



A promise to live by

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All political parties must be mindful of the core values that invigorate Indian democracy

- As the countdown for elections to the 17th Lok Sabha begins, the world's largest democracy has a chance to re-imagine itself.
- Over the last 16 general elections and numerous elections at lower levels, the resolute trust that the founding fathers of the Republic put in the parliamentary democratic system has been substantially proven wise.
- India did make some dangerous turns and show signs of fragility, especially during the Emergency in the 1970s, but in the long term it expanded the scope of its democracy through widening representation, devolution of power and redistribution of resources.
- This is not to overlook the various maladies that have afflicted the country's democracy, such as disinformation campaigns, corruption, disenfranchisement of the weaker sections of the society, the corroding influence of money and muscle power in elections, and divisive majoritarian tendencies.
- While the representative character of institutions has in general improved, women and religious minorities are alarmingly underrepresented.
- The exercise of elections itself is a matter of great pride for all Indians.
- The Election Commission of India has over the decades evolved itself into a fine institution and plays a critical role in the sustenance of democracy.
- Its efforts to increase voter participation through a series of small steps over the years, including the use of the Electronic Voting Machines, have been praiseworthy.
- The ECI has announced a series of fresh measures to strengthen the integrity of the electoral process and curb some rapidly growing hazards such as the spread of falsehoods aimed at creating social polarisation for consolidation of votes.

- Measures such as better monitoring of social media campaigns, while steps in the right direction, are not in themselves adequate to deal with the challenges of these times.
- The stakes are high for all contenders this year, and Indian politics has reached a level of competitiveness where ground rules of engagement are routinely disregarded.
- While furthering individual interests, all parties must realise that democracy itself is at stake if the campaign is aimed at communal polarisation.
- Though the promise of Indian democracy has not been fully realised, voters have remained committed to it.

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