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Women's marches

# From the Women's March to the International Women's Strike

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**The organizers of the January 21 Women's March on Washington were expecting a large turnout, but the almost 3m people who decided to take to the streets around the country, and in a number of cities around the world, went well beyond the most optimistic expectations and represented a serious embarrassment to Donald Trump. The most notable fact about the Women's March is the massive participation of people with no previous political experience, nor participation in protest. This fact alone, regardless of the political limitations that have characterized the call for the march and its public representation in the media, should be a reason for optimism, as well as an invitation to think seriously about how to maintain momentum and about the ways in which women's mobilizations can work as a trigger for the birth of a mass movement; tackling not only the aggressively right wing policies of the Trump administration, but also the effects of neoliberalism and institutional racism on the life of millions of women and the working class more generally.**

## The composition of the marches

While the narrative surrounding the march has been largely monopolized by liberal leaning organizations and spokespeople such as Planned Parenthood, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Sierra Club; and while initially only white people were included among the main organizers, the actual composition of the marches was much more diverse. One cannot explain the sheer number of participants without taking into account the complexity of motivations and factors that led people to take to the streets, as well as the diversity of the participants.

The marches certainly attracted disappointed Clinton supporters, but also worked as a catalyst for a more widely spread resentment and fear of Trump's unapologetic misogyny and sexist policies – particularly concerning reproductive rights – and for a general opposition to his islamophobia, racism, climate change denial, and authoritarianism. Moreover, they also attracted organizations and campaigns working on a number of issues ranging from the fight for the minimum wage to climate change, as well as many rank and file union members.

## Criticisms of the Women's March

In the days following the march, a number of criticisms have been leveraged against it, focusing mostly on three issues. The first was the march's self-representation as 'well-behaved' and 'peaceful', which obscured the fact that it was not respectability that explained the absence of arrests compared with the #DisruptJ20 demonstrations of the day before, but rather the massive presence of white women, who are much less likely to be harassed by the police than women of color.

The second issue was the liberal narrative surrounding the march, which exclusively focused on Trump's reactionary policy announcements and made little mention of class, obfuscating the fact that women's rights and living conditions, especially those of migrants and women of color, working class and unemployed women, as well as trans and queer women, have been under attack for years, including under Obama's administration.

A third concern was more of an expression of resentment against the mass of people who felt motivated enough to

take to the streets to protest against Trump, but did not feel motivated enough to take part in Black Lives Matter demonstrations and in protests against police brutality against people of color of the last few years.

Even taking into account all of its pitfalls and contradictions, however, it would be a mistake to think that there is no connection whatsoever between the Women's March and the mobilizations of recent years, from Occupy to Fight for Fifteen, from Black Lives Matter to the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline. In fact, while Trump's election has triggered an increase in the scale of mobilization, the various struggles of recent years have been key in shifting popular perceptions concerning protests, their legitimacy, and their efficacy.

While there is no perfect political continuity between the call for the Women's March and these more radical, racial justice and class-based mobilizations, one could hardly imagine almost 3m people taking to the streets in a single day without the groundwork laid by the last five years of nation-wide social mobilizations. A change of scale unavoidably entails a more heterogeneous composition of protest, both on a social and on a political level, and therefore political limitations of all sorts, but the large participation in the Women's March should be seen as one of the outcomes of mass social resistance that was years in the making.

## Toward the March 8 Women's Strike

Another important element of analysis for understanding the potentialities created by the Women's March is the international wave of women's struggles that has taken place in recent months across a number of countries: women led strikes and demonstrations have swept through Poland, Argentina, Italy, Ireland, and elsewhere. It is too early to say whether we are witnessing the birth of a new feminist movement, but the signals certainly look promising.

This context should be central to the discussions about what to do next in the wake of the Women's March and of the more recent demonstrations against Trump's Muslim ban. The International Women's Strike network has called for a strike on March 8th. [\[1\]](#) So far, feminist collectives and coalitions from Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, Russia, Scotland, South Korea Sweden, Turkey, and Uruguay have joined the call and are making preparations.

The various coalitions working on this are articulating their own platforms and demands, which in most cases combine together opposition to male and sexist violence against women and LGBT people, social demands such as the minimum wage, labor rights, equal pay, public services and health care, opposition to racism and xenophobia and defense of migrant women, environmental issues and reproductive rights.

The forms of action vary by country and include demonstrations, pickets, boycotts, sex strikes, and direct action. Moreover, in some countries, such as Italy, coalitions of women and radical trade unions are working on creating the conditions for a wave of women led workplace strikes.

Joining the March 8 International Women's Strike and creating and expanding strike coalitions in the United States would not only help maintain the momentum generated by the Women's Marches, but would also be a step towards reshaping the mobilization along the lines of international and anti-imperialist solidarity, advancing the leadership and agency of racialized, migrant, and trans women, asserting the centrality of the fight against institutional racism and islamophobia, and bolstering opposition to the dismantling of social reproduction provisions and labor rights. Against Trump, but also beyond Trump.

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[1] The website is [here](#). The call can be found in English and Castilian.