1 LESSONS - 10 MIN

Elections

In this course, we will look at tools to help you find, visualise and protect your stories around an election cycle.

Tools Used:
Trends
Flourish
Datagifmaker
2-sv
Outline
Project Shield

LESSON 01

# Covering politics with Google Trends

In this module, we will look at ways to use Google Trends to analyse searches specifically related to politics.

Lesson Overview

Google Trends as a tool for informed political coverage

As journalists report an election campaign, they can turn to the Google Trends tool to see which topics people are searching for the most - they can visualise anonymous, indexed data from each country and specific regions.

If you are not familiar with the public Google Trends tool, work through "Basics of Google Trends" before you embark on this lesson. We will build on those skills to look in detail at how you can surface trending political searches.
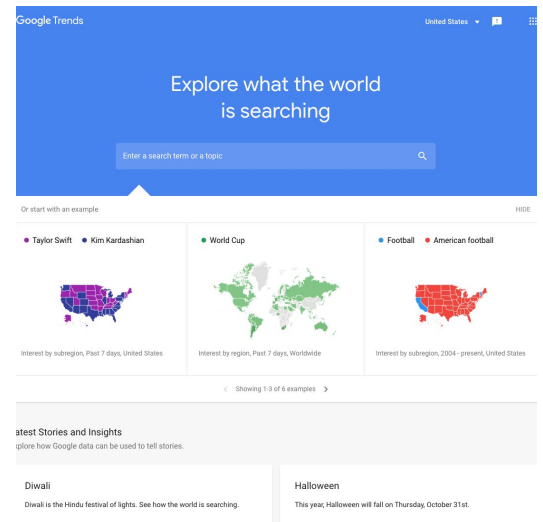
1	Recapping the basics
2	Terms and topics for useful data
3	Getting more granular data with categories
4	What does this data really mean?
5	Additional Trends data sources

For more lessons, visit:

newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training

Recapping the basics

You can explore Google Trends data using the free [Trends Explore tool](#). To navigate around the tool, begin to type a search term in the box. For this exercise, we will explore searches for key political parties around the world.

Begin by searching for Canada's New Democratic Party. Start typing the party name in the search box. A drop-down list should appear.

Select the [New Democratic Party](#) topic from this list.

Topics are the most reliable way to analyse Google Trends data. They pull in the exact phrase as well as misspellings and acronyms, and cover all languages. For example "New Democratic Party" and "NDP" will both be included.
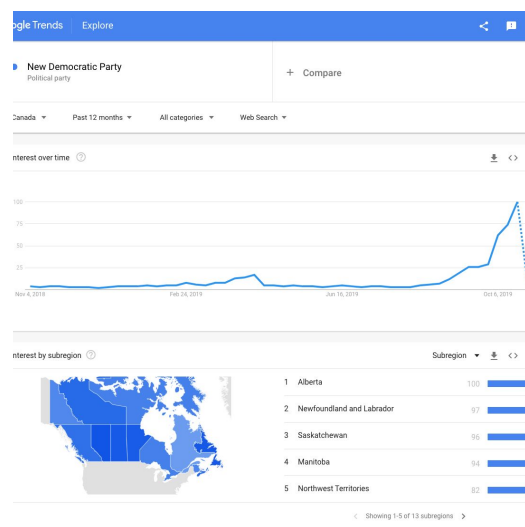
To get a better understanding of the difference between topics and search terms, [explore a search term and a](#) [topic with the same title](#).

Those two versions look different because the topic includes searches for "NDP", while the search term version does not. Ensuring you use search topics where possible.
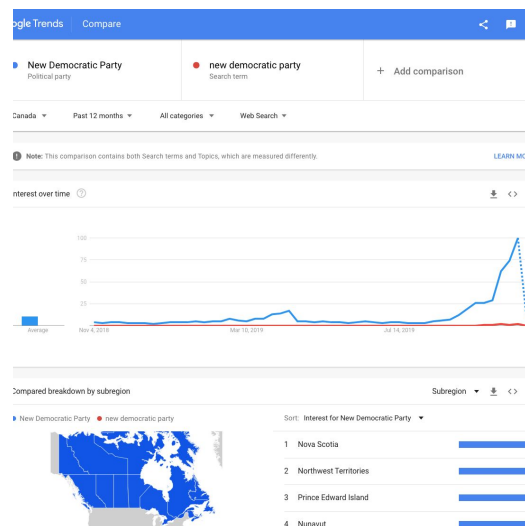
The time series graph is the first thing you see once you have entered a term on Trends Explore. Hover over the graph to see search interest over time, numbered from 1-100.
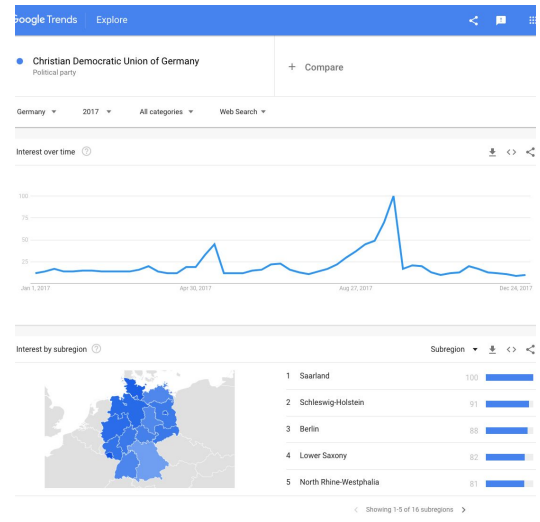
No matter what date range, location, or topics you have selected for your search, the maximum value in the Trends dataset will always be 100. For example, see search interest in Germany's CDU party since 2004, in 2017, and compared to the SPD.

These are indexed search interest values, on a scale from 1-100. For more information on this, see Basics of Google Trends.
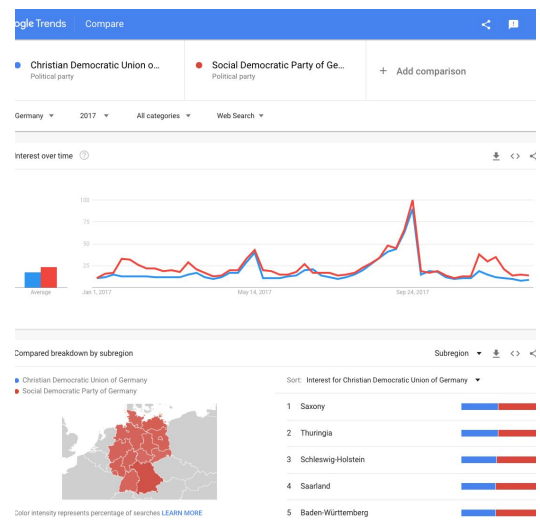
Below the time series graph, you will see a shaded map showing search interest in your topic by location. Let's look again at Germany's CDU in 2017.

These results are broken down by region. On the left, the regions are shaded according to search interest. They are also ranked by search interest on the right. Again, all numbers are indexed on a scale of 1-100.
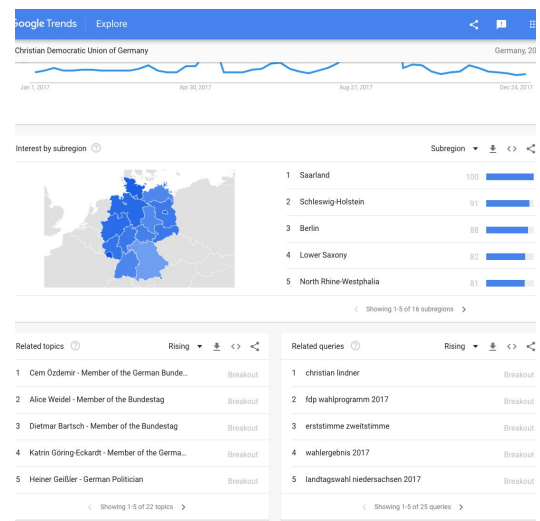
Switch to city-level data using the menu on the top right of the widget. The map will now display as points, again shaded according to search interest.

Some countries also give you the option of organising your results by metropolitan area. This is possible in the US and France, among others.
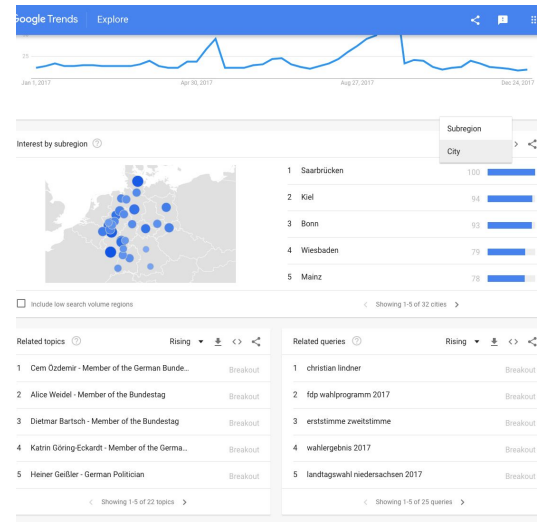
View related search terms and topics at the bottom of the Trends Explore page.

This will automatically display "rising" data. Rising searches have seen the largest increase in search interest compared to the previous equivalent time period.

At the top right of the widget, you can switch to "top" related searches. These are the queries or topics with the highest search volume in the selected time frame and location.
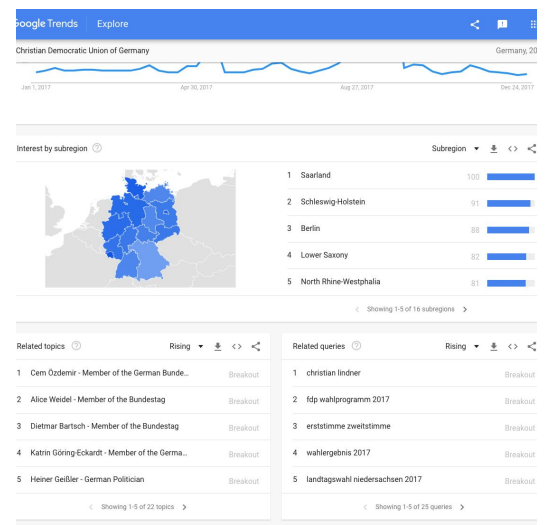
You can explore search data for up to five topics in the Trends Explore tool. Here we have input four key political parties in Mexico.

As well as ranking search interest in the parties over time, you can compare them by region, and view top search queries for each of them.
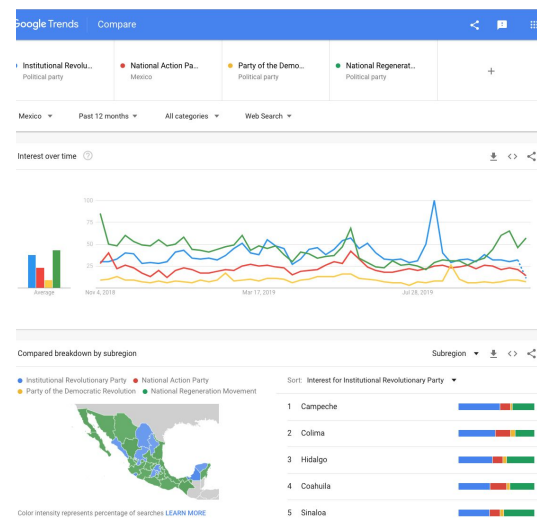
Terms and topics for useful data

Once you're confident of the basics of using Google Trends Explore, you will be able to start exploring political searches in detail. These are some of the search terms and topics typically used by Google News Lab's data curation team around an election, in order to surface useful political trends data.

- News
- [Polls](#)
- Manifesto, platform, or policy
- "Why vote" + party
- Speech, rally
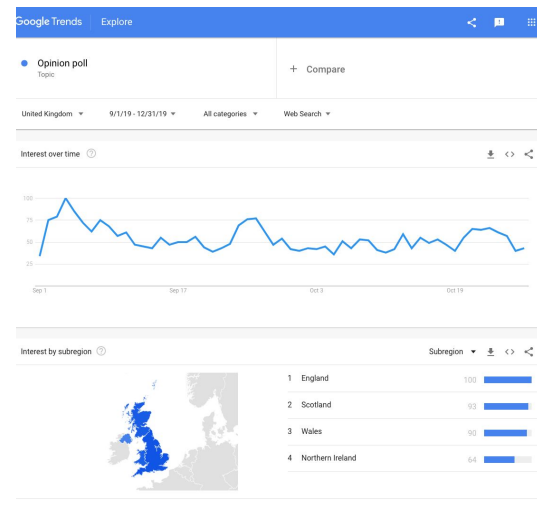
Getting more granular data with categories

Searching for one specific topic can be both too broad, and too specific at times. Next we will go through grouping search data by category to get more relevant results.

Start by looking at search interest in [health in the UK in 2019](#).

Health is a key talking point in British politics, but the topic of health will not always be searched in an explicitly political context -- users might just be looking for their local doctor. We can use categories to refine this.
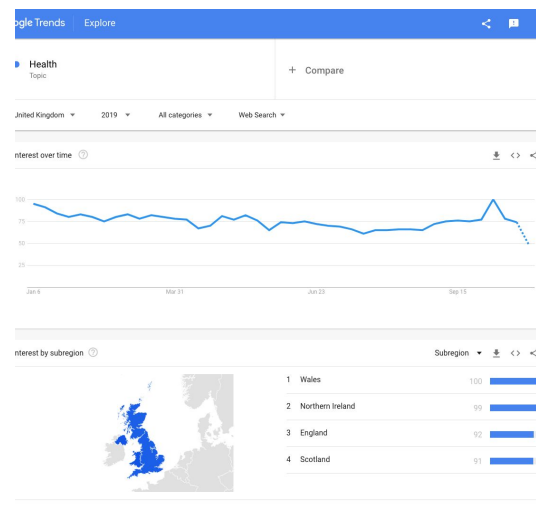
On the results page, above the line graph, there is a drop-down menu labeled "All Categories". Click on the arrow to view a list of categories.

You click through the parent categories to explore the full list, or type the name of a category to refine options. If you type "pol" you will see there are a few different politics-related categories to choose from.
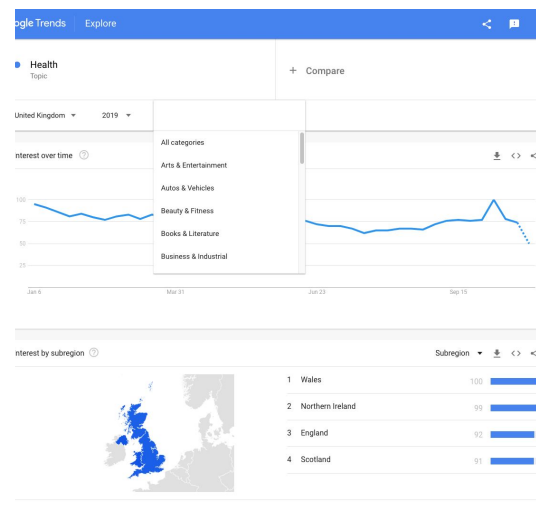
Select the main "Politics" category. You are now viewing [results for health](#) in relation to politics. Both the line graph and the related topics now look quite different!
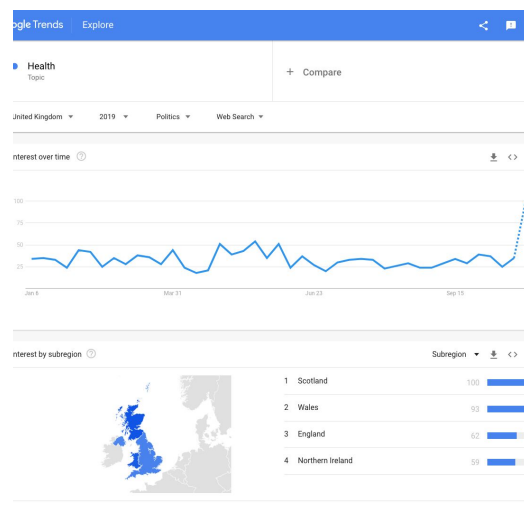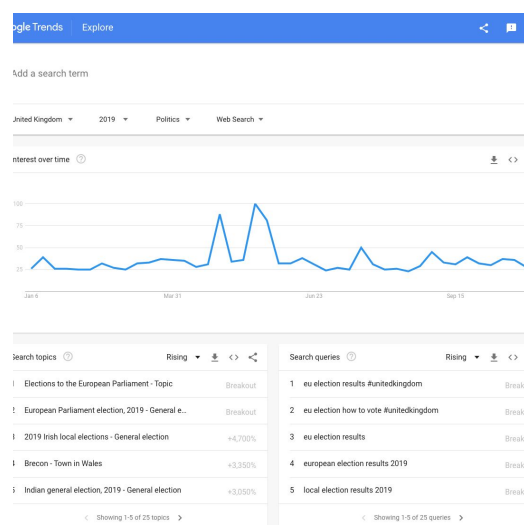
Scroll to the top of the page, then hover over the field where your health topic is selected. Click the menu and select "Remove".

You are now able to view detailed [results in the politics category](#), for any time period not within the last 14 days.

This is a particularly useful tool for getting a wide overview of highly-searched political terms and topics.

What does this data really mean?

There are many ways to put Google Trends data in context.

In order to put political trends into perspective, you can compare search interest levels to consistently highly-searched topics. These vary by country, but typically include news, weather, recipes, film, the president or prime minister, and certain popular sports.

Crucially, it is important to recognise that Google Trends is not a substitute for polling data. Search interest has no bearing on voter intention -- Google users may search for a party or politician for any number of reasons, without intending to vote for them. Trends data is indicative only of what Google users want to know more about.
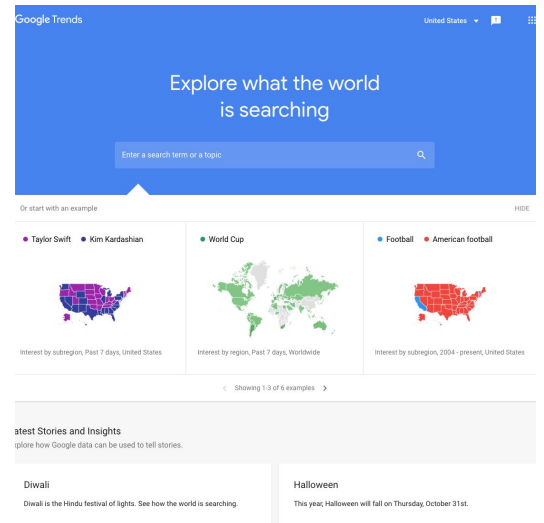
Additional Trends data sources

We hope you now feel empowered to analyze Google Trends around politics for yourself. However, as well as maintaining the public tool, Google News Lab provides a series of other resources where you can access Search data.

You can follow Google Trends on Twitter for regular updates of the latest data from our News Lab data team.
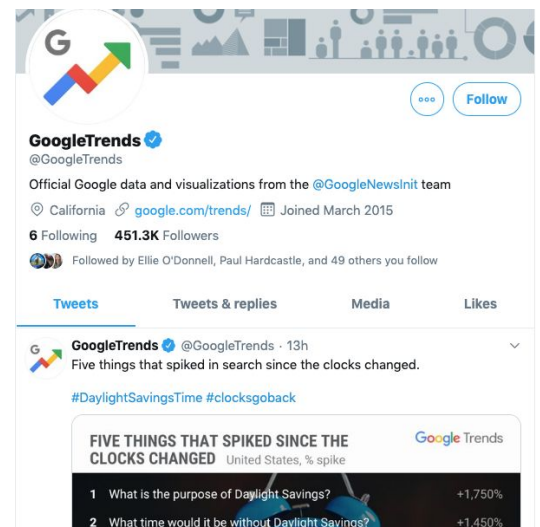
In some countries, Google News Lab's data team curate dedicated Trends pages related to specific news topics, such as national holidays or elections.

Access these by scrolling down on the Trends homepage, where they are below the search bar and above "recently trending".
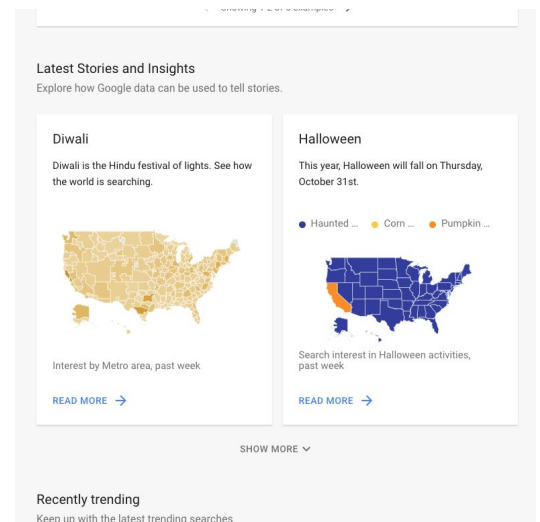
Google News Lab also maintains the [Trends data store](#), where new datasets are regularly uploaded based on the news and current events. You can download these datasets as a csv file, and use them in your reporting.

Finally, you can get in touch with the News Lab team for specific requests. We regularly work with journalists to compile lists of the top-searched political parties, candidates, and issues. Around elections, we often also send regular data newsletters updating politics data. Please [contact us](#) for more information.
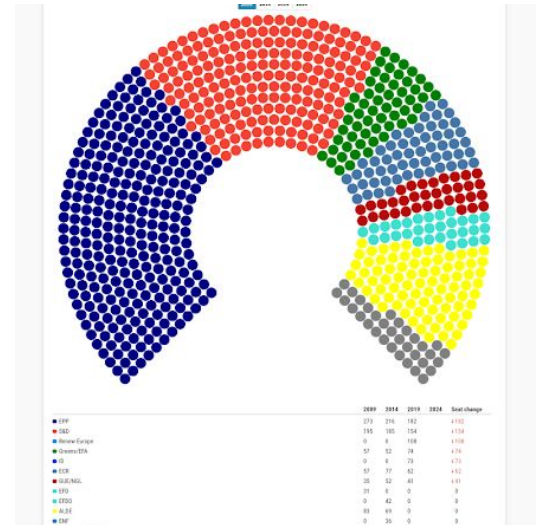
LESSON 02

Visualising elections

In this module, we will look at ways to bring elections to life with interactive visualisations

Lesson overview

Visualisations can help your audience to quickly digest polls

How to bring election results and polls to life by creating interactive visuals.

1	Build candidate profile cards
2	Quick visualisations with Datagif Maker

For more lessons, visit:

newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training

Building candidate profiles in Flourish

In this section, we'll use Flourish to display key information about political candidates. As well as going through Flourish's card templates, we'll think about the best way to show different kinds of data.

Go to [Flourish](#) to start the training.

Go to your Flourish library and click "new visualization" to browse the menu of templates. Scroll down to view the card templates.
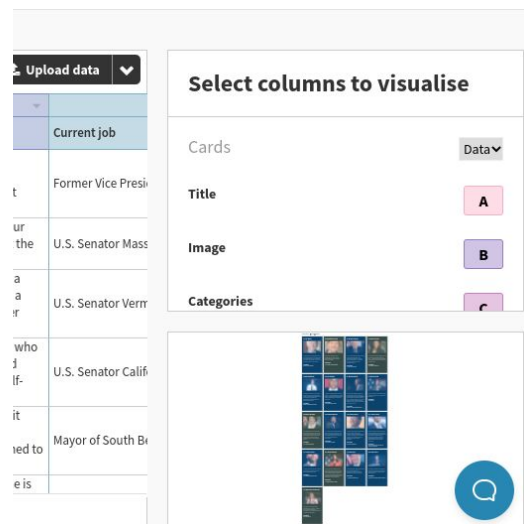
Select "profiles", although you can experiment with any of the default visuals.
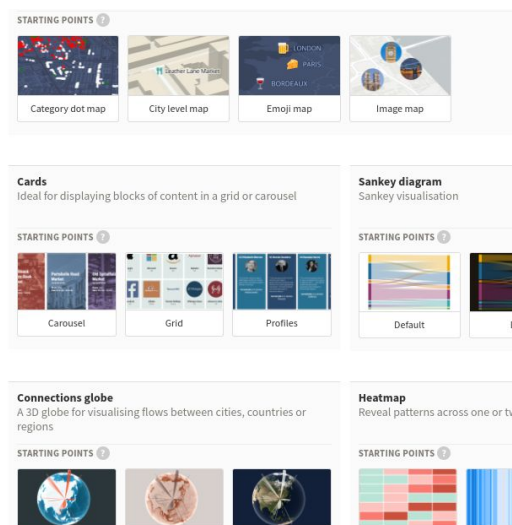
Above the visual, toggle from "preview" to "data". Instead of looking at the dataset, focus on the right side of the screen, where it says "select columns to visualise".

This visualisation lets you choose a title, an image, a card category, a subtitle, and some additional text.
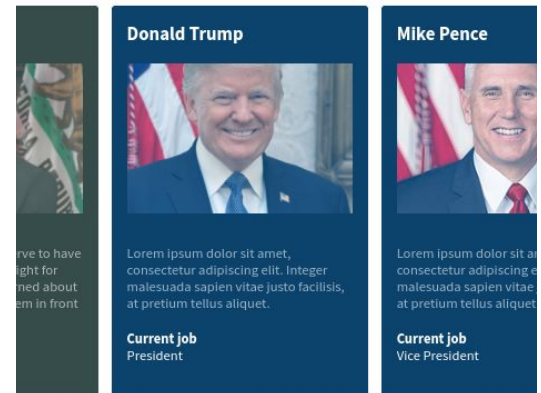
To understand how this column selector works, and how it displays the data. Look at which columns are being selected, and compare this to what you can see in the visualisation.
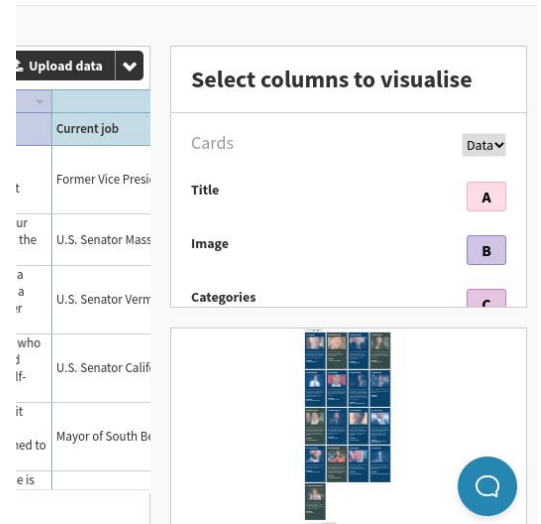
Remove all of the candidates except for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, then add Donald Trump and Mike Pence.

Your visual should now look something like this.

Column C, which corresponds to the card's category according to the data panel, is currently set to gender. Let's change this to represent a candidate's political party. Biden and Harris are Democrats, while Trump and Pence are Republicans.

We can then switch to preview, and change the category colours to red for Republicans, and blue for Democrats.
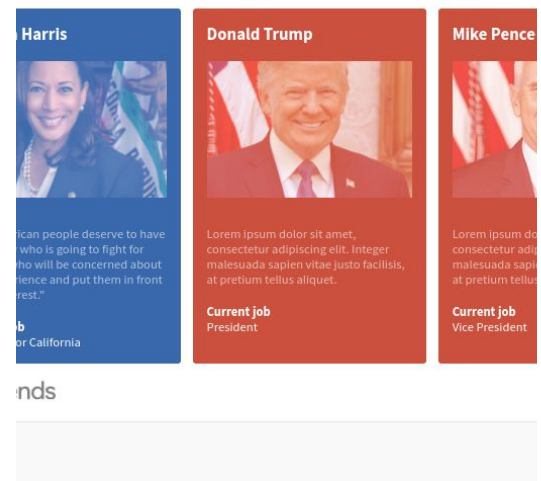
That visual doesn't look quite right – stay in preview mode and have a look at your options to make more changes.

Here I have set my image blend mode to "normal", increased the font size of my body text and my subtitle, and aligned my footer to the right of the visualisation.

an

Kamala Harris

"The American people deserve to have somebody who is going to fight for them . . . who will be concerned about their experience and put them in front of self-interest."

Current job
U.S. Senator California

Donald Trump

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Integer malesuada sapien vitae justo facilisis, at pretium tellus aliquet.

Current job
President

Source: Politico/Mor

Our final step is to add a title to our visual. Once you are happy, you can click "publish" above the visualisation editor, and either send your visual by direct link or get code to embed it on your website.

Presidential Elections 2020: Candid

Explore the candidate field as America prepares to vot

Click to filter: Democrat Republican

Joe Biden

"If we give Donald Trump eight years in the White House he will forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation - who we are - and I cannot stand by and watch that happen."

Current job
Former Vice President

Kamala Harris

"The American people deserve to have somebody who is going to fight for them . . . who will be concerned about their experience and put them in front of self-interest."

**Current job**
U.S. Senator California

LESSON 03

Election visualisations linked to Google Sheets

Keep your election visualisations live by linking them to Google sheets

Lesson Overview

Keep your election visuals up to date with Google Sheets and Flourish

Flourish makes it even easier for you to keep your election data up to date: Thanks to the Flourish live CSV, you can link to a web-accessible CSV file instead of uploading your file to Flourish manually.
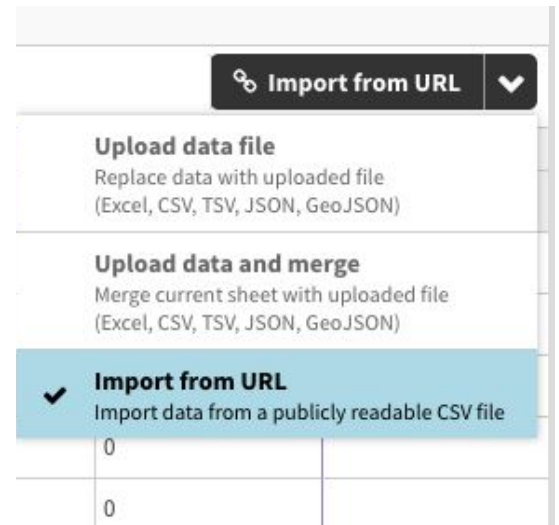
1	Visualizing seat changes in the EU parliament
2	Implementing your URL in Flourish
3	Customizing your visualization in Flourish

For more lessons, visit:

newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training
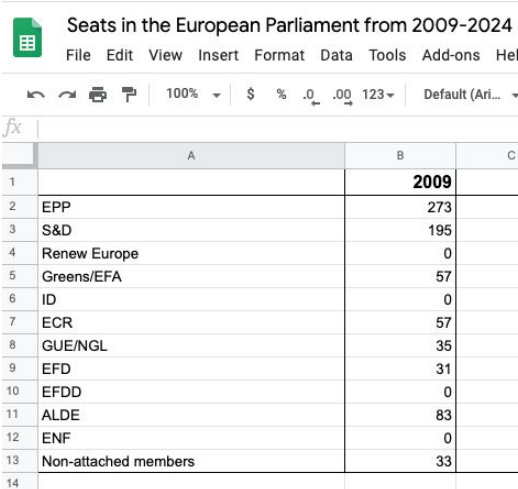
Visualizing seat changes in the EU parliament using sheets and Flourish

Linking a Google sheet to a visualisation unlocks the power of sheets. You can scrape data directly into a visualisation or just update it quickly on the fly. These steps will take you through setting up the link between a Google Sheet and Flourish.

Start with a dataset that to visualize: This is a table showing the distribution of seats in the EU Parliament from 2009 to 2024.

Let's say you would like to visualize this data set with Flourish and automatically update it using the Live CSV function.

In order to be able to use the table with Flourish's Live CSV feature, we have to publish it first:

- Click on "File" in the Sheets menu.
- Continue with clicking the "Publish to web" tab.

A new window should open.
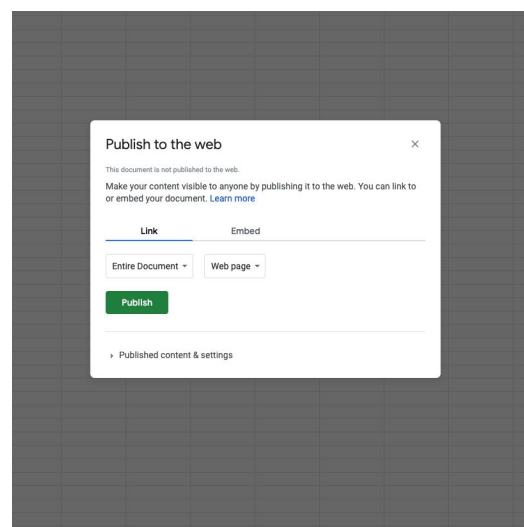
For the visualization of the EU parliament, to be available in Flourish we need to link the Google Sheet to flourish
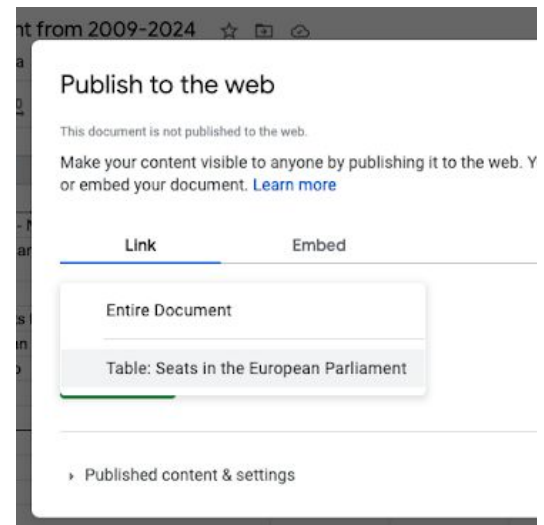
In order to use the Live CSV feature in Flourish, the Google Sheet needs to be published as a CSV file.

To publish the sheet as an CSV, click on the drop down menu on the right and choose the option "Comma-separated values (.csv)".
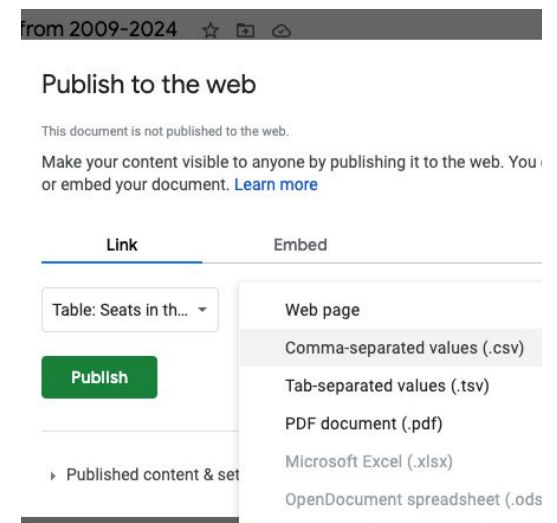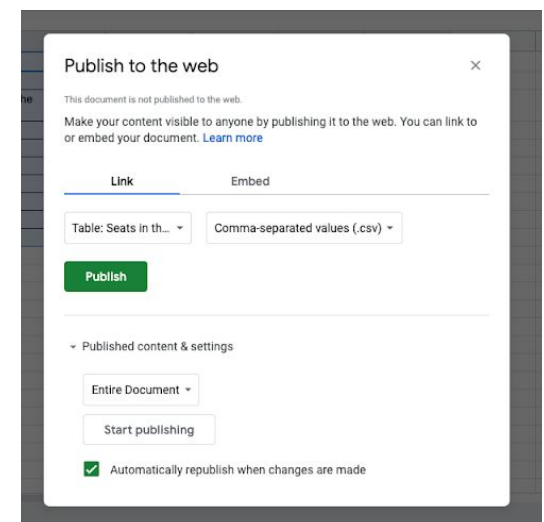
There's another drop down menu called "Published content & settings". To keep the data up to date, click on the box "Automatically republish when changes are made".

Click "Publish".

A link to the table will then appear. Copy the link to use it in Flourish later on.

Copy the link to use it in Flourish later on.

Implementing your URL in Flourish

Link your data sheet to your visualization to update the values automatically

Go to Flourish: Choose a visualization that you would like to create using the Live CSV feature. Open the visualization and click "Data". You will see a drop down menu on the right.


|	A
1	Party Group
2	European People's Party (EPP)
3	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
4	European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)
5	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
6	European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)
7	Greens–European Free Alliance (Greens–EFA)
8	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD)
9	Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)
10	Non-Inscrits (NI)
11	New Parties (NP)
12	TBD

Click on the drop down tab and choose between

- "Upload data file"
- "Upload and merge"
- and "Import from URL".
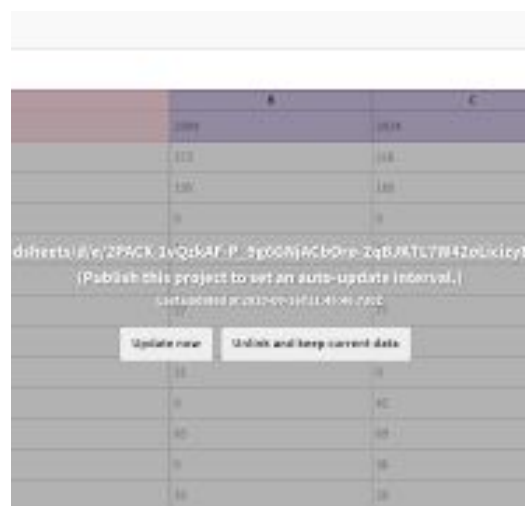
To use the Live CSV function, select "Import from URL".
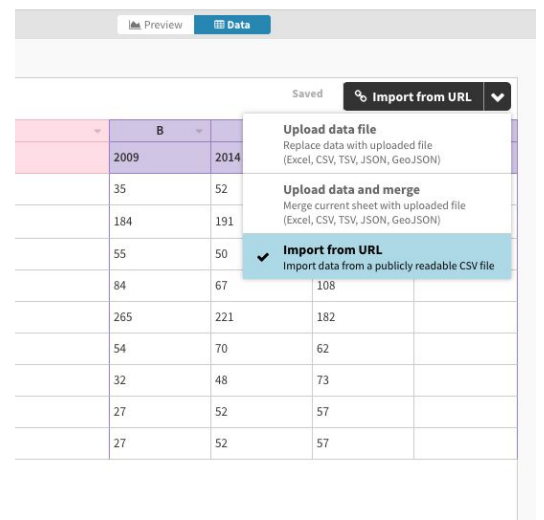
Paste the Google Sheet URL and click "Import".
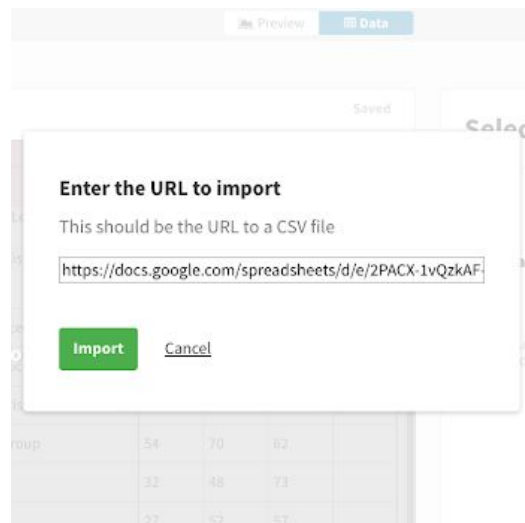
The sheet should be linked to your Flourish visualization now.
The data sheet will look greyed out, there will not be an option to edit the values in Flourish.
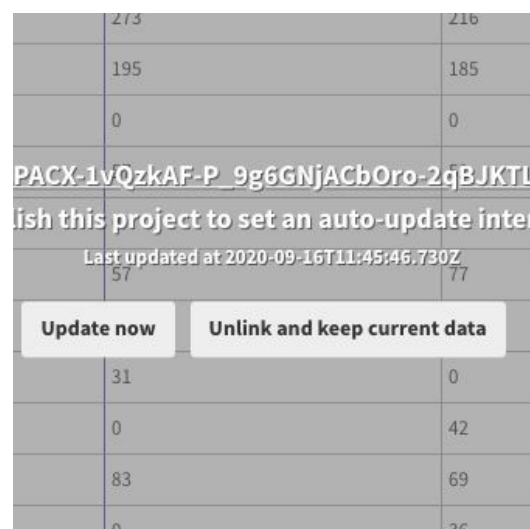
Customizing your visualization in Flourish

The final step is to customise the appearance of the visualisation

To make changes to the visualization, first you have to unlink your Google Sheet from Flourish temporarily.

- Go to your data sheet in Flourish
- Click "Unlink and keep current data"

The grey overlay should disappear afterwards. You can start editing your visualization now.

- First, switch from "data" to "preview"

- To make sure the correct values are being displayed in the visualization, go to "Select columns to visualise" and pick the columns you would like to be used in the parliament chart.

In this case, you need columns B to E to visualize the seats correctly.

The number of seats in the parliament chart can be adjusted in Flourish. In 2009, 764 members were elected The European Parliament.
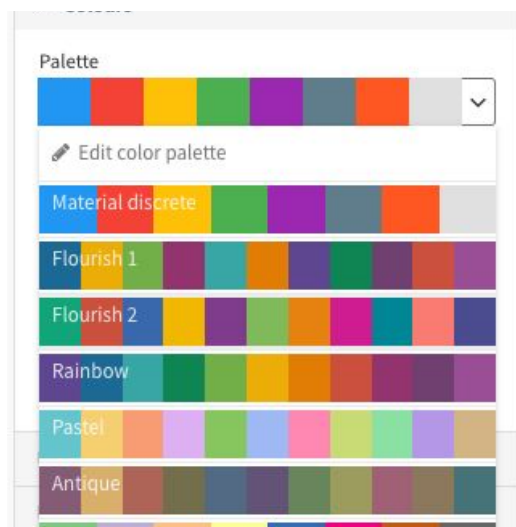
- Go to "Parliament Layout"
- Change the number of seats.
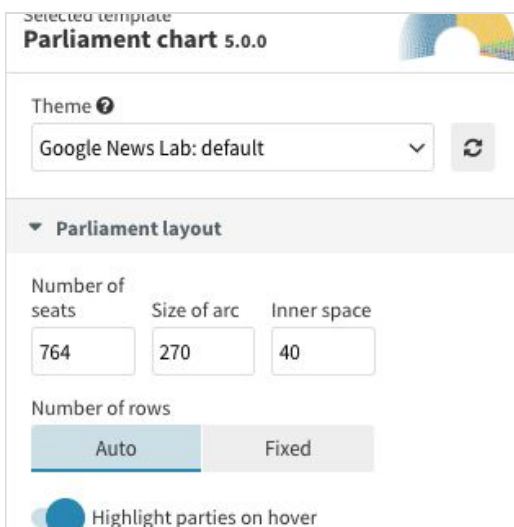
To adjust the colours in the visualization:

- Switch from "data" to "preview"
- Open the tab "Colours"
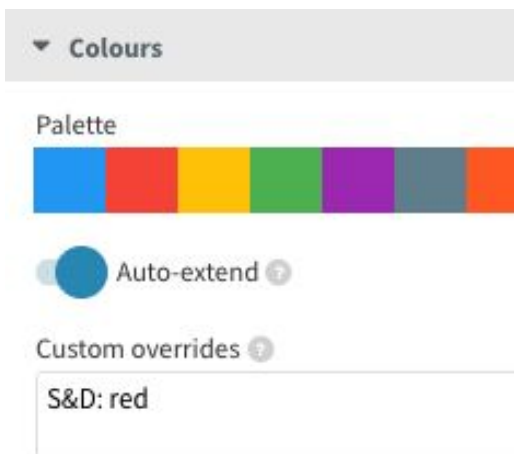- Choose a preset design or customize displayed colours
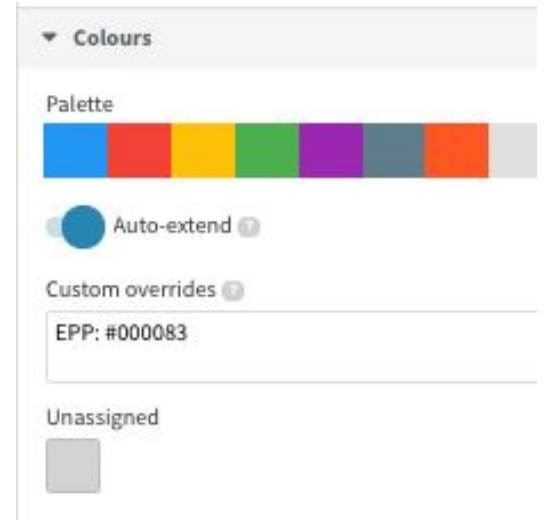
A custom the colour palette is available too:

- Click into the field "Custom overrides"
- Put in a value, separate it with ":" and follow up with a colour

Example: S&D: red

To use special colour hues, use Hex Colour Codes.

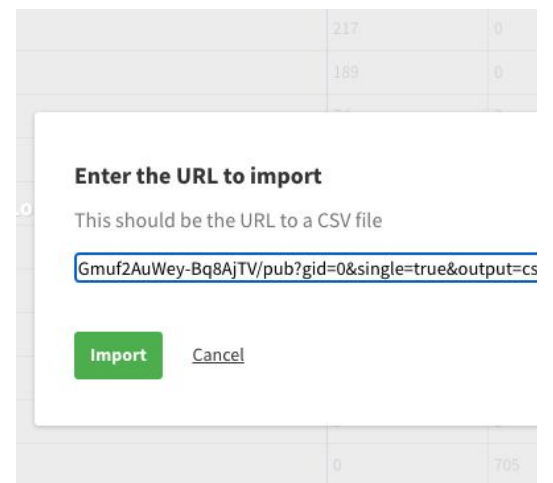Reconnect the Google Sheet to Flourish after finishing the customisation.

- Go back from "preview" to "data"
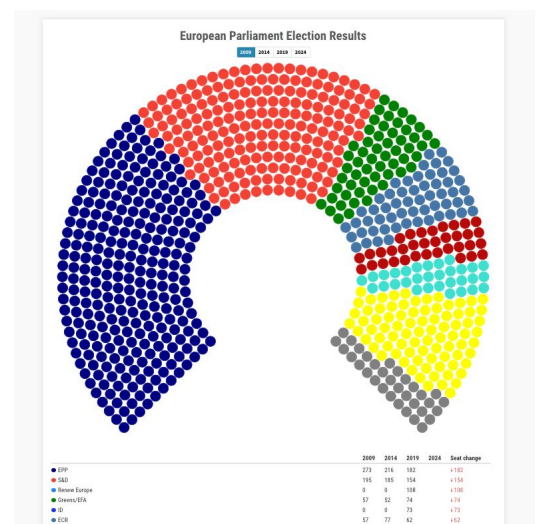- Click the drop down menu on the right and repeat the import process with your Google Sheet.

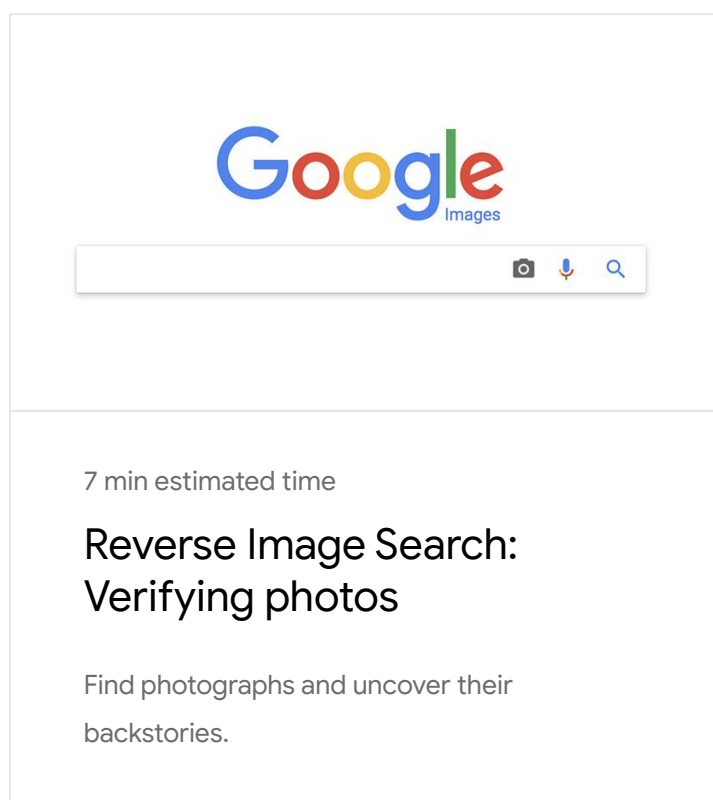The visualization will be automatically synchronized with the Google Sheet again.

This is the finished visualization! To update the seats in the European Parliament after the 2024 election, add the numbers in your Google sheet and Flourish will update your visualization.

Click here for finished example

Congratulations!

You completed "**Create live visualizations with Flourish and Google Sheets**"

7 min estimated time

Reverse Image Search: Verifying photos

Find photographs and uncover their backstories.

For more lessons, visit:
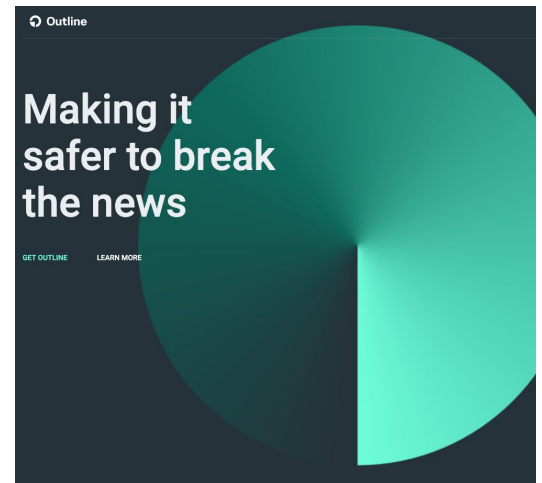
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LESSON 04

Protect your election coverage

In this module, we will look at tools to protect and secure your election coverage

Protect your election

During elections news organisations can be the target of digital attacks. Google and its sister company [Jigsaw](#) have some tools to help protect your newsroom

1	Secure your account with 2-Step Verification
2	Secure your network with Outline
3	Secure your site with Project Shield

For more lessons, visit:

[newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training/course](#)

Secure your network with Outline VPN

Outline makes it easy for news organizations to set up a corporate virtual private network (VPN) on their own server to more safely connect to the internet and keep their communication private.

Outline is built specifically for news organisations It never logs your web traffic. Strong encryption helps keep your communications private.
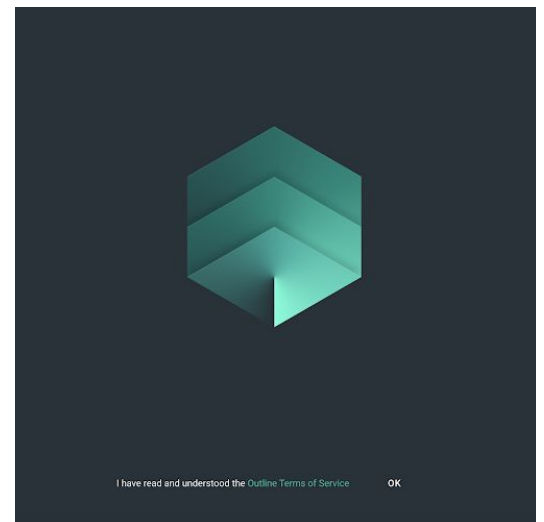
To set up your news organisations own private VPN you first have to download and install Outline Manager. This is available on getoutline.org
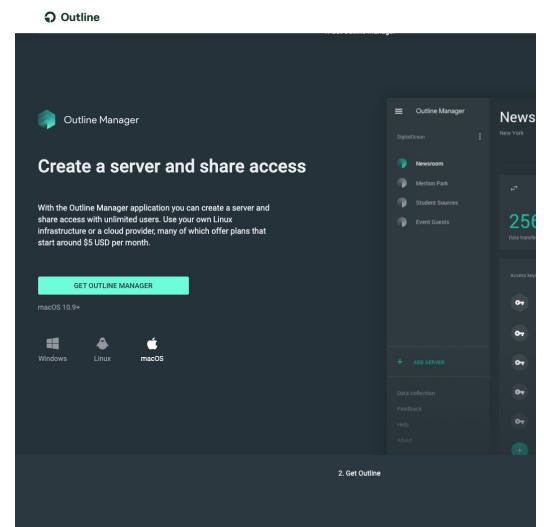
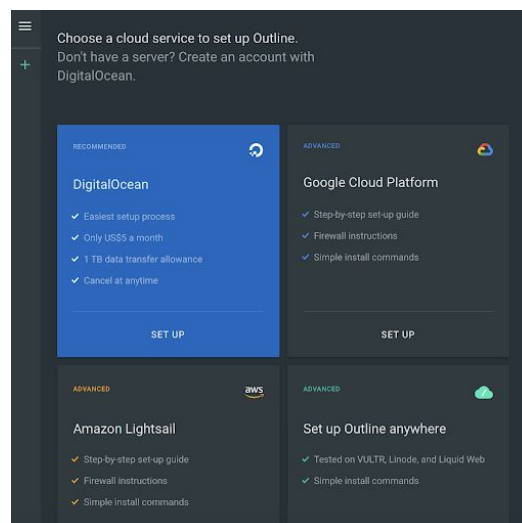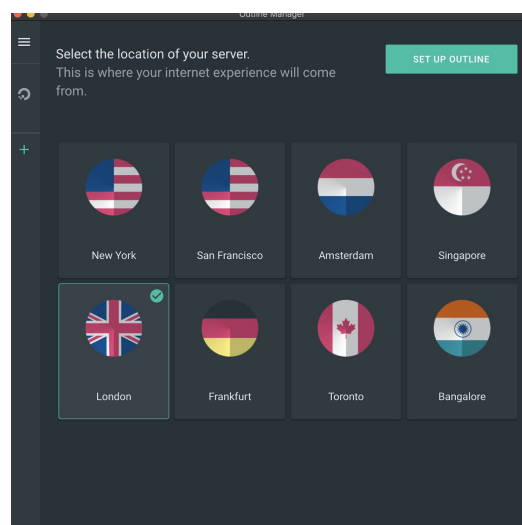Once you have downloaded Outline click on the files and it will extract. When you open it you simply agree to the Terms and Conditions.

Outline Manager will then take you step by step on how to set up your own virtual linux server.
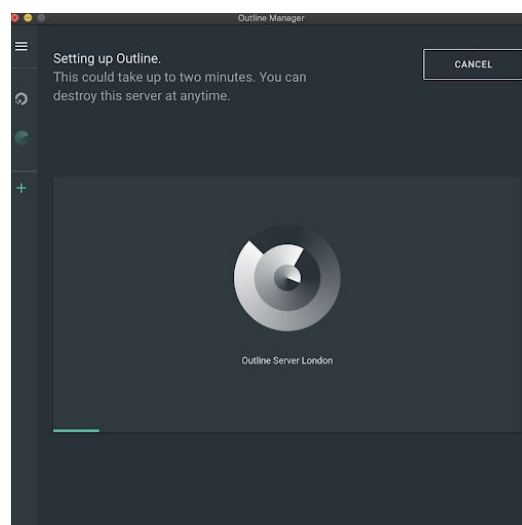You can choose any cloud provider of your choice.

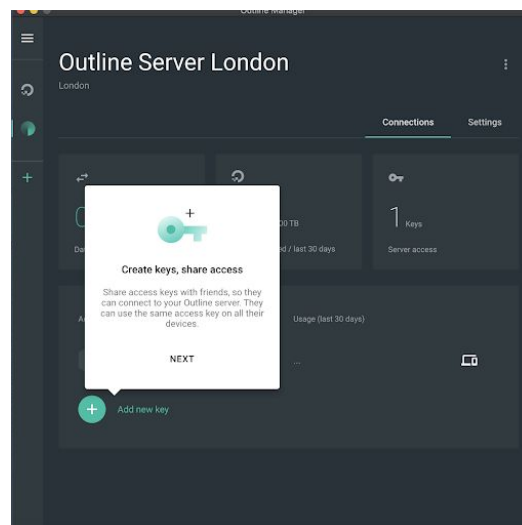Once you have set up your server. You can select what region you would like your internet to
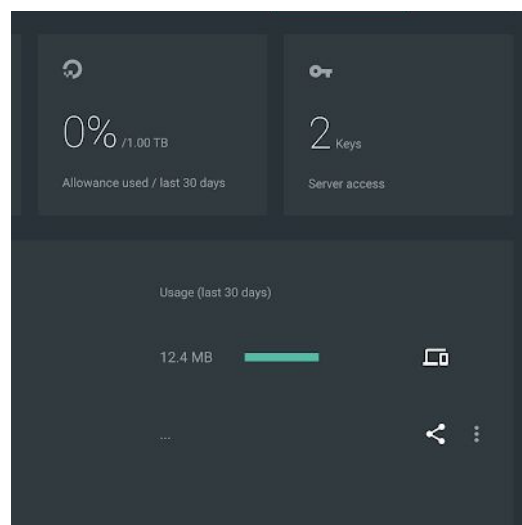
Outline manager will then build your network.

Once you have set up your VPN you can share the keys with as many other users as you would like.

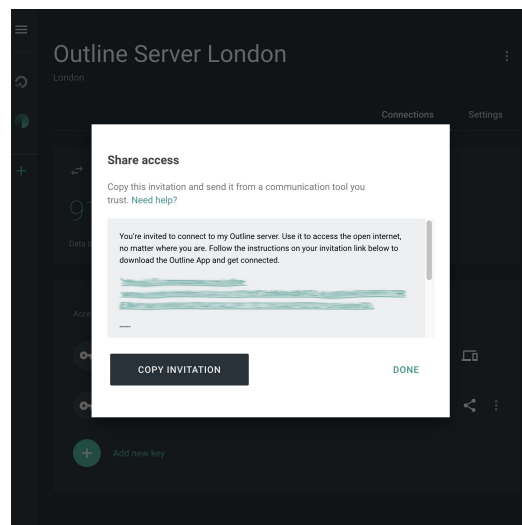The share icon allows you to get a unique code that others can use to access the secure network.

Once you click on the share link you will be able to copy the code to your clipboard and share the code on any platform you choose.

Download the Outline App, and paste the code into the
Outline your mobile communications will also be secured.