The web is an increasingly popular avenue for political claims-making, but we know little about who is making claims about abortion online and what kinds of claims (supportive or oppositional) they are making. Using quantitative data on websites discussing abortion from a large dataset of online activism, this study investigated online claims-making about abortion.

This study found that online claims-making about abortion is fairly common, but informational and/or educational information about abortion as a procedure is rare on these sites. Few sites contain factual content on abortion and nearly none do so without accompanying political claims. In addition, while political discussion on the topic of abortion is well-represented, the twin positions on abortion (for and against) are not equally represented. Across the dataset, there was a higher representation of anti-abortion claims than of abortion rights claims. Further analysis of these sites revealed that abortion rights claims were made primarily by organizationally-affiliated websites, while anti-abortion claims were forwarded primarily by individuals.

This dominance of organizations in the abortion rights movement online may be a lingering effect of the dominance of organizations in the offline abortion rights movement. The history of the offline anti-abortion movement, in contrast, demonstrates that individual activists have always played a significant role in the movement. Specifically, so-called lone activists who act without the public endorsement of formal anti-abortion organizations have assassinated abortion providers. These outlier actions have significantly shifted the field of contention around abortion and are key actions—widely endorsed or not—of the anti-abortion movement. To the extent that they explicitly rely on individual activists, the individual activist has always had a place in the anti-abortion movement. The data presented here suggest that remains the case online.

These findings can inform the work of family planning advocates, particularly in their thinking about mobilization on behalf of the abortion rights cause both online and off. This study can further inform providers about the volume of anti-abortion claims-making women may find when they search for information on abortion online.