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USA

One year later and twice as pissed off

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Nicole Colson rounds up reports from the Women's Marches mobilized to protest one year of Trump and looks at the debates about building an effective opposition.

"Last year it felt like a funeral. This year it feels like a resistance."

Those words—“from one of the many hundreds of thousands of protesters who took to the streets on January 20 as part of the massive Women's Marches marking the shameful anniversary of Trump's first year in office”—summed up the political mood.

In two words: Pissed off.

The sheer size of the marches—smaller overall than last year's turnout of some 3.5 million, the largest single day of protest in U.S. history, but not by much—caught organizers and longtime activists off guard: as many as 300,000 in Chicago; 200,000 in New York City by the official count, but possibly twice that; half a million in Los Angeles; 65,000 in San Francisco and 50,000 across the Bay in Oakland.

Smaller towns and cities, including in reliably red states, turned out big time: some 8,000 in Omaha, Nebraska, for example.

In New York City, there were so many people that it took hours for the back of the march to step off—side streets that fed into the march were stuffed with people who waited hours to enter the main artery.

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Like last year, the marches were made up mostly of individuals, families and friends who self-organized to turn out, as opposed to contingents. Also like last year, homemade signs gave expression to the many messages that women and men wanted to send after a year of enduring Trump.

This was something that lead organizers of the Women's Marches nationally had hoped to contain.

Initially, the 2018 events were supposed to center around a Las Vegas conference, with a "Power to the Polls" theme, reflecting an emphasis on promoting votes for Democratic candidates in 2018. This would "harness our collective energy to advocate for policies and candidates that reflect our values," [the website noted](#).

But the balance swung the other way as pressure built among people determined to register their disgust with Trump in their own cities. Just like last year, when established liberal organizations were missing in action, newer or unaffiliated activists stepped in to make sure there was a Women's March 2018.

Of course, the "Power to the Polls" theme was a major message wherever the marches were held—it wasn't likely to be any other way given the bitter hatred of Trump and the hope for a consistent alternative from Democrats, [despite the party's long record of betrayals](#).

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But for every "Grab him by the polls" sign, there were two or three or five or 10 times more about urgent political issues—immigrant rights and the defense of the DREAMers, opposition to Islamophobia, challenging sexual violence, taking on racism and many more—around which a different kind of resistance could take shape.

In some cities, march organizers reportedly attempted to exclude voices from this year's marches. In Los Angeles, [a Palestinian group withdrew its support for the local march](#) in protest of actor Scarlett Johansson, a devoted opponent of the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israeli apartheid, being a featured speaker.

In Philadelphia, [organizers announced "heightened security measures"](#) negotiated with police, including searches of bags and metal detectors. By contrast, organizers in other cities explicitly challenged measures to limit participation, particularly from people of color.

But these debates, while important, contrasted with the mood of the crowds in city after city, by all reports. The spirit of solidarity predominated, with crowds of people chanting by turns against Trump, for immigrant rights, against racist violence, and for democracy and freedom.

In spite of the efforts of organizers to restrict the message to this coming year's elections, [the powerful account of a mainstream Philadelphia news outlet](#) is telling about the feelings of the people who took part:

A stranger called Stacy Shilling her "hero" on Saturday. Dozens of others asked to take a photo of her. That's because Shilling was donning a "Women's March on Philadelphia" hat and wearing a sign around her neck that read: "Nobody asks what my rapist was wearing."

"I have my voice back," [Shilling] said. "And I want to help other women find their voice, too."

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In Washington, D.C., the crowd was smaller than last year's massive 500,000—but far larger than the one that turned out to celebrate Trump's inauguration in 2017.

But of course, that didn't stop Trump from [sneering at marchers on Twitter](#) that it was "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."

If Trump doesn't have to eat those words, he ought to. "People were pretty damn mad last year, and they're pretty damn mad this year," [Tamika Mallory, co-president of the Women's March board, told The Associated Press](#).

At the heart of that anger is the #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment and violence that began several months ago. The references were everywhere on the marches. "#MeToo is coming for you," one sign on the New York march warned.

In San Francisco, where 65,000 turned out, 16-year-old marcher Joan spoke powerfully about why she wanted to march: "I was raped. I was victim-blamed all throughout high school, and it ruined me. But we're going to keep pushing and fighting. And I'm just tired of it."

"We were out here last year, and we're here again this year, and things haven't gotten better," said another marcher

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named Maria, who spoke about the need for sustained organizing to create lasting change. "[T]he key is we need to show up every single day. It's not just about going to a march or two—we need to show up for ourselves and for each other, and continue this battle wherever it takes us."

For others, there was a sense of collective relief that women can finally begin to talk about their experiences. As San Francisco marcher Luz Perez summed up:

When #MeToo broke out, I was scared that women were not going to be taken seriously about this issue, and I was scared for that disappointment. That's why it's important that we have to keep working really hard and keep talking about it with co-workers, friends, family, men, young, older and tell them, "Life is different through the eyes of a woman."

In Seattle, where more than 80,000 were in the streets, members of the "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" group led the march, and one of the largest contingents was the Reproductive Justice contingent, organized by Seattle Clinic Defense, Legal Voice and the Gender Justice League, among others.

Perhaps the most poignant image came from a march [in the Canadian town of Whitehorse in the Yukon](#). Holding a red dress aloft to commemorate First Nations women who are missing, murdered or sexually assaulted, a group marched through the snow in temperatures well below freezing.

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THE #METOO wave that has continued to give voice over the past several months to deep anger about sexual assault is opening a larger conversation about the need for social change.

That sense of collective injustice goes well beyond the issue of sexism: to the need to defend reproductive rights and fight for workplace justice and equal pay; stand in defense of immigrant rights; fight for LGBT rights; to build the anti-racist struggle and the fight against police brutality—in short, to stand in solidarity against oppression in all of its many forms.

Many people at the marches were deliberate in highlighting the need to build this idea that an injury to one is an injury to all.

"Fight ignorance, not immigrants," read a sign carried by trans activist Janet Mock at the march in LA. Another photo from the same march showed [young women carrying signs arguing for intersectional feminism and solidarity](#): "We march for ALL women: Black, immigrant, Muslim, disabled, poor, LGBT. Real feminism is intersectional."

In New York, a "Free Ahd Tamimi" contingent drew attention to the case of the Palestinian teenager who has been jailed for defending her family against the brutality of Israeli apartheid—and underlined that the fight for women's rights has to stretch to every corner of the world.

These are visible examples of a deepening political consciousness for a layer of people who are becoming active through #MeToo and the current anti-Trump sentiment, and who feel compelled to mobilize because the stakes seem so high—not just for women, but for all of the marginalized and exploited.

In Boston, where 5,000 gathered on Cambridge Common, high schoolers, families and others carried signs that read

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"If it's not intersectional, it's not feminism," "We are all DREAMers" and "End mass jailing and sanctioned murder of people of color."

One of the most electrifying speeches of the day was given by a woman from the Poor People's Campaign, who argued for Martin Luther King's vision of connecting racism, militarism, and materialism in the fight for sexual liberation.

In some cases, young people took the lead, like in Montpelier, Vermont, where 3,000 people rallied at a "March for Our Future" organized by grammar and high school students.

Other marchers were part of a previous generation who have protested before, but feel compelled to come out again. "I'm old," 63-year-old Debbie Droke [told NPR at the Washington, D.C., march](#). "I was doing this in the '70s. I was walking with Gloria Steinem. And I never thought in a million years that I'd have to be doing this again to bring focus to women's rights."

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AT EVERY march, of course, there were messages about throwing Trump and the Republicans out of office—reflected not only in the "Power to the Polls" theme of the marches and the post-march conference in Las Vegas, but also in the signs that many carried.

Accompanying that was the push in favor of the Democratic Party. In Chicago, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel—who has led the attack on Chicago schools and the women-led Chicago Teachers Union, and presides over a police force that routinely brutalizes young men of color—[declared that he was "proud to join" the march](#).

Many march attendees were enthusiastic both about marching in the streets and about voting—despite the record of the Democratic Party's broken promises and betrayals.

For socialists and other radicals who participated in the protests, that can be an ongoing discussion with co-workers, friends and family. So should the actions of organizers—in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, for example—that effectively excluded voices from the message of the marches. Anything that limits our struggles and creates obstacles to solidarity should be challenged.

But it's important for the left to attempt to confront questions and shape actions like these on the ground. In some cases, we can make the difference in helping argue for politics that stand against divisiveness and bigotry.

It was important, for example, that the left in New York helped lead a pro-Palestinian contingent on the Women's March.

In Boston, the presence of socialists and left-wing activists was critical when 20 members of the far-right group "Resist Marxism" attempted to march through Cambridge Common with hateful messages about "saving" women from "illegal immigration" and Sharia law.

Initially, there was confusion in the crowd about whether the group and its hateful message should be ignored. But left-wing activists brought people together in the moment, and after an intense and vocal confrontation, the bigots turned tail and left, proving the importance of not ceding political space to the right.



The left can't afford to abdicate responsibility for participating when people want to take action to oppose Trump and the awful reality of the status quo in American politics. There are important debates that start with what can be done beyond days of protest, however massive, like Saturday's. And the conventional message that many organizers tried to impose on the Women's Marches doesn't speak for all those who mobilized to participate.

One year ago, [left-wing author Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor challenged one reaction on the left to last year's massive demonstrations](#):

Liberals become radicals through their own frustrating experiences with the system, but also through becoming engaged with people who became radical before them. So when radicals who have already come to some important conclusions about the shortcomings of existing systems mock, deride or dismiss those who have not achieved the same level of consciousness, they are helping no one.

Think of what it would mean if only a part of the power and energy on display on Saturday were harnessed to struggles to stop the deportations and raids when ICE invades our communities; to defend abortion clinics when the right attempts to shut them down; to build mass resistance when the Republicans pass legislation like the giant tax-cut giveaway.

One year after Trump, the opposition to hate and reaction is going strong, fueled by the #MeToo phenomenon that is finding new forms of expression, including people taking the streets.

Now our task is to help build the connections between the many grievances and struggles represented on Saturday—and organize the resistance in the months to come.

Caty Caldwell, Nisha Cirino, Paul Fleckenstein, Kristen Martin, Natalia Tylim, Melanie West and Jenna Woloshyn contributed to this article.

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