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Narkowicz, Kasia, Before the Czarny Protest: Feminist activism in Poland *[1]*, Cultivate: The Feminist Journal of the Centre for Women's Studies, 2018

Abortion in Poland was legal under Communism and became illegal (with a few exceptions) after the political shift to multi-party democracy. Feminists opposing the abortion law had little impact. This changed in 2016, when hundreds of thousands of Poles across the country took to the streets in the Czarny Protest, or Black Protest. They opposed a bill that would remove some of the exceptions in the existing legislation and impose criminal sanctions on abortion. The scale of the protest meant that the proposal was stalled, despite the newly elected right-wing populist government. It was a surprising victory for the feminist movement, especially after a similar proposal in 2011 received almost no public attention and failed to mobilise resistance even among feminists. This paper looks back at the pro-choice movement before the mass mobilisation in 2016. It draws on interviews and focus groups conducted with pro-choice activists in Poland between 2011 and 2012, when the feminist movement was predominantly active online rather than on the streets. The paper concludes with questions about the success of the mass mobilisation that took place five years later in 2016, which was largely mobilised from online platforms. It asks whether there has been a shift within the pro-choice feminist movement or a sudden interest in feminist politics among the Polish public or whether the 2016 protest reflected a broader dissatisfaction with the current regime. If the third exploration is correct, what are the implications for feminist activism in Poland and the wider resistance to right-wing politics?

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