

EC Rules on Unusual Election Symbols: Can a Cockroach Become a Poll Symbol?

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EC Rules on Unusual Election Symbols Latest News

- Following Chief Justice Surya Kant's controversial remark comparing some unemployed youth to "cockroaches", protesters and the satirical Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) have adopted the insect as a symbol of dissent.
- While CJP is currently a youth pressure group and not a registered political party, its founder has not ruled out seeking registration in the future.
- However, even if the group registers as a political party, the Election Commission is unlikely to allot the cockroach as an election symbol, as symbols must comply with specific EC guidelines regarding acceptability and public perception.

Election Symbols in India: What the Rules Say

- **Allocation of Election Symbols** – The Election Commission (EC) allocates election symbols under the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**. These symbols help voters identify parties and candidates on the ballot.
- **Reserved Symbols for Recognised Parties** – Recognised national and state parties are allotted their exclusive reserved symbols. For example, the BJP uses the lotus, while the Congress uses the hand symbol.
- **Free Symbols for Others** – Unrecognised political parties and independent candidates are allotted symbols from the EC's list of "free symbols". These are not permanently reserved for any party.
- **No Guaranteed Choice** – Candidates and unrecognised parties may request a preferred symbol from the free-symbol list, but the Election Commission is not obligated to grant their choice.

What Symbols Are Allowed by the Election Commission

- The Election Commission's **list of free symbols** includes a wide range of simple and easily identifiable images drawn from everyday life.
- These cover categories such as fruits, vegetables, household appliances, farm tools, sports equipment, and food items.
- **Diverse Range of Free Symbols** – The latest EC list, released in May 2025, contains 184 free symbols, including items such as air-conditioners, balloons, door bells, dustbins, frying pans, jackfruits, and grapes.
- **Everyday Objects and Food Items** – The list also features common household objects like immersion rods, latches, mixers, toothbrushes, and TV remotes, along with various fruits, vegetables, cakes, and toffees to ensure easy voter recognition.

Can a New Political Party Choose Any Election Symbol

- **Free Symbols Are the Usual Option** – In most cases, new or unrecognised political parties must choose from the Election Commission's approved list of free symbols, which contains over 100 options.
- **How Symbol Allotment Works** – Parties can indicate their preferred symbols, but the final decision rests with the Election Commission.
- **If Multiple Parties Want the Same Symbol** – When more than one party seeks the same symbol, allotment may be decided on a **first-come-first-served basis** or through a **draw of lots**.
- **EC Has the Final Say** – Even if a party requests a particular symbol, the Election Commission can allot a different free symbol if the preferred one is unavailable.

Why a Cockroach Is Unlikely to Become an Election Symbol

- **EC's Ban on Animal Symbols** – The Election Commission largely stopped allotting animals as election symbols in the 1990s following concerns raised by animal welfare activists about the misuse and mistreatment of animals during election campaigns.
- **Background to the Decision** – The move was influenced by incidents such as the 1989 Tamil Nadu Assembly election, when roosters used as a party symbol were reportedly subjected to cruelty during campaign activities.
- **Existing Exceptions** – Some parties that received animal symbols before the ban continue to retain them. The most prominent example is the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which still uses the elephant as its reserved

symbol.

- **Cockroach Symbol Unlikely** – Given the Election Commission’s long-standing policy against allotting animal symbols, a cockroach is unlikely to be approved as an election symbol for any new political party or candidate.

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