

POLITICAL FORCE, GOVERNMENT, WORKERS, AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

(Approved by the National Plenary of the Frente Amplio)

Introduction

The Frente Amplio has more than 32 years of political life, but the struggle of the Uruguayan workers and people that led to its foundation is even longer.

The political unity of the left was not an easy process. Its construction demanded great sacrifices and cost blood, imprisonment, exile, and the efforts of tens of thousands of Uruguayans—men, women, and young people—who gave the best of themselves to build a country based on solidarity, where the highest values of social justice guiding their struggle could be fulfilled.

The political accumulation achieved over so many years is close to bearing fruit, and the Frente Amplio—together with its allies—has strong possibilities of reaching government in the upcoming elections.

This places on the table, more strongly than ever, the need to deepen the definitions made regarding the relationship that must exist between the Frente Amplio, its government, workers, and all of civil society.

The alternation in government between Blancos and Colorados, serving the same interests, consolidated a type of administration that allowed changes in the people occupying government positions without significantly altering how the state functioned—and that helped reinforce the existing power bloc.

[Note: “Blancos” and “Colorados” refer to Uruguay’s two traditional parties—the National Party and the Colorado Party—which alternated in power for over a century.]

A progressive government, however, cannot be sustained and consolidated merely by replacing the individuals in the cabinet and applying a different policy program.

That is not enough. A government serving popular interests and the great national majorities—beyond forming its own team, composed of technically competent cadres capable of implementing the program—will have to transform an entrenched bureaucracy that has long operated in service of the existing power bloc. And this will not be an easy task. It will require time and effort. To do so, the Frente Amplio and its allies must also fulfill their purpose of promoting participation, transferring decision-making capacity to the people, and transforming citizens and the people into active protagonists who manage their own interests and participate in the difficult task of governing the country.

The Frente Amplio has built itself by putting this principle into practice—remembering always that building the political force precedes building its government. Thus, one cannot apply certain principles to develop the political force and then apply others when building the government.

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Political decentralization and citizen participation must be part of the principles guiding the functioning of a new progressive government.

General guidelines for a relational policy

It is undeniable that to clearly define how a Progressive Government should relate to organized society, it is essential first to have clearly defined the rules governing the relationship between the government and the political force. These rules must aim to provide rationality and efficiency to the relationship between both spheres, which obviously share the same strategic objectives. If this is not clear—and if the rules of the game previously agreed upon are not respected—it will be difficult to establish a dialogue that allows these objectives to be achieved.

The first thing to bear in mind is that these are distinct spheres—different in their composition, their rules for decision-making, their timelines, and their responsibilities before society. Despite these differences, it is possible and necessary to establish channels of mutual interaction that enable the best results.

The relationship between the political force and its government, in order to achieve the stated objectives, must be built by establishing an appropriate balance between the global guiding function exercised by the political force and the necessary autonomy of management required to govern efficiently.

The relationship between the political force and the government must rest on **three major pillars**:

a. Relative autonomy — that is, the mutual acknowledgment that each has its own domain, rules, and timelines, and that each actor has the right to be recognized as such. The term *relative* makes it clear that we are not speaking of dissociation or estrangement; instead, it refers to expressing a shared project across different institutional and temporal spheres of action. Each actor has full autonomy to develop its respective role, but within an agreed and clearly defined relational framework.

b. Coordination — the actions of both actors aim toward the same strategic objectives; therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that they reinforce each other, are harmonious, and are understandable as part of a single strategic line of action. Fluid coordination—properly adjusting the rhythms and needs of each actor—increases each one's effectiveness and capacity to meet its commitments and short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

c. Responsibility — decision-making and defining courses of action require that those who assume them be willing to take responsibility for the consequences and how they may affect other political and social actors. In addition, those who act in leadership positions must always remember that their present decisions and actions may affect their future room for maneuver. This influence is particularly strong in the relationship between the political force and the government, and must always be kept in mind by both actors.

We emphasize that these three principles must operate together and in an articulated manner when designing and implementing relational policies. The absence—or overdevelopment—of any of them jeopardizes the balance and rationality of such policies and ultimately works against our principles in this fundamental area.

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Among the many responsibilities of a political force, one central task—particularly in relation to the government—is defining the **National Program** and the **Government Plan**. This means that programmatic orientation and the content of the proposed government agenda are fundamental to understanding relational policies, especially in the case of progressive forces. These definitions pertain to deepening democracy. The political force is also responsible for defining ethical standards and codes of conduct for those holding government responsibilities, establishing mechanisms for internal oversight of program implementation, and providing permanent monitoring and support for the government.

Management autonomy is exercised in connection with:

- the implementation of programmatic guidelines through the plans deemed necessary;
- all matters regarding administrative functioning, improvement, and innovation;
- institutional relations with public, private, and social actors;
- and the management of government timelines (which do not always coincide with those of the political force).

Relational policies operate across multiple spheres. The first principle is that—while recognizing the particularities of each sphere—the overall set of policies must have common and coherent elements that allow practice and reflection to mutually enrich each other.

In particular, government action regarding public employees must serve as a reference for implementing labor-relations policies in the private sector. These must be rebuilt on the basis of expanded citizenship and the drive for just and sustainable development, in a context shaped by the profound global changes in the world of work.

The main spheres of relational policy are:

- Government ↔ Political Force
- Government ↔ Employer-Unions
- Government ↔ Social Organizations
- Government as shaper and overseer of Labor Relations
- Citizen participation and consultation mechanisms

Participation and dialogue are central pillars sustaining government action. In fact, they must be the source of legitimacy for the structural changes that the Frente Amplio and its allies aim to promote from national government—changes whose fundamental objective is to overcome social exclusion. As stated earlier, this involves expanding democracy and citizenship, overcoming social disconnection and opacity, and using every possible mechanism of decentralization and effective promotion of popular participation.

The Progressive Government

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1. Our government will result from the sovereign decision of the citizenry, expressed through support for our electoral proposal. This implies a democratic legitimacy that we have always defended and deeply valued. That legitimacy means that the government has strong backing and an explicit mandate from the citizenry to govern—that is, to decide and to mediate among diverse interests—and to do so according to a program clearly and publicly presented to voters in advance. Such a mandate includes the intention to make the general interest prevail over particular interests—whether of groups or individuals.

Our commitment to the entire citizenry is to govern for *all* Uruguayans, based on the principles and priorities of our program, for those who supported our proposal, for those who supported other proposals, for citizens without party affiliation, and for the population in general.

The government's primary commitment is to govern well and, according to its program, to do so in favor of those most marginalized and the great majorities.

2. Without doubt, the government must be the government of the Frente Amplio and its allies, insofar as the political force is responsible for its proposal, its program, its candidates, its team, and its administration. It is the political force that, through its organizational bodies, establishes and defines the general lines of its National Program and Government Plan, and it is within those lines that the government must act.

Since these lines are submitted to the popular will through elections, they also acquire the character of a commitment to society.

The political force must continuously evaluate the government's implementation of what has been defined in the organization's resolutions and in its commitment to the citizenry—bearing in mind that within the Program there are central issues, less central issues, and secondary issues, and that its approach must focus on the essential rather than the secondary.

3. The political organization cannot and must not exhaust itself in its relationship with the government. That would constitute a major limitation. It must transcend the government and elaborate policies for the future.

Government is the present; the political force is the future. The latter must project today's action toward the future, giving the government perspective. Without such projection, the government would exhaust itself in the immediacy of its tasks.

The political force may legitimately assert its role of oversight and guidance over the government, but it must not neglect its responsibility to shape the future—otherwise it would be renouncing one of its principal functions.

4. In this sense, as mentioned earlier, there cannot and must not be total autonomy or independence. The progressive government will be the product of the responsibility of the Frente Amplio, its allies, and all those who have built and continue to build our political force.

5. The phrase about “cutting the umbilical cord” between the political force and the government has often been misinterpreted. It refers *only* to the daily functioning of government: it is not possible to govern at the rhythm of the political organization, whose pace is necessarily slower than that of government. Once installed, the government will have its own rhythm and, in day-to-day matters, cannot wait for definitions from the political force. The political force delegates to its government—the government it has chosen—the capacity to decide and carry out its tasks.

The political force will support the government in implementing the agreed-upon Program and in promoting the government's achievements and project among the people.

6. It is unnecessary and impossible to govern in a state of permanent assembly. It is unnecessary because the comrades entrusted with decision-making responsibilities act on the basis of a program, and because they were chosen—among other reasons—for their capacity to carry it out.

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It is impossible because the dynamics of government action require making multiple decisions in multiple areas simultaneously. The comrade elected by the Frente Amplio to the highest office of government was chosen for, among other things, their ability to operate in an extremely complex environment. This capacity must also manifest in controversial situations—whether unforeseen, or foreseen but requiring adjustment to the realities of the moment.

In situations of major controversy that have not previously been analyzed, consultation with the political force becomes more necessary than ever—so that the political force can help search for solutions and share responsibility. The political force cannot be limited to being informed *after* a decision has been made, since this inhibits meaningful criticism due to sterility or the risk of appearing to undermine the authority of the person who made the decision.

7. Ensuring that the government remains the government of the political force—guided by a program supported and shared by the social sectors that form the people and that need a sovereign national development strategy to meet their needs and resolve their problems—is the principal challenge. This means governing for all Uruguayans, but from a program that necessarily reflects the interests of the people and their allies—the great national majorities.

National Government Group (Agrupación Nacional de Gobierno)

8. Government is often associated exclusively with the Executive Branch; however, the Executive requires parliamentary majorities to support its administration. How these majorities are achieved is part of the action of the political force.

9. The political force must guide government policy—both in relation to the Executive and to legislative practice. The current National Parliamentary Group (*Agrupación Parlamentaria Nacional*), which already functions, must be maintained with all its specific features.

10. To contribute to defining the major outlines of government policy, a **National Government Group (Agrupación Nacional de Gobierno)** will be created, meeting periodically to address matters of significant importance.

It shall be composed of:

- the Vice President of the Republic,
- the Secretary of the Presidency,
- all ministers belonging to the political force,
- elected departmental intendentes,
- the President and Vice President of the political force,
- all elected legislators,
- and the Political Leadership, with sectors and grassroots representation maintaining proportionality.

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This body will meet regularly and whenever the political force needs to be consulted. Its decisions will apply to all areas of government—executive and legislative.

11. The National Government Group will appoint a **Board (Mesa)** as its regular working body, defining its composition and operational structure.

The Board may convene the lead legislators (*cabezas de lista*) when functioning as a mechanism for urgent consultation or in situations requiring rapid decisions that might imply a change from previously established positions or demand decisions not anticipated but of significant political relevance. In such cases, the lead legislators shall participate.

Government and Social Forces

12. The political force's access to government—even within a successful process—does not eliminate the contradiction of interests between labor and capital, nor between the State and its salaried employees, nor among the diverse interests and demands present in society. The very idea of a Social Agreement (*Acuerdo Social*) confirms this.

The enormous transformations in economy and society under neoliberalism have produced popular and national sectors composed today of a large number of unemployed, underemployed, destitute, excluded people, workers, retirees, middle classes, productive sectors weakened by crisis, and sectors affected by different forms of discrimination.

Bringing together and articulating these diverse groups—victims of traditional policies—around an alternative project is a central challenge of our time.

[Note: “Neoliberalism” refers to the market-centered reforms of the 1980s–1990s in Latin America, marked by privatizations, deregulation, and weakened social protection systems.]

A progressive government must recognize these facts from the outset, as well as the economic struggles and conflicts that will inevitably arise.

13. Governing is not merely drafting programs or policy lines. It is not enough to change the officials responsible for implementing government decisions: it is necessary to build an administrative structure that can develop, execute, monitor, and correct these decisions when mistakes occur.

This structure must incorporate participation and the transfer of decision-making and management capacity to communities and to workers.

This cannot be done in relation to a fragmented subject; it requires permanently fostering the development of a **collective social subject**.

14. Transferring decision-making capacity to communities, users, or economic sectors presents important challenges. Experience in this area is limited, and must be developed well in advance. However, accumulated experience—such as Neighborhood Councils (*Concejitos Vecinales*), their open commissions, open council meetings, and local networks—must be considered starting points.
[Note: Concejos Vecinales are participatory governance bodies within Montevideo's decentralized administration model.]

15. An attitude we consider mistaken is refusing to transfer decision-making capacity. Doing so would deprive the administration of essential support, which it will undoubtedly need and must help organize. The great task of the political force, with a view toward a popular government, is to

promote the development of a **collective social subject** with participatory arenas to which decision-making power can be transferred.

16. Uruguay has a major advantage in this regard: it already possesses a broad and extensive social network that must be stimulated and supported, as well as a unified and combative labor movement. There is no need to start from scratch or in the absence of organized social structures.

17. These elements are reflected in the **Social Agreement (Acuerdo Social)**, which will be, without doubt, a strategic axis of the Progressive Government's action. As stated in documents approved by the Tota Quinteros Congress (September 2001):

“This Social Agreement will only be possible if we persist on the path already begun: consolidating a broad social and political bloc composed of all those who are victims of the current neoliberal model and who are willing to converge in opposition and in proposing alternatives. Popular struggle and mobilization will be decisive in each conjuncture to achieve and concretize social agreements.

Supported by the agreement among all forces forming the social base of the Frente Amplio, and by the need to deepen democratization and to involve all sectors committed to progress and growth with justice, the progressive government will expand its call to the rich social fabric of organizations, associations, unions, and business chambers committed to sovereign national development.

It is a broad call where each sector must contribute to the shared objectives.

The process of dialogue and search for agreements cannot be limited to economic issues; it must also include social, political, and cultural rights that build citizenship and give integral meaning to productive growth.”

18. The Social Agreement (*Acuerdo Social*) is therefore the strategic framework within which relational policies must be placed. Clearly: the many channels of dialogue that the progressive government must establish with organized society are not separate from the program—they must fully express participation, citizen commitment, and transparency, which are foundational to our political project.

19. The Social Agreement requires shared perspectives on certain aspects of reality and on proposals for action agreed upon and supported by all parties involved. Without this, it becomes merely an ideological aspiration or a political wish—and will not serve as a useful instrument for progressive governance.

The task is to weave together common ground around the shared project of the alternative social bloc.

As has been stated, the Social Agreement implies the willingness to encourage broad participation, to recognize relevant social actors, and to acknowledge the organizations they have formed. In this sense, the **Social Economy**—in its various associative expressions, particularly the **Cooperative Movement**—is especially significant. It must be recognized as a fundamental social actor, particularly regarding the strategy of a productive country, comprehensive development, and the democratization of economic life.

20. In this context, and in light of certain present difficulties, it has become clear that we have shortcomings in the relationship between the political force, the government of that political force, social actors—often with demands of a clearly corporatist nature—and society as a whole.

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Failure to clarify the terms of these increasingly conflictive relationships may become a true obstacle to the transformations we pursue.

21. The political force and its government—and the broad, multifaceted, and combative mass movement—together constitute the **alternative political and social bloc** (or “the great national majorities”), opposed to the power bloc. As members of this bloc, we share a common strategic project—popular, national, democratic, anti-imperialist, and anti-oligarchic—elaborated through long struggles and which we will apply, monitor, and defend simultaneously.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of social composition, the alternative bloc is *not* homogeneous. It is formed by different classes, class fractions, strata, and groups.

Its expression is also not uniform, but diverse: political, social, cultural.

Consequently, the behaviors, practices, and traditions of its members are not identical.

These different classes, sectors, and organizational forms—through which the broad majorities express themselves—compose an objective political and social bloc with shared interests, yet also with nuances, differences, and ultimate projects that may not coincide.

From this arises the real possibility of contradictions and differing views within the alternative bloc.

22. Therefore, acknowledging the complexity of this reality, it becomes necessary to establish formal mechanisms (approved and respected by all) and/or strengthen existing ones, through which relations among the various components of the bloc of change can be structured.

Urgently, we must strengthen or create arenas for debate, procedures for regulating and resolving conflicts (which are to some degree inevitable), and support, advisory, or research mechanisms that enable the effective participation of political and social actors constituting the bloc—while, at the same time, recognizing that government administration and the political force must each have their own distinct spheres of action, and that the mass movement must maintain its autonomy from political parties.

23. Autonomy is necessary and fundamental for preserving the diverse characteristics, objectives, and roles of the political force, the government, and social forces.

24. Historically, the labor movement as a whole has been capable of transcending a purely corporatist perspective in favor of a broader project for the country—seeking alliances with other social layers and sectors.

This experience supports our expectations regarding the feasibility of broad social agreements around a national development strategy led by a government of our political force—one that assumes the historical legacy of workers’ struggles and the struggles of all marginalized sectors for social emancipation and national independence.

At the same time, beyond strategic agreements, in day-to-day reality—and often legitimately—social organizations defend the specific interests of the sectors they represent.

As a result, conflicts may arise both among sectors and between these sectors and a government embodying a national project for society as a whole.

This is not, in itself, dramatic: life is conflict, and progress takes place through confronting conflicts.

The real issue is **how conflicts are resolved**.

A progressive force in government must defend full implementation of its program, exercising the authority of the State strictly within the rule of law and always through methods of respect and dialogue.

Resolving conflicts may require choosing between differing interests, guided by an ideological orientation regarding what best serves society as a whole.

25. The political force, in exercising government, assumes responsibility for carrying out a project of change for the country.

Such a project is not the sum of sectoral interests present in society, but rather the articulation of those interests—or, when necessary, prioritizing some over others—in pursuit of the common good, both in the present and for the future.

In other words: based on society's material reality and the concrete conditions of the various social classes and sectors, the project is fundamentally built in the sphere of politics—through political discourse and political action—and, to be viable, it must generate active consensus throughout society.

26. Making these transformations viable requires a clear and consistent **will for dialogue**. The depth and durability of such transformations are directly related to the degree of involvement and commitment assumed by society. This cannot be achieved without placing dialogue and agreement above authoritarian or unilateral imposition.

This spirit of dialogue and openness to participation—hallmark traits of our style of government—must operate on several levels:

- **Institutional Reform.**

The progressive government must promote the institutionalization of forms of citizen participation and participation by civil society organizations.

Examples include:

- the regulation and creation of a **National Economic Council** (or a similar participatory forum of social actors),
- worker participation in the governance of public enterprises (for example, through representatives or oversight bodies),
- and political decentralization.

- **The National Budget Debate.**

In the first year of government, discussion of the 2005–2009 National Budget must serve as an opportunity to promote broad social participation and involvement in shaping the first fundamental law of the government.

This process should lay the groundwork for institutionalized participation—strengthening and organizing civil society, and narrowing the distance between society and the government.

Regarding public-sector workers under our administration, the relationship must be based on **mutual respect, dialogue, and negotiation**, according to clearly defined principles:

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- The government's commitment to improve working and salary conditions, within available resources and strategic priorities.
- The promotion of **collective bargaining** and the negotiation of agreements.
- Significant improvements in salaries and benefits must be accompanied by clear commitments regarding productivity, management, public service quality, worker involvement, and a strengthened ethos of public service.

27. The rebuilding of labor relations must begin with a State that decisively promotes negotiation with public-sector employees—with the firm goal of achieving **Collective Agreements in the public sector**, clearly delineating commitments from each side, ensuring the dignity of public service, and providing maximum quality in public services and products.

28. An institutionalized model of labor relations must be based on:

- **legitimacy of organizations** (unions and employers)—meaning they genuinely represent their members, whether through affiliation levels, mobilization capacity, or social legitimacy;
- **mutual recognition** among government, unions, and employer chambers;
- **trust, respect, and constant willingness for dialogue**;
- **legality**, expressed through binding labor agreements and especially through compliance with the **Wage Councils Law (Ley de Consejos de Salarios)**;
- ratification of the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** conventions.

[Note: Uruguay's Wage Councils are tripartite bodies (state, employers, workers) that negotiate sector-wide minimum wages.]

29. A key component of employment and reactivation policy is the State's defense of labor rights and guarantees for full exercise of the right to unionization.

Accordingly, the government will promote— administratively and through legislation—the **mandatory nature of collective bargaining**, making its development a central concern.

These policies seek to bring democratic rationality to labor relations, expanding institutional channels for conflict resolution.

30. This may be the area where the strategic goals of the Social Agreement are tested most intensely.

The government will honor its commitment to open channels and guarantee spaces and agreements; workers' organizations will have avenues to express their needs; and business sectors will be able to express their concerns—knowing that the success of productive ventures depends on creativity, the ability to assume risks, and respect for dialogue and the government's long-term objectives.

31. Regarding workers specifically, participation will be promoted in:

- mechanisms of evaluation,

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- oversight,
- collective productivity schemes (preferably),
- training,
- promotions,
- incentives and sanctions, and
- conflict-prevention mechanisms, including early-notice procedures and dialogue.

32. Proposals to be considered—at least for discussion—include:

- reduction of the working day;
- elimination of overtime (except in extraordinary situations);
- legislation on **sector-wide collective bargaining** (*negociación colectiva por rama*);
- **union protection** guarantees (*fuero sindical*);
- the incorporation of workers into public-sector management bodies;
- creation of **workplace committees** and **joint commissions**;
- gender equity in labor matters.

33. Discussions must include deep analysis of changes in the world of work, their impacts, and their consequences.

Spaces for agreement must become forums for public, transparent consideration of issues that have long remained in the background—yet are central to the lives of hundreds of thousands of Uruguayans, such as:

- informality,
- flexibilization,
- technology,
- new unemployment forms,
- job precarization.

Without a shared understanding of what has happened in the world of work in the last 30 years, it is impossible to reach solid, sustainable agreements.

34. At the State level in particular, mechanisms must be established to ensure **worker participation** with the capacity to *co-manage* public enterprises.

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35. A government is “popular” because of its relationship with the workers under its responsibility, and because of the way it addresses and resolves the needs of the people as a whole.

This must be done through the very workers who are part of the administration: they are the necessary instrument of popular governance.

However, the *popular* character of the government is not determined merely by who its employees are, but by **how it responds to people’s needs**, how it addresses management challenges, and how it relates to its workers.

36. As a matter of principle, we affirm the central importance of the government’s relationship with workers.

The political force must necessarily define how this relationship should be carried out, and—based on what has been discussed by the workers themselves—later elaborate a mutually agreed policy of exchange and coordination between both parties.

This will only reaffirm, develop, and deepen something that has existed since the birth of the Frente Amplio.

Montevideo, April 19, 2004

(This marks the formal end of the document approved by the National Plenary of the Frente Amplio.)