Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) Rally and March January 3, 2026 in San Diego Crowd Size

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Summary

The PSL rally responding to the U.S. invasion of Venezuela was held at Waterfront Park in San Diego on January 3, 2026. Because the event was organized within only a few hours, the expected turnout was modest. Despite the short notice, approximately 585 participants gathered to hear speakers and take part in a brief march.

The primary crowd estimate was derived from direct hand counting, and the result was independently confirmed using standard crowd density and area-based estimation methods applied to the section of the park surrounding the fountain.

Crowd Size Estimation

Accurate crowd size estimation is essential for gauging the scale and societal impact of public demonstrations. Recent advancements in the use of UAVs have significantly enhanced the precision of such assessments (Choi-Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). However, the practical deployment of drones is prohibited by cost, required training, and strict regulations—particularly in urban areas or directly above protest crowds.

Fortunately, the widespread availability of mobile phone cameras, combined with social media and online geospatial tools such as Google Earth Pro, has empowered organizers to apply traditional crowd estimation techniques with greater accuracy. These traditional methods involve calculating the total area occupied by a crowd and applying density estimates in addition to use of crowd flow measurements.

1. The hand counting estimate was conducted using an iPhone 17 running an RLM-11CX RPN calculator emulation. All four registers of the RPN calculator were loaded with the number 1. When the "+" key was pressed, the count is incremented by 1. The count was taken by walking the perimeter of the crowd and into the crowd when necessary to score each individual present. A total of 585 individuals were recorded.

The standard crowd density and area-based estimation method used an area occupied (5,653 sq ft) and density estimate of 10 sq ft per person, to estimate the crowd size at 565 individuals (Fig 1). This estimate is close to the hand count value of 585 above. However, this method does not take into account the variation in density of the crowd that ranged from DL1 to DL3 based upon Choi-Fitzpatrick, A, T. Juskauskas and B. Sabur. 2018. As a result, this value is very likely an underestimate.

Conclusion

While estimating crowd sizes remains complex, employing consistent and reproducible methods is essential for accurate assessments. Future research should focus on refining these techniques to better capture the dynamics of public demonstrations. (Choi-Fitzpatrick et. al. 2018).

References

1. Choi-Fitzpatrick, A, T. Juskauskas and B. Sabur. 2018. All the protestors fit to count: using geospatial affordances to estimate protest event size. Interface. 10:297-321. Retrieved 4/7/2025 chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Interface-10-1-2-Choi-Fitzpatrick-et-al.pdf
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Figure 1. Google Earth estimate of area that the crowd occupied during the speech portion of the Rally when most people were gathered near the speaker. At 10 sq ft per person, the area is expected to represent 565 individuals. This is close to the hand count of 585.