

# Glenn Beck rally sparks debate over crowd size

By [Michael Calderone](#)

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Glenn Beck kicked off Monday's radio show by thanking the many attendees at Saturday's "Restoring Honor" rally in front of the Lincoln Memorial — at least 500,000 by his count. Beck said he's "still waiting on the real number" and plans to look closely during his 5 p.m. Fox News show at photos of the large crowd assembled on the National Mall.

The rally — which took place on the 47th anniversary of Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the memorial — drew a good deal of controversy, with civil rights leaders holding a countermarch. But the event largely kept free of overt political references, as Beck (a longtime scourge of the Obama White House) had pledged it would. It [stressed religious themes, together with celebrations of noncontroversial virtues](#) such as charity and national service.

Even though Beck is still tabulating a crowd estimate, it can be expected to be [significantly higher than the number CBS News reported](#) over the weekend: 87,000.

[Video: [Thousands come to D.C. for Beck rally](#)]

CBS commissioned an estimate from [AirPhotosLive](#), a company that provides crowd sizes based on aerial photos. CBS noted that there's a margin of error of plus or minus 9,000. So, by this estimate, there were as few as 78,000 attendees or as many as 96,000.

Unlike CBS, most news organizations balked at getting that specific (or hiring professionals to make a head count). Some media outlets played it safe with "tens of thousands," a count that's indisputable. Others went with "hundreds of thousands." Perhaps the only thing the media agreed on — including this reporter on hand — is that a very large number of people assembled to hear Beck speak.

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The media, in years past, would typically cite the National Parks Service estimate, along with the organizer's estimates (which tend to be higher). But the Parks Service stopped providing crowd estimates in 1997 after organizers of the 1995 Million Man March assailed the agency for allegedly undercounting the turnout for that event.

**Click image to see photos of Glenn Beck's 'Restoring Honor' rally**



AP/Jacquelyn Martin

Beck and other conservative commentators routinely criticize the mainstream media for what they consider unfair coverage of the right. Beck, early on, joked about just getting "word from the media that there is over 1,000 people here today." The conservative crowd ate up the line. A couple hours later, Beck told the audience about media reports of 300,000 to 500,000 people, which he said means the real number is even higher.

Without official estimates, any numbers published by reputable news organizations — like the 300,000 estimate — quickly got picked up and repeated enough to almost become fact. Domenico Montanaro, an NBC News off-air political reporter, tweeted Saturday that [a Parks Service official said there were probably 300,000 to 325,000](#) in attendance (even though the Parks Service wasn't

officially counting). The New York Times [cited NBC News' estimate of 300,000](#), and [the Drudge Report amplified the tally even more](#).

On Monday, MSNBC host Joe Scarborough repeated 500,000 several times during "Morning Joe." (That's the number organizers of the event gave to The Upshot on Saturday.) Beck said Monday that he didn't think there were a million people there as some have claimed.

It's doubtful there will be a consensus any time soon. Most likely, Beck fans will cite the organizer's numbers in the half-million-or-more range. Critics might go with CBS's estimate. But those who attended the rally, or who watched it on television, may simply go with their own personal, unscientific estimate rather than the numbers furnished by either media reports or organizers.

Republican [U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann told supporters shortly after the rally](#) that "we're not going to let anyone get away with saying there were less than a million here today — because we were witnesses."

(Photo of the Beck rally: AP/ Jacquelyn Martin)

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