

Party Symbols in India [UPSC Notes]

In February 2023, the Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered that the Eknath Shinde camp of the Shiv Sena will retain the official name and the 'bow and arrow' symbol of the party. This development throws light on the role of the ECI in allocating political party symbols in India. In this article, you can read all about party symbols and the role of the ECI for the [IAS exam](#) polity segment.

Political Party Symbols

Political parties are represented by a symbol or a visual emblem. This symbol makes it easier for illiterate voters to cast their votes for their favoured political party. In India, it is the [Election Commission of India](#) that assigns symbols to political parties. No two national parties can have the same symbol. However, two or more regional or state parties can have the same symbol provided they are contesting from different states.

Read more about [political parties in India](#) in the linked article.

Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968

- The order was issued by the Election Commission (EC), and it provided for the **specification, reservation, choice and allotment of symbols at elections in Parliamentary and State Assemblies' constituencies.**
- Additionally, it included clauses governing the registration and designation of political parties as state, and national parties.
- In addition, the Election Symbols Order offered a mechanism for resolving conflicts arising from the split of legally recognized parties or the merger of two or more political parties.

Political Party Symbol Dispute and Election Commission

Election Commission's powers in a dispute over the election symbol when a party splits:

- The **Symbols Order of 1968's Paragraph 15** addresses the issue of a political party **split** outside of the legislature and states as follows:
 - When the Commission is satisfied that there are rival groups or sections of a recognized political party each of whom claims to be that party the Commission may decide that one of these rival sections or groups—or none of these rival sections or groups is that recognized political party after considering all the

relevant circumstances and facts and hearing from (their) representatives... and other individuals who desire to be heard.

- The **Election Commission's decision shall be binding** on all of these rival sections or groups.
- This applies to disputes involving **recognized national and state parties**.
- In case of splits in registered but unrecognized parties, the ECI usually advises the warring factions to resolve their differences internally or to approach the court.

Factors looked by the Election Commission of India (ECI) while deciding on a dispute over party symbols:

- The ECI examines the party's Constitution and the list of office-bearers submitted when the party was united.
- The ECI identifies the party's apex organisational committee(s) and determines the number of office-bearers, delegates, and members who support the rival claimants.
- The ECI considers the support enjoyed by each claimant in the party's organisational and legislative wings (here, looks at the number of MPs and MLAs who support each rival claimant).
- If majority support is unclear, the ECI may freeze the party's symbol and allow the two factions to register themselves with new party names or add prefixes and suffixes to the existing party name to make a clear distinction about the new entities that are formed.
- In 1997, the ECI introduced a new rule stating that a splinter group of a party must register itself as a separate party, and can lay claim to national or state party status only on the basis of its performance in state or central elections after registration.