

Women's March events demonstrate mass support for abortion rights

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Mass protests in support of the right to an abortion took place over the weekend. An estimated 250,000 people gathered at more than 600 rallies and marches across the country on Saturday to oppose the Texas abortion ban and the refusal of the Supreme Court to uphold *Roe v. Wade*.

The scale of the protests demonstrates the broad support for abortion rights in the United States. There were an estimated 10,000 or more at protests in Austin and Houston, Texas, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and New York City, while thousands more gathered in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Boston and dozens of other large cities. There were protests in hundreds of smaller cities and towns, ranging from college towns to regional centers.

While the overwhelming majority of those participating were women, there were substantial numbers of men as well, gathered to voice their support for abortion rights. College students and other young people made up a huge proportion of those attending, but there were marchers of all ages, from children to the elderly.

The marchers took COVID-19 more seriously than the corporate media and political establishment. Most were masked and many observed a six-foot social distancing, and appeals to keep masks on and maintain distance were regularly issued by speakers and march organizers.

Many marchers targeted the Texas state government and Governor Greg Abbott for stinging attacks. One hand-printed sign which hit its target denounced Abbott for combining the abortion ban and a "let it rip" policy on the COVID-19 pandemic. The sign read: "Texas: Where a virus has reproductive rights and a woman doesn't."

There were numerous attacks (from marchers, not the interminable pro-Democratic Party speakers) on the role of organized religion in the attack on reproductive rights. One mocking sign, hand-lettered in the style of a Bible verse, read: "Thou shalt not mess with women's reproductive rights: Fallopian 10:2."

The spirited nature and wide scope of the demonstrations are reflective of the broad support for abortion rights that exists in the general population. According to polling data gathered by Pew Research earlier this year, 59 percent of people in the United States believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

Despite this popular support, the size of the protests was considerably smaller than the millions who showed up for the inaugural Women's Marches in 2017, the day after Trump's inauguration. This must be attributed to a number of factors, including a justifiable concern over COVID-19, and an equally justifiable sentiment, after years of such protests, that pleading with corporate-controlled politicians to protect democratic rights is a dead end.

There are likely to be, as well, illusions that with the end of the Trump administration, the threat to democratic rights, including abortion rights, has receded. However, the Guttmacher Institute, which carries out systematic studies on the issue, reported that more state laws were introduced to restrict abortion rights in the six months since Biden was inaugurated than in any previous six-month period.

The severity of the attack in Texas, combined with the upcoming Supreme Court hearing on a Mississippi law which could provide the vehicle for a decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* outright, might be expected to garner a larger response. That this was not the case is the result of the feckless politics of the Democratic Party and its supporters who organized the rallies.

One particularly disoriented aspect of the rallies were signs proclaiming that "men" in general, not right-wing or bigoted men (and women), were the primary threat to abortion rights. This presents abortion rights as a gender issue rather than a class issue, in keeping with the Democratic Party's advocacy of identity politics.

But restrictions on abortion overwhelmingly impact the

working class and poor. Wealthy women will always have access to safe abortions. Regardless of the legal status of abortion services, women from the ruling class may simply use their wealth and power to slip past the law and avoid the crushing penalties.

The focus on gender ignores the reality that female governors like Kristi Noem in South Dakota and Kay Ivey in Alabama are just as fervent in their opposition to abortion rights as Greg Abbott in Texas.

Pew Research demonstrates that 56 percent of men support abortion rights, compared to 62 percent of women. Much more influential than gender are factors such as religious and political sentiments.

Many rallies were addressed by local and state Democratic officials, along with a host of Democratic-aligned celebrities, peddling the same electoral posturing that has achieved nothing for abortion rights in decades.

At the rally in Austin, Texas, was a slate of Texas Democratic Party politicians, including US Rep. Lloyd Doggett, Texas State Senator Sarah Eckhardt, and other local officials. They were joined by a slate of speakers who doused themselves in identity politics, introducing themselves as “a woman of color,” “a Latina woman,” and “an Asian-American ally of the transgender community.”

Following the rollout of their identity credentials, these speakers proceeded to do little more than promote the Democratic Party and offer meaningless displays of disapproval of the fascist Republican Party.

One speaker stated, “The Republicans are coming to take away your rights and only we can stop them.” Another encouraged attendees to “blow your whistles on three to show the GOP our voices will be heard.”

The Democratic Party exploits mass opposition to attacks on abortion rights to further its own electoral fortunes, but once in office, the Democrats do nothing to defend or expand this democratic right, accepting such atrocities as the Hyde Amendment, which bars most federal funding for abortion services.

As recently as 2018, Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi denied that there was any “litmus test” on abortion rights for Democratic Party candidates. In other words, Democratic congressmen who are anti-choice can still expect the full support of the party apparatus, as well as anti-choice candidates who win a party primary.

The ruling on *Roe v. Wade* was issued in 1973, nearly 50 years ago. Since then, the Democratic Party has made no serious effort to codify abortion rights in federal law. When it has had majorities in the House and Senate, the

Democratic Party failed to pass any federal legislation that would prevent what is occurring in Texas today. Currently, there is more federal legislation restricting abortion access than expanding it.

Along with the appeals to electoral politics were frequent references to late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. News reports show signs and posters urging the Supreme Court to intervene on behalf of abortion rights. A Supreme Court with a 6-3 ultra-right majority can hardly be entrusted with the defense of fundamental democratic rights.

The fight to protect abortion rights must be taken out of the hands of the Democratic Party. It has done nothing to mobilize any meaningful effort to protect abortion rights beyond using the threat to *Roe v. Wade* to promote its electoral interests.

But now there is a Democratic-controlled House, a Democratic-controlled Senate, and a Democrat in the White House. Yet the Democratic Party has proven incapable of passing its own voting rights bills, not just because there is Republican opposition, but because representatives and senators of its own party do not wish to protect democratic rights.

A party that is abandoning the most fundamental democratic right of them all, the right to vote, cannot be relied upon to protect the right of a woman to get an abortion.

Working people must break with this dead-end political orientation. The Democratic Party is offering nothing to defend women’s rights or democratic rights in general. The only social force capable of defending abortion rights is the working class itself. It must not put faith in the confused, disoriented and reactionary political conceptions promoted by the Democratic Party.

The capitalist system is clawing back every concession made over the past century of working class struggle. Only through the fight for socialism can these gains, including the right to an abortion, be protected from the right-wing politics of the two major capitalist parties.



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