

How successful was the government of king philip ii of spain essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In order for Philip and his government to be defined as successful they would need to conform to the following characteristics: Philip would need to be a strong figurehead, efficiently overseeing all aspects of administration, but having the ability to delegate; communications should be proficient between separate areas of Philip's supervision, and implementation of policy should be smooth and uniform. There should be peace and unity within the regions of the country and a constant maintenance of law and order.

There should be no cliques or factionalism within the court nor should there be any preference or bias in terms of personal regional favouritism. Finally there should be a sense of the government as an institution able to withstand change and the reigns of individual monarchs. Philip lived in an age when the idea of "personal monarchy" and the pretence of power, were extremely significant. Therefore Philip's personal role was crucial in the shaping and control of the government. Philip lived in the shadow of his father and took the advice given to him to "depend on no one but yourself" very literally.

All work was done on paper, on the basis of consultas (memoranda, reports, and advice presented to him by his ministers). He forced himself to review all documents personally, a huge undertaking for the ruler of an empire the size of his, and communication was therefore extremely slow. The king worked alone in his small office late into the night, giving his decisions or just as often, deferring them. He spent an enormous amount of time "signing letters, licences, patents and other affairs of grace and justice: on some days amounting to over 2, 000 documents".

Yet all his contemporaries agreed that his methods dangerously, and sometimes fatally, slowed down a system of government already notorious for its dilatoriness. Philip was painstaking and conscientious in his desire for even more information, demanding up to date reports from every regional governor on “ cities, towns, sites, wilderness, rivers, of their advantages civil and military, their finances, manufactures and tributes.. ” Yet this hid an inability to distinguish between the important and the trivial and a temperamental unwillingness to make decisions.

This meant that he neglected crucial matters and during the 1566 uprising in the Netherlands, it was months before he dispatched an army. He was well informed and in possession of the finest ambassadorial network and courier system in Europe, yet his inability to delegate and prioritise matters often slowed bureaucracy to a standstill. He was also unwilling to place control of more than one small aspect of business in the hands of one man, relying heavily on two competing State secretaries and his personal secretaries such as Vasquez (1571-1593).

This was coupled with an almost pathological suspicion of even his most able and faithful servants. Margaret of Parma; the Duke of Alba; Don John of Austria; Antonio Perez; and Alessandro Farnese, to name only the most distinguished, suffered disgrace. “ His smile and his dagger were very close,” wrote his official court historian, Cabrera de Cordoba. As a result, Philip’s court became notorious for the bitterness of its faction fights. This meant that though “ he prevented the emergence of any institutional challenge to

his own authority," the carrying out of government business was disrupted still further.

The atmosphere of the Spanish court did much to poison the whole Spanish system of government, and this played no small part in causing the rebellions of the Netherlanders (1568-1609), of the Moriscos of Granada (1568-70), and of the Aragonese (1591-92). This factional conflict was enhanced by Philip's chosen style of government and administration, based on his father Charles V. It was the largest in Europe, and due to Philip's micro managing style, it grew even more complex throughout his reign.

The basis of the system was a series of councils and in addition to territorial councils, there were eight departmental councils overseeing separate areas of policy. However these were not updated, nor did they evolve throughout the reign and some, for example the Council of Military Orders, lay largely dormant throughout the reign. This shows a lack of dynamism to Philip's governing style, for though he added bodies he did not get rid of redundant ones and the Camara (Chambers) originally established during Charles's reign, was only reformed after 70 years.

Philip also made no attempt to unify and codify these councils, resulting in gaps in his knowledge and, as he did not travel outside of the peninsula post-1559, he had to rely on the legitimacy of what he had been told. The Council of State was the most senior of these bodies advising the king, and the nobles were allowed to attend it. Yet Philip himself was not involved specifically and it only served as one of the many different bodies offering

competing advice. Thus despite its aim it did not act as an over-riding form of centralising administration.

Philip preferred the smaller specialised bodies such as the Councils of Aragon, Italy and Portugal and the Netherlands, as it meant he could try and control all aspects, even those on a trivial scale. The increase in bodies (14 by the end of Philip's reign) meant that many had overlapping aims and members, allowing factionalism and inefficiency to continue. For example, the Council of State's duties included overseeing Spain's diplomatic and military interests in Europe, specifically the Netherlands and Italy despite the fact that there were specific councils for these countries and a Council of War.

This led to conflict between different powerful officials and was intensified by Philip's constant need to consult everyone, meaning different opinions and ideas, and lengthy amounts of time for decision making and processing, not the efficient administrative body that was needed. The structure worked well in theory, as it allowed policy to be carried out, and Philip could oversee all matters, yet the growing competition and complexity of the system throughout his reign meant that more often than not, appeals and documents were sent directly to him, as opposed to the relevant body.

Personal court arguments, such as those between Alva and Eboli, could disrupt the King's attention and force the whole system into disarray.

Towards the end of his reign he began to rely on juntas (specialised committees filled with his most skilled advisors), such as the Junta Grande

but Philip's constant lack of trust meant that he refused to succumb to the advice of just one junta and therefore once again succumbed to competing suggestions.

Therefore despite the outward appearance of centralisation, the councils were actually an ad hoc system centred around the king, who again refused to delegate or devalue his power. Another aspect affecting Philip's government was his reliance on Spanish ministers and officials, and bias towards other more distant subjects of his empire. These subjects did not contest Philip's right to the throne, but the antipathy towards the Castilian stronghold of his empire meant that there was a definite lack of unity within his kingdom.

Philip's predisposition to appoint Spaniards to official posts in the Netherlands, alienated local elites causing further tension and restricting efficient governing. Though Philip was well travelled and had a strong knowledge of the countries in his realm he did have a strong preference for Spaniards and could be narrow-minded when it came to receiving advice from officers of other nationalities, particularly as he grew older. This limited the range and quality of advice he was offered.

On one hand the king recognised that a centralised base was needed away from the medieval-style travelling court government. Yet his choice did much to further the belief that he and other Castilians " give the impression that they alone are descended from heaven, and the rest of mankind are mud. " Significantly there were calls to move the capital to Lisbon away from the

Castilian stronghold of Madrid and this could have perhaps lead to a degree of decentralisation, but Philip adamantly opposed such efforts.

Within Castile the system was one of checks and balances, and Philip relied on royal informers and secret agents to maintain control over the viceroys, governors and royal servants, many of whom he had never met. In Castile there was a real attempt made at centralising administration. This was important for if Philip's power was seen to be weak there, then his authority could be threatened elsewhere. Yet control fell to the grandees and nobility who were exempt from taxation and already controlled thousands of men.

Men such as Marquis of Monejar in Granada and the Duke of medina were therefore extremely powerful and had vested interest in fulfilling Philips wishes of law and order. The sixty six corregidores therefore had crucial roles in fulfilling political, administrative and judicial authority. The corregidores managed local councils and ensured that loyal procuradores were appointed to the Cortes. This was difficult as many of the local councils resisted and defended their local rights and the corregidores could do little to enforce this uniformity.

The corregidores had full jurisdiction and conducted a vista once a year to determine the success of local government. This system worked successfully except in times of war (considerable in Philip's reign) and the increased need for the corregidores to raise money provided resistance in Valladolid (1588) and Seville (1590). The crown had little authority here and often the corregidores conspired with local nobles to further resist crown rule. Venality

for offices meant that bribing, fees and gifts between government officials further corrupted the system. Despite this Philip still held substantial control over the Castilian Cortes.

Though this was not without difficulties and it constantly tried to repeal taxes and Philip kept it in control by ignoring its grievances. By resisting blackmail Philip exercised absolute control and the Cortes was devoid of power over legislative and tax issues. With the exception of Castile no other region was wealthy enough to warrant this absolute control, and by gaining control over Castile on a “contractual basis” Philip ensured that for the most part his will was done. Yet Philip did have to make concessions and he became dependent on them for taxes as the Cortes became more and more outspoken towards the end of his reign.

The situation outside Castile, was significantly worse; the various regions fiercely defended their independence and local privileges, and Philip was outside of physical jurisdiction. He thus relied on deputies and nobles, who often, as in Valencia, were more concerned with their own interests and power than with that of the crown. Particularly in Aragon, the nobles dominated the Diputacen, a committee meeting in the absence of the Cortes, kept private armies and resisted attempts at control from Madrid.

Philip could only appoint the viceroy and all other posts were filled by the Aragonese, who could typically outweigh this position. The governing of Aragon weakened throughout Philip's reign, and reports of lawlessness, and disturbances – such as the murder of a Christian sheep farmer by Moriscos –

increased. Philip intervened in 1588 by appointing a new viceroy and buying up a fief and assumed control of Ribagorza. The Aragonese nobles began to revolt in Zaragoza in 1590, though few supported it; it showed the lack of Philip's control, and the strength of the nobles.

The length of the Perez affair showed the inefficiency of Philip's administration, as it was over a year before he was silenced, and the strength of the popular demonstrations organised by the nobles grew. Finally, Philip sent an army and within two weeks the revolt had been suppressed. Philip responded positively to this revolt. The military had to assert his authority but Philip was sympathetic to legal niceties. Philip could have viewed all Aragonese as guilty but this would have left the region in anger and could have led to further problems in the future.

In June 1592, the Cortes of Aragon was reformed but the changes were moderate and done within the letter of the law. A motion could be passed in the Cortes by a mere majority - previously any change had to be voted in unanimously. Also the Justicia could be removed by the king. The king was given the right to appoint a non-Aragonese viceroy. Despite these changes, Aragon kept a great deal of self-rule within Spain and the solution must have been successful as the region never rebelled again under his rule. However this revolt proved that Spain was far from united.

Regionalism plagued Spain and Philip justly feared that the Catalans would help the Aragonese. Philip could not assert his authority without using force in those regions which challenged his rule. The revolt proved how jealously

fueros were guarded and that these provinces resented a king who had ceased "to be their own". In conclusion, the government of Spain suffered as there was far too much power concentrated in Philip's hands. Unlike England, Spain was subject to separate assemblies: the Cortes in Castile along with the assembly in Navarre and three for each of the three regions of Aragon.

The lack of a viable assembly led to a great deal of power being concentrated in Philip's hands. Authority was administered by local agents appointed by the crown and viceroys carried out instructions of the crown. Philip, a compulsive micromanager, presided over specialized councils for state affairs, finance, war, and the Inquisition. A distrustful sovereign, Philip played royal bureaucrats against each other, leading to a system of imbalance, often damaging state business and the implementation of policy.

A large part of this can be attributed to Philip's personal character traits as the pope Pius V said, "Your majesty spends so long considering your undertakings that when the moment to perform then comes the occasion has passed and the money has been spent.". However Spain was still a very medieval society, and the disunity of the country as a whole, due to the independence of the separate kingdoms, no doubt contributed to the deterioration and inefficiency of Philip's government.