value on the sense of departmental belonging among public employees and the relations between politicians and civil servants).

The uneven **subjective evaluation** of departments made by the parties leads to a different order of preferences that facilitates agreement:

- Ideology. Seek departmental leadership that best allows the transformation of a party's ideological proposals into concrete policies, and to promote policies that directly affect social sectors close to the parties.
- Political landscape and agenda. The political landscape can make departments that are not objectively relevant appear very relevant and leading them will be interpreted as a symbol of political strength, while forecasting of the legislature's political agenda helps to identify the most conflictive and most successful sectoral policies in advance.
- Candidates available to lead departments. Having the best people leading specific departments and the presence of charismatic profiles makes it possible to increase the political prominence

of areas of government and bring departments with little social interest to the forefront of the media.

- Territorial strength of the parties. The greater or lesser presence of a coalition party in particular territorial areas of government influence leads to party preferences for the departments where they have a stronger electoral base.
- Political strategy of the opposition. Predict the opposition's strategy and which sectoral policies will be permanently in focus.
- The media. Take into account the future relationship with the media and the media treatment of certain sectoral policies.

1.3. Budget allocation

The criterion for **budget allocation to departments** may also be the percentage of seats that each political party holds within the coalition, that is, drawing a proportional equivalence between the number of MPs or councillors that each party contributes to the coalition and the amount of public money that it will manage, although in this case the **nuances** are important. Firstly, it is not easy to establish proportional equivalence between the volume of budget items and the percentage of seats that each party holds within the government. Secondly, the budgetary allocation to different departments should not be based on power quotas between parties, but on the implementation of the government programme and the provision of social needs. Thirdly, when considering budget allocation as a factor of negotiation between coalition parties, it must be taken into account that the volume of public money managed is not an infallible indicator of political relevance, since within the same administration there may be very important departments that have substantially horizontal functions with lesser budget allocations, and other departments with large final budget allocations that

have explicit destinations and little margin to be used in the development of new sectoral policies. Fourthly, budget negotiations (the budget law) are annual, and it is therefore an area of political power-sharing that is negotiated year after year. Finally, if a budget allocation based on the percentage of MPs or councillors from each party is used, the difficulty involved tends to accentuate the differences between them: the major parties will end up managing a higher percentage than they would if strict proportionality were followed.

1.4. Distribution of politically appointed government positions

Another negotiation in the distribution of power is that of positions of trust within the departments of those administrations that include politically appointed positions. A key goal here is to avoid an excessive increase in the number of discretionary positions, since coalition governments tend to provoke artificial growth of the administrative structure, and this damages the functioning of the government and leads to irregular practices, as well as harsh criticism from the opposition and the general public.

In the distribution of political-administrative power, the intra-departmental political structure must be taken into account (vice-presidents, vice-ministers, secretaries of state, heads of cabinet, secretaries general, directors general, etc.), as well as other types of positions of trust that the governing parties cover at their discretion (advisors, positions in state companies, in autonomous entities, in department-related institutes, etc.). These are all part of what is known as the “subgovernment”.

The **criteria for establishing the subgovernment** can be more or less plural or conflicting. There are two criteria: the vertical, and the horizontal. In the **vertical criterion**, the distribution of minis-

tries or offices among the coalition parties implies control of the positions of trust within their departments. Although it is not a very plural criterion, as the departments would pertain to a single party, it has the advantages of avoiding much conflict in the initial negotiation of the distribution of areas of power, and of favouring the promotion of sectoral policies that are more coherent with the guidelines set by the senior policy makers in each government department.

In the **horizontal criterion**, all political parties appoint positions of trust in all departments. The plurality of this model is absolute, and thus there is greater internal control, and all parties contribute through their positions of trust to the planning of all of the government's sectoral policies. This is a high-risk model, which not only precipitates tense and difficult negotiations in the initial distribution of these positions, in the short term, but also significantly complicates the daily execution of government policies. In the distribution of politically appointed positions, the criterion of the percentage of seats that each party contributes to the coalition can be used, but this arithmetic is difficult to apply at these administrative levels and the allocation of specific positions to each party becomes even more complicated. This approach, which always leads to the undesirable bloating of the number of departmental political positions, impedes government action, as the mingling of political roles pertaining to different parties generates an unworkable relationship of intra-departmental political distrust.

A **mixed model** is one based on vertical distribution, but with exceptions. Thus, in some key policy areas, positions of trust may be appointed to a party other than the one that heads the corresponding department. The difficulties of this model lie in determining the exceptions, and in the mistrust generated by the presence of individuals belonging to parties other than that leading the department.

SUMMARY TABLE

DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Quantitative distribution of power	Departments	Distribute in proportion to the seats that each party contributes to the coalition. Fair and flexible criteria (adaptable to changes in the correlation of forces of the coalition parties).
	Budget	Budget allocations do not relate to power quotas and their volume is not an indicator of political relevance. Avoid distributing in proportion to the seats that each party contributes to the coalition.
	Political posts	Control of a political department implies control of its positions of trust. Avoid distributing the subgovernment in proportion to the seats that each party contributes to the coalition.
Qualitative distribution of power	Departments	Prioritize the parties that lead the coalition in the distribution of departments. Preferences of parties will not align and must be reconciled with the priorities of the dominant party.

2. Guidelines for internal functioning

The stability, survival, success, and proper functioning of a coalition government relies not only on identifying and evaluating the elements that condition the negotiating scenario, exploring the objectives of the parties and the best formula of government to achieve them, and applying fair criteria in the distribution of areas of power among the coalition parties, but also on factors intrinsic to governments themselves and on the establishment and respect of protocols for internal functioning.

The internal operating guidelines that must be agreed upon by the coalition parties when forming a coalition government are mainly the drafting of a government programme, the establishment of ordinary and extraordinary procedures to promote government action, the creation of strategic collegial bodies to guarantee the proper functioning of the coalition and to manage internal crises, the drawing up of a communications plan, and the formalization of rules on coordination between the government and the parliamentary groups of each government party.

2.1. Develop an agreed programme for government

The formation of a coalition government between parties that have clashed in elections and that have presented different electoral programmes to the public implies the need to agree at the beginning of the legislature on the **main lines of government action**. This negotiation involves swiftly combining divergent programmes, ironing out differences, and renouncing some points of each electoral programme. This is an initial negotiation that tests the ability of the coalition parties to agree on essential aspects of the future government alliance.

Developing an agreed programme for government does not simply mean adding together the electoral programmes of the parties

that will form the government. Compromise is necessary, to set aside the most contentious issues that distance the future government partners, and to avoid transferring the logical tensions and contradictions between their electoral programmes to the objectives of the legislature. In the short time available to formulate an agreement and reach consensus on a government programme, it is not always possible to negotiate all the differences between parties. This does not mean the negotiation is doomed to failure, but rather forms part of the logical evolution of a government agreement. In some countries where coalition governments proliferate, parties explicitly tell voters who their future government allies will be and engage in programmatic negotiations even before elections take place.

The difficulty of drafting an agreed programme for government is reduced when the coalition government is formed from electoral coalitions that have shared the same electoral programme, as shared electoral proposals have already been discussed. There will still be negotiations to be made between these parties on government action, however, as they may have different ideas about policy prioritization. Also, electoral programmes tend to be quite generic and never include all policies for government action in a legislature, and the parties will devise solutions to unforeseen issues or reformulate some electoral proposals when in government.

If the coalition parties have some recent experience of government, drafting an agreed programme for government is simpler. Any past collaborations make it easier to draw up not only the list of government priorities but also the procedure for reaching a rapid and sound agreement. Ultimately, replicating successful models simplifies the negotiation of the government programme.

The **final coalition agreement document** will outline the main government actions planned for the legislature, without necessari-

ly going into too much detail on all the objectives, especially if they represent conflicting issues. All parties know that the political reality is complex and continually evolving, and that it would be imprudent to specify a government action without exploring the reality in depth or knowing the contextual characteristics that will exist when a certain public policy is drawn up.

The coalition agreement should be accompanied by an **implementation schedule** that is also not too detailed, but rather outlines a broad calendar dividing the legislature over longer periods. The main advantage of a scheduled government plan is the possibility of assessing its degree of compliance within the government and before the general public.

Ultimately, the coalition agreement will be presented to the general public to show that the parties that will share government have been able to quickly negotiate the priorities that will define the legislature and to convey a feeling of confidence.

SUMMARY TABLE

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN AGREED PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

- ① Avoid adding together the electoral programmes of the parties that will form the government
- ② Compromise and set aside the most contentious aspects that distance the future government partners
- ③ Avoid transferring tensions and contradictions between electoral programmes to the objectives of the legislature
- ④ Replicate tried and tested successful models that simplify negotiation of the programme for government
- ⑤ Outline the main actions that are planned for the legislature without detailing all specific objectives
- ⑥ Accompany the coalition agreement with a broad implementation schedule
- ⑦ Present the agreement to the general public

2.2. Establish procedures to promote government action

Governing in coalition implies collegial responsibility for all executive action by all parties in government, and this requires teamwork based on trust, greater harmonisation of administrative departments, and the establishment of protocols for agreeing and implementing all types of policy. Governing in a coalition requires the establishment of regulated and respected procedures on the elaboration of all government policies, although for some of them it is more necessary: those that define the coalition parties ideologically and condition their programmatic coherence; those that generate greater public and media debate, and economic policies,

which are especially important in any political context and have repercussions in multiple sectoral areas.

There are two types of procedures that are established to promote government action: ordinary procedures, for regular policies, and extraordinary procedures, for policies that generate social conflict or disputes between government parties.

Formalizing an **ordinary procedure** means establishing a provision, even after having given the leadership of different departments to specific governing parties, for policy-making processes to be shared among all the political forces that are jointly responsible for the government's action, without any of them feeling excluded. The ordinary procedure requires that all parties understand the decision-making process for all government policies, from conception to implementation. The departments will give the government partners access to the **information** necessary to know which policies are to be implemented (along with implementation details), which policies they will delay (with accompanying reasons), and which they will avoid (with their justification).

To ensure all departments provide this information, effective organizational and internal functioning mechanisms must be established. Provision must be made for the existence of specific departmental subgovernment bodies responsible for providing this information, or cross-departmental and pluralistic bodies (including members from all coalition parties) that are specifically assigned this function, along with the logistical support and networked IT resources that centralize information on the content of projects and their current development phase.

In coalition governments it is also necessary to create a specific procedure to promote policies that are contentious (within the government or within society). Disagreements between parties on

certain policies or on how to resolve certain social conflicts are frequent. The objective of an **extraordinary procedure** is to avoid internal crises, which in shared governments are usually more serious than in single-party governments, since the balance of forces that guides the coalitional dynamic is more vulnerable, can cause irreversible distrust, and is more difficult to resolve with a simple reshuffling.

While the ordinary procedure is based on the exchange of information, the extraordinary procedure for contentious policies requires the **coparticipation** of all government parties in its planning and implementation. This requires cross-departmental bodies to organize coparticipation and networked IT support to facilitate the joint activity of all parties.

In short, when government action promotes ordinary policies, they are normally drawn up within the corresponding department (or departments), which provides the necessary information to all government parties to avoid inconsistencies and guarantee internal cohesion. However, if the policies under consideration are socially contentious or encompass contradictory views among the governing parties, the procedure must go beyond the exchange of information to a formalized system of coparticipation between all members of the coalition.

SUMMARY TABLE

PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE ACTION WITHIN COALITION GOVERNMENTS

**Ordinary procedure
(regular policies)**

All coalition parties know the decision-making process of all government policies, from conception to implementation.

**Extraordinary
procedure
(contentious policies)**

Formalize a system of coparticipation for all members of the coalition, to create consensus and avoid internal crises.

2.3. Create strategic bodies for the proper functioning of the coalition

To improve the functioning of a coalition government, prevent crises, and make it more stable, internal strategic bodies should be created to manage three key areas: communications, interdepartmental coordination, and monitoring of the coalition.

Public perception of a coalition government’s action is a priority factor. One of the most strategic and important bodies in any government is the **government communications office**. The communications office will have the following characteristics: 1) it will depend organically on the head of the government or the mayor’s office, so that it is located in a transversal and relevant department; 2) it will be plural, that is, it will comprise individuals from all government parties, and 3) it will be connected to and coordinated with the communications offices of all departments.

The link between the communications office and the head of government or mayor's office places it at the heart of government activity and gives it the organic superiority required to carry out its functions. The presence of all coalition parties in the communications office, even if not on equal footing, facilitates consensus in the design of government communications. Finally, the coordination of the departmental communication offices requires the participation and agreement of all political parties involved in the government.

The main function of the government communications office is to prepare official government communication and to coordinate departmental communication. Given the ideological plurality of coalition governments, effort is required to achieve communicative coherence, and the presence of different political parties in the leadership of different departments can cause a certain misalignment in the transmission of sectoral policies. The communications office is responsible for centralizing communication guidelines and guaranteeing the application of homogeneous criteria in the explanation of government action to the media and the public.

Applying a vertical model for the distribution of political positions of trust in government departments must be compatible with the creation of bodies for **interdepartmental coordination**, which enhance pluralism, transparency, and internal control.

The activity of coalition governments demands a high level of coordination between departments. Most government initiatives impact various departments, and all the governing parties share responsibility for them. Ordinary and extraordinary procedures, mentioned above, require the exchange of information and coparticipation in policy development. This is ensured through the creation of cross-departmental coordination bodies, characterized by their connection to the head of government or the mayor's office, by their plurality, and the participation of all government parties.

The first characteristic means that they are linked to a cross-departmental and extremely relevant unit, which means their structural location denotes the importance of the body. The second is fundamental for creating a climate of intra-coalition trust and for facilitating the collaboration of all departments.

Another body essential to the good functioning of a coalition government, and of an eminently political nature, is that responsible for the **monitoring and evaluation of the coalition**, the resolution of major internal conflicts, and the transmission to society of a sense of cohesion between the coalition parties and of governmental strength.

The dynamics of power-sharing governments require continuous monitoring to examine their daily functioning and to correct or amend those aspects causing intra-governmental dysfunction. Reacting without consensus to unforeseen social conflict, untimely public statements, disputes between departments or between ministers or councillors, or explicit disagreements between government parties can all lead to a profound crisis of government. To avoid this, a political body is established to monitor and evaluate the governing coalition, which will be able to assess the coalition's evolution and act as a crisis cabinet. Knowing how to detect, cushion, manage, and resolve deep government crises and having a structure to deal with them effectively is fundamental to guaranteeing the stability of coalition governments.

The body created to monitor and evaluate the functioning of a coalition must be supra-departmental (situated above the level of ministers or councillors), plural (includes the presence of all coalition parties), balanced (with the same number of representatives from each party, without distinctions based on their parliamentary or council strength), reduced (a maximum of two or three representatives per party), politically powerful (comprising senior lead-

ers of government and government parties), regular (it must meet regularly and whenever events require), agile (capable of meeting urgently at short notice), executive (its decisions are strictly implemented by the government and by party leadership), and public (the public must be aware of its existence and functions). The creation of such a political body is vital to improving the performance of a coalition government and to conveying to society a sense of government cohesion, strength, and rigour.

2.4. Establish a communications plan

All governments, including coalitions, have a plan for communicating government action. The importance of the media and the need to relate executive action with the general public's concerns and demands make communication of government activity a high priority for governing parties.

For coalition governments, the **communication of government action** is even more necessary and certainly more complex. It is more necessary because coalition governments have to demonstrate to the public that an ideologically pluralistic executive is compatible with coherent government action. And it is more complex because it requires internal agreement between the government partners, and seeks to satisfy more political sensibilities. Failing to communicate government action not only has negative public consequences and presents a poor government image, as it would for any government, but it can also affect relations between the government partners, produce an internal crisis, and weaken the electoral base. Good communication of government action contributes to strengthening the multi-party collegial responsibility of coalition governments and to producing stability.

The complexity of coalition government communications lies, above all, in choosing the right broadcasters, identifying the needs

SUMMARY TABLE

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNAL BODIES CREATED TO ENSURE THE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT

Communications office	Public perception of a coalition government's action is key. The government communications office: 1) depends organically on the head of government or the mayor's office; 2) comprises members of all government parties; 3) is connected to and coordinated with the communication offices of all departments; 4) prepares all official government communications and coordinates departmental communication.
Interdepartmental coordination	Interdepartmental coordination in a coalition government is essential, enhancing pluralism, transparency, and internal control. Ordinary and extraordinary procedures for promoting coalition government action require coordination between departments. The interdepartmental coordinating body must include representation of all parties and be linked to the head of government or mayor's office.
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluating the functioning of a coalition government is a priority. Cohesion of internal dynamics and crisis management in coalition governments requires continuous monitoring of day-to-day functioning to correct any dysfunction. The monitoring body must be supra-departmental, plural, balanced, reduced, politically powerful, regular, agile, executive, and public.

of disparate receivers close to the government, and offering information content that fosters a positive public image.

The **broadcasters** will depend upon the social significance of what is to be reported. The **government spokesperson** has the function of informing and communicating to society the political action of the executive, and there are various profiles: more technical or more political, and being part of the government or independent. The coalition government spokesperson will communicate in a way that embodies the synthesis of executive action with different ideological sensibilities. In order to communicate on behalf of a coalition government, it is necessary to master communication techniques, to know the ideology of the government parties, to avoid statements that may cause internal controversy, and to offer the information necessary to fulfil the media's function of reporting and for the public to be informed of the government's actions.

From the perspective of the **receiver**, the expectation is that the communication of all kinds of government activity be coherent, and that measures are announced that answer society's demands and resolve social issues. For coalition governments, communication is complicated by an additional aspect: the need to satisfy disparate social sectors that are sympathetic to one or more government parties. There are rank and file members, electoral bases, and simple sympathizers of some coalition parties who, due to ideological positions and diverse political or personal affinities, want the government's messages to be consistent with their ideas and not to offend their values.

In terms of **information content**, government messages must strike a balance that allows, on the one hand, the social bases of government to interpret them in a way that is favourable to their interests and, on the other, the public to understand them as a demonstration of internal coherence and efficiency in the resolution of

social issues. Communication of a coalition government’s actions must provide information on the policies agreed upon by the executive, build loyalty, encourage greater confidence and trust, demonstrate solvency in the art of governing, and offer political education.

SUMMARY TABLE
COALITION GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Nature	For coalition governments, communication is more necessary and more complex than for one-party governments.
Objectives	Demonstrate to the public that an ideologically plural government is compatible with coherent and effective government action .
Requirements	Choose the right broadcasters, identify the needs of receivers, offer content that reinforces a good public image.
Broadcasters	The broadcasters chosen will depend upon the social significance of what needs to be reported .
Spokesperson	Must master communication techniques, know the ideology of government parties, avoid statements that cause internal controversy, and provide the necessary information for media reporting and to inform the public of government actions.
Receivers	Communications must take into account the social sectors that sympathize with particular government parties and the nature of a diverse society.
Content	Communications must be favourably received by the government’s social bases and demonstrate the coherence and effectiveness of the executive to the public.

2.5. Formalize the action of parliamentary groups

Parliamentary systems, based on the fiduciary relationship between the legislature and the executive, require that parties forming a coalition government must guide the activity of their parliamentary groups in order to contribute to the development of government action through parliamentary headquarters. A balance must be found between the autonomy of operation of each parliamentary group and the joint action of parliamentary groups in order to assist the government and prevent excessive parliamentary involvement from having negative consequences for the executive. Parliamentary groups will maintain their ideological positions and will scrupulously respect the agreed programme for government, so that the possibility of misalignment does not endanger the stability of the coalition or hinder government action.

The **rules for coordinating the institutional activity of parliamentary groups** refer to both legislative activity and the executive's control function. Constant communication between the executive and parliamentary groups must be ensured, as well as respect for political pluralism that adds rather than divides, internal negotiation channels for conflict resolution, programmatic coherence, and cohesion between groups that allows for parliamentary guarantees on government action.

Key figures in drafting these coordination regulations are the **parliamentary group spokespersons**, who are responsible for enforcing these operating protocols and who are in contact with each other and with government representatives. At the meetings of these spokespersons, the activities of the plenaries and sectoral parliamentary committees will be prepared, and application of the coordination rules will be monitored.

Initiatives that the parliamentary groups of each party wish to present for checking the executive (questions, appeals, motions,

requests for appearance, etc.) will also be previously communicated to the government for agreement on their content. Parliamentary groups will also work together to curb the opposition's parliamentary checks.

These guidelines for coordination between the government and parliamentary groups should also be upheld at the municipal level. In this case, the parties in government will collaborate on the planning of municipal plenary sessions.

SUMMARY TABLE

PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS

Objective	Member parties of a coalition government guide the activity of their parliamentary groups in order to contribute to the promotion of government action.
Content	Coordination of the institutional activity of parliamentary groups encompasses legislative activity and checking the executive.
Spokespersons	The spokespersons of parliamentary groups prepare the activity of the plenary, of parliamentary sessions, and monitor the application of coordination rules.

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Forming a coalition government requires knowing and evaluating the elements that condition the negotiating scenario, exploring the different parties' proposals and the best formula for achieving them, applying equitable criteria in the distribution of power, and establishing certain guidelines for internal functioning. This guide—aimed at political parties, representatives and advisors, as well as social actors—presents the mechanisms used to successfully achieve these objectives, detailing the different phases of negotiation and outlining a systematized set of practical indications for their formalization. Governing in coalition requires a great deal of effort on the part of those involved, but it undoubtedly strengthens the democratic values of dialogue, trust, agreement, tolerance, solidarity, and civic-mindedness.



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