The Pre-Spanish Era ended when the Philippines was colonized by Spain. Spain's title to the Philippines was based on the discovery made by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 and was consummated by its conquest by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi forty-five years later. The Philippines was under Spanish rule for almost four centuries. From 1565 to 1821, the Philippines was indirectly governed by the King of Spain through Mexico. From 1821, when Mexico obtained her independence from Spain to 1898, the Philippines was ruled directly from Spain. As the crown colony, the council in Spain responsible for the administration in the Philippines was the Council of the Indies but when it was abolished in 1837, the Council of Ministers temporarily took over. Then from 1863, the Ministry of Ultramar (colonies) exercised general powers of supervision over the Philippine affairs. The basic principle introduced by Spain to the Philippines was the union of the church and state but this however produced serious strifes between the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. The government which Spain established in the Philippines was highly centralized in structure and national in scope. The central government was so powerful that almost everything had to be done with its knowledge and consent. The Governor-General, who resides in Manila, had executive, administrative, legislative, and judicial powers. He is also a member of the Royal Audiencia, being its president or presiding officer. As Captain-General, the Governor-General was the Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces in the Philippines. And as the vice- royal patron, he exercised certain religious powers like appointing priests. The Governor-General is the King's official representative in the colony. And there are only two branches of government in the Philippines: executive and judicial. There was no legislature or congress because the laws for the Philippines were made by the Spaniards in Spain. If a law is to be created in the Philippines of such actions needed to be done, it has first to get the approval in Spain which may take years due to the distance overseas. The Supreme Court of the Philippines during the Spanish Period was the Royal Audiencia. It performed functions of executive and legislative nature. The Audiencia is the highest court in the land and was established in the Philippines in order to give justice to the aggrieved people of the colony. In the provincial level, the Alcalde Mayor was head of provinces that were already peaceful and recognizing the authority of Spain was governed by civil provincial governors. Those not yet fully pacified and conquered were ruled by military officers. The Gobernadorcillo (Capitan Municipal) or the Captain is the head of the municipalities or the towns (pueblos). The Ayuntamiento or Cabildo is the city council and governs cities under special charter. A pueblo is composed of barangays; each barangay is headed by a Cabeza de Barangay.  
  
  
  
During the **Spanish colonial rule** in the Philippines (1565–1898), there was no formal written **constitution** in the modern sense. Instead, Spain's governance structure in the Philippines was based on royal decrees, laws, and edicts issued by the Spanish crown, which were then implemented by various government officials in the colony. The Spanish government in the Philippines was highly centralized and largely controlled by the **Governor-General**, who held both executive and judicial powers. Here's a breakdown of the key components that shaped the governance system:

**Key Aspects of Governance Under Spanish Rule:**

1. **No Formal Constitution:**
   * Unlike modern nations, the Philippines under Spanish rule did not have a written constitution that defined the rights of citizens or the structure of government. Instead, the governance system was based on **Spanish royal decrees**, laws passed by the Spanish crown, and decisions made by Spanish officials.
   * The laws were primarily crafted in Spain, and the Philippines was governed as a colony without a locally established legislative body, making it reliant on decisions from Spain for most governance matters.
2. **Centralized Government:**
   * The Spanish government in the Philippines was highly centralized, meaning that the **Governor-General** in Manila had immense power. The Governor-General was the **King's representative** in the colony and had executive, legislative, and judicial authority.
   * The Governor-General was also the **Commander-in-Chief** of the Philippine military and had religious powers, such as appointing priests, due to the union of church and state.
3. **Council of the Indies and Other Spanish Institutions:**
   * **Council of the Indies:** This was the primary governing body in Spain responsible for overseeing colonial affairs in the Philippines until it was abolished in 1837.
   * After the dissolution of the **Council of the Indies**, governance was temporarily overseen by the **Council of Ministers** and later by the **Ministry of Ultramar** (Ministry of Colonies), which exercised general powers over Philippine affairs.
4. **The Royal Audiencia:**
   * The **Royal Audiencia** was the highest court in the Philippines during the Spanish period. It functioned as both a **court of law** and a **governmental advisory body**. It played a role in administering justice, handling petitions, and advising the Governor-General on legal and political matters.
5. **The Governor-General’s Role:**
   * As the King's official representative in the Philippines, the Governor-General held combined powers, including:
     + **Executive Powers**: Direct control over the administration of the colony.
     + **Judicial Powers**: The Governor-General had the power to act as the head of the **Royal Audiencia**.
     + **Legislative Powers**: The Governor-General could issue local laws and ordinances but had to obtain approval from the Spanish crown for any significant legal changes.
     + **Religious Powers**: As **vice-royal patron**, the Governor-General had influence over the church in the colony, including appointing priests.
6. **No Local Legislature:**
   * Unlike modern systems where a legislature (e.g., Congress or Parliament) creates laws, the Philippines under Spanish rule lacked a locally elected or appointed legislature. Laws were primarily enacted in Spain and had to be approved by the Spanish government before being implemented in the Philippines. This often led to delays and inefficiencies.
7. **Local Administration:**
   * The **Alcalde Mayor** was the head of provinces that had been pacified and recognized Spanish authority. He was responsible for civil governance.
   * In more peaceful or settled provinces, local governments were run by civil officials, while areas that were still being pacified were overseen by military officers.
   * The **Gobernadorcillo (or Capitan Municipal)** was the head of a town (pueblo), while **Cabeza de Barangay** was the leader of a smaller administrative unit within the town.
   * The **Ayuntamiento** (or Cabildo) served as the governing council for cities that had special charters.

**Summary:**

In short, during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines, there was no written constitution like those of modern democratic countries. Instead, governance was structured around the absolute power of the **Governor-General**, with laws coming from the Spanish crown and its various councils. The Spanish system was highly centralized, with the **Governor-General** holding almost complete control over the executive, judicial, and legislative functions of the government, though these decisions were often influenced by the Spanish monarchy and its royal institutions.