Twitter Thread by Moritz Stefaner

Moritz Stefaner
@moritz_stefaner

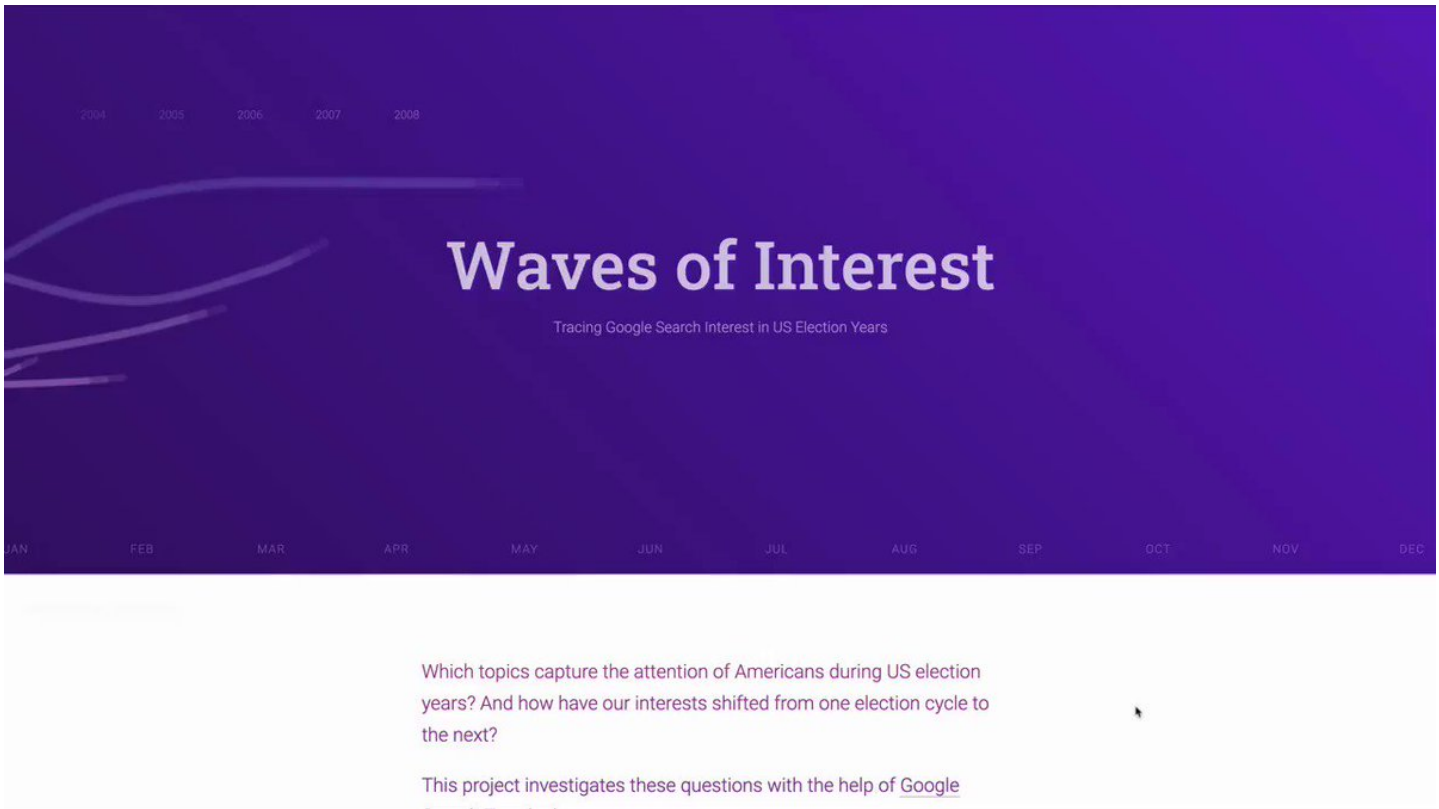
■ Excited to launch:■

~ WAVES OF INTEREST ~
Tracing Google Search Interest
in US Election Years

https://t.co/iF8VwZTgS7

w/ @recifs @destrysibley @googlenewsinit @albertocairo @smfrogers

■■



When @smfrogers and @albertocairo reached out to do a project for the US elections, based on Google Trends data, my immediate thought was to make it *long-term*.

Google Trends covers 17 years of data by now!

What an opportunity to investigate how past US election years were different from this one, and which attention cycles can we observe within election years.

How did the topic landscape evolve?

And how has the pace of attention shifts changed?

After lots of analysis and experimentation, we put together the site as follows:

Opening with a smooth wavy line chart animation — an ambient introduction to the theme of waves, and trends — we dive right into the first central question:



"Which political topics trend in election years in general? And when?"

We show both a list of top rising topics in election years, as well as a detailed chart of how their search interest values unfolded over the years.

Which search terms trend in US election years — and when?

TOP RISING TERMS | **FULL TOPIC LIST**

ELECTORAL FRAUD
+366% search interest

POSTAL VOTING
+362% search interest

OPINION POLL
+338% search interest

FACT CHECK
+235% search interest

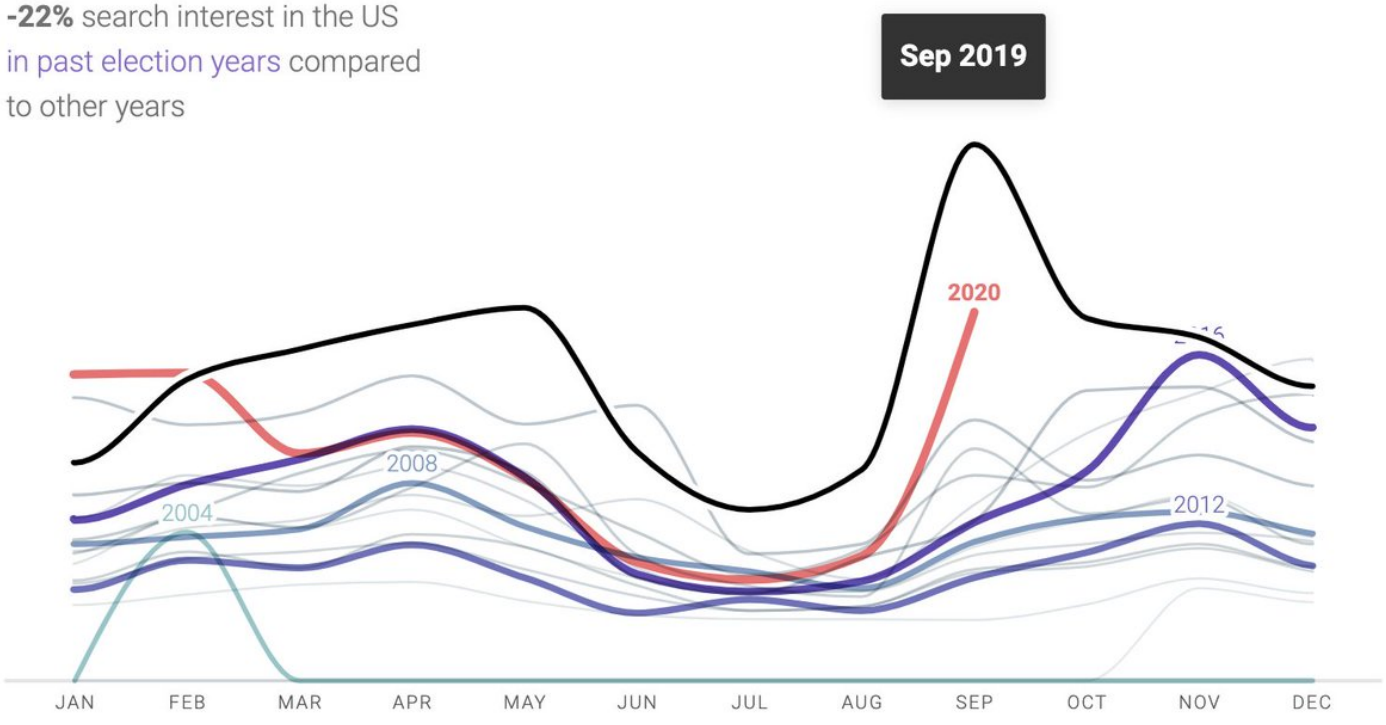
VOTING
+193% search interest

ELECTION
+186% search interest

This comparison allows us to understand where we are in the "attention cycle" around certain topics…

CLIMATE CHANGE

-22% search interest in the US in past election years compared to other years



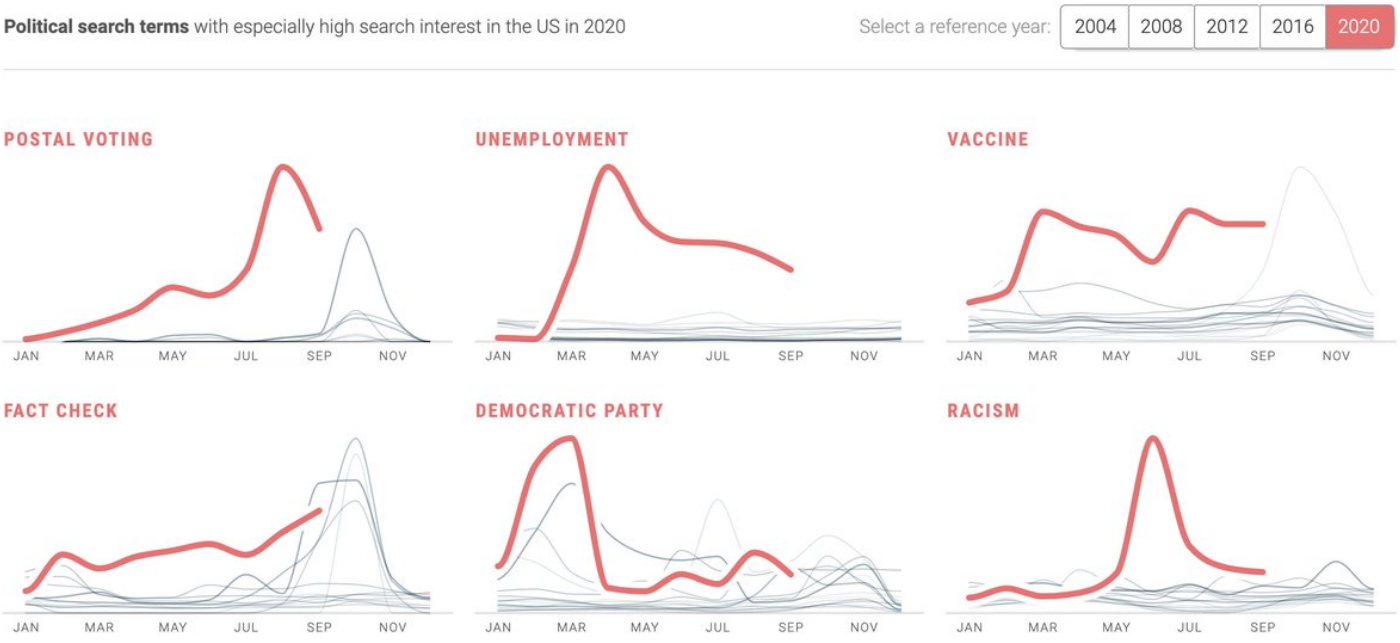
…and gives us an opportunity to introduce the topic lists we are working with:

- a set of top searched political terms on Google,
- concepts from Pew surveys on top political issues in election years
- and a few manually added terms to account for recent events.

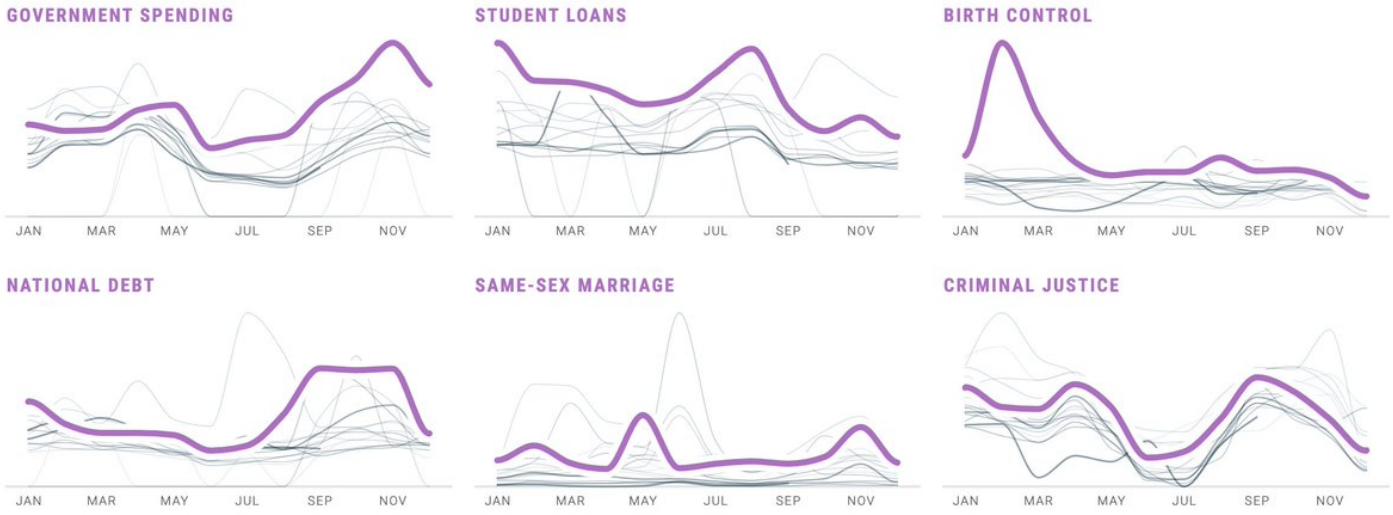
Abortion Affordable Housing Antisemitism Army Birth control Budget deficit Civil and political rights Climate change Criminal justice Democratic Party Economy Education Election Electoral fraud Energy Fact check First amendment Foreign policy Gender equality Gender identity Gerrymandering Government spending Gun control Health Care Health insurance Homelessness Immigration Income tax Inequality Information privacy Interest rate Legality of cannabis Medicare Mexico–United States barrier Minimum Wage Misinformation Mortgage loan National Debt National security October surprise Opinion poll Opioid Parental leave Pension funds Police Politics Postal voting Poverty President Racism Recession Renewable Energy Republican Party Same-sex marriage Second amendment Social security Student loans Supreme Court Tariffs Tax policy Terrorism Trade Union Unemployment Vaccine Violent crime Voting Voting rights Wages War

Obviously, 2020 begs the question how much out of the ordinary the year is compared to other years.

Data says YES INDEED.

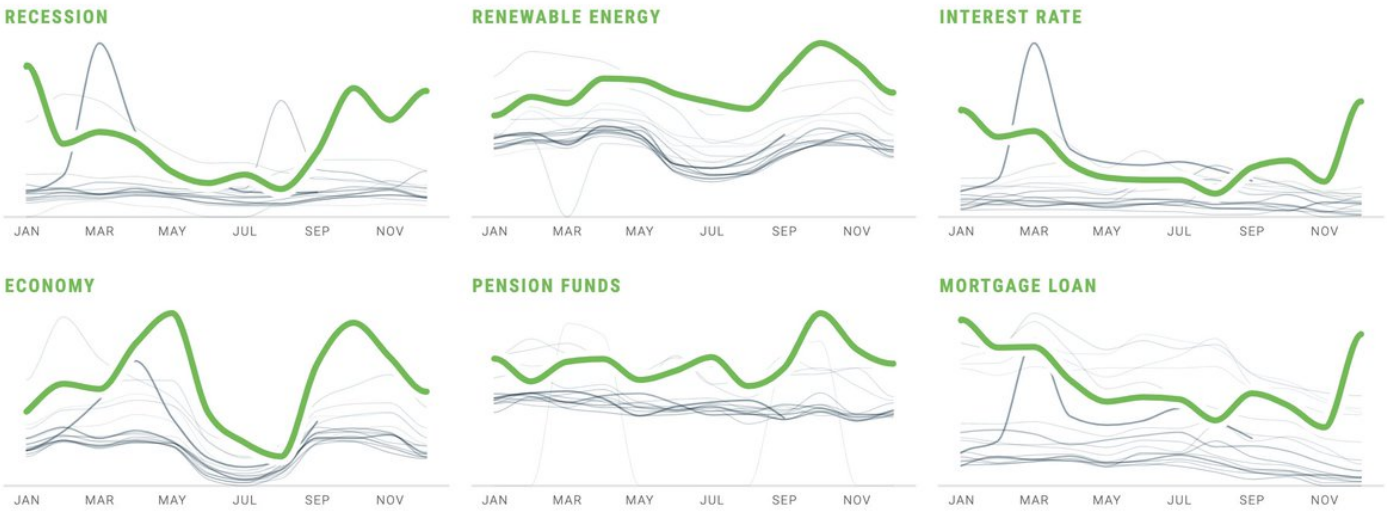


But, it's also been really interesting to also "time-travel" back to 2012 when national debt, student loans, legality of cannabis or same-sex marriage were among the most searched topics.

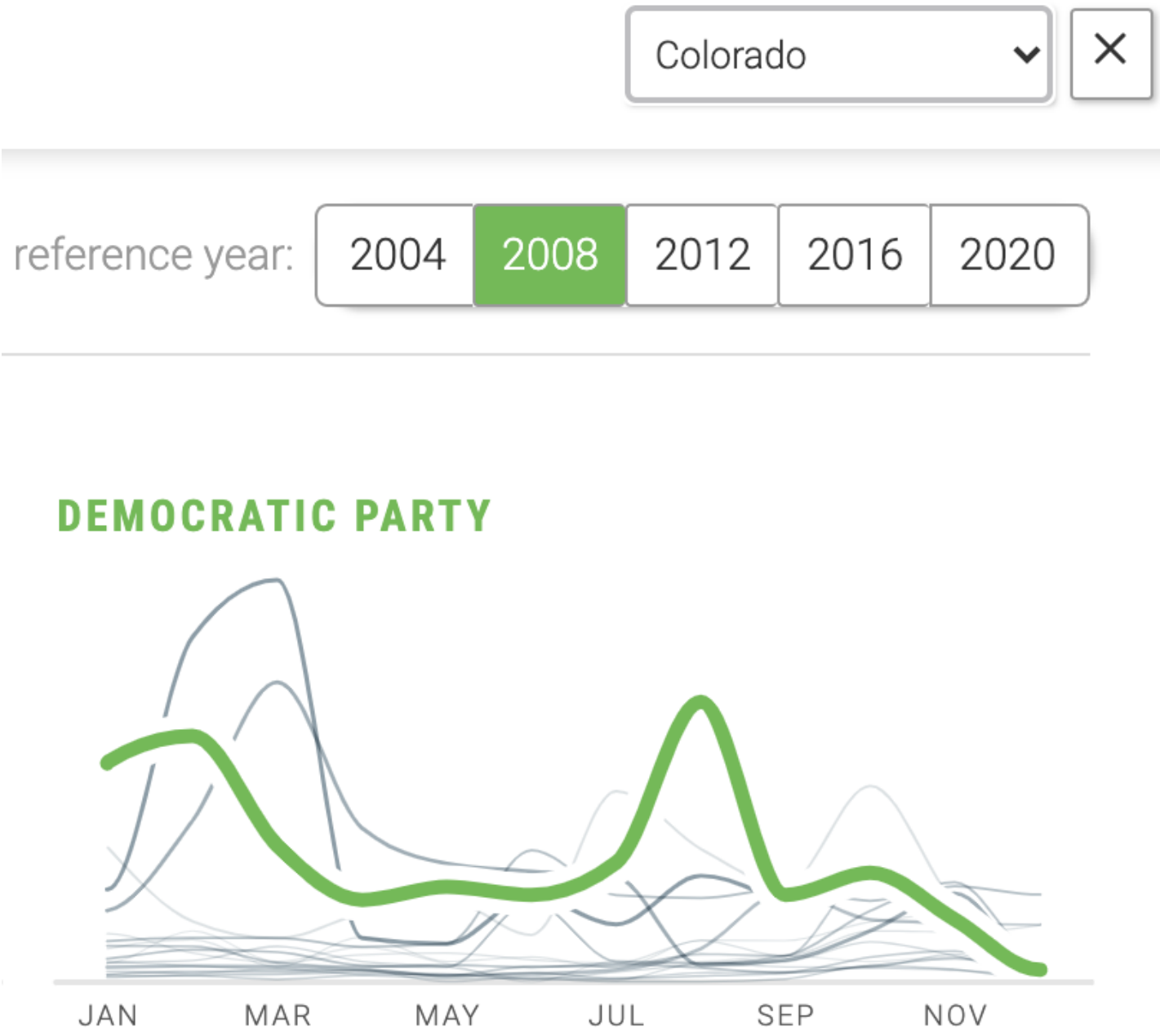


Or look at 2008, where economy and environment were the dominating themes.

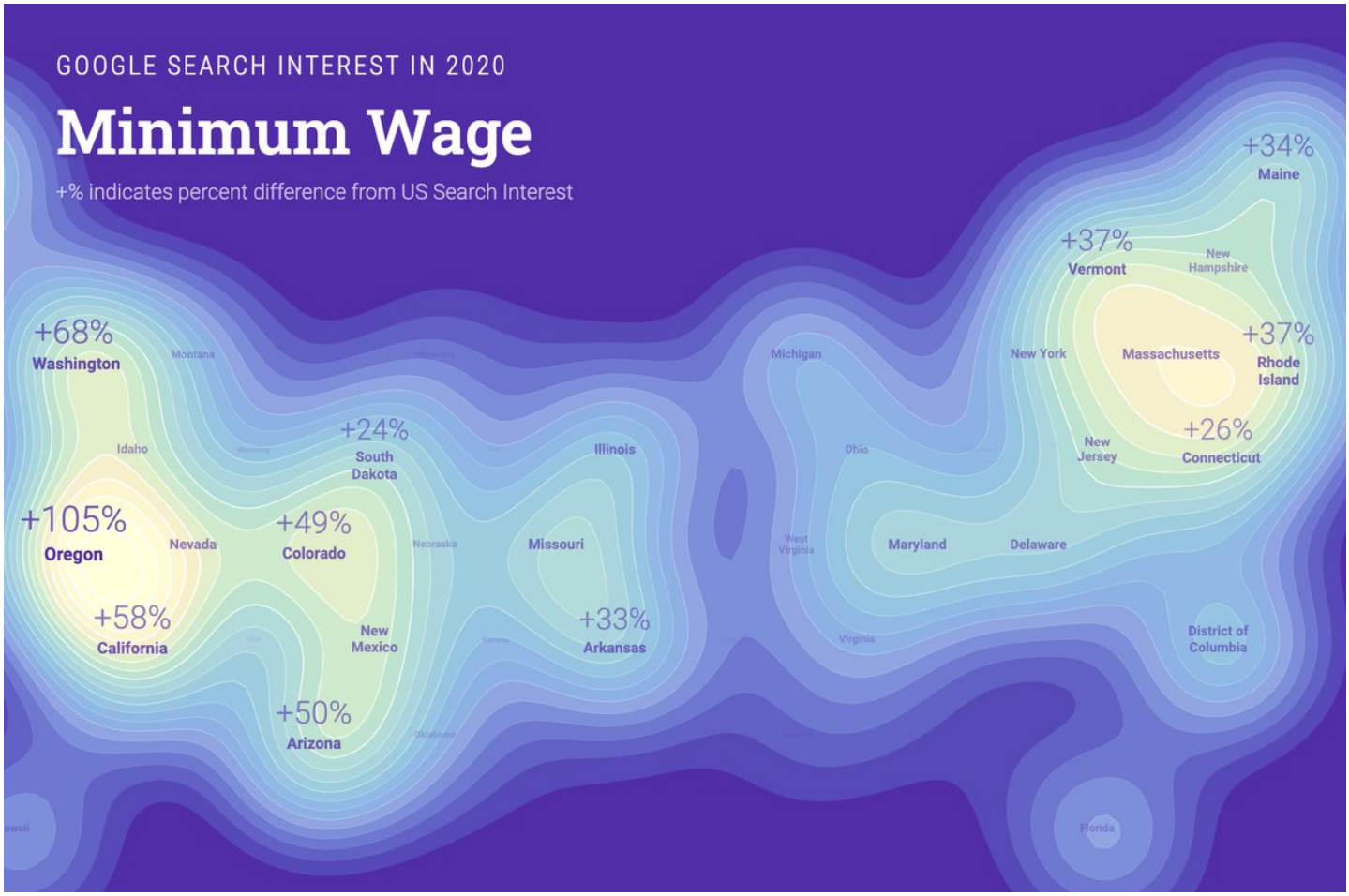
The flatness of these top issue curves, compared to 2020s attention spikiness, tells a striking story how pace of attention shifts has changed dramatically.



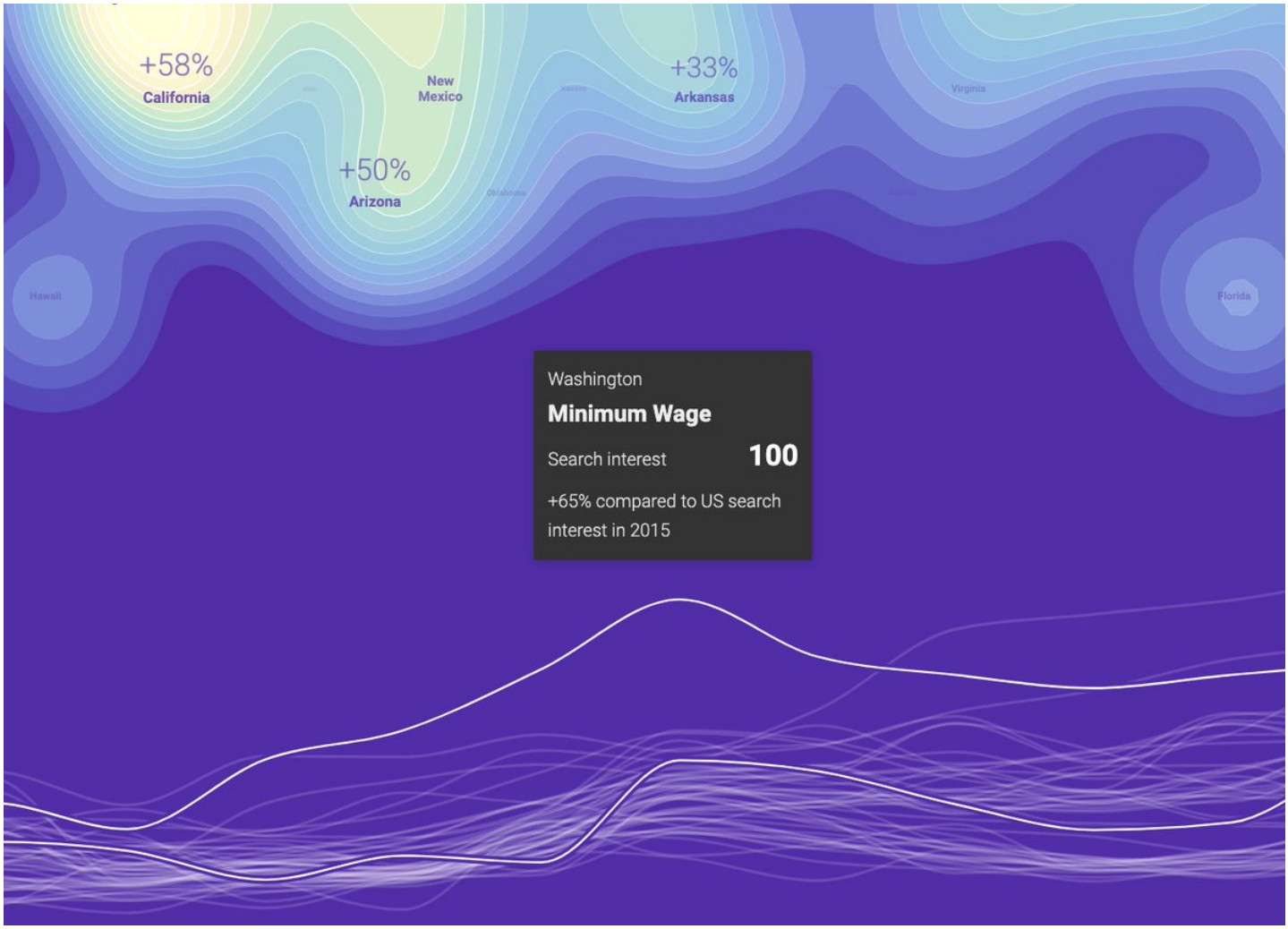
By the way — one other, somewhat hidden, but quite neat feature is to switch the whole site US-wide mode to individual state perspective.



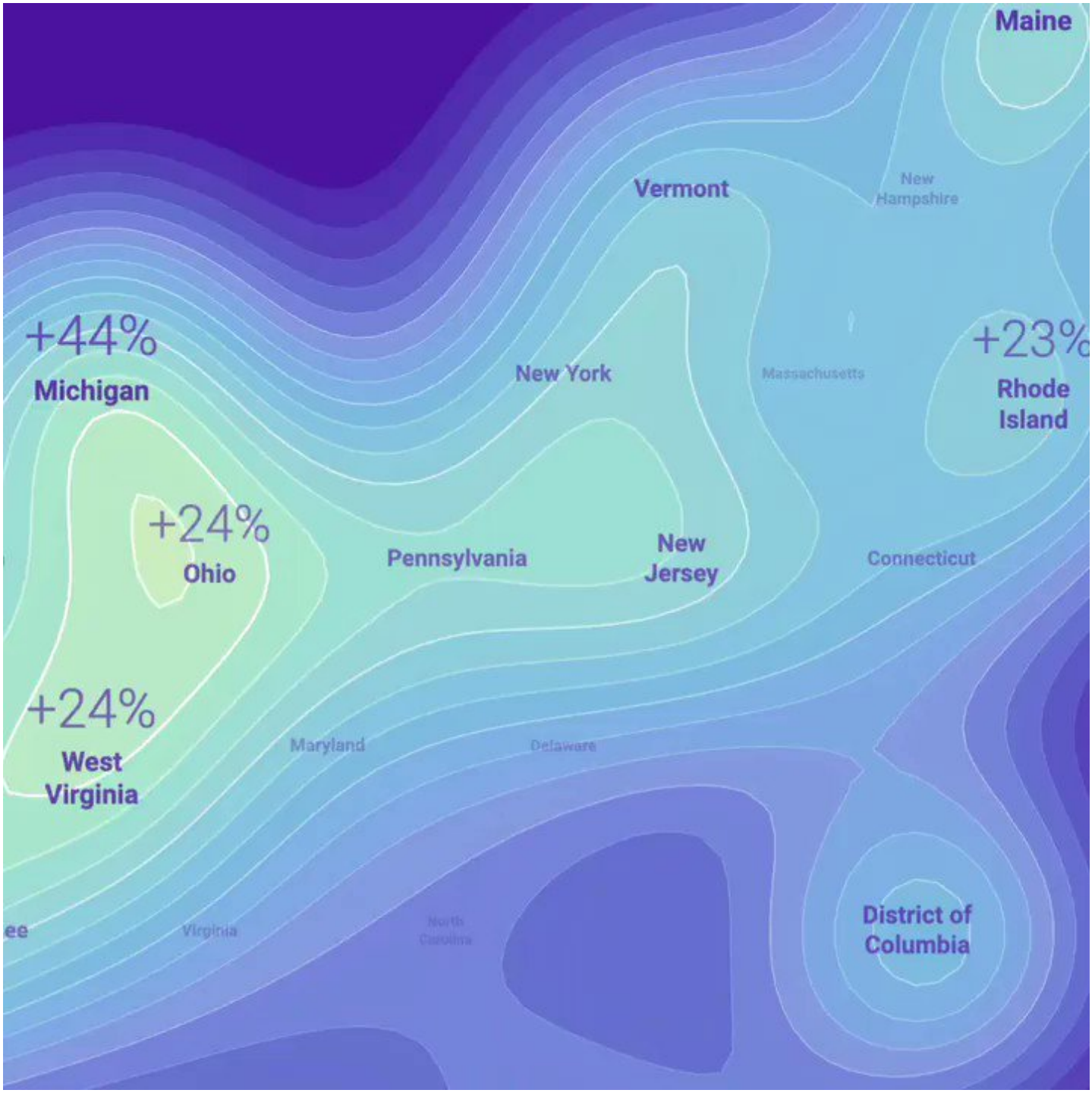
Which brings us to the final view: A map of the US based on topic interest — which topics are searched uniformly across states, and which are unevenly distributed?



And how has the volume and spread of search interest developed over the years? Read precise values in the line chart…



… or get a geographic overview with the animated maps (Lava lamp style!)



@recifs developed these gorgeous contour maps and had a big hand or two in the rest of the site as well — make sure to check out his behind-the-scenes writeup!

https://t.co/7rWPWNLyeL

Big thanks also to @destrysibley who worked on concept and copy editing, as well as @smfrogers and @albertocairo for the opportunity and advice!

The site was built with @sveltejs — it's a great framework for data-heavy interactive sites with custom graphics. Other than that, lots of @d3js_org, a few svelte plugins and preprocessing with @ProjectJupyter and @pandas_dev.

Read more about design considerations and process over at:
https://t.co/HyOCQIYCuH

And, of course, again, check out the full site here, and let us know what you think!

https://t.co/Mskb1P6n1Z

Some first coverage: @ranimolla wrote a nice piece on @recode: https://t.co/PSzAtHyrE1