Historical Evolution of Bihar's Polity 3
Constitutional Framework of Bihar 6
Role of the Governor in Bihar 9
Structure of the Bihar Legislature 13
Chief Minister of Bihar: Roles and Responsibilities 14
Bihar State Cabinet and Council of Ministers 18
Judiciary in Bihar: High Court and Subordinate Courts 19
Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) 22
Local Self-Government in Bihar: Panchayati Raj System 24
Bihar Administrative Services 28
District Administration in Bihar 29
Bihar Police: Structure and Functioning 33
Implementation of Central Schemes in Bihar 35
State Development Plans and Governance in Bihar 38
Role of NGOs and Civil Societies in Bihar's Administration 40
State Finance and Budgetary Management in Bihar 43
Land Revenue and Tenancy Administration in Bihar 44
Bihar's Role in Indian Federalism 48
Electoral System in Bihar: Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections 49
Challenges in Governance and Administration in Bihar 52
E-Governance Initiatives in Bihar 54
Public Distribution System in Bihar 58
Implementation of Right to Education in Bihar 59
Social Justice and Affirmative Action Policies in Bihar 63
State Commissions: Human Rights, Women, and SC/ST in Bihar 64
Law and Order Challenges in Bihar 68
Bihar's Administrative Reforms 69
Corruption and Anti-Corruption Measures in Bihar 72
Judicial Reforms and Access to Justice in Bihar 74
Public-Private Partnerships in Bihar's Governance 77
Disaster Management and Mitigation in Bihar 79
Administrative Decentralization and Accountability in Bihar 83
Bihar's Representation in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha 85
Role of Political Parties in Bihar 88
Bihar's Socio-Political Movements 89
Leadership and Political Personalities of Bihar 93

Reservation Policies and Implementation in Bihar 95
Economic Governance in Bihar 99
Public Health Administration in Bihar 100
Welfare Schemes and Social Security in Bihar 104

Historical Evolution of Bihar's Polity

The polity of Bihar has evolved over millennia, influenced by its rich history, socio-political movements, and geographical significance. From ancient kingdoms to the modern democratic framework, Bihar's political evolution provides valuable insights into the broader political trajectory of India. This article explores the historical phases of Bihar's polity, highlighting key events, rulers, and transformations.

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1. Ancient Bihar: The Cradle of Indian Polity

1.1. Magadha Empire

- **Rise of Magadha (6th Century BCE):** Bihar's political history begins with Magadha, one of the sixteen Mahajanapadas (great kingdoms). Magadha, with its capital at Rajgir (later Pataliputra), became a dominant power in ancient India.
- **Key Rulers:**
    - **Bimbisara (544-492 BCE):** A visionary ruler of the Haryanka dynasty, who expanded Magadha's boundaries and established alliances through marriage.
    - **Ajatashatru (492-460 BCE):** Known for his military innovations, including the use of war chariots and catapults, he further expanded the empire.
- **Contribution to Polity:** Magadha laid the foundation of centralized governance and statecraft, which influenced subsequent empires.

1.2. Mauryan Empire

- **Chandragupta Maurya (321-297 BCE):** Under Chandragupta, Bihar became the epicenter of the Mauryan Empire. Pataliputra emerged as a model of urban governance and administration.
- **Ashoka the Great (268-232 BCE):**
    - His reign marked the zenith of Mauryan polity, characterized by efficient administration, welfare measures, and promotion of Buddhism.
    - The **Edicts of Ashoka** showcased a commitment to dharma (moral governance) and laid the foundation for ethical governance.
- **Legacy:** The Mauryan polity was marked by centralized administration, a well-organized bureaucracy, and codified laws.

1.3. Gupta Empire

- Known as the **Golden Age of India**, the Gupta period (320-550 CE) saw Bihar flourish as a center of culture and politics.
- **Contributions:**
    - Development of local self-governance through village councils.
    - Emphasis on justice and fairness, reflected in the judicial practices of the time.

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2. Medieval Bihar: Turbulence and Transition

2.1. Pala Dynasty (8th-12th Century CE)

- The Palas, originating in Bengal, ruled over Bihar and were patrons of Buddhism.

- **Polity Characteristics:**
  - Decentralized governance with significant autonomy to local chieftains.
  - Establishment of monasteries like Nalanda and Vikramshila, which also acted as centers of political discourse.

2.2. Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Rule

- **Incorporation into the Delhi Sultanate:** Bihar became a part of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century, marking a shift to Islamic governance.
- **Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545):**
  - Born in Sasaram, Bihar, Sher Shah introduced administrative reforms that influenced the Mughal and British systems.
  - **Reforms:**
    - Introduction of a standardized revenue system.
    - Establishment of the Grand Trunk Road, which enhanced trade and governance.
- **Under the Mughals:** Bihar was integrated into the Mughal provincial system, with a focus on agrarian revenue administration.

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3. Colonial Bihar: The Seeds of Modern Polity

3.1. British Administration (1764-1947)

- Following the **Battle of Buxar (1764)**, Bihar came under British control as part of the Bengal Presidency.
- **Administrative Changes:**
  - Introduction of zamindari system, which altered the socio-economic fabric and concentrated power in the hands of landlords.
  - Creation of Patna as an administrative hub.
- **Impact on Polity:**
  - Emergence of a feudal political structure.
  - Gradual disenfranchisement of the rural population.

3.2. Role in Freedom Struggle

- **Champaran Satyagraha (1917):**
  - Mahatma Gandhi's first major political movement in India, initiated in Bihar, marked a turning point in Indian politics.
- **Leaders from Bihar:**
  - **Rajendra Prasad:** The first President of India and a key figure in the nationalist movement.
  - **Jayaprakash Narayan:** A socialist leader who later played a significant role in post-independence politics.
- **Legacy:** The nationalist movement fostered grassroots political awareness and mobilization in Bihar.

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4. Post-Independence Bihar: Democracy and Challenges

4.1. Integration into the Indian Union

- **Formation of Bihar as a State (1950):** Bihar became a state of the Indian Union, with a bicameral legislature.
- **First Government:** The first Chief Minister was Sri Krishna Sinha, with Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha as the Deputy CM.

4.2. Political Landscape (1950s-1980s)

- **Congress Dominance:** The Congress party dominated Bihar's politics in the early decades.
- **Emergence of Regionalism:**
    - The rise of leaders like Karpoori Thakur and Lalu Prasad Yadav marked the beginning of identity-based politics focusing on caste and social justice.

4.3. The JP Movement (1974)

- Jayaprakash Narayan led the **Total Revolution Movement**, calling for systemic change in governance and society.
- **Impact:**
    - It led to the rise of leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar.
    - Strengthened the demand for decentralization and grassroots governance.

4.4. Mandal Commission Era (1990s)

- Implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990 revolutionized Bihar's polity by prioritizing reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).
- **Shift in Politics:**
    - Focus on caste-based mobilization.
    - Decline of national parties and the rise of regional parties like Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Janata Dal (United).

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5. Contemporary Bihar: Polity in the 21st Century

5.1. Coalition Politics

- The politics of Bihar has been dominated by coalitions, reflecting the fragmented social and political landscape.
- **Key Alliances:**
    - RJD-JDU-Congress coalition.
    - BJP-JDU alliance.

5.2. Governance Reforms

- **Nitish Kumar's Tenure:**
    - Emphasis on law and order, infrastructure development, and women's empowerment.
- **Social Welfare Programs:**
    - Introduction of schemes like bicycle distribution for girls and prohibition policies.