



VIPRA/AP

Police officers detain a person in New Delhi, India's capital, amid a mass protest.

New Delhi Locks Down As Voter Protests Grow

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NEW DELHI—The government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi locked down India's capital with thousands of security forces in a bid to thwart a mass protest over an effort to clean up voter lists that critics say is stripping millions of Indians of the right to vote.

Last year, India's election commission began a cleanup of voter lists that, according to activists, have resulted in some 130 million people being cut from preliminary or final voter rolls.

Modi's government and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have said the cleanup—the first in two decades—was needed to preserve the integrity of the lists and remove deceased, duplicate or fraudulent voters, such as illegal immigrants they say have entered from India's eastern border with Bangladesh.

The anger over the voting lists has melded with grievances from young Indians struggling to find work, together presenting a stiff challenge to Modi. A youth move-

ment called the Cockroach Janta Party emerged in the spring following a scandal over a university entrance exam. The group has thrown its support behind those protesting the voting issue, joining in Saturday's protests in New Delhi.

In the Indian capital, police—who were deployed starting before dawn—stopped vehicles and pedestrians at yellow metal barricades. Dozens of metro stations were closed and many intercity trains were canceled.

Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of the Cockroach party, posted a video of himself and fellow protest leaders being taken into custody on their arrival at New Delhi's airport. "This is dictatorship," Dipke shouted as the police officers entered the plane.

Wall Street Journal reporters saw about 100 people be detained over the course of two hours.

Over the course of the day, thousands were detained in the capital, according to Cockroach party activists and multiple local news accounts. The Journal couldn't independently verify the numbers. A Delhi police

spokesman didn't respond to requests for comment.

Dipke and his two fellow activists were released following a court appearance Sunday.

On Saturday, Ishrat Ansari, 49, said she set off at dawn from her home in the north of the capital, walking 9 miles to reach the protest area.

She said she, her son and her daughter received notices this year from election authorities that their names had been flagged for discrepancies. In her case, she thinks it was because her name appeared on 2002 voter rolls with the honorific "Khatun," often used by Muslim women, which doesn't appear on her current identification. The social worker, who mainly goes by her first name, feared that she may have received the notice because she is a Muslim. "Is it because my name is Ishrat that I was cut?"

Modi's BJP has promoted a form of Hindu nationalism that his critics say discriminates against India's Muslim minority. The government denies that, and says its policies are focused on the progress of all Indians.