

# FAIR AND SAFE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON FIVE STATE ELECTIONS AMID COVID-19 SURGE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

All indications are that elections to five State Assemblies — Goa, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab — will be held on time, regardless of the rising new wave of COVID-19. The three-member Election Commission of India (ECI) has visited four States over the past weeks to assess the preparedness, which is usually one of the last steps before the announcement of the poll schedule. Its visit to Manipur is expected soon. Conducting an election in normal times is one thing, but doing so in the midst of a pandemic is quite another. On the ECI's visit to U.P. last week, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) [Sushil Chandra said that all parties wanted the polls to be on schedule](#). He said the ECI would look into the enforcement of COVID-appropriate behaviour in campaigning and voting after the schedule is announced. Once the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in force, the [ECI's COVID-related restrictions](#), first drawn up in August 2020 ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections, will also be in play. The rules include mandatory wearing of masks during the whole election process, from campaigning to casting of votes, holding rallies in identified grounds with social distancing measures in place, and reducing the number of people allowed in roadshows. In the wake of the second wave of the pandemic in April 2021, the ECI put in place more measures such as a longer silence period before polling, reducing the time for campaigning.

Going by the spree of inaugurations and groundbreaking ceremonies for government projects by the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and Ministers, the election season has already begun. On January 2, [the Prime Minister laid the foundation for the Major Dhyan Chand Sports University](#) in Meerut, with a large, mostly mask-less crowd in attendance. Huge gatherings organised by all parties are taking place in the poll-bound States. Official events are being turned into campaign opportunities by those in power, raising a different question of propriety. The MCC imposes special restrictions on the party in power, which, it says, "shall ensure that no cause is given for any complaint that it has used its official position for the purposes of its election campaign". Till the announcement of polls, however, it is only a question of decency and propriety of those in power. The lines between a political party's rally and a government function continue to blur, to the advantage of the BJP in most cases. Once the poll schedule is announced, the burden will be on the ECI to be fair, and seen to be fair. In the last round of elections, its conduct was questioned on various valid grounds. The ECI must take political parties into confidence and ensure an environment conducive to a fair election process that also limits public health risks.

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U.S. President Biden should not buckle to pressure from irate anti-vaccine campaigners

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