

PolPaL (Political Party Links) Data Import v1.1

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As of October 2026

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1. Introduction

This document explains the integration of external datasets into the PolPaL database. It is written for those users who are tasked with integrating new data into PolPaL. We publish this documentation on the PolPaL website for transparency reasons.

Generally speaking, the import of external datasets comprises three steps:

1. Add the dataset to the PolPaL website
2. Prepare the dataset for import into the PolPaL database
3. Upload the prepared dataset file

2. Distinction between data project, dataset, and data version

PolPaL links entries of political entities across datasets. Those datasets (external datasets) are provided by a variety of different scholars, institutions, and research infrastructures. Some of them are updated regularly, while others are published and archived once. In addition, some institutions and research infrastructures publish not only one thematic dataset but several different ones. To accommodate differences across published datasets, PolPaL structures datasets into data projects, datasets, and data versions. Datasets are nested within data projects; versions are the different releases of a specific dataset. Datasets can have different versions due to new releases and/or the revision of major/minor issues.

Data projects are the overarching research projects, institutions, or infrastructures responsible for datasets. For example, the Varieties of Democracy Institute is the responsible institute for publishing and updating several datasets on the democracy levels of states and the political ideology of political parties, the Varieties of Democracy Dataset (Coppedge et al. 2026) and Varieties of Party Identity and Organization dataset (Lindberg et al. 2022). In PolPaL, the Varieties of Democracy Institute would be the respective data project (projectKey: vdem). Datasets published by individual or multiple scholars but outside the context of larger research projects, institutions, or infrastructures are also included in PolPaL. In those cases, the information for data projects and datasets is sometimes duplicated. For example, the One-Party Membership Dataset (OPAMED) (Angiolillo 2024) was published by Fabio Angiolillo in 2024. In this case, we treat OPAMED as both the data project (projectKey: opamed) and the dataset (datasetKey: opamed-opamed).

Datasets are nested within data projects. A dataset is a specific collection of data, usually provided by the data project as one data file (+ additional supplementary files). For example, the data project European Social Survey provides the datasets ESS round 1 (ESS ERIC 2023) and ESS round 2 (ESS ERIC 2018). If a project separates the collection of data into several files, for example, when projects publish datasets by country, those country-files are handled as separate datasets (e.g., ESS2 - integrated file, edition 3.6 (Italy not included) & ESS2 - Italy country file from main questionnaire).

Versions are versions of the same dataset with minor or major changes. Those changes can be due to minor corrections in the data (e.g., ESS11 - integrated file, edition 4.0 & ESS11 - integrated file, edition 4.1) or major new releases of the same dataset (Country-Party-Date: V-Party version 1 & Country-Party-Date: V-Party version 2). We typically follow the data project's distinction between different datasets and different versions of one dataset.

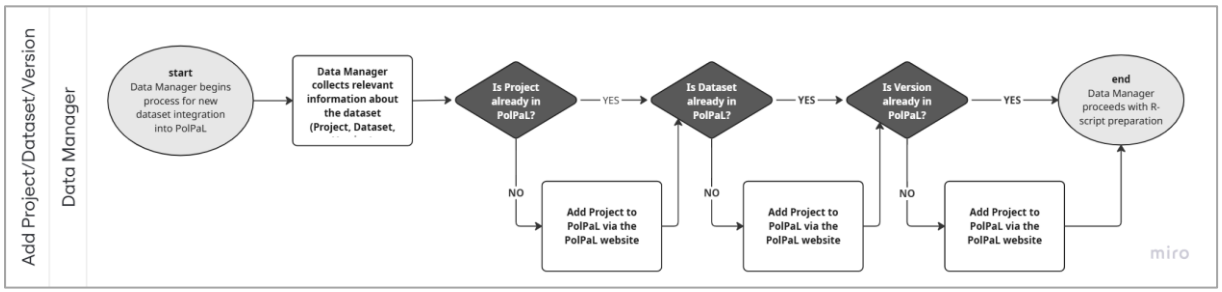
For each dataset version we integrate into PolPal, we create a projectKey, datasetKey, and versionKey. These keys (IDs) built on each other. The **projectKey** is the shortest key identifying the project (e.g., *vdem*). The **datasetKey** consists of the projectKey and a short key identifying the dataset separated by a "-" dash (e.g., *vdem-vparty*). The **versionKey** consists of the datasetKey and a short key identifying the version separated by another "-" dash (e.g., *vdem-vparty-2_cpd*).

Please note that the distinction between data project, dataset, and data version is not a fixed scheme that applies to all published data in the same way. While it is fairly straightforward to distinguish between projects, datasets, and versions in some cases, other cases might be missing one level or publish their data using more than three nested levels. In case you want to integrate data for which the different levels are unclear, please consult with a PolPaL team member. See also Appendix A: Examples for data project, dataset, and data version for examples of how we distinguish between projects, datasets, and versions for the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), European Social Survey (ESS), and One-Party Membership Dataset (OPAMED).

3. Add project/dataset/version to PolPaL website

Integrating a new dataset into PolPaL might require creating the data project, dataset, and data version on the PolPaL website. In the following subsections, we illustrate how to find the page to create a project on the PolPaL website. We additionally describe the relevant variables for each data project. Figure 1 illustrates the general workflow for generating new projects, datasets, and versions on the PolPaL website.

Figure 1. Decision tree for the creation of Project, Dataset, Version



3.1. Data Project

To prepare the integration of external data into PolPaL, please access the following URL and create a new project entry, if necessary: https://polpal.org/data/projects. Creating a new data project is only necessary if the project has not been created before. Hence, please check whether the dataset version you are about to integrate is part of a project already listed in PolPaL. Create a new project only if this is *not* the case.

After clicking on the button highlighted in Figure 2, you are asked to add information on the project. We briefly describe this information in Table 1. The V-Dem Project serves as a good example.

Figure 2. PolPaL Data Projects page

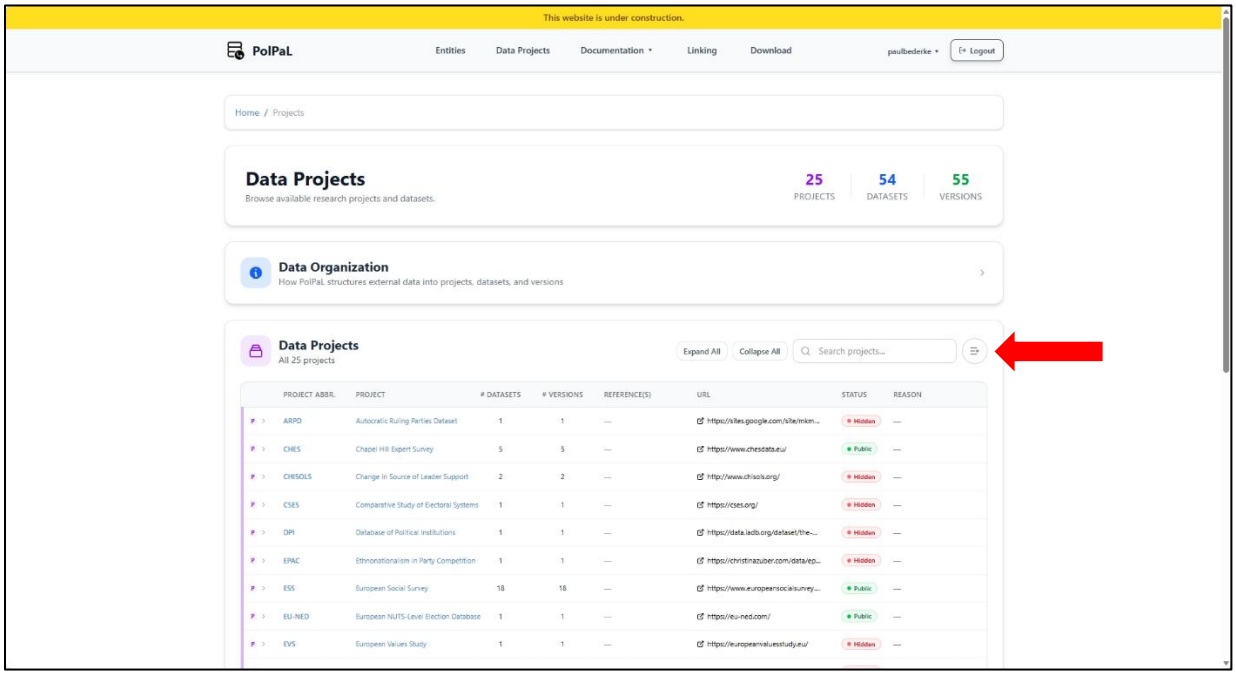


Table 1. Information you need to provide for each project

Field name	Required	Content	Comment	Example
Project Key	yes	Short identifier of the project (e.g., *vdem*)	All lowercase, no punctuation, no special characters	vdem
Short Name	yes	Abbreviation of the project (e.g., *V-Dem Institute*)		V-Dem
Full Name	yes	Full name of the project (e.g., *Varieties of Democracy Institute*)		Varieties of Democracy Institute
URL	yes	URL to project page	This is NOT necessarily the page where the data can be downloaded.	https://www.v-dem.net/
Description	yes	Description of the project	Preferably taken from the project's website; if taken from the project's website, cite this directly and fully in the Project Information field.	"V-Dem provides a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of rule that goes beyond the simple presence of elections. We distinguish between five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian, and collect data to measure these principles." (https://www.v-dem.net/, last accessed 2026-05-26)
Comment	no	Additional information for internal use.		
Visibility	no	Set to "hidden" if the project shall not be visible to users who are not logged in		
Reason for hiding	No	A reason why the project should be hidden from users before login	Please provide a short reasoning if you hide the project	

3.2. Datasets

Once you have created a new project, you are directed to the project page. An example is shown in Figure 3 for the CHES project. To proceed, please click on the indicated button to create a new dataset entry.

You can also create a dataset entry for a project that already exists in PolPaL (see Figure 1). If you do so, please avoid duplicating already existing dataset entries. Create a new dataset only if it is not a new version of an existing one. For example, if the ESS publishes a new wave, you only need to create a new dataset, not a new project entry. If the newly published data is, however, a new version of a dataset already integrated into PolPaL, you only need to create a new version entry. To create a new dataset, access the projects in PolPaL and click on the relevant project to be directed to its PolPaL page. Figure 3 is an example of such a page for the CHES project. There, you can add a new dataset to the project (see red arrow).

After clicking on the button indicated in Figure 3, you are asked to add information on the dataset. We briefly describe this information in Table 2. The 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Rovny et al. 2025) serves as a good example.

Figure 3. PolPaL Data Project page for the CHES project

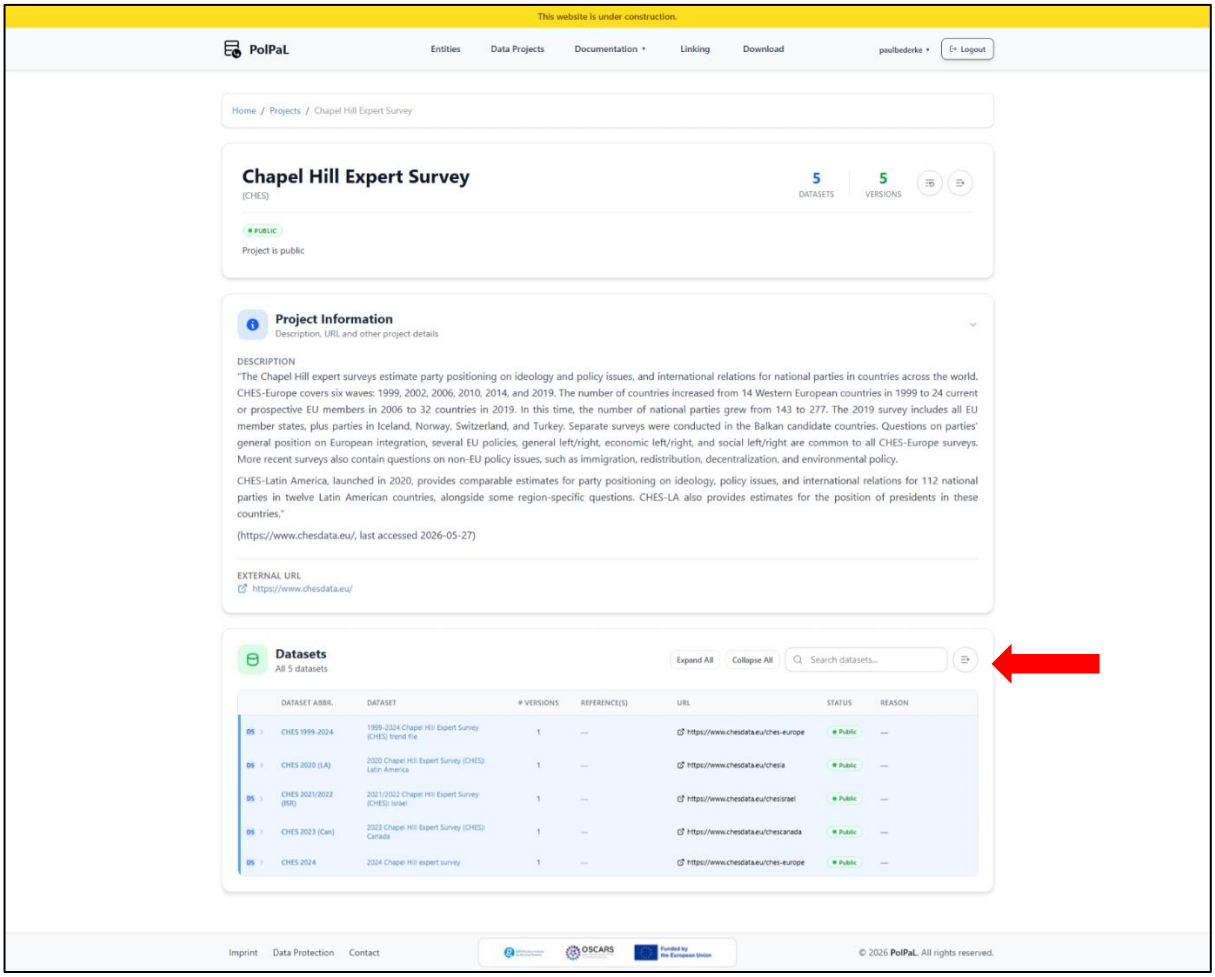


Table 2. Information you need to provide for each dataset

Field name	Required	Content	Comment	Example
Dataset Key	yes	Short identifier of the dataset (e.g., *vparty*)	All lowercase, no punctuation, no special character (except underscore "_"), projectKey is automatically first part of datasetKey (*projectKey-XXX*)	ches-1999_2024
Short Name	yes	Abbreviation of the dataset (e.g., *V-Party*)		CHES 1999-2024
Full Name	yes	Full name of the dataset (e.g., *Varieties of Party Identity and Organization*)		1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file
URL	yes	URL to dataset page	This is NOT necessarily the page where the data can be downloaded	https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe
Description	yes	Short description of the dataset	Preferably taken from the project's website; if taken from the project's website, cite this directly and fully in the Project Information field.	"The Chapel Hill expert surveys estimate party positioning on European integration, ideology and policy issues for national parties in a variety of European countries. The first survey was conducted in 1999, with subsequent waves in 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2019, 2024. The number of countries increased from 14 Western European countries in 1999 to 24 current or prospective EU members in 2006 to 31 countries in 2024. In this time, the number of national parties grew from 143 to 279. The 1999-2024 trend survey includes all EU member states (except Luxembourg), plus the United Kingdom. Questions on parties' general position on European integration, several EU policies, general left/right, economic left/right, and social left/right are common to all surveys. More recent surveys also contain questions on non-EU policy issues, such as anti-elite rhetoric, immigration, redistribution, decentralization, and environmental policy." (https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe, last accessed 2026-05-27)
Comment	no	Additional information for internal use.		
Visibility	no	Set to "hidden" if the dataset shall not be visible to those who are not logged in.		
Reason for hiding	No	A reason why the dataset should be hidden from users before login	Please provide a short reasoning if you hide the dataset	

3.3. Dataset Version

Once you have created a new dataset, you are directed to the dataset's PolPaL page. An example is shown in Figure 4 for the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Rovny et al. 2025). To create a new dataset version, please click on the highlighted button.

You can also create a new dataset version for a dataset that already exists in PolPaL (see Figure 1). If you do so, please avoid duplicating already existing version entries. To create a new version entry, access the relevant dataset page via "Data Projects" (see also above). Figure 4 is an example of such a dataset page for the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file dataset.

After clicking the button shown in Figure 4, you are kindly asked to provide information about the version. We briefly describe this information Table 3. The 2025.2 version of the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Rovny et al., 2025) is a good example.

Figure 4. PolPaL Dataset page for the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file

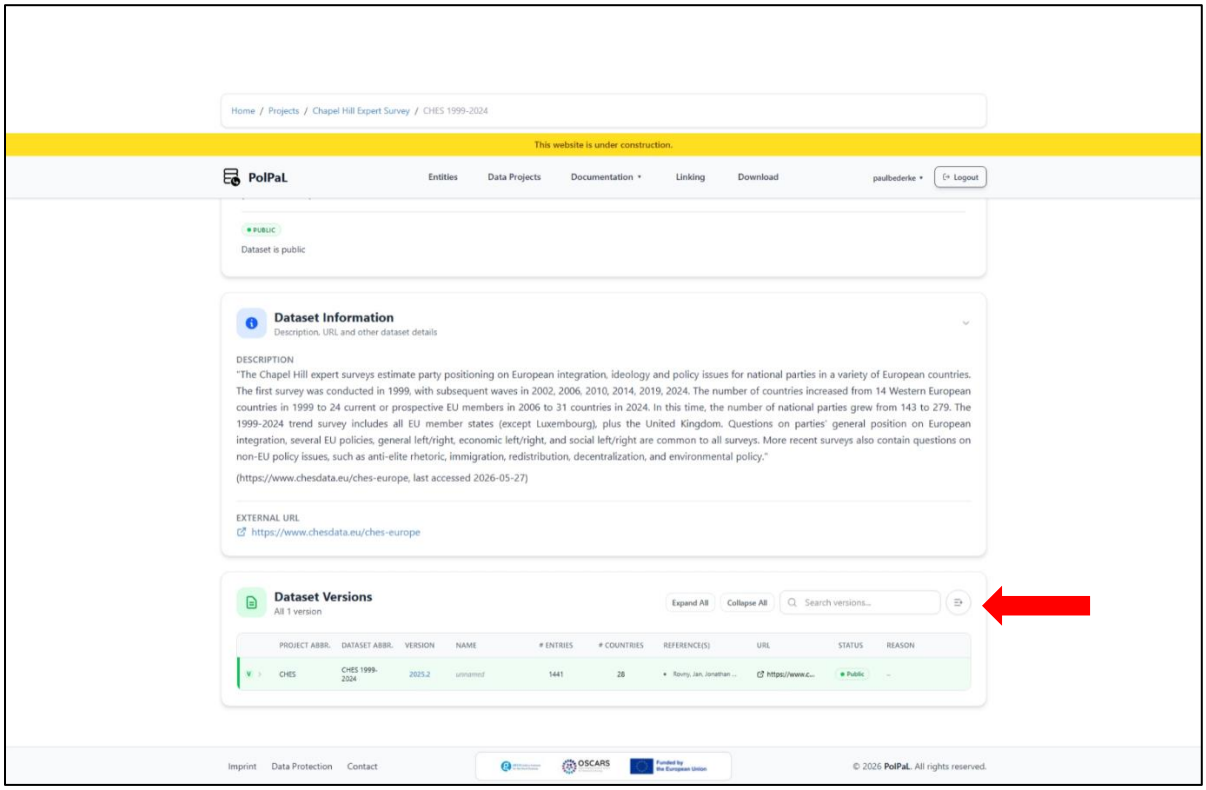


Table 3. Information you need to provide for each dataset version

Field name	Required	Content	Comment	Example
Version Key	yes	Short identifier of the version (e.g., *vdem-vparty-2*)	All lowercase, no punctuation, no special character (except underscore "_"), datasetKey is first part of versionKey (*datasetKey-XXX*)	ches-1999_2024-2025_2
Version	yes	Version number/name	String field since the projects name their versions differently	2025.2
Version Name	no	Specifing the version (e.g., Country-Party-Date: V-Party version 2)	Leave empty if no specification is required/available.	
URL	yes	URL to dataset page	This is NOT necessarily the page where the data can be downloaded, depending on public availability of download page ***Please do not add URLs that directly start the download. Instead, only add the URL for the website on which you can start the download.***	https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe
Comment (Version)	no	Additional information on the dataset version		
Comment (Entries)	no	Additional information about the entries in the dataset	Should contain information for all users about the entries in general. Such information could be, for example, information on whether day or month formats were chosen during the ingestion	
Citations	yes	Citation(s) for the dataset version	APA 7th edition	Rovny, Jan, Jonathan Polk, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2025. "The 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey on political party positioning in Europe: Twenty-five years of party positional data." Electoral Studies 97 (October). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102981
Visibility	no	Set to "hidden" if the dataset version shall not be visible to those who are not logged in.		
Reason for hiding	No	A reason why the dataset version should be hidden from users before login	Please provide a short reasoning if you hide the dataset version	

After adding project, dataset, and dataset version entries on the PolPaL website, the metadata to be uploaded onto the website will be extracted from the external data (see Section 4. Extracting metadata from external data).

4. Extracting metadata from external data

PolPaL uses only the necessary metadata information to identify and link the political parties present in the external dataset. Briefly, PolPaL extracts metadata on the country, the temporal dimension, party IDs and party names, and additional information supporting party identification, as well as information about the variables themselves. This is supplemented with metadata information about the data file, time of download, corresponding PolPaL countrycode, and a unique ID of the data entry (observation) (see Table 4 below for a detailed schema of relevant information). PolPaL only provides metadata on external datasets due to data ownership rights and storage capacity. PolPaL does not host the external datasets.

In most cases, we generate the metadata from external data alone using a standardized R code file. In some cases, we add necessary information on the external data from other sources, such as codebooks or additional data tables. However, this is the exception and should be applied only if identifying the political parties in the external dataset is not possible without the additional information. Typos and other errors are usually not corrected during preparation, as we extract metadata as provided in the external data. The template *[versionKey].R* file to extract metadata from external data can be found in the dedicated PolPaL Own Cloud folder, hosted on a file-sharing system provided by the European Open Science Cloud - EU Node. Sicne this folder is not accessible to the general audience, we additionally provide each R script that was used to extract metadata on the PolPaL website for Downloads.

PolPaL aims to be as fine-grained as possible on the temporal dimension. This means that observations of each party ID are kept for each point in time at which this party ID appears in the dataset. For example, in an electoral result dataset, the temporal dimension constitutes the election date. Observations for the *Social Democratic Party of Germany* would be captured for each election date, such as 2017-09-24, 2021-09-26, and 2025-02-23. Typical survey datasets contain observations for a party for each date a survey respondent answered the questionnaire and selected the party (e.g., 2024-11-29, 2024-11-30, and 2024-12-01). One observation thus represents a specific party ID in a specific country for a specific variable at a specific date. Multiple observations for this combination (versionKey—entryCountry--entryYear-entryMonth-entryDay--entryPartyIdVar--entryPartyId) are reduced to one external

data entry. Due to the size of some datasets, it might be necessary to exclude the entryDay information. We aim at balancing granularity, server capacity, and workload.

4.1 Downloading and archiving the external data

After creating the relevant project, dataset, and version entries on the PolPaL website, we download the external data from the source and take a note (e.g., by hand) of the download date and the URL from which we downloaded it. All external data is archived in subfolders of the PolPaL OwnCloud folder, for internal use. This datasets folder contains nested subfolders with the respective *projectKey*, *datasetKey*, and *versionKey* as folder names. Nested means that the folder containing the external data is stored within a folder that is named after the *versionKey*, and that this *versionKey* folder is stored within the *datasetKey* folder (the name of the folder is the *datasetKey*), and so forth (see Figure 5). Please follow the same structure when you archive the external dataset, as this mirrors the structure on the PolPaL website and allows others to navigate to the correct files more easily. In addition to the external dataset, you should also store the corresponding codebook and any additional files necessary to understand the content of the external dataset.

Figure 5. Folder structure for external datasets in PolPaL OwnCloud folder with the example of the 2025.2 version of the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file

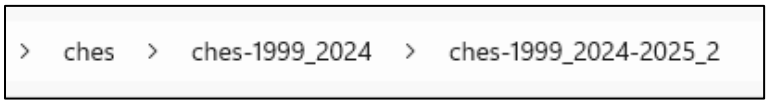


Table 4. Import schema for external datasets

Variable	required	type	content	comment
usedFile	yes	String	Name of file as downloaded	
dateDownloaded	yes	String	Date of the day the dataset was downloaded [YYYY-MM-DD]	
projectKey	yes	String	Short identifier of the project (e.g., *vdem*)	Must match the projectKey for the respective project on the PolPaL website.
datasetKey	yes	String	Short identifier of the dataset (e.g., *vdem-vparty*)	Must match the datasetKey for the respective dataset on the PolPaL website.
versionKey	yes	String	Short identifier of the version (e.g., *vdem-vparty-2*)	Must match the versionKey for the respective version on the PolPaL website.
entryCountryVar	yes	String	Name of country variable	If no country variables is included, add one yourself and leave a note.
entryCountry	yes	String	Value of country variable	If no country name is provided, add the countrynames yourself and leave a note.
entryYearVar	no	String	Name of year variable	
entryYear	no	Int	Value of year variable	
entryMonthVar	no	String	Name of month variable	
entryMonth	no	Int	Value of month variable	
entryDayVar	no	String	Name of day variable	
entryDay	no	Int	Value of day variable	
entryEntityIdVar	yes	String	Name of party ID variable	In case the external data does not provide a proper ID, use a variable that contains the name of the party.
entryEntityId	yes	String	Value of party ID variable	
entryEntityNameShortVar	no	String	Name of short party name variable	
entryEntityNameShort	no	String	Value of short party name variable	
entryEntityNameEnglishVar	no	String	Name of English party name variable	
entryEntityNameEnglish	no	String	Value of English party name variable	
entryEntityNameVar	no	String	Name of party name variable	
entryEntityName	no	String	Value of party name variable	
additionalInformation	no	String	Contains additional variables formatted as one JSON	The file to upload can contain *vote share*, *leader name*, or other important information to identify the political entity during the linking process. Be cautious not to include too many additional variables.
countrycodePolpal	yes	String	countrycodePolpal as in Country (PolPaL database)	The country name must reflect a PolPaL country.
uniqueObservationId	yes	String	Unique ID to identify entry across all entries.	[versionKey--entryCountry--entryYear-entryMonth-entryDay--entryPartyIdVar--entryPartyId].

4.2 Preparation of the R script to extract metadata

To prepare the metadata of the external dataset, PolPaL uses the software *R*. Please use the template *[versionKey].R* for the preparation of external datasets. As datasets differ in their structure, the template needs to be adjusted accordingly. Please rename the R script according to the versionKey of the version you are preparing (e.g., *ess-1-3_6.*R). Remember that you generated a versionKey while adding a version entry to the PolPaL website. Please use this versionKey. Using the versionKey as the file name for the R script ensures that the script is correctly displayed on the website. Please store the newly created R file in the respective version folder (see Figure 5).

Table 4 describes the data that is generated using the R script. You will also find helpful comments in the R script itself. A list of PolPaL countries is included on the PolPaL website. If you encounter issues and/or have questions, do not hesitate to consult with another PolPaL team member.

4.2.1 Identifying party IDs in external data

In general, PolPaL aims to integrate all party IDs that are used in the external dataset. Depending on the structure of the external dataset, Party IDs can be present in one or more variables, be numeric, character, or a combination, or be completely missing. We extract all such party IDs. In case no IDs are provided, we use the name of the party as an ID. It is absolutely necessary to extract an exhaustive list of all party IDs used in any variable. A straightforward example is the 1999-2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Rovny et al. 2025). Here, only the variable *party_id* contains party IDs. In contrast, the European Social Survey (ESS) round 1 (ESS ERIC 2023) has 67 variables containing different sets of party IDs. That is because the ESS provides data on various variables related to respondents' voting choices, the party with which they feel closest, and the party membership all separated by country. To better understand what a party name, party short name, and party ID can look like, feel free to browse the PolPaL entries on the PolPaL website: polpal.org/data/countries.

4.2.2 Adding necessary information that is missing in the external data

In some cases, datasets might be provided by projects without directly containing the necessary information, e.g., when the dataset only covers one country. In these cases, we add a new variable and the relevant information to the external data before integrating it.

Whenever possible, we take this information from the dataset documentation. For example, we added country information for the different ParlLawSpeech dataset versions, and the year of a survey wave when a survey was published without date information as for the Latinobarometer. In some cases, adding all additional information is not possible, as for example in the case of the ParlGov Parties dataset.

5. Importing external data into PolPaL

The actual metadata import takes place on the PolPaL website. The respective data project, dataset, and data version must be present (see Section 3. Add project/dataset/version to PolPaL website). Before the import is conducted, the uploaded file is automatically checked for missing variables, the correct *versionKey*, and the existence of all PolPaL countrycodes. Should the file not follow the pre-defined schema, it will not be possible to import the metadata. Please note that the import can take several minutes, depending on the number of external data entries and the computing power of the web application.

To upload the metadata, navigate to the corresponding PolPaL data version page and click the upload button (see Figure 6). On the upload page for metadata from external data (see Figure 7), select the corresponding metadata file prepared for upload. If parsing the metadata file succeeds without errors, it is possible to upload the metadata to the PolPaL database (see Figure 8).

If metadata from another version of the same dataset is already integrated into PolPaL, it is possible to select the already integrated version as a reference version. If metadata entries are exactly the same between different data versions, it is possible to apply the already set linkages between external dataset metadata entries and PolPaL entities also for the newly imported data version.

Figure 6. PolPaL data version page for the 2022.1 version of the 2020 Chapel Hill Expert Survey: Latin America (Martínez-Gallardo et al. 2022)

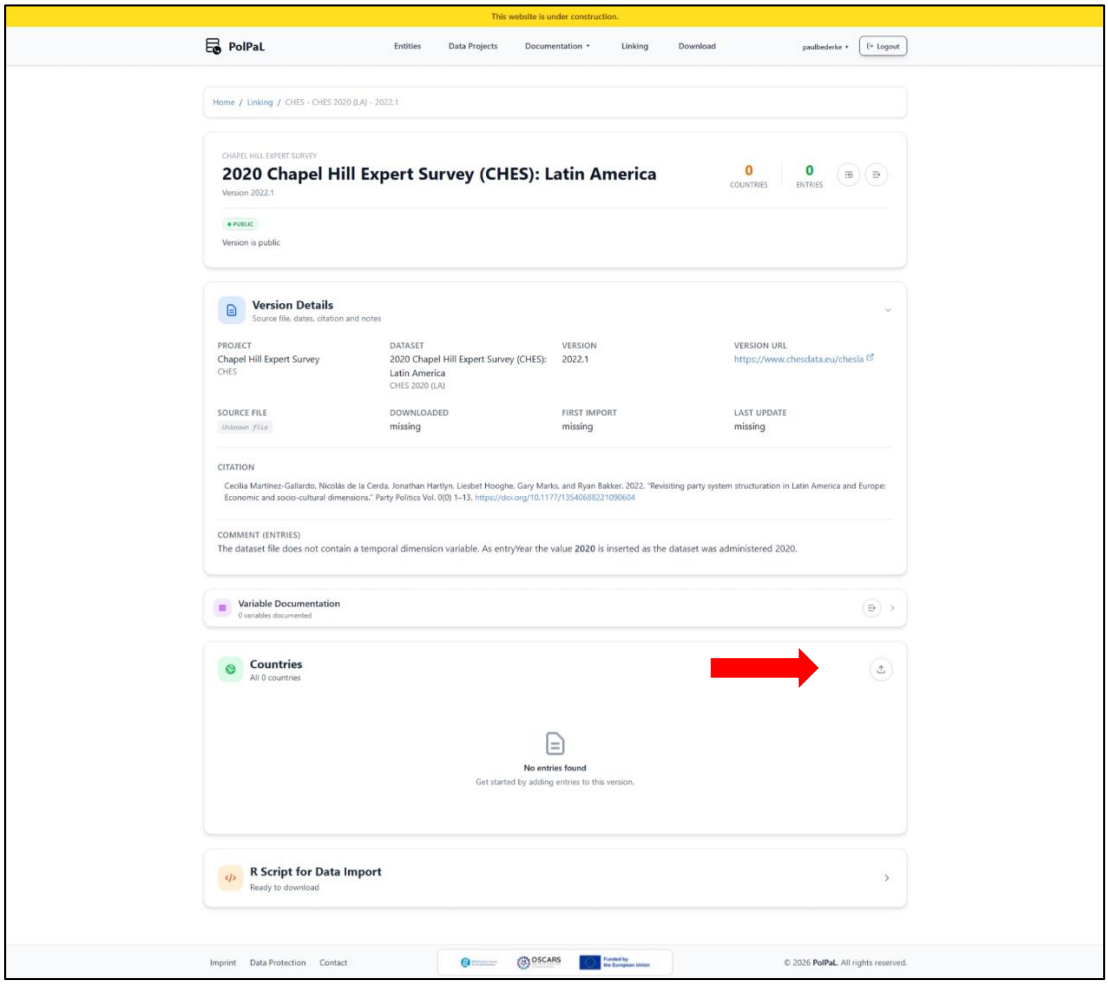


Figure 7. PolPaL upload page for external data entries

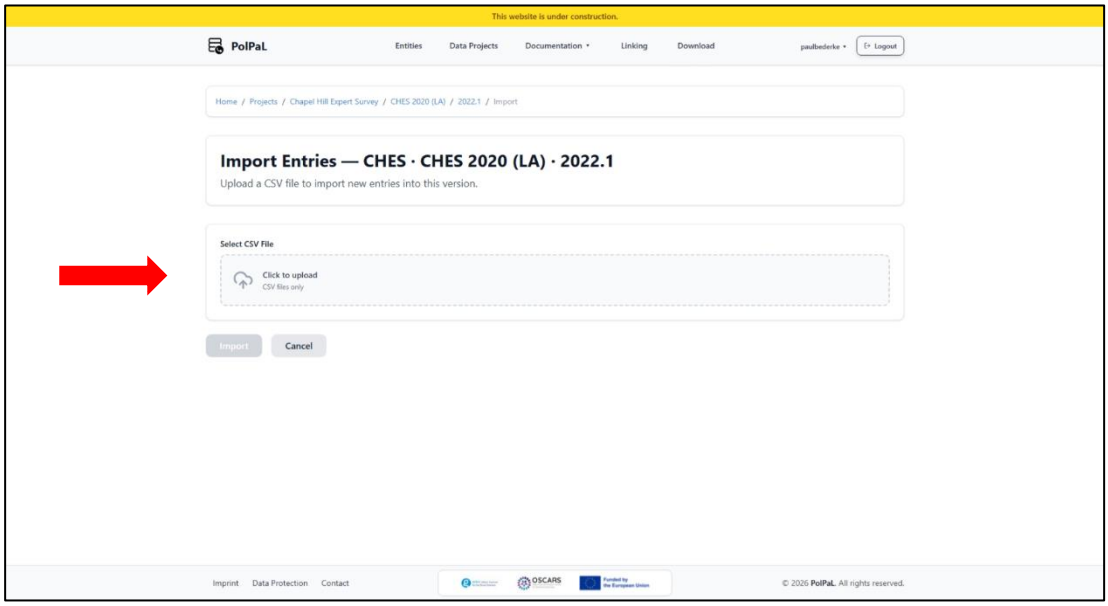
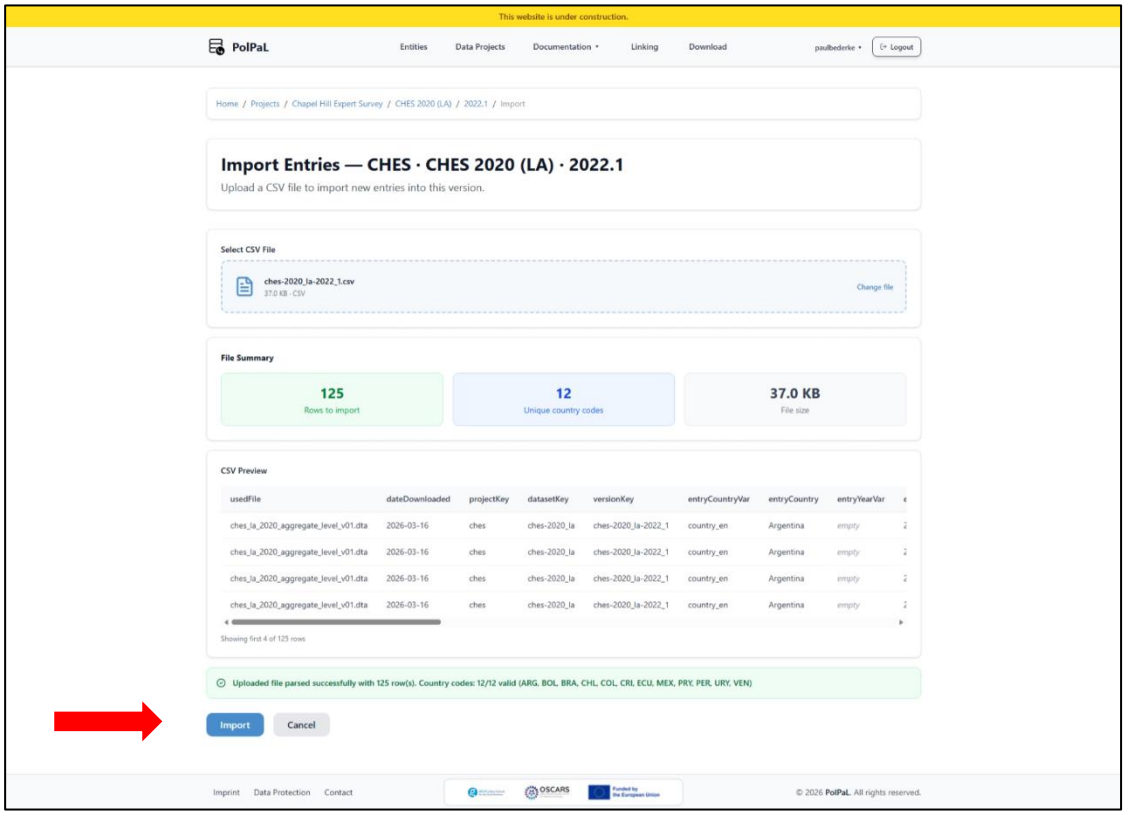


Figure 8. Example of successful parsing of the external data entries file during the upload on the PolPaL website



6. Updating of external data entries in the PolPaL database

In some instances, it is necessary to revise the uploaded data entries file due to errors in the R-script. The steps to be taken are similar to the steps taken during the initial import. You need to navigate to the data version page at the PolPaL website and click the update button for the entries (see Figure 9). On the next page, you select the updated data entries file. Upon successful parsing, the changes (updated entries and deleted entries) are displayed (see Figure 10). These changes can now be applied to the PolPaL database.

Figure 9. PolPaL page for the data version of an external dataset with already imported data entries

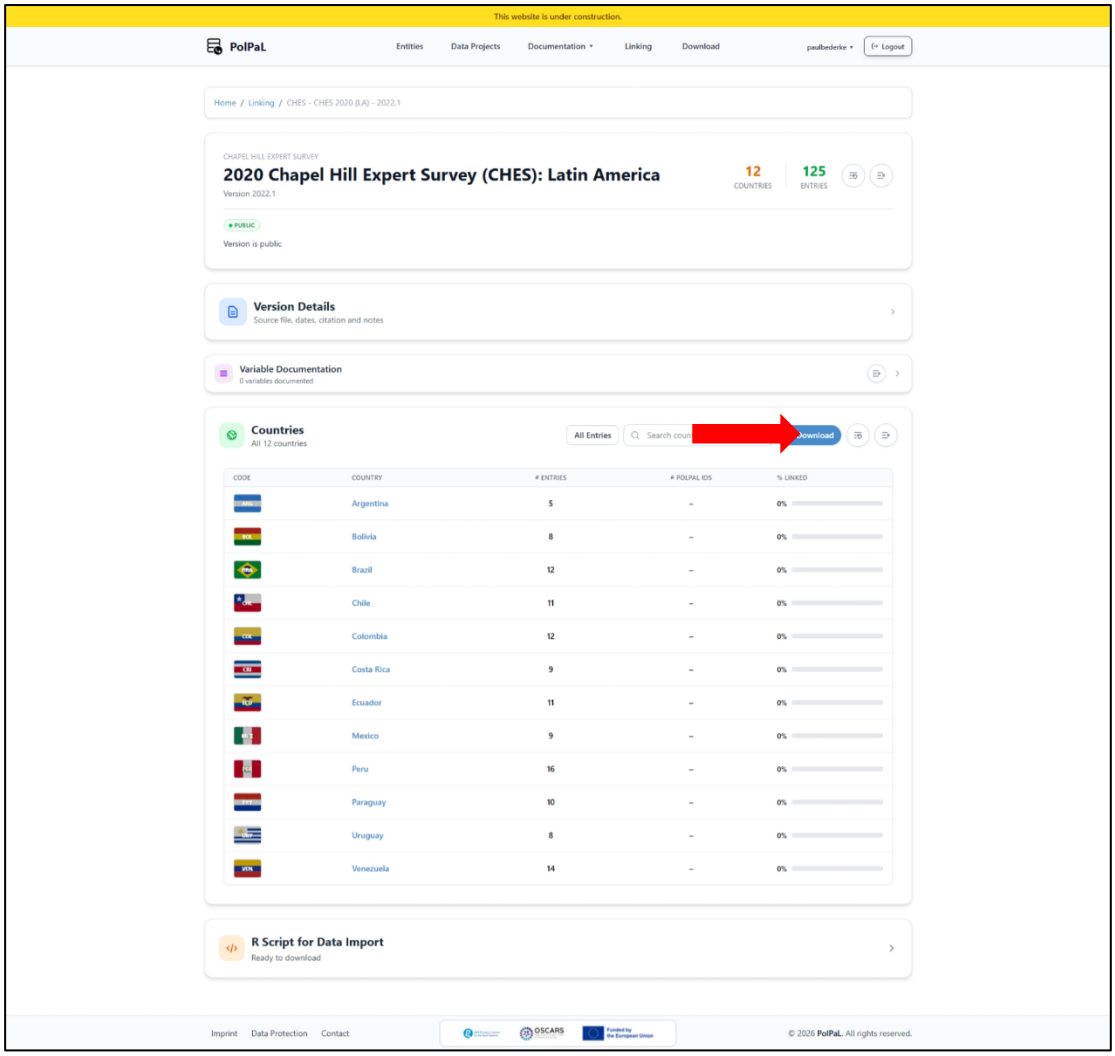
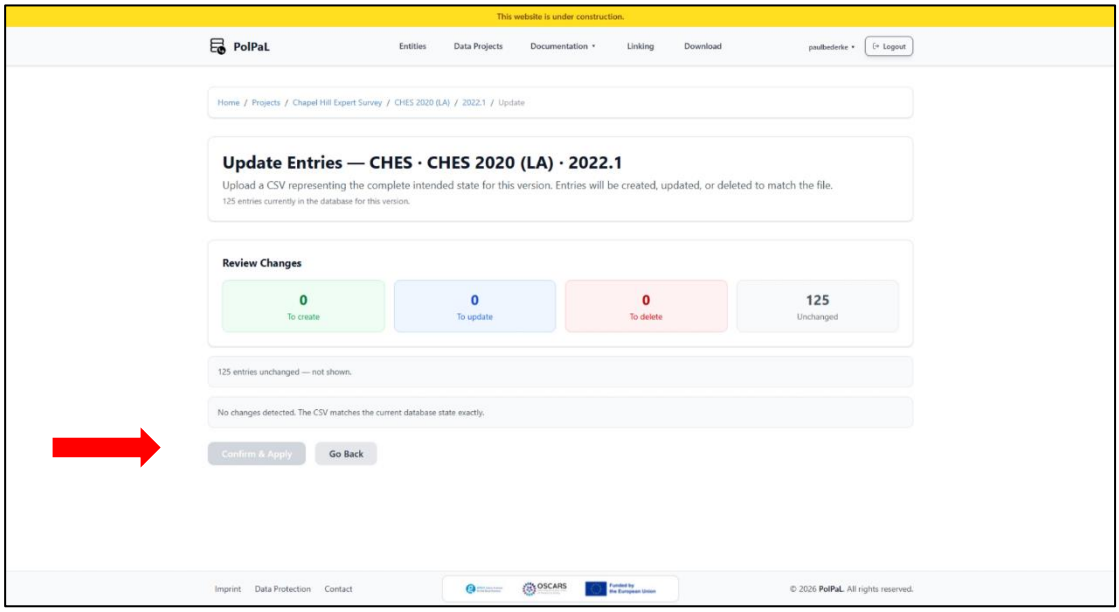


Figure 10. Overview of successful parsing of updated data entries file for an external dataset at the PolPaL website



7. References

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Appendix A: Examples for data project, dataset, and data version

Example: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

Project: Varieties of Democracy Institute (projectKey: vdem)

Dataset: Country-Year: V-Dem Full+Others (datasetKey: vdem-vdem_cyfo)
Version: version 16 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cyfo-16)
version 15 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cyfo-15)

Dataset: Country-Year: V-Dem Core (datasetKey: vdem-vdem_cyc)
Version: version 16 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cyc-16)
version 15 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cyc-15)

Dataset: Country-Date: V-Dem (datasetKey: vdem-vdem_cd)
Version: version 16 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cd-16)
version 15 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cd-15)

Dataset: Country-Date: V-Dem (datasetKey: vdem-vdem_cl)
Version: version 16 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cl-16)
version 15 (versionKey: vdem-vdem_cl-15)

Dataset: Country-Party-Date: V-Party (datasetKey: vdem-vparty_cpd)
Version: version 2 (versionKey: vdem-vparty_cpd- 2)
version 1 (versionKey: vdem-vparty_cpd- 1)

Dataset: Coder-Level: V-Party (datasetKey: vdem-vparty_cl)
Version: version 2 (versionKey: vdem-vparty_cl -2)
version 1 (versionKey: vdem-vparty_cl -1)

Example: European Social Survey (ESS)

Project: European Social Survey (projectKey: ess)

Dataset: *ESS round 1* (datasetKey: *ess-1*)
Version: ESS1 - integrated file, edition 6.7 (versionKey: ess-1-6_7)
ESS1 - integrated file, edition 6.6 (versionKey: ess-1-6_6)

Dataset: *ESS round 2* (datasetKey: *ess-2*)
Version: ESS2 - integrated file, edition 3.6 (versionKey: ess-2-3_6)
ESS2 - integrated file, edition 3.5 (versionKey: ess-2-3_5)

Dataset: ESS round 2 (Italy) (datasetKey: ess-2_ita)
Version: ESS2 - Italy country file from main questionnaire (versionKey: ess-2_ita-unk)
Note: The ESS wave 2 (ESS ERIC 2018) for Italy does not provide a version number. However, the ESS typically updates their data on a regular basis. So, this might not be version 1. Hence, we chose *unk* as version number. Decisions like these can be documented in the version comments field.

Example: One-Party Membership Dataset (OPAMED)

Project: One-Party Membership Dataset (projectKey: ess)

Dataset: One-Party Membership Dataset (datasetKey: opamed-opamed)
Version: OPAMED Version 1.0 (versionKey: opamed-opamed-1_0)
Note: Angiolillo (2024) only provided one version of this dataset so far. We assigned it the version number 1.0.