

The Ebb and Flow of Controversial Debates on Social Media

Kiran Garimella*, Gianmarco De Francisci Morales#, Aristides Gionis*, Michael Mathioudakis*

*Aalto University/HIIT, #Qatar Computing Research Institute

{kiran.garimella, aristides.gionis, michael.mathioudakis}@aalto.fi, gdfm@acm.org

Dataset available on request

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What we study

discussions about controversial topics on Twitter

Questions

Q1: has polarization increased over time?

Q2: is polarization higher when big events occur?

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Data

5 years of tweets, 1% sample

September 2011 to September 2016

controversial topics

obamacare, abortion, gun control

What we do

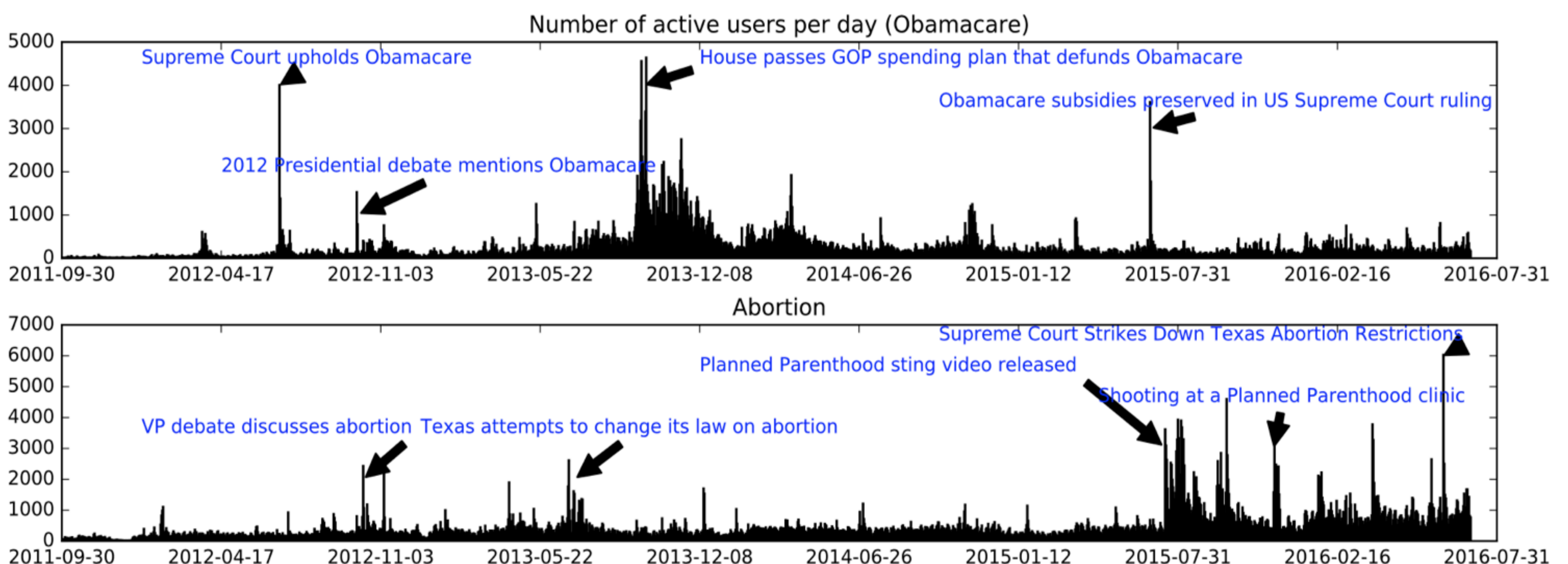
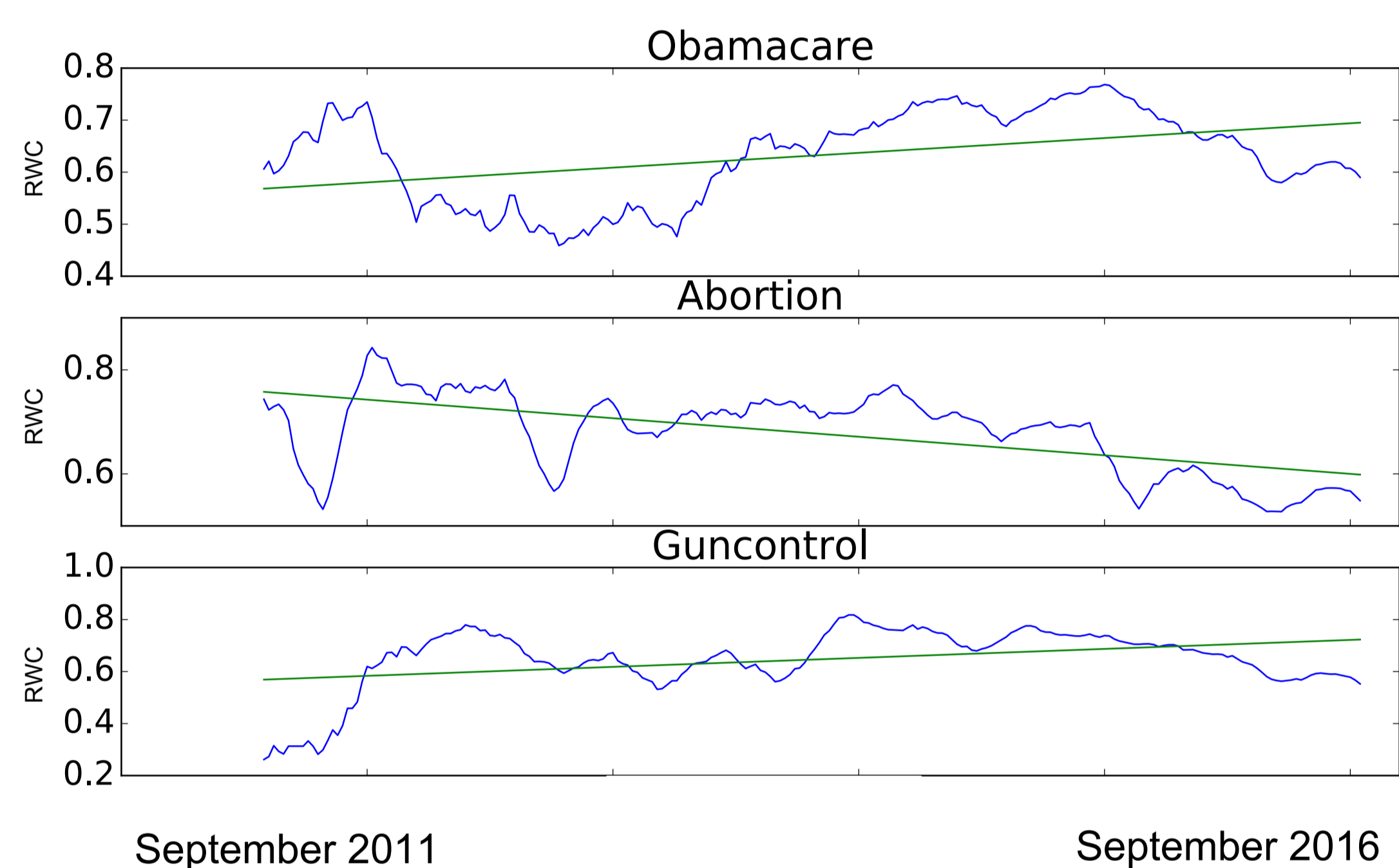
for each topic & day: build retweet graph
measure polarization via

Random Walk Controversy (RWC) score

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for Q1
we find no clear trend

for Q2
we notice that big events
are marked by large
volume of activity....



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...so we plot
RWC against volume of activity

- for controversial topics we find a positive correlation
- for non-controversial topics stays near zero polarization

