



## **Nevertheless, she persisted: Mobilization after the Women's March**

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### **Abstract**

The Women's March in Washington D.C. had a crowd size of approximately 750,000 people, possibly much higher. Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City and numerous other cities across the United States experienced large and diverse demonstrations. What is particularly noteworthy is both the size of individual demonstrations and the number of demonstrations across the country. With such high levels of participation, and with such an intersectional platform, the Women's March created an inclusive, large-scale social movement and was an impressive display of political mobilization.

We are interested in whether the participants in the Washington D.C. march were likely to continue to participate in other forms of social mobilization as compared to participants who marched elsewhere, or who did not march at all that day. We administered a survey to assess whether people who attended the women's march in D.C. were indeed influenced to participate in more marches, and importantly, for a greater range of causes, than people who attended smaller marches or who did not march at all. We found that our hypotheses were partially supported in that participants did not differ in their level of protest participation before the women's march. However, whether participants marched in D.C. or elsewhere did make a significant difference on future intentions; participating in any march that day increased interest in future protests for a wider set of causes.

Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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*Keywords:* Women's March, feminism, social movements, activism

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Driving to Washington, D.C. from the Midwest the day before the Women's March, every rest stop along the six-hundred mile trip was filled with women from all parts of the United States who were also heading to the march. Riding the Metro from Maryland in to D.C. on the morning of the Women's March, virtually every inch of every train car was full people headed to the protest. As we made our way, the city streets filled with people holding signs that addressed sexism, inequality, the environment, xenophobia, the Dakota Access Pipeline, racism, reproductive rights, homophobia, and islamophobia. The crowd grew as the speakers took to the stage for four hours of speeches that ranged in scope and focus (see Image 1). The point, quite clearly, was that poverty, police brutality, climate change, and a host of other social issues are "women's issues."

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Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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*Image 1.* The 2017 Women's March in Washington, D.C. copyright authors.

Early estimates of the crowd size were of about 470,000 people in attendance (Wallace & Parlapiano, 2017), but being there it was quite clear that there were far more people at the march. Indeed, later estimates put the crowd size at approximately 750,000, with a high end estimate of 1 million people (Pressman & Chenoweth, 2017). Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City and numerous other cities across the country experienced large and diverse demonstrations. Particularly noteworthy are both the size of individual demonstrations and the number of demonstrations across the country: some accounts estimated that well over a million people in the United States, and possibly three million, demonstrated that day (Darrow, 2017). With such high participation, and with such an intersectional platform that connected a wide range of political concerns, the Women's

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March became an inclusive, large-scale display of political mobilization. But will people continue to mobilize after this impressive and historic event?

This short article originated in this journal's call for papers seeking responses and reactions to the Women's March. The journal's call in the days after the march provided a valuable, nearly 'real time' opportunity to ask whether the participants in Washington, D.C. are likely to continue participating in other forms of social mobilization as compared to participants who marched elsewhere or who did not march at all that day. The brief study we conducted indicates that in fact participation in any march that day, whether in the nation's capital or not, generated significant enthusiasm for future participation, though with further studies of future protest events a more comprehensive and robust longitudinal assessment will be possible to ascertain whether this in fact occurs. The article, then, provides a snapshot of early reactions and attitudes to future protest participation.

Contemporary social movements research sheds some light on the possibilities for continued mobilization in the mid- and long terms. The term social movement is rather wide ranging and used in a variety of ways among scholars, but for our purposes we mean collections of organizational and individual actors who carry out political or cultural contestation, often through a variety of formal and inform tactics and strategies. We emphasize that social movements are sustained, collective and popularly based engagements with authorities, though in some cases they may be emergent and less self-consciously organized (Smith & Verdeja, 2013).

The short time frame available to conduct this study did not permit us at this stage to investigate why people protested or the various mechanisms of protest recruitment that may have operated here, though a substantive body of research has emerged showing that recruitment is best modeled as a multistage process over time (Kitts 2000; Lim 2008)

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and is most successful if conducted by members of one's own social networks (Schussman and Soule 2005). Social movement scholars have found that through mobilization social actors come to see themselves and others as members of larger movements and develop a host of affective attachments to these movements (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polleta, 2004; Polleta & Jasper 2001). Participants' identities, values, and interests shape and are shaped through interactions with others in the movement as well as through the continued engagement with opposing actors, such as authorities. This sustained interaction, especially in highly performative and symbolic instances of marches or protests, may help create and strengthen future social networks, which in turn make further social movement participation likely (Passy, 2003; Tindall, 2004). Given previous participation in collective action, ties to other activists and a shared set of identities, goals and values, actors may come to mobilize for a broader range of issues and causes in the future (Kitts, 2000; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Indeed, as one scholar has argued, "It is now common place that social movements connections to people who are already mobilized are what draw new people into protest movements..." (Gould 2003, p. 236). We anticipate that research on future women's marches will be able to investigate this further and examine whether the findings presented here confirm this in the case of these marches.

## **Overview of study**

To assess whether people who attended the Women's March in D.C. on January 21, 2017 were indeed influenced to participate in more marches, and importantly, for a greater range of causes, than people who attended smaller marches or who did not march at all, we administered a survey to a large cross-section of people throughout the United States. This study was somewhat exploratory in nature given that an event of this scale

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has not occurred in recent history, but we did have three guiding hypotheses detailed below:

H<sub>1</sub>: Participants would not differ in their level of protest participation before the women's march.

H<sub>2</sub>: Participants who attended the women's march in Washington, D.C. would show increased interest in participating in a wider range of future marches than participants who attended marches elsewhere.

H<sub>3</sub>: Participants who attended any march would show increased interest in participating in a wider range of future marches than participants who did not attend any march.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited from social media groups and forums for people who were interested in participating in the women's march or other forms of political engagement. Online recruitment through social media has become widely used in the social sciences (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004), and helps to ensure a geographically diverse pool of participants who have a common interest or experience, which was important for this study. Ninety-five participants completed the survey, of whom 22 (23.2%) attended the march in D.C., 38 (40%) attended a women's march on January 21, 2017 in another location, and 35 (36.8%) did not attend a march that day. Although these are not large sample sizes they fall within the acceptable range of a minimum of twenty participants per condition for social psychological research using one-way

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ANOVAs (Wilson VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007). Participant demographics varied, with an average age of 34.64, and a range from 20 to 61. The vast majority of participants were cisgender women (92.6%), with some cisgender men (3.2%), one transgender woman (1%), and one participant who preferred not to answer. 80% of the participants were White, 7.4% were multiracial, 4.2% were Latina/o/x, 3.2% were Black, 2.1% were another ethnicity that was not listed, and 1% were Middle Eastern. Economic status varied considerably, with 4.2% reporting income under \$20,000, 16.8% \$20,001-\$50,000, 7.4% \$50,001-\$70,000, 15.8% \$70,001-\$90,000, 10.5% \$90,001-\$110,000, 10.5% \$110,001-\$130,000, 7.4% \$130,001-\$150,000, 20% more than \$150,001, and 5.3% who preferred not to answer. The majority of participants (68.4%) were of U.S. nationality, 7.4% were of European nationality, and 1% were of Latin American nationality. Political affiliation was measured on a 1-100 scale, with 1 being very liberal, 50 being moderate, and 100 being very conservative. On average, participants were fairly liberal ( $M = 17.86$ ,  $SD = 12.49$ ), with a range from 1-48.

## Materials

All participants completed a brief survey that asked whether they attended the women's march in D.C., a women's march in a different location, or did not attend a march that day. If they indicated that they attended a march elsewhere they were asked to report the location of where they marched that day. They were next asked if in the past 10 years they had marched for causes related to Women's rights/gender issues, LGBTQ rights (marriage equality, pride), Racial justice issues (Black Lives Matter), Reproductive issues (Planned Parenthood, pro-life), Environmental justice (Climate change), Indigenous rights (NoDAPL), Anti-war/peace, Economic justice (Pro-union, labor rights), Refugee rights (immigration reform, DREAM act), or another cause that they were then asked to specify.

Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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Additionally, participants were informed that they could check all the options that applied. Next, they were asked the likelihood of whether they would participate in any marches of the above mentioned topics sometime in the future. Finally, participants all completed demographic questions about age, gender identity, ethnicity, family income, country of origin, and political affiliation.

## **Procedure**

Participants were recruited from social media groups that were directly connected to women's march in some way, that is, the groups either served as a source for organizing before or after the march. These sites were specifically used to help ensure a sample that was politically engaged in some way, and showed some interest in participating in a women's march. The survey was administered online, and after indicating consent, participants completed the brief questionnaire about their participation in the women's march, past marches, and intent for future marches. Next, they completed several questions about their background information, and upon exiting, received a written debriefing form that explained the full hypothesis. The entire procedure took approximately five minutes to complete.

## **Results**

### **Main Effects**

In order to eliminate any potential demographic differences, all of the demographic variables were analyzed via one-way ANOVAs to determine whether personal

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background may influence increased interest in participating in future marches. There were no significant main effects of gender identity, age, ethnicity, income, or nationality of origin, thus, all of the following analyses are presented without any covariate controls.

### **Previous participation**

The first hypothesis was that participants would not differ in their level of protest participation before the women's march. A one-way ANOVA supported this hypothesis such that there was not a significant difference in political participation before the women's march, and thus, the hypothesis was supported,  $F(2, 92) = .39, p = .67$ . Specifically, participants who did attend the march in D.C. had previously attended .63 protests, participants who attended a march in another city had previously attended .97 events, and participants who did not attend a women's march had previously attended .80 events. This hypothesis was important to establish that participants who did or did not march in the women's march did not already vary in their level of political participation.

### **Washington, D.C.-specific increased participation**

The second hypothesis was that participants who attended the women's march in D.C. would show increased interest in participating in a wider range of future marches than participants who attended marches elsewhere. Interest scores were computed by subtracting the number of previous march participation rates from the interest in participating in future marches rates, thereby creating a "change" score. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant difference in interest in participating in future marches between participants who participated in the D.C. march as compared to participants who marched elsewhere,  $F(1, 57) = .13, p = .71$ . Indeed, all of these

Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

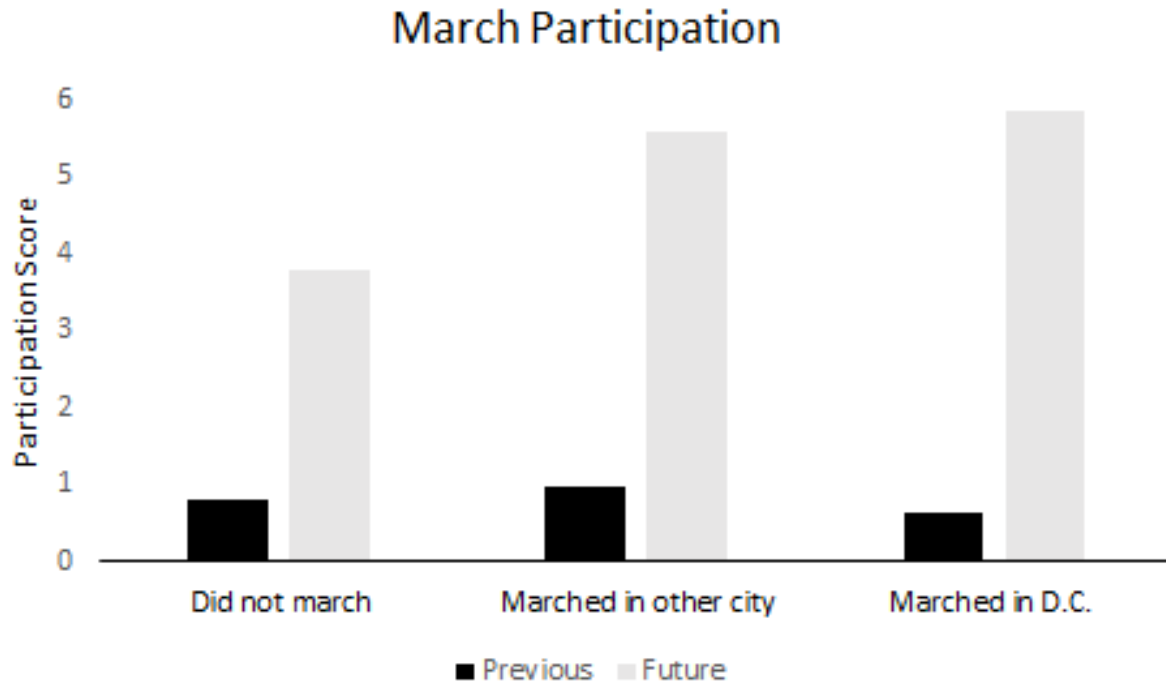
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participants showed an increase in interest in participating (D.C.,  $M = 5.8$ ; elsewhere  $M = 5.6$ ).

### **General increased participation**

Importantly, the third hypothesis was that participants who attended any march would show increased interest in participating in a wider range of future marches than participants who did not attend any march. A one-way ANOVA supported this hypothesis,  $F(2, 91) = 5.65, p = .005$ . Post-hoc Bonferroni comparisons reveal specifically, that participants who attended the march in D.C. ( $M = 5.85, p = .01$ ) and participants who attended the march elsewhere ( $M = 5.60, p = .01$ ) both had a significant increase in interest in participating than participants who did not attend any march that day ( $M = 3.80; p = .01$  see figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Mean participation scores before the Women's March, and interest in participation in future marches for those who did not march in the Women's March, those who marched in another city, and those who marched in Washington, D.C.

## Discussion

Two of our three hypotheses were supported, in that participants did not vary in their levels of previous participation (hypothesis 1), but did significantly differ in their interest in participating in more, and more diverse, marches in the future. Specifically, participants who attended any women's march on January 21, 2017 showed an increased

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interest in future participation compared to participants who did not participate in a march that day (hypothesis 3). The hypothesis that participants who attended the Washington D.C. march would show an increased interest in mobilizing compared to participants who marched in other cities was not supported (hypothesis 2). Taken together, these results support previous social movement research findings that prior experiences in collective mobilization, including protests and marches, increase the likelihood of future protest participation (Kitts, 2000).

The participants in our study who protested outside of D.C. marched in a wide-range of locations, from large cities (Atlanta, GA, Chicago, IL, New York, NY), to smaller towns across the nation (South Bend, IN, Pocatello, ID, Ithaca, NY). Regional and local marches in locations outside of D.C. varied greatly in crowd size from several hundred to hundreds of thousands, yet the impact was the same. Importantly, participants who participated in any women's march were not only more interested in participating in future protests, but also in a wider range of marches. For instance, many of the participants reported previously marching for gender issues or reproductive rights. After the women's march they reported wanting not only to continue marching for these issues, but also issues connected to poverty, racial justice, immigrant rights, and more, meaning that they were not just more motivated to mobilize for previous causes, but they were also more motivated to protest for a greater range of causes. Although there were thoughtful and meaningful reports and critiques after the march regarding the displays of white feminism at the D.C. march (Ramanathan, 2017), our findings suggest that while many of the marchers may have had a more limited sense of activism before the march, their level of engagement expanded afterwards. The platform of the Women's March was inclusive and intersectional, and it appears that it achieved part of its goal in helping people understand that women's issues concern a wide range of justice causes.

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This study is an early, preliminary exploration of the marches, and naturally it includes several limitations. First and foremost, we only gauged interest in participating in future events, not actual participation in subsequent actions. This was because we collected data immediately after the women's march in response to this special journal issue, and thus, not enough time had passed since the march wherein participants could have already participated in other events or actions. It is certainly possible that many people who reported that they planned on participating in additional protests will not do so. However, there was a clear difference in motivation immediately following the march, and social psychological research consistently demonstrates that it is easier change an attitude rather than a behavior (Festinger, 1962), but that once the behavior has changed by, for example, participating in a march, people usually have a strong desire to stay consistent in that behavior, particularly if the behavior is public (Stone & Fernandez, 2008). Another limitation is that, for obvious reasons given the issues raised at the marches and the new government's right-wing agenda, this sample was heavily liberal, with no participants identifying as conservative. As such, we can only generalize these findings to people who identify as liberal, and we hesitate to infer whether conservatives would also mobilize in a similar manner. Additionally, and unsurprisingly given the nature of the marches, the sample was also heavily skewed towards women; thus, these findings cannot be generalized to men. However, we did not find any significant differences on interest to participate based on other demographic information, such as ethnicity and income, so it is possible that people of varying gender identities and political affiliations may respond similarly to mobilization.

These limitations could be addressed in future research, particularly research that is longitudinal and measures actual behavior over time. A follow-up study could also potentially include a larger, more diverse sample, to better determine whether there are

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demographic differences in whether people mobilize after large-scale events similar to the Women's March. However, the Women's March was a distinct and unique event in its size and scope, and thus, it may be difficult to replicate its effect. Our results suggest that the momentum from the march will mobilize and resonate for many people for some time.

In the one month that has elapsed between the Women's March and the point of writing this article, the authors have witnessed multiple groups forming and organizing at the local and state levels. We have seen coworkers, friends and family members who marched in cities across the United States mobilize around this unifying experience. We have seen people resist and march for justice.

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Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Equality and  
Diversity  
Special Issue: Women's March & Trump  
Volume 3, Issue 2. 2017.



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Submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Accepted on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017

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