



LET'S GOVERN TOGETHER!

The Formation of a Coalition Government

Jordi Matas Dalmases



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The Formation of a Coalition Government

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*For Mar, the key partner
in my family coalition*

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Introduction¹

Governing democratically means not only guaranteeing socially accepted rules of the game, but also, that those who legitimately achieve political power must behave in a profoundly democratic way when generating attitudes and transmitting values. A coalition government tends to reinforce these forms of behaviour, these attitudes and these values, and it is where the most genuine essence of democracy best comes to the surface.

Sharing responsibilities of government with other political parties means making a commitment to political pluralism within the body responsible for running the administration and for the promotion of policies, broadening the government's social base, dealing better with the demands of society, increasing communication between the government and the people, generating more social interest in politics, and creating the foundations of a political culture of dialogue, agreement, confidence and tolerance. Coalition governments bring executive and legislative power closer together, give more prominence to the role of parliament, enrich political debate, broaden the range of possible party alliances, make relations between parties more responsible and constructive, and increase joint responsibility, control, and the transparency of the government's actions.

The circumstances that influence the formation of coalition governments also help to strengthen the foundations of the democratic system. These are: legal and institutional factors, and the need for qualified parliamentary majorities to make important decisions; electoral laws and the adoption of proportional systems to facilitate the presence in parliament of minority political parties; relations between parties, and the presence of systems of multi-party groups that generate parliamentary pluralism; intra-party

¹ This book was produced with the support of the R & D projects Ref. CSO2010-16337 and CSO2013-42262-P.

dynamics, and the existence of internal democracy and organizational decentralization for the formation of governments on multiple levels; historical events and the repercussions of experience in political and ideological progress; motivating factors and the search for objectives to make the highest expression of democratic values compatible with the wish to influence the government of the *res publica*, and cultural aspects and the consolidation of public opinion favourable to respect for diversity, solidarity, integration, consensus and shared government.

Governing in coalition requires more effort, more dedication and more political skill from governors. Knowing and respecting all the factors that condition political negotiation, establishing shared government objectives, distributing political power equitably, establishing standards for the internal workings of government and communicating government action that blurs the party identity of the coalition members, requires greater mastery of the art of politics. Governing in coalition unquestionably makes it possible to concentrate more on the pedagogy of democratic politics and strengthens social progress.²

Since the Second World War, the negotiation and formalization of coalition governments has been a very common practice at the different political levels of European parliamentary systems. A look at the nearly 350 governments formed in 13 European parliamentary systems from 1945 to the early years of the new millennium shows us that most of them (60%) have been coalition governments. Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxemburg, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden are countries in which there have been shared governments for more than half a century and in various areas of government.³ The Second World

² MATAS, J. "Governs de coalició i valors democràtics". In: *EINES per a l'Esquerra Nacional*. 2007, no. 2, pp. 13-24.

³ De Swaan, in a comparative study of nine European parliaments between 1918 and 1972, refers to more than 100 historical examples: DE SWAAN, A. *Coalition Theories and Cabinet Formations*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1973. See also: MÜLLER, W.; STROM, K. (eds.). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

War left behind societies in ruins and immersed in a profound economic, political, institutional and social crisis. The aftermath of the war, along with a sharp increase in the importance of political parties, generated the need to involve all the political forces in the rebuilding of those societies. Later, after a lot of hard work and once a minimum of political and social normality had been recovered, that way of working together supportively ceased to be a necessity and became a democratic objective of government.

The proliferation of coalition governments in Europe has generated a large field of study of the coalition based fundamentally on the application and empirical verification of formal theories, on the explanatory contributions of multidimensional theories, and on the analysis of the distribution of portfolios between parties in coalition. In this respect, regional and local levels of states have been a good field of work for the study of all aspects of coalitional behaviour, given that the explanatory variables thereof are usually more within reach of researchers and, above all, because they make it possible to carry out, with greater scientific rigour, a comparative analysis between governments with similarities (institutional, electoral, motivational, historical, cultural) that is difficult to find in analyses comparing different countries.⁴ Nevertheless,

⁴ For a comparative view of coalition governments at local level, see: DOWNS, W. M. *Coalition Government, Subnational Style. Multiparty Politics in European Regional Parliaments*. Ohio: Ohio State University, 1998; MELLORS, C.; PIJNEBURG, B. (eds.). *Political Parties and Coalitions in European Local Government*. London: Routledge, 1989. On regional and local coalition governments in Italy, see: CAZZOLA, F. "Partiti e coalizioni nei governi locali". In: *Democrazia e Diritto*. 1982, no. 5; PRIDHAM, G. "Parties and Coalitional Behaviour in Italian Local Politics: Conflict or Convergence?" In: *European Journal of Political Research*. 1984, vol. 12, no. 3; DENTE, B. *Governare la Frammentazione: Stato, Regioni ed Enti Locali in Italia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985; DI VIRGILIO, A. "Elezioni locali e destrutturazione partitica. La nuova legge alla prova". In: *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*. 1994, vol. 24, no. 1. On Great Britain, where coalition governments are basically found at local level, there are also some studies: MELLORS, C. "Coalition Strategies: The Case of British Local Government". In: BOGDANOR, V. (ed.). *Coalition Government in Western Europe*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983; MELLORS, C. "Political Coalition in Britain: The Local Context". In: *Teaching Politics*. 1984, vol. 13; LAVER, M.; RALLINGS, C.; THRASHER, M., "Coalition Theory and Local Government: Coalition Payoffs in Britain". In: *British Journal of Political Science*. 1987, vol.

one must bear in mind that the local ambit has aspects very different to those found at state and even regional levels (relations between electors and the elected, political agenda, criteria for assessing political power, ideological distances between parties, relations between leaders, the importance of personal aspects, etc.).⁵

The case of Spain presents certain peculiarities. Firstly, when coalition governments started to become more common in Europe, Spain was immersed in a dictatorship that still had many years to run. Secondly, in spite of the consensus that inspired the transition to democracy, and despite the fact that, between 1977 and 2016, in eight general elections the winning party did not obtain an overall majority of seats in parliament, coalition governments have never been formed at state level. Thirdly, all the experiences of shared governments are to be found at autonomous community and, above all, municipal levels.⁶ For all these reasons, up to now

17, no. 4. For the case of Sweden, see: BÄCK, H. *Explaining coalitions: Evidence and lessons from studying coalition formation in Swedish local government*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2003. For Spain, see also: MÁRQUEZ, G. “Las coaliciones políticas en las instituciones del sistema político local en España: gobiernos locales y diputaciones provinciales”. In: FONT, T. (ed.). *Anuario del Gobierno Local 2002*. Barcelona: Fundación Democracia y Gobierno Local/Institut de Dret Públic, 2003, pp. 189-253; DELGADO, S.; ROSADO, E. “Consideraciones sobre la estabilidad y el funcionamiento de una coalición mínima mayoritaria: el caso del Ayuntamiento de Granada (1999-2001)”. In: *Política y Sociedad*. 2003, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 179-194; MÁRQUEZ, G. “Las coaliciones políticas en las instituciones del sistema político local en España: gobiernos locales y diputaciones provinciales”. In: FONT, T. (ed.). *Anuario del Gobierno Local 2002*. Barcelona: Fundación Democracia y Gobierno Local/Institut de Dret Públic, 2003, pp. 189-253; MÁRQUEZ, G. “Marco metodológico para el estudio de las coaliciones políticas en los gobiernos locales en España.” In: *Política y Sociedad*. 2003, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 157-178; MÁRQUEZ, G. *Política y gobierno local. La formación de gobierno en las entidades locales en España*. Madrid: CEC, 2007; RIDAO, J. *Les coalicions polítiques a Catalunya. El cas del govern catalanista i d'esquerres*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2007 (Working Papers, no. 257).

⁵ LAVER, M.; RALLINGS, C.; THRASHER, M. “Coalition Theory and Local Government: Coalition Payoffs in Britain”. In: *British Journal of Political Science*. 1987, vol. 17, no. 4, p. 502.

⁶ Thus, coalition governments have been formed in 13 of the 17 Spanish autonomous communities (Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Madrid and Murcia are the exceptions). See the following studies: ROBINSON, R. “Coalitions and

political parties in sub-national government: the case of Spain". In MELLORS, C.; PIJNEBURG, B. (eds.). *Political Parties and Coalitions in European Local Government*. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 240-274; COLOMER, J. M.; MARTÍNEZ, F. "The paradox of coalition trading". In: *Journal of Theoretical Politics*. 1995, no. 7:1, pp. 1-63; LLERA, F. J. "Los gobiernos de coalición en el País Vasco". In: MATAS, J. (ed.). *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2000; MÁRQUEZ, G. "Los gobiernos de coalición en Galicia". In: MATAS, J. (ed.). *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2000; MONTABES, J. "La coalición de gobierno en Andalucía: elementos institucionales y práctica política". In: MATAS, J. (ed.). *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2000; MATAS, J. (ed.). *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2000; MÁRQUEZ, G. *La formación de gobierno y la práctica coalicional en la ciudades autónomas de Ceuta y Melilla (1979-2007)*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2003 (Working Papers No. 227); MÁRQUEZ, G. "Las coaliciones políticas en las instituciones del sistema político local en España: gobiernos locales y diputaciones provinciales". In: FONT, T. (dir.). *Anuario del gobierno Local 2002*. Barcelona. Fundación Democracia y Gobierno Local/Institut de Dret Públic, 2003, pp. 189-253; RENU, J. M. "Hacia una tipología de los gobiernos autonómicos en España, 1980-2003". In: *Autonomías*. 2004, no. 30, pp. 27-56; PALLARÉS, F.; KEATING, M. "Multi-level Party Competition: Sub-state Elections and Party Systems in Spain". In: HOUGH, D.; JEFFREY, C. (eds.). *Devolution and Electoral Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2006, pp. 96-118; HAMANN, K.; MERSHON, C. "Regional governments in Spain: exploring theories of governments' formation". In FIELD, B. N.; HAMANN, K. (eds.). *Democracy and Institutional Development: Spain in Comparative Theoretical Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 203-216; FALCÓ-GIMENO, A. "Preferences for Political Coalitions in Spain. In: *South European Society and Politics*. 2012, no. 17 (3), pp. 487-502; FALCÓ-GIMENO, A.; VERGE, T. "Coalition Trading In Spain: Explaining State-wide Parties' Government Formation Strategies at the Regional Level". In: *Regional and Federal Studies*. 2013, vol. 1, pp. 1-19; CALVET, J. "Los gobiernos de coalición en la Comunidad Valenciana". In: RENU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; CALVET, J. "Los gobiernos de coalición en las Islas Baleares". In: RENU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; DELGADO, S. "Los gobiernos de coalición en la Comunidad Foral de Navarra". In: RENU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; DELGADO, S.; ROBLES, A. "Las experiencias de gobiernos de coalición en la Junta de Andalucía". In: RENU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; FALCÓ-GIMENO, A. "Aragón: la política de bisagra en los acuerdos de coalición". In: RENU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comuni-*

there have not been very many studies of coalition governments in Spain and they have been dedicated to analysing the reasons for the creation of minority governments, their effects, and coalition governments in autonomous communities.

This study aims to take a step further in the analysis that has hitherto been made. Based on one hand on formal and multidimensional theories and, on the other, on the empirical analyses that have been made over the years, it will focus on the aspects that may be useful in parliamentary systems for the practice of negotiating a coalition government in its different phases.⁷

dades Autónomas. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; GARCÍA-ROJAS, J. A.; BÁEZ, A. “La inevitable necesidad de pactar: acuerdos políticos y producción de gobierno en la Islas Canarias”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; MÁRQUEZ, G. “La formación de los gobiernos autonómicos en Galicia”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; MATAS, J.; RIDAO, J. “Los gobiernos de coalición en Cataluña”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; RENIU, J. M.; JOVÉ, J. M. “Dinámicas coalicionales en el Principado de Asturias”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; RIDAO, J. “La gobernabilidad y la política de coaliciones en Cantabria”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; SIMÓN, P. “Las comunidades mayoritarias: Castilla y León; Castilla-La Mancha; Extremadura; Madrid y Murcia”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; SIMÓN, P. “Los gobiernos de coalición en La Rioja”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; URQUIZU, I. “Los gobiernos de coalición en el País Vasco”. In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014; In: RENIU, J. M. (ed.). *Los gobiernos de coalición de las Comunidades Autónomas*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2014.

⁷ On the formation of coalition governments in presidential systems, see: CHEIBUB, J. A.; PRZEWORSKI, A.; SAIEGH, S. M. “Government coalitions and legislative success under presidentialism and parliamentarism”. *British Journal of Political science*. 2004, vol. 34, no. 4; ALBALÁ, A. *Coaliciones gubernamentales y régimen presidencial: incidencia sobre la estabilidad política, el caso del Cono Sur (1983-2005)*. Documents CIDOB. Latin America. 2009, no. 29 (1); RENIU, J. M.; ALBALÁ, A. *Los gobiernos de coalición y su incidencia sobre los presidencialismos latinoamericanos. El caso del Cono Sur*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2011 (Working Papers, no. 296); ALBALÁ, A. “Coalition governments and their incidence on Latin-American Presidentialism: the case of the Southern Horn”. In: *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 2012, no. 155, pp. 101-150;

Firstly, the variables will be pointed out that must be taken into account at the initial stage of negotiation between political parties and which are therefore those that most condition them: the legal and institutional framework; the electoral system and the party system; parties and ideology; history, political culture and external factors. Thus, not only will the explanatory factors of multi-dimensional theories and the predictive ones of formal theories be analysed from a more practical perspective, but new variables will also be put forward, more difficult to theorize, but which in practice have been shown to also influence the first stage of negotiation. The aim, in short, is to set out in detail all the aspects that appear in the scenario in which the negotiation takes place.

Secondly, the principal short- and medium-term objectives of negotiation will be identified in order to later identify the coalition governments that make it most possible to achieve them. The classifications of coalition governments proposed here are not intended to be closed, but simply useful so that negotiators may achieve their objectives more easily.

Thirdly, the elements that must be borne in mind in order to formalize a coalition government will be specified. The criteria will be listed for optimizing the distribution of areas of political power among the parties of government and the aspects of multi-party collegial working that are essential for the proper development of shared government, which are often erroneously left in the background or omitted.

All the suggestions that are made during the study are meant to be general, and their application will therefore be conditioned by the characteristic features that accompany political systems and, more specifically, the form of parliamentary government, and their unequal influence must be assessed on the basis of these peculiarities. Thus, we begin with a look at coalitions, more interested in

RENIU, J. M. "Los retos de gobernar en coalición". In: RIVAS, F. E.; MASCOTT, M. A.; ARELLANO, E. (coords.). *La actuación del legislativo en contextos de crisis. México y España comparados*. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública, 2012, pp. 189-219.