

GUIDE TO FORMING A COALITION GOVERNMENT

Jordi Matas Dalmases



Biblioteca Universitària

GUIDE TO FORMING A COALITION GOVERNMENT

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

Jordi Matas Dalmases

Contents



Introduction	8
Definition of a coalition government	11



phase 1

Factors affecting the formation of coalition governments	15
---	----

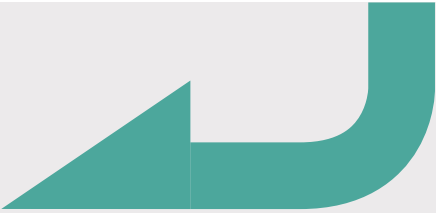
1. Legal and institutional framework	17
2. Electoral system and party system	22
3. Political parties and ideology	26
4. History, political culture, external factors, and personal relationships	32



phase 2

Objectives of negotiation	39
---------------------------------	----

1. Short- and medium-term objectives	40
2. Types of coalition government	43



phase 3

Distribution of power and guidelines for internal functioning 49

1. Criteria for the distribution of political power 50
 - 1.1. Quantitative distribution of departments 50
 - 1.2. Qualitative distribution of sectoral areas
of government 52
 - 1.3. Budget allocation 54
 - 1.4. Distribution of politically appointed
government positions 55
2. Guidelines for internal functioning 58
 - 2.1. Develop an agreed programme for government 58
 - 2.2. Establish procedures to promote government action ... 61
 - 2.3. Create strategic bodies for the proper
functioning of the coalition 64
 - 2.4. Establish a communications plan 67
 - 2.5. Formalize the action of parliamentary groups 71



Bibliography 74



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

* This work has been undertaken with the support of R+D project Ref. CSO2013-42262-P.

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