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Women of protest: main social actors, motives for participation, expected results of women's strike protests in Poland

Introduction

In August 1980, people passing by the Gdańsk Shipyard apparently saw a banner hung on the wall with the slogan "Women, do not disturb, we are fighting for Poland!" The meaning of this slogan clearly defined the place and role of women in the public sphere in the socio-political reality of the time. Men were defenders of the nation, heroes of the fight for freedom and independence, and creators of a new social order. They were the flagship figures and the main members of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity," whose aim was to protect workers' rights and fight the communist regime. Of course, women were also active members and organizers of this movement, but they were insufficiently represented and appreciated there – one can even talk about "non-female Solidarity" [Malinowska 2005]. Meanwhile, women played a very important role in the long-term process of overthrowing communism, and as a consequence – they built a civil society in Poland and they accelerated the democratization of the country. Women within the Women's Operational Group organized a conspiratorial network and were involved in publishing and distributing independent press, among others "Tygodnik Mazowsze." They hid the escaped leaders of "Solidarity," fed and supported them. They were brave, strong, determined, had great organizational, management and leadership skills; they defeated communism in Poland [Penn 2006]. As Padraic Kenney rightly emphasizes, female resistance seemed to be stronger and more effective in the fight against communism, primarily because women's anger and indignation resulted from gender roles and tasks that they performed in the private sphere (pregnancy, motherhood, childcare, household budget etc). The existence of problems related to unemployment, lack of food, poor protection of women's health, failure to respect their reproductive

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rights could not be questioned, and the lack of solutions in this regard, the lack of any help or support from the state exposed the defects and neglect of the communist regime [Kenney 1999: 425]. In this sense, women can even be considered the leading figures of the opposition, leaders of the resistance movement – as a group that directly and uncompromisingly confronts the state authorities, especially within the framework of “street politics.” Although women’s involvement and civic activity is an indisputable fact, for a long time women’s activities remained unnoticed and disregarded. This was because, in the official and binding discourse, women were to – in line with the shipyard workers’ slogan cited earlier – “not to disturb,” and thus not to engage in political events, not to express their opinions, not to articulate their civic interests, not to initiate social movements. They should remain politically passive, not manifest their presence and subjectivity in the public sphere. They should, on the other hand, fulfill “female” duties in the private sphere: cook, clean, feed the family, look after the children, protect the house, faithfully wait for men. At the same time, they had to go to work, earn money, run a household on their own and raise children – in a situation where the men were active in the anti-communist underground or, because of their political involvement, they were imprisoned. The marginalization and exclusion of women from the political mainstream took place in two ways. First, at the level of national and church discourses, which were paternalistic and patriarchal in nature, and which stereotypically defined the roles, positions, and statuses of women in society. Secondly, through the applied practices of power, which were manifested primarily in everyday life – in the process of creating women’s interests, aspirations, and desires, in the process of disciplining the body and taming female sexuality.

In October 2020, women went onto the streets of Poland, carrying banners with the slogan “This is war!” Thus began a series of nationwide protests by women caused by the tightening of the right to legal abortion. The main purpose of these strikes was to oppose and express their resistance to the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, which stated that abortion – in the case of suspicion of “severe and irreversible impairment of the fetus or an incurable disease that threatens its life” [Journal of Laws of 1997 No. 9, item 49] – is inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. This premise was previously recognized as a reason for a legal abortion. On the day of the announcement of the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal, mass protests and demonstrations began in many towns and villages in Poland and abroad: Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Italy, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Australia (www.oko.press). Particular intensity could be observed in the period October-December, which may be due to the “freshness effect” – that is, the moods and thoughts that arose just after the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal was announced. Moreover, the resonance and the impact of these protests resulted from strong social emotions – enormous anger, agitation, frustration, terror, and fear for the future of Polish women. According to official police data, 410 protests took place in the country on October 28 (summit day), and 430,000 people took to the streets. It is estimated that in the capital city itself – during the so-called Great March to Warsaw on October 30 – 100,000 people participated (gazetaprawna.pl). World media and commentators of public life recognized that these were the largest

demonstration actions since 1989 (see "The New York Times," Oct. 30, 2020) – the historic moment when communism in Poland ended and the political transformation began. The protests lasted until December 2020 and take the form of cyclical (every Monday) demonstrations. At the end of the year, the dynamics of the protests were lower due to the "exhaustion" of the population potential, problems with the organization of these actions, and disagreements related to the way of leadership. On the emotional level, social anger was slightly calmed down, which on the one hand was caused by the helplessness and fatigue of the protesters (especially in the face of stubbornness, inactivity, and cynicism on the part of decision-makers; and at the same time, the authorities ridiculed, mocked and ostentatiously disregarded the participants of the protests). On the other hand, it was possible to observe the activation of psychological defense mechanisms and rationalization of the situation, slow accustoming to the status quo, getting used to and accepting the "is as it is" state – despite the initial non-acceptance and resistance. Finally, the strength of the protest has weakened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to high fears of contracting the virus and getting sick. In addition, since March 2020, an assembly ban has been in force in Poland, which meant that the protests were treated as illegal, so they were often suppressed by the police with the use of direct coercion and firearms. To avoid punishment and repression, the protests were euphemistically labeled a "walk." It should be emphasized that men also took part in the protest marches, but it was women who constituted the numerical and qualitative majority (mainly due to their determination, motivation, and commitment).

The background of women's protest activity outlined above is the starting point for presenting a partial sociological portrait of female activists, taking into account two selected their socio-demographic characteristics – such as age, and political orientation. This will show to some extent who is the subject of these protests – who is the main political actor and what statistical variables affect civic involvement and participation in protests. So I start by reconstructing the socio-demographic image of an active female citizen in terms of their age and political preferences – considering them to be crucial and determining participation in protests against the tightening of the abortion law. It is true that the question of the cause and effect relationship of the indicated socio-demographic features and the undertaken protest activity remains open. Then I indicate the main motivations and reasons for participating in the protests – thus the goals and expectations related to taking up protest activity.

By indicating these motives, it is possible to understand what was the factor that triggered the protest action; and also what is the direction and purpose of the proposed change or path of emancipation. Therefore, the research questions posed in the article are as follows: 1) what age range are the women who took part in the protests? 2) what political preferences are dominant among female protesters? 3) what are the expected results of women's protest activity? 4) when or under what circumstances, in the opinion of the protesting women, should legal abortion be available and possible? After presenting the results, I will argue that women in Poland are an important management entity of social change, a collective participants in public life who makes informed decisions and effective actions; women are a political subject that influences power, can mobilize and act together to defend women's interests and values. Women's

protest activity has had a wide impact in other sectors – so it can be a tool for cross-sector understanding, dialogue, and cooperation. At the same time, it can be a reference point for women to fight for their rights in other countries.

The course of my argument goes as follows: first, I will outline the history of abortion protests in Poland, along with the social and legal context; then I will present the results of the quantitative CAWI research. Concerning the results obtained, she will reconstruct the image of a group of women participating in protests – a new collective entity that articulates its values and goals, fights for women’s interests, and represents their will. This reconstruction and further, extensive interpretation refer to the proposed research hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: women aged 26–35 (potential reproductive age) are the largest percentage of protesters. Hypothesis 2: the reasons for women’s participation in the protests will be identical or similar – and they mainly concern the autonomy of choice and the right to decide on the continuation of pregnancy. Hypothesis 3: the protests are attended by women who declare political views other than right-wing (i.e. left-wing, centrist or non-partisan). Hypothesis 4: Women who take an active part in the protests expect abortion to be legal, which means that it is admissible and that it can be carried out on the basis of statutory premises, in accordance with the procedure provided in general laws. The argument leads to the conclusion that the protest activity of women against the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal on abortion can be considered a collective and political action that confirms the subjectivity and solidarity of women in Poland and confirms the relevant role of women in the process of democratization and the creation of a civil society in Poland.

Abortion protests – the social and legal background

Abortion in Poland has always been a difficult and controversial topic. Until April 1956, the Criminal Code of 1932 was applied to this matter – according to this legal act, termination of pregnancy was punishable by up to three years in prison, while those who assisted in carrying out this procedure could be punished with a penalty of five to ten years (if the woman died during or after an abortion) [Klich-Kluczewska, Perkowski 2020: 371]. At a later period of the People’s Republic of Poland, following the example, or rather under the order of the Soviet Union [Łopuszański 1989: 109], the Act on the conditions for the admissibility of termination of pregnancy was introduced on April 27, 1956. Under this Act, the termination of pregnancy was possible if there was a medical indication, when the pregnancy was the result of a crime, when the pregnant woman had poor living conditions [Journal of Laws No. 12, item 61, 62, 1956]. Abortion was performed if the woman, first, could prove her difficult financial situation (poverty, low income, unemployment, housing problems); and second, she already had children, was already a mother. Paradoxically, as Małgorzata Fidelis points out, the liberalization of abortion was accompanied by a perverse rhetoric that defined female identity in the traditional sense – as a parent, mother, giver of life. In practice, only the poorest mothers from large families had access to the abortion service, only so that they could better fulfill their maternal obligations towards their children [Fidelis 2015: 211]. In order to legally terminate a pregnancy for socio-economic reasons (due

to lack of financial resources and appropriate and decent living conditions), women were required to submit a declaration confirming their complicated life situation. This statement was to be verified by doctors – mostly young men, bachelors, with no life experience, who approached the matter either too naively or too severely [Sterkowicz 1956: 2]. Therefore, it was not women who decided about a possible abortion, but strange men and third parties towards whom women remained in a relationship of inferiority and dependence. Many times, women who wanted an abortion were accused of cheating, lying, so they felt unjustly accused, humiliated, sometimes abused and blackmailed. In 1959, under the Act approved by the Ministry of Health, the abortion service became universal and accessible, not subject to social and legal sanctions, the decision to terminate the pregnancy belonged to the patient. This approach to the abortion service corresponded with the ideas of progress and modernization proclaimed at the time, with rationality and science, with the idea of a secular state, with the postulate of caring for the wholesomeness of female citizens [Grabowska 2018: 80–81]. The extension of the right to abortion also resulted from the beliefs of communists that reducing fertility would increase the welfare and wealth of society and would accelerate the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and upgrading. To implement modernization plans, women were needed as a workforce and pro-development [Zielińska 2000: 26]. They were mobilized to participate completely and non-selective in the labor market and even to become “labor leaders” who at the workplace significantly exceeded the prescribed standards of employment. However, it was predicted that neither the mechanical engineering and chemical industry would provide jobs for the post-war baby boom generation, which would increase the number of unemployed and socially alienated people [Dudek, Zblewski 2008: 160]. Finally, selective abortion was to lead to the creation of a society with “high-quality citizens” [Fidelis 2015: 211, 221]. In the 1970s, the Polish Committee for the Defense of Life, Family and Nation asked the Sejm of the People’s Republic of Poland to tighten abortion regulations and cancel universal access to abortion. However, the universality of the availability of abortion has been maintained, primarily to reduce the number of illegal abortions. These were a threat to the health and lives of women, as they were performed in negligently, outside of hospitals, by people who were not certified doctors. The results of the research show that the most frequently indicated reasons for abortion in the years 1960–1975 were: material and housing problems [Bogunia 1980: 155–156]. In 1981, under the influence of “Solidarity” and pro-life activists, the possibility of terminating a pregnancy was somewhat narrowed – the abortion had to be performed in a hospital by an appropriate gynecologist, at the same time gynecologists had the right to refuse abortion for ethical reasons – if it conflicted with their conscience and moral convictions [David, McIntyre 1991: 130–131].

After the fall of communism – under the influence of the Catholic Church and right-wing parties – the debate on prohibiting and stopping abortion was revived in Poland, argued by the need to protect human life from the moment of conception. These arguments were additionally strengthened by the glorified image of the “Polish mother” and a large family as the most desirable form of functioning in society. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, abortion is a grave sin that violates the fifth

commandment of the Decalogue – “do not kill.” This conviction is also upheld in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* – according to which abortion is a crime, “the murder of innocent beings,” and a Catholic cannot claim and support the legal permissibility of termination of pregnancy (www.vatican.va). The above-mentioned religious argumentation is of great importance in Polish society, as it is conservative and Catholic – 91.9% of Poland’s inhabitants declare their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church (www.sta.gov.pl). On the other hand, moral conservatism is manifested in the professing of traditional values – such as family, authority, nation, religion, patriarchy, natural law. Conservative ideology is considered crucial in talking about family, sex, contraception, procreation, pregnancy, and upbringing. At the same time, this conservatism perpetuates the traditional family model, the acceptance of masculine patterns, and the dichotomous division of gender roles – based on biological roles and patriarchal gender stereotypes. All this determines the socio-cultural role and position of women, determines her potential political subjectivity, decision-making, and agency.

The agreement built around the Round Table, concluded by men, did not take into account the problems, interests, and rights of women, so no position was agreed on the issue of abortion to which further arrangements or projects regarding the conditions for legalizing abortion could be referred to. On January 7, 1993, the Act on family planning, protection of the human fetus and conditions for the admissibility of termination of pregnancy was introduced, which allowed for legal abortion in the following cases: 1) pregnancy endangers the mother’s life or health – which is confirmed by a judgment of two independent doctors – other than the doctor performing the procedure; 2) prenatal tests show that the fetus is severely and irreversibly damaged; 3) the pregnancy resulted from a prohibited act – which is confirmed by the prosecutor’s certificate. In other cases, the abortion service is penalized. Performing an illegal abortion is a crime punishable by a penalty of 6 months to 8 years imprisonment – depending on the conditions, circumstances, and mode of termination of pregnancy [Penal Code, Articles 152–154]. Poland is therefore a country with one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the entire European Union. Therefore, in Poland there is a large abortion underground [Mishtal 2009; CBOS 2013] and dynamic abortion tourism continues – women go to neighboring countries, where they undergo abortion for a fee.

The Act of 1993 is commonly referred to as the “abortion compromise” – this does not mean, however, that we are dealing with an actual agreement between various circles or political groups; it is not a jointly developed consensus that is satisfactory for both parties. The approach to abortion and the understanding of reproductive and sexual rights constitute an area of social conflicts and deep political divisions. The polarization of society results from a clear division between the two groups. The first are the opponents of abortion – and at the same time supporters of protecting human life from conception. They refer to the concept of the fetus’ subjectivity, granting it the status of a citizen whose rights should be protected [Szelewa 2015]. On the other hand, the second group aims to return to the Polish People’s Republic legislation and to maintain universal access to the abortion service. In this case, the right to abortion is an expression of self-determination, one’s own body, sexuality, and fertility. Thus, Polish socio-political discourse diverges in two extremely different directions – on the

one hand, abortion is interpreted as a woman's right, her personal and autonomous decision, a private matter; and on the other hand, as a murder for which she should be punished [Krajewski 2004: 37].

After the right-wing conservative parties came to power in 2015 (then the united right gained a parliamentary majority), the ideological and axiological dispute over abortion flared up again. In 2016, two civil bills were submitted to the Sejm, extremely different in their approach to abortion. The first, created by the "Save the women" committee, assumed the liberalization of abortion regulations (legal abortion up to the 12th week, without restrictions) and the second, initiated by the "Stop abortion" committee – which tightened the regulations, its effect should it be to completely ban abortion, punish who "causes the death of a conceived child," and for the pregnant woman for using this service. The first draft was rejected with a majority of votes at the first reading, while the second draft was redirected to further parliamentary work (www.wnp.pl). This fact has been interpreted by a large part of the public as a prelude to tightening the regulations and leading to a complete ban on abortion and to penalizing this service. In response to the rejection of the project "Save women" and the procedural continuation of the project "Stop abortion," in September 2016, a new social movement was created – the National Women's Strike (OSK) (www.strajkkobiet.eu). Mass protests by women in many Polish cities took place in Poland under the aegis of OSK. The first took place on October 3, 2016 (metaphorically referred to as "Black Monday") – its leaders were inspired by the 1975 Icelandic women's rights strike. The protesting women took leave from work or their employer dismissed them from work that day, and they did not work in the household. According to estimates, 98,000 people took part in the protest (www.wp.pl). At that time, new organizations, communities and funds were created to facilitate access to abortion. In addition, there were additional forms of mobilizing women – citizenship became a social practice [Karolczuk i in. 2019]. In line with the Sejm's recommendation, the Health Committee, and unofficially – under the influence of social pressure, the Sejm rejected the bill – 352 deputies voted against it, 58 were against, 18 – abstained (www.wnp.pl). The authorities were surprised by the turn of events, especially the sudden and dynamic social upheaval, so it seemed that the topic of tightening abortion rights would be "frozen" for a long time – so as not to lose the female electorate.

Another wave of women's protests swept in 2018. The reason for the protests was the appearance of another civic legislative initiative under the slogan "Stop Abortion" (the bill was submitted on November 30, 2017). This initiative aimed to prevent an abortion if there was a suspicion of disability or disease of the fetus. Termination of pregnancy for these reasons was described by right-conservative circles in a populist way – as "eugenic euthanasia" or "eugenic abortion" with a clear semiotic reference to the practices of the Nazi era. The authorities approached this project with caution so as not to fuel social anger, which – as in previous years – could be a motivation for people to take to the streets. However, on March 14, Polish bishops – during the episcopal conference – issued a message that proclaimed "the necessity of unconditional respect due to every human being at all times of its existence" (www.episkopat.pl), and at the same time called for the initiation of a legislative process regarding the project "Stop abortion." The representatives of the authorities immediately responded to the

bishops' appeal and announced the resumption of work on the project the next day (within the Committee on Justice and Human Rights). This project was also supported by the representatives of some legal circles; and the President declared that he would sign the law "prohibiting eugenic abortion as soon as the Sejm votes it and it hits my desk" (www.niedziela.pl). On March 23, 2018, another great protest ("Black Friday") took place in many cities. Due to the fact that the most important decisions about the fate of women were made in the capital, the protest was held under the slogan "We're going to Warsaw," which of course does not mean that the protests did not take place in other Polish cities and villages. The mass of the protest and the scope of its impact caused consternation among the authorities. Finally, the case was referred to the Constitutional Tribunal by MPs from the Law and Justice party ("Prawo i Sprawiedliwość"), Confederation ("Konfederacja"), Kukiz'15.

On October 22, 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling that the condition for abortion is inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, when "prenatal tests or other medical conditions indicate a high probability of severe and irreversible fetal impairment or an incurable life-threatening disease" (www.trybunal.gov.pl). Therefore, the reasons for legal abortion remained: a threat to the health or life of the mother and pregnancy as a result of a prohibited act (rape, pedophilia, incest). Taking into account the statistics, the number of abortions in Poland for the above reasons would almost be zeroed – fetal disease or impairment is the most common reason for termination of pregnancy – 97.76% (www.pulsmedycyny.pl). The ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal sparked an avalanche of protests in Poland that can be considered epochal events – those that co-create the history of the Third Polish Republic. In this context, it should also be emphasized that on January 27, 2021, the Constitutional Tribunal issued a written justification of the judgment, in which it maintains the position that "there should be no doubt that the constitutional provisions guarantee protection of the health of a conceived child, and in particular from these provisions it is possible to infer the obligation of the legislator introducing a ban on violating the health of a conceived child and establishing legal measures ensuring sufficient compliance with this prohibition" (www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl). As a result of the creation of a new legal act, has been created a new statutory actuality, new legal and social reality that relates to the way of understanding humanity, the human person, reproductive rights and the rights of the fetus.

Methodological note and results

The study was conducted among adult (18+) women who took an active and personal part in street protests against the tightening of abortion law. So the criterion for recruiting to the group and surveying was participation in at least one of several dozen protests that lasted in the period October – December 2020. The research was carried out as part of an individual research project entitled Citizenship of Women in Urban Democracy (reference: WPBU/2020/05/00130).

Empirical data was collected via the internet surveying technique (computer-assisted web interview – CAWI). This study was based on a script posted on a website

containing a collection of questions to which the respondents answered. The advantage of this approach was the high availability of respondents (according to the Central Statistical Office, 90.4% of Poles had access to the internet in 2020), hence – a high response rate. This approach turned out to be the right choice of research technique, especially since the pandemic conditions limited the possibility of direct and close interpersonal contacts.

After excluding invalid or incomplete cases, the data set consists of the answers of 586 respondents (N = 586). The CAWI survey included questions about the motives for participating in the protests; the expected effects of the protest; at the same time, the survey took into account the beliefs of the respondents about the abortion and selected information about the socio-demographic profile of the surveyed group (age, political views). The responsive nature of these studies, which results from the conscious participation of respondents, made it possible to collect a lot of data creating not only the socio-demographic profile, but also the research allowed to determine the relationships between the variables (for example, interferences between the age of the respondents and the motives of participation in the protest or the expected effects of the protest). The conducted analysis led to the formulation of idiographic conclusions that explain what motives and decisions are behind the protest activity; what are the main goals and rationale behind this activity; what demographic features stimulate this activity. The fact of personal participation in the protest can be seen as an expression of civic subjectivity, awareness of civic rights, and the need to defend them; as a testimony to real commitment in the public sphere, the ability to decide on the direction of political activities, and to influence decision-makers by expressing objections, reluctance or contestation against their decisions and resolutions. At the same time, one can risk a statement that active participation in a protest assumes the potential possibility of a similar action in the future, and thus – the creation of a new political community or social movement.

The permissibility of abortion in the light of the respondents' opinions

In the main part of the project, the participants' opinions on the permissibility of abortion in certain life situations, selected circumstances, or random events were examined. The aim of this is to show the conditions and possibilities of terminating pregnancies that exist in the social consciousness, which shape the collective imagination – and thus they constitute, to some extent, the Polish socio-cultural order. At the same time, it is about showing the potential and strength of women (their subjectivity and agency), which includes, among others, the will to fight for the right to decide about your body, well-being, physical and mental well-being. The applied approach also shows the scope of social acceptance for violations of personal freedoms, oppressiveness of institutions, the way women are treated by the state – as persons requiring supervision and control, perhaps irresponsible and dependent in thinking and acting, deprived of subjectivity and autonomy, and the ability to resist.

The absolute majority of the respondents (99.15%) strongly agree with the statement that termination of pregnancy should be allowed when the pregnancy threatens

the mother's life – it is a threat to health in the physical, mental and social sense, i.e. diseases and conditions induced by pregnancy. Therefore, there is a consensus in the study group that the mother's life is the main and superior value, so it should be protected in the first place. Of course, there is a discourse (among some orthodox representatives of the Church and right-wing parties) that the life of the fetus is equal, worth the same, and even that the mother must be able to heroically sacrifice her life and health for the sake of the child. However, it cannot be argued that this is the dominant discourse.

In the opinion poll, another statement was that termination of pregnancy should be allowed when the pregnancy resulted from a prohibited act (rape, incest, intercourse with a minor). 98.29% of the respondents strongly agree with this; 1.20% – rather agree; 0.34% – has no opinion; 0.17% – rather disagrees. In this case, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents have no doubts in this matter, while in the general population of Polish women there are also dissenting opinions. The diversity of group views results from the fact that pregnancy in Poland is a glorified, or even sacralised, public topic (in Church discourse, pregnancy is a “blessed state”). Moreover: in the debate about termination of pregnancy resulting from a crime, one can often hear the voice saying that “the child is not to blame for the crime committed”; however, such a belief does not take into account the physical and mental health of the woman – the victim of this crime. The next opinion concerned the possibility of abortion when the fetus is irreversibly damaged, severely disabled, or has a genetic (lethal) defect. 98.29% of respondents strongly agree that abortion should then be legal; 1.54% of respondents rather agree; 0.17% of the respondents did not have an opinion. Finally, a recent opinion identified potential access to an abortion service. 65.3% of the respondents strongly stated that the service should be universal (“on-demand”) – which means generally available and free of charge; 21.03% of respondents rather agree with it; 6.50% did not express an opinion on this subject; 2.91% disagree with this statement; and 4.27% categorically disagreed. So it is clear that even among the participants of the protests (who consciously and deliberately go to the streets in the name of fighting for women's rights) there is no full agreement as to the popularization of abortion. These women assume that the abortion should be clearly motivated, for a specific reason. The will, internal need, or necessity to perform an abortion (resulting, for example, from the lack of mental readiness for motherhood or the lack of material and living conditions) are not sufficient, socially acceptable reasons and justification for termination of pregnancy.

The next aspect that can explain the participation of women in the protests is the main motivations of the respondents. Recognizing the motivations (the reasons that guided and sustained the behavior of the respondents) is important because it illustrates the internalized cultural content that is important and valued for the respondents. The reasons for the protests were personal (private) and public (with the intention of acting for the benefit of the public, on behalf of other women). The need to participate in the protests was not stimulated by material benefits, but the reasons were autotelic, ideological. The main motivation turned out to be the necessity and the need to decide about oneself – 99.66% of the respondents definitely or rather agree with the statement that women should have a free and unlimited right to decide about themselves, their body, life, and fate – they are full citizens who they can and should

make autonomous and free decisions, not succumb to pressure from the environment, not succumb to ideologies, make responsible choices and bear their consequences.

Subsequently, the following reasons for participation can be indicated (the respondents answer “definitely yes”): I believe that the authority interferes with my personal life and intimacy (97.78%); I believe that my civil rights are violated (97.44%); the Tribunal’s ruling violates my freedom and dignity (96.58%); the Court’s ruling is not applied, I disagree with it (96.07%); I show solidarity with other women (92.99%); I am fighting for democracy (89.74%); I believe that abortion is a woman’s right (87.69%). In addition to these motivations, other accompanying factors were also taken into account, perhaps less political and formal, and related to the atmosphere of protest, building a community, or being in a group of people. So there were also the following motivations: I can scream and reveal my emotions (12.99%); I like happenings and protests (6.15%); there is a cheerful, relaxed atmosphere at the protests (3.76%); I always take part in protests, no matter what they concern (4.62%); I like the buzz around when a lot is going on (1.20%); due to the need to go outside, meeting friends and acquaintances (0.34%); in the current situation it is a good way of spending free time (0.68%); for no reason (1.20%); out of boredom, lack of entertainment (no one gave such an answer).

Expected results

Having learned about the motivations of women participating in protests, it is also worth distinguishing the desired effects of the protest – those that the respondents would like to achieve. They are as follows (the respondents answer “definitely yes”): the topic of abortion will be widely discussed in Poland (65.81%); women’s rights will be respected (60.17%); abortion, regardless of the reason, will always be possible and legal (53.68%); the government will be overthrown or resign (45.30%); a new party or party will be created to look after women’s interests (31.11%); the government’s attitude to abortion will be liberalized (38.12%); there will be a new “abortion compromise” (24.10%); The Catholic Church will change its position on abortion (14.87%); the government’s stance becomes radicalized (4.62%); I have no expectations (1.54). In the opinion of the respondents, the most important effect of the protest should be the opening of a debate on abortion in Poland – which means: discussing this issue taking into account various perspectives, dependencies, or situational nuances, creating a new language to describe the phenomenon. This seems particularly justified, because in Poland the topic of abortion is perceived in taboo categories, it exists outside the official discourse and the institutional system – in the so-called abortion underground. At the same time, it also results from the lack or very limited sex education in Polish schools – if such education were conducted professionally, there would probably be fewer unwanted pregnancies, and women would know how to prevent pregnancy using contraception. Respondents particularly care about the two effects of the protest. Firstly, that in the course of a broad debate it will be possible to work out a new law that will enable universal access to abortion. Secondly, there will be a new, accepted by the majority, “abortion compromise” worked out with the participation of Polish

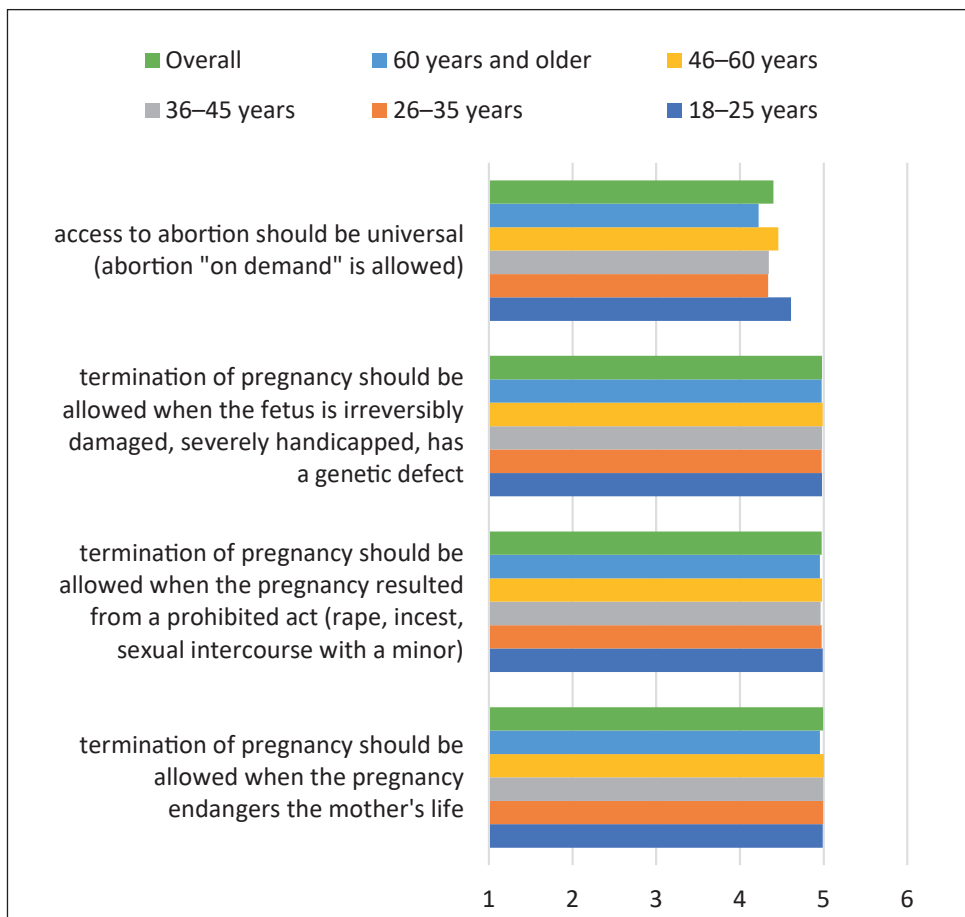
women, political authorities, the Church, medical experts and scientists. Significant percentage of respondents declared prediction of a new political party with a liberal orientation, where a dominant progressive worldview assumes the transformation of the existing social system by changing thinking, valuation, behaviour and social practices. In this context, it should be emphasized that a large proportion of the respondents indicate that the expected effect of the protest is the overthrow or dismissal of the government. It is therefore about the creation of new structures and political culture, and consequently – about the project of a new social order.

Age and political views of women in protest

Age is an important indicator of participation in protests. The highest percentages of protesters (30.94%) were people aged 26–35. This can be considered symptomatic, mainly because it is the age when most Polish women decide to have or give up children. At this age, reproduction is particularly likely due to biological conditions – then fertility remains at a relatively high level; the chances of conceiving a child naturally are very good; the fetus has a low burden of possible defects resulting from the mother's age. It should be mentioned here that in Poland the reproductive period was extended and procreation was delayed – statistically in Poland, the first child is born by a woman at the age of 29.5; in the European Union, the average age is 30.7 years (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>). Social aspects also have a great impact on reproductive decisions – in this age group, Polish women most often give birth to children due to the material status achieved at that time, life stability resulting from education, satisfying work, regular earnings, financial independence, moving out of the family home, the purchase of an owner-occupied apartment or renting an apartment. It is also the age when a conscious desire to have a family appears – women find a permanent partner, start to form a civil partnership or marriage, and plan the number of children. Thus, it is a group particularly interested in decisions and legal restrictions in the field of pro- and anti-abortion decisions. In the context of age categories, it is worth noting that the lowest percentage (7.69%) in the group of protesters was people over 60 years of age. Adult age is a destimulant of protest activity for at least three reasons. First, the negative influence of age on potential protest activity may correlate with a physical condition – participating in a protest (or some other form of “street politics”) requires stamina, physical strength, well-being, and full health. Secondly, absenteeism may result from the current pandemic situation and the risk of developing COVID-19 – which is especially dangerous for seniors. Participation in a street protest requires real physical effort, which becomes additionally burdensome in unfavourable weather conditions (protests took place in the afternoon, when the temperature dropped to a few degrees Celsius, and often rained). In addition, there were scuffles with the police and counter-demonstrations (representatives of the radical right, the Catholic Church, and the national movement). Thirdly, it cannot be ruled out that the low percentage of female senior women participation is an artefact, and the disclosure of this trend in the survey results from the incomplete and limited access to the internet of some Polish residents.

Knowing which age categories took part in the protests most often or most willingly, it is worth asking the question: what opinions about abortion dominated in particular categories. Thus, as shown in the chart below, depending on the data series, the number of positive responses ranges from 4.22 to 5.00 (the maximum value), which is confirmed by the fact that there is agreement among the respondents as to the general beliefs about the permissibility of abortion. The most consistent age category was the 26–35 age group (a group particularly focused on pro- and anti-abortion solutions due to the greatest potential reproductive tendency), especially in the case of the opinion that abortion should be allowed, when pregnancy endangers the mother’s life (there was complete compliance). Women are aware that an abortion may be medically necessary to save a mother’s life – in some situation, such as intrauterine fetal death, some malformations or a tubal ectopic pregnancy, e.t.c. And furthermore if the pregnancy progresses create a serious risk of death of pregnant woman.

Chart 1. Opinions on abortion and the age of the respondents



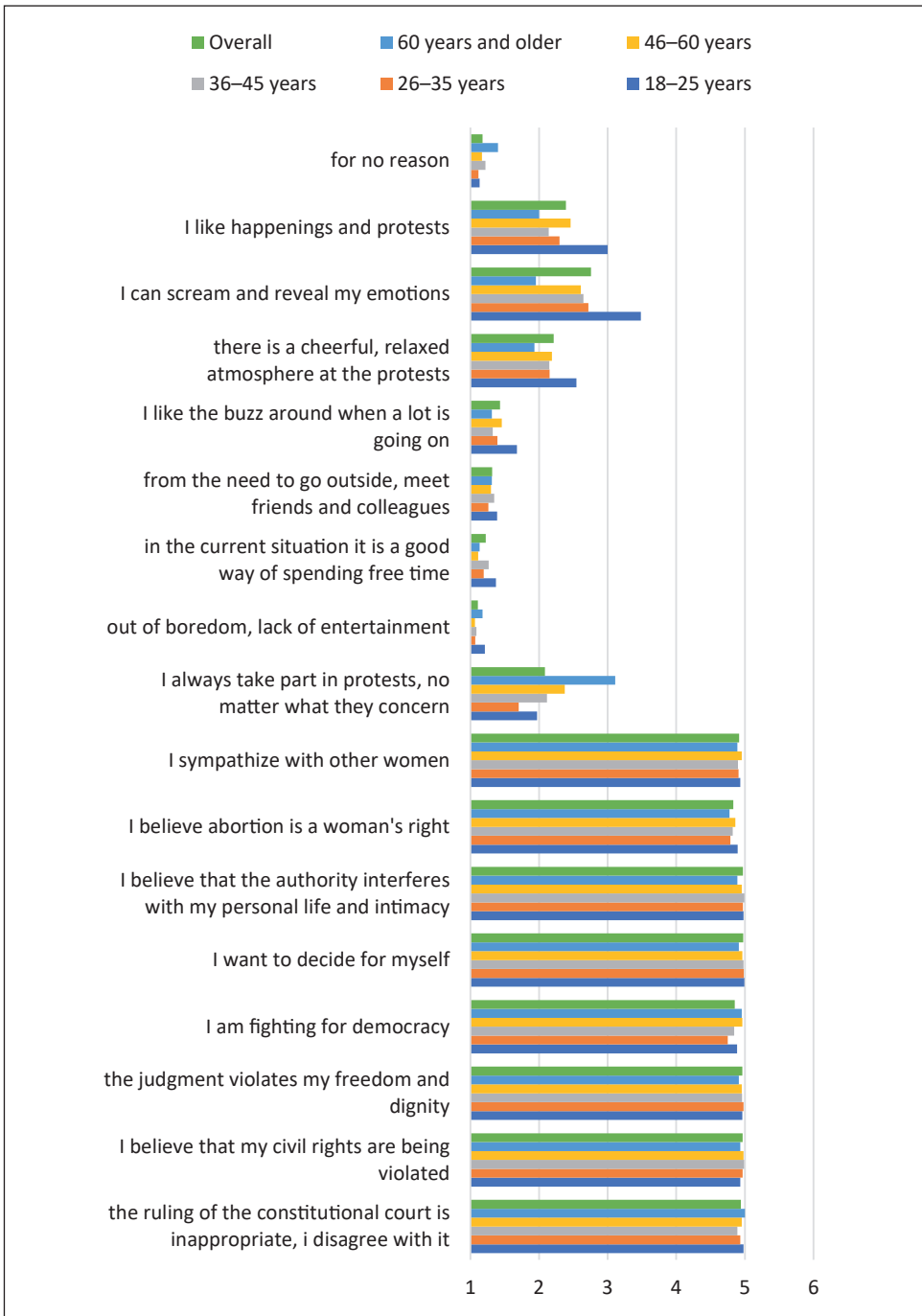
Source: Own research, n=585

Another correlation that has been included in the research concerns age and reasons why women participated in the protest. As the chart shows, although the reasons generally remain consistent for individual age categories, it is worth noting that for women aged 18–25 this protest was largely an opportunity to express their emotions (regardless of their type or intensity). Moreover, most of the representatives of this age category claim that the reason for participating in the protest is their sympathy towards protests and happenings as a form of expressing their needs, interests, political claims, values and emotions. This is because happenings are an opportunity to present the problem using original and unusual means of communication (pictures, objects, slogans). Thanks to such forms of expression, social actors can effectively catch the viewer's attention and expand the field of influence of certain ideas, narratives, and beliefs.

Next indicator that I used to reconstruct the sociological portrait of protesting women is their political views. The participants of the protests, specifying their political views, had the following options: I am a supporter of left-wing parties: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, Wiosna, Razem, Zieloni (45.64%); nonpartisan (36.24%); I am a supporter of centrist parties: Platforma Obywatelska, Nowoczesna, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (18.12%); I am a supporter of right-wing parties: Prawo I Sprawiedliwość, Solidarna Polska, Porozumienie, Konfederacja (0%). Not a single respondent declared a right-wing orientation – which may be directly related to radical position on abortion of the rightist parties and the ultraconservatists. They, advocating an extended penalisation of abortion, strive to establish new (additional) penal norms and stern laws, with the ultimate goal of a panoptic and punitive stance, and the power to impose penalties. On the other hand, great support for the left (45.64%) results from the fact that on the axiological level its program is permissive, progressive and liberal. The left-wing election program clearly emphasized the need to introduce the right to abortion (regardless of the woman's motivation), universal access to contraception, the possibility of regulating births, limiting the influence of the Church on state family policy, and secularism. Most of the respondents probably identify with these views and aspirations. On the other hand, 36.24% of the respondents consider themselves to be non-partisan, which indicates that they separate the private from the public sphere; perhaps they do not see a relationship between the political affiliation of the rulers and political decisions regarding women's rights and freedom of decisions. It can also be presumed that this percentage did not participate in the parliamentary and presidential elections, which contributed to the current shape of the political scene.

Through party self-identification, it became possible to place the respondents on a continuum of political preferences: Left – Centre – Right, and nonpartisan, which seems to be important for at least two reasons. First of all, political identification is an element of the worldview – a person chooses those political views that match his personal beliefs, which correspond to the values he professed, opinions, internal feelings that reflect his perception of the social world. Secondly, political preferences become an element of social capital and locate an individual in a specific place in the political sphere. In Poland, it is very clear, because political views polarize society and lead to divisions between the parties to the political dispute. This, in turn, causes the

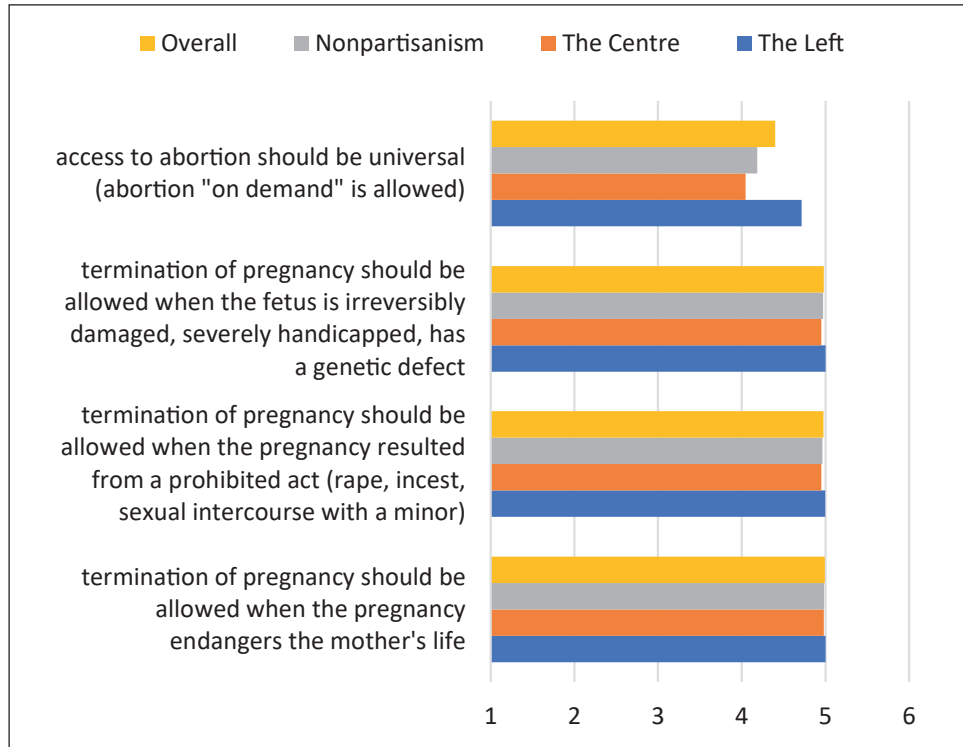
Chart 2. Reasons for participating in protests and the age of the respondents



Source: Own research, n=585

lack of social dialogue and the inability to reach a compromise – not only in the approach to abortion, but also in the recognition of other civil rights and freedoms. In this connection, it is interesting to note what opinions on abortion are shared by supporters of particular political options. As can be seen in the chart below, beliefs about termination of pregnancy in cases where it threatens a woman's life, is the result of rape, or the fetus has a serious genetic defect are similar among supporters of separate political groups. However, he also points out that universal access to abortion ("on demand") is wanted primarily by women with left-wing views.

Chart 3. Opinions on abortion and the political views of the respondents

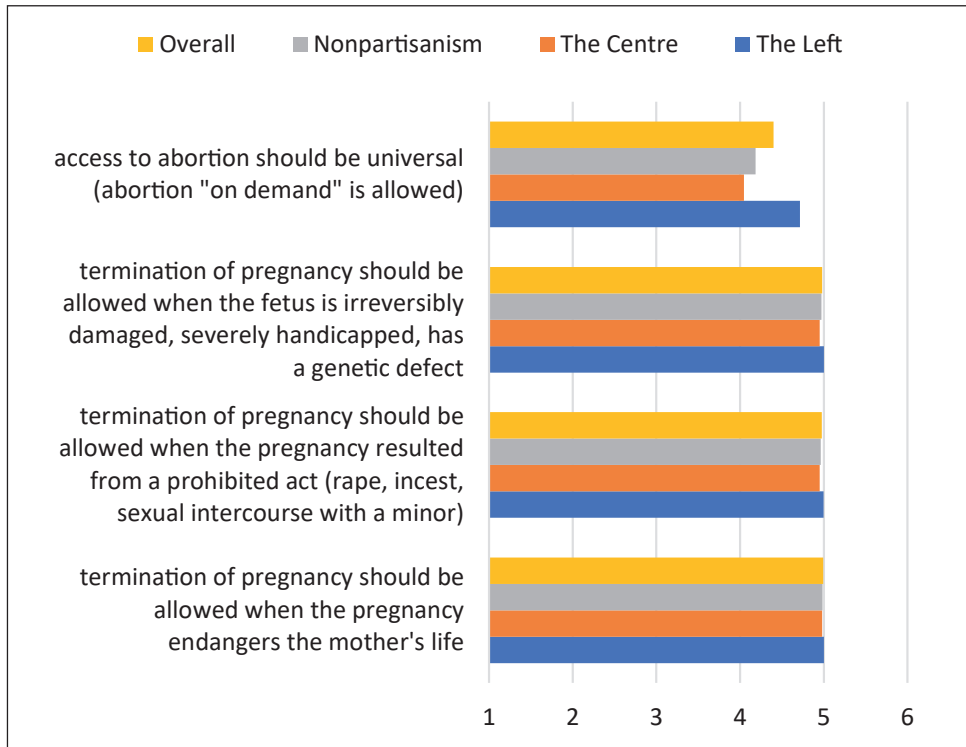


Source: Own research, n=585

It is also worth noting (see the chart below) that relatively the largest number of left-wingers take part in protests in order to express their emotions, shout out their anger, express opposition and rebellion. At the same time, the supporters of the left – declaring that they like protests and happenings – want to feel the atmosphere of protest when heterogeneous social actors have common goals, interests and views in terms of political preferences; they share the degree of commitment to the pursuit of these interests and the need to defend these beliefs. In a situation where the opponent and the object of the fight remain common to the defenders of a given case, when they build a common front (style, manner, mode of protest), when network communication

channels are open and accessible to all protesters, a relatively lasting sense of group bond develops and belonging to a community is getting stronger.

Chart 4. Reasons for participating in protests and political views of the respondents



Source: Own research, n=585

The results obtained provide important answers to the questions. First, how might age and political views influence the decision to participate in a protest? Secondly, in what sense they are a measure of the community and homogeneity of women – as a category not only demographic, but also socio-cultural. On this basis, one can at the same time infer about divisions and distinctions within the studied group. It is also connected with the essence of protest as such – when dissatisfaction, tension and conflict can become the core of new organisational structure and the axis of collective identity.

Conclusions

The empirical material presented in the article is a fragmentary illustration of events related to the cycle of women's protests against abortion restriction in Poland. The obtained results confirm the research hypotheses and bring satisfactory answers to the research questions. Probable hypothesis 1 proves that women aged 26–35 were over-represented during the strikes (although women from different age categories were

on strike). This is because this is the part of the population which, due to its procreative potential, is particularly interested in legislation on pregnancy, prenatal testing, abortion, childbirth and maternity benefits. At the same time, it should be emphasized that (according to hypothesis 3) in the protests, apart from the age, the political views of the respondents turned out to be important. And thus: the beliefs and values that are promoted by certain parties or factions. Most of the respondents declared left-wing views, therefore political behavior (protesting opposition to the banning of abortion) was consistent with the ideological message of the left and its electoral program. Referring to the issue of the motives for participating in the protests (hypothesis 2) and the expected effects (hypothesis 4), the monolithic nature of civic activity should be noted. The respondents joined the protest because they opposed the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, demanded recognition of their reproductive health and sexual rights. The main effect of their opposition and protest was to be a broad and serious discussion on abortion in Poland.

On the basis of these analyzes, it is possible to identify a model of female civic activity, a repertoire of activities that contribute to this model, and above all, to reconstruct a portrait of an active citizen in the field of reproductive rights. Thus, on the basis of analyzes and interpretations, a coherent image of forms, types and directions of action emerged, as well as a set of specific demands or postulates put forward by the protesting women. The main conclusions emerging from these studies concern the following issues. Firstly, the protests of women highlighted the awareness, willingness and willingness of this socio-demographic group to participate in the field of women's rights – to articulate their needs, set personal boundaries, defend women's interests, and shape the political reality. Secondly, a strong sense of female community and environmental solidarity strengthened this group, it also influenced the motivation to participate in protests, the goals set, the assumed and anticipated effects of this participation. The expected results included not only changes in law I in state policy, but also transformations in the field of the social order (especially the egalitarianization of gender and social relations). Nevertheless, in this context, one can observe the politicization of these protests, consisting in an attempt to “smuggle” new discourses and use them instrumentally for party or ideological purposes. Thirdly, participation in the protests strengthened the autonomy, decision-making and agency of women and probably caused the formation of collective subjectivity expressed by the pronoun “we” – in opposition to “them,” who are identified with the oppressive power that wants to control the lives of Polish women and impose an axiological system on them. These protests can therefore be seen as a kind of civic intervention and an attempt to initiate systemic changes in the area of women's rights – with particular emphasis on autonomy and bodily integrity.

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Women of protest: main social actors, motives for participation, expected results of women's strike protests in Poland**Abstract**

The article presents a partial sociological portrait of women who took part in nationwide social protests against abortion restriction in Poland – with a particular focus on motives for participation, and expected results. The article may become a reference point for indicating who an active female citizen is, what socio-demographic characteristics she has, and what motivations determine civic involvement.

Key words: woman, women's rights, civic activity, Poland, abortion, protest