

*The uncertainties of electoral politics have shown their face once again in Jammu and Kashmir, where governor's rule has been declared,*

*essentially placing the region under New Delhi's direct control. The development comes after elections held in December ended in a stalemate, with no party stepping forward to attempt to form government. In the polls, the regional People's Democratic Party, led by 'soft-line' separatist Mufti Muhammad Sayeed, won most seats, but not enough to form government. The party claimed 28 seats, only three more than Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP. The ruling National Conference won 15 seats, while the Congress party, which had fared poorly across the rest of India, was able to pick up 12 seats – a surprise for many. The divided verdict, however, means that no party has collected the 44 seats needed to form government in the 87-member state assembly. This means only a coalition can rule the state. Forming one has proved impossible, with tentative talks between the PDP and BJP essentially leading nowhere. The PDP essentially wants an end to a law that grants Indian security forces draconian powers to seize and arrest in Kashmir. It also wants talks with Pakistan, with which tensions have been high after a series of skirmishes along the Line of Control. The BJP has shown no inclination to accept this and instead seeks an end to the 'special status' awarded to Kashmir, which allows it to decide which federal laws to accept. The elections have also brought out the deep divide within Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP collected the vast majority of its vote in the Hindu-dominated region of Jammu; the PDP in the Muslim region of Kashmir. This is the first time the state has voted so obviously along religious lines, and this too could have implications for its future. What these will be is for now uncertain. The decision on governor's rule came after caretaker chief minister Omar Abdullah of the National Conference announced that he would be stepping down as the state required a full-time administrator and not one who was in no position to take decisions. This is the sixth time since 1977 that Kashmir finds itself under governor's rule. Abdullah, whose party has traditionally allied itself with the Congress, has also said that the situation on the borders of Kashmir had displaced thousands of people and that some sense of stability was needed in the region. How this will be brought about is as yet unclear. There had been talk of the PDP attempting to forge a coalition with the NC but almost everyone agrees such a set-up would be a weak one. The possibility of new elections is very real but for now the people of Kashmir watch and wait to see what happens next.*