

# Women March as Politics, Equal Rights Dominate Discussion

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Demonstrators for women's rights listen to a speaker at the St. Louis Women's March on Jan. 20, one year after women and supporters rallied for awareness of women's issues following the inauguration of President Donald Trump.

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By

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Demonstrators gathered by the thousands in New York on Saturday to voice opposition to the Trump administration and rally support for strong voter turnout among women in the 2018 elections and beyond.

The rally at New York's Central Park kicked off on Saturday with demonstrators singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to loud applause. Ann Toback, executive director of the Workmen's Circle, a Jewish-advocacy group, spoke of immigration rights.

"All must be protected, all must be empowered. Because we all know it's for all of us to stand united," Ms. Toback said. "Attacks on any one of us are attacks on all of us."

While big gatherings are slated for New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Philadelphia this weekend, smaller cities such as Concord, N.H., Fargo, N.D., and Midland, Mich., also are hosting events.

Many organizers said they weren't expecting this weekend's crowds to rival the size of last year's big-city demonstrations, partly because there are a wider range of local events for people to choose from.



A crowd lines up near Central Park before the start of the Women's March on Saturday, Jan. 20, in New York City, one of many marches on the one-year anniversary of President Donald Trump's swearing-in to protest his past statements on women and to celebrate women's rights. Photo: Getty Images

Last year, for example, an estimated 175,000 people descended on Boston Common. This year, Massachusetts organizers coordinated 16 separate events across the state, from panel discussions and film screenings to activism training in places ranging from the university city of Cambridge to the fishing hub of New Bedford.

"We weren't going to be satisfied by repeating merely what we did on Boston Common last year," said Karen Cosmas, one of the coordinators. "It's time to show that what we've done has evolved over the past year into something more action-oriented."

"Last year, we marched. This year, we're putting our numbers to action," said Emma Collum, a Fort Lauderdale, Fla., lawyer who is an organizer of "Power to the Polls," an event scheduled for Sunday in Las Vegas. It is meant to kick off a national voter-registration tour of swing states, organizers say.

Beautiful weather all over our great country, a perfect day for all Women to March. Get out there now to celebrate the historic milestones and unprecedented economic success and wealth creation that has taken place over the last 12 months. Lowest female unemployment in 18 years!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) January 20, 2018

President Trump addressed the march with a post on Twitter that didn't speak to the themes of the demonstrators. "Get out there now to celebrate the historic milestones and unprecedented economic success and wealth creation that has taken place over the last 12 months. Lowest

female unemployment in 18 years!” the president tweeted.

In turning the focus to the ballot box, women’s march organizers are following a strategy deployed by the Tea Party, which arose in 2009 to oppose bank bailouts and the health-care overhaul and helped the Republican Party win control of the House of Representatives in 2010.

“There’s a deliberate attempt by women on the left to take a page out of the same playbook,” said Melissa Deckman, a professor of political science at Washington College who has studied the Tea Party.

Over the past year, many of the same people who participated in the 2017 women’s marches also organized town hall protests of Trump administration policies and threats to the Affordable Care Act, Ms. Deckman said. Some leaders of last year’s marches have formed March On, an organization that has started a super PAC to support candidates.

“We’ll go to red states and swing states where it matters most,” said Vanessa Wruble, executive director. She said March On already was involved in the November elections in Virginia and the special election for a Senate seat in Alabama, where Democrat Doug Jones notched an upset win.

A potential challenge will be keeping activists engaged through the 2020 presidential election, said Dana Fisher, a University of Maryland professor of sociology. “That’s a long march,” she said.

Mrinalini Chakraborty, a 27-year-old doctoral student in molecular anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, says she marched last year, has stayed active and promises to stay engaged. Her goal, she said, is “to turn it into concrete electoral wins, whether in federal or local elections.”

In New York, politics merged with broader discussions of sexual harassment and misconduct in the wake of scandals that have rocked the media and entertainment industries over the past year. Actress Veronica Dunne praised women in the crowd for showing up.

“Getting taken advantage of at a young age, I thought it was my fault,” she said. “...But because of you, that has all changed. Because of your bravery, women will no longer feel like they deserve ‘less than.’ Actresses will no longer be afraid to say no,” she said to applause.

Actress Rosie Perez praised women who came forward with allegations of sexual assault. She said the “MeToo” movement would be a central theme of this year’s march. The Complicated Collective, three women in red uniforms, then took the Central Park stage for a dance performance.

In Massachusetts, demonstrators holding handmade signs and wearing knitted pink hats poured into a 1 p.m. rally at Cambridge Commons, a historic park across from Harvard University. A marching band played as volunteers worked a voter-registration area. Volunteers at one table said they had signed up 100 voters.

Marcy Wanzer, a 55-year-old pediatric physical therapist from Littleton, Mass., smiled as she watched her 18-year-old daughter fill out forms necessary to cast a ballot in future elections. Ms. Wanzer said she believes the women's march movement will motivate young women to be politically active. "It feels like the beginning of an explosion of girls feeling stronger and having a voice," she said.

The Cambridge rally wasn't entirely harmonious. On the sidelines, a verbal confrontation broke out between women's marchers and counterprotesters. Police stood between the two groups as barbs flew. Some with the women's march rally called the other side "Nazis," while an antiabortion counterprotester with a megaphone shouted "You're evil" to women voicing support of abortion rights.

A mother and daughter, Mary Delaney, 56, and Cindy Dalton, 30, wearing navy women's-march hoodies, hoisted a sign that urged: "Use Your Voice. Use Your Vote." Ms. Delaney, a resident of Gardner, Mass., who works as a municipal procurement manager, said her presence at the march was more than symbolic.

"It's so important to be visible so people don't ignore us," she said. "But most important is that we go back to our community and stress, 'You have to go to the polls.' "

Ms Delaney said she voted regularly and kept up on news before the 2016 presidential election but hadn't been active politically. That changed, she said, after she participated in last year's women's march in Boston. She switched her political affiliation from political independent to Democrat, knocked on doors as a volunteer for a state political campaign and became a regular at elected officials' town hall meetings.

Standing nearby, Jan Cawley, 46, a registered nurse who had traveled from Plainfield, Conn., also described herself as a new activist. She said she used to avoid crowds but tossed hesitation aside to attend the Boston women's march last year. Since then, she said she has been calling legislators, going to public events held by lawmakers, signing petitions and engaging on social media about concerns including equal rights, immigration and health care.

"Our elected officials are supposed to represent us," Ms. Cawley said. "If we're loud enough, they can't ignore us."

Michael Moura, a 24-year-old retail-store supervisor and counterprotester, carried a "Make America Great Again" flag and wore a sweatshirt with a message printed on the back: "My president is Trump. If he's not yours then leave America."

Mr. Moura, of Stoughton, Mass., said he and a group were there to "stand up for conservative women." He said the women's march attendees hadn't given Mr. Trump a chance and were overlooking the fact that many women did support his election.

"I don't think he has hampered women's rights in the way they are thinking," he said.

Counterprotester Julie Guinto, a Trump supporter standing nearby, described herself as disheartened. “I’m actually scared for the country,” said Ms. Guinto, a 29-year-old freelance event planner who lives in Cambridge. “People have so much pent-up aggression toward Trump,” she said.

On Saturday morning in Washington, D.C., thousands of protesters gathered around the Lincoln Memorial before marching to the White House.

As children ventured across the frozen Reflecting Pool, politicians and lawmakers including Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D., Conn.), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D., N.Y.) and former Vice Presidential nominee Sen. Tim Kaine (D., Va.) delivered short speeches and called for protesters to pursue activism beyond the march.

“We don’t agonize,” said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) flanked by dozens of her House colleagues. “We organize.”

Many in the crowd said they were galvanized by last year’s Women’s March in Washington, which drew hundreds of thousands of protesters from across the country.

Lee Adams, a 69-year old man wearing a “Nasty Man” baseball cap, said he had never attended a protest before the election of Mr. Trump. “I started with the Women’s March in 2017 and I haven’t stopped,” Mr. Adams. “This is like my 15th march.”

Others in attendance were running for office in local jurisdictions. “We are engaged to the point of scary,” said Vangie Williams, who is running for Congress in Virginia this year. “I have six daughters and my government doesn’t represent them,” said Ms. Williams, who trained with Emerge America, a program designed to help Democratic women get elected. “And it’s not just because they’re women of color, but because they’re women.”

In Washington, the march was planned largely by organizers who sought to place a focus on inclusion, said Reagan Sampson, co-chair of the event. “We reached out to all these different communities and made sure that everybody could be heard who wanted to be heard.”

“I didn’t go last year in protest,” said Brittany T. Oliver, who led women from a Baltimore-based group called Not Without Black Women. This year, she was invited to speak in front of a crowd of approximately 25,000 people, according to organizers’ estimates. “The crowd is predominantly white,” Ms. Oliver said. “They definitely needed me here.”

### **Corrections & Amplifications**

Sen. Kamala Harris (D., Calif.) didn’t attend the women’s march in Washington. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that she had spoken at the march. (Jan. 20, 2018)

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