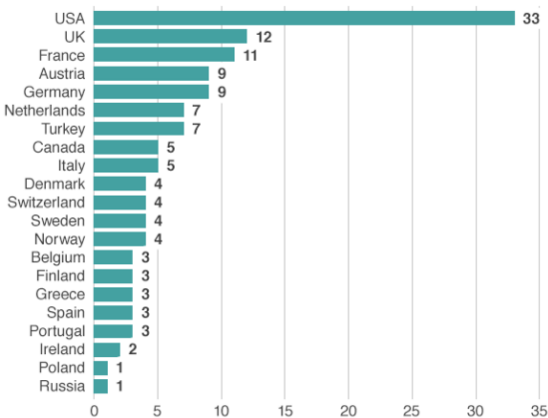


The Bilderberg meeting, an annual gathering of some of the most powerful and influential figures in the world, starts on Thursday. But who's on this year's guest list?

Critics call it a sinister conspiracy, reinforcing without accountability the dominance of a transatlantic capitalist cabal. Those involved say it's merely an informal way to understand better the way the world works and to share their expertise to improve it.

Whatever one's view, an invitation to the four-day Bilderberg meeting is a sign that someone has arrived as a politician, business leader, administrator or opinion-influencer.

Where do the Bilderberg group's members come from?



Source: Bilderberg

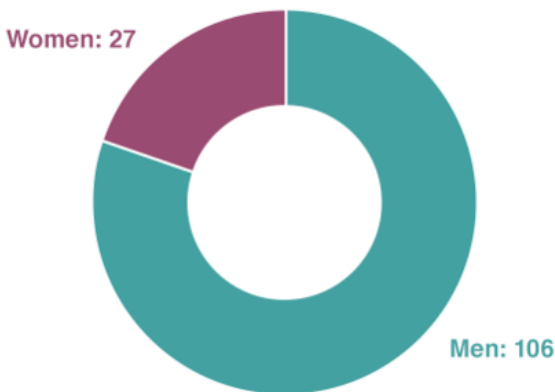
Chart: Representation at Bilderberg

Of the **133 people** due to arrive in the small town of Telfs-Buchen, Austria, this week, 21 will be politicians. Among them is a regular attendee in UK Chancellor **George Osborne**. Another notable figure is **Ed Balls**, his former Labour shadow, who lost his seat in Parliament in May's general election but is still deemed influential enough to come. The United Kingdom - including its economic performance - is on the agenda.

Laurence Boone, special adviser on financial and economic affairs to President Francois Hollande, will be there too, as will Dutch Prime Minister **Mark Rutte** and Austrian President

Heinz Fischer.

Gender breakdown of this year's Bilderberg meeting



Source: Bilderberg

Pie charts

A **conspicuous absentee** is the International Monetary Fund's managing director Christine Lagarde, who attended last year. Several of the political contingent at Bilderberg are retired from day-to-day involvement, such as former Italian Prime Minister **Mario Monti** and former European Commission President **Jose Barroso**.

Technology firms and organisations provide six representatives. Google boss

Eric Schmidt will be there, as will two other of the company's senior executives. Artificial intelligence is one of Bilderberg's suggested topics for discussion. There is no detailed agenda, with no resolutions or votes.

"Thanks to the private nature of the conference, the participants are not bound by the conventions of their office or by pre-agreed positions," Bilderberg says. "As such, they can take time to listen, reflect and gather insights."

Critics argue its aim is more sinister and there are countless different flavours of conspiracy theory.

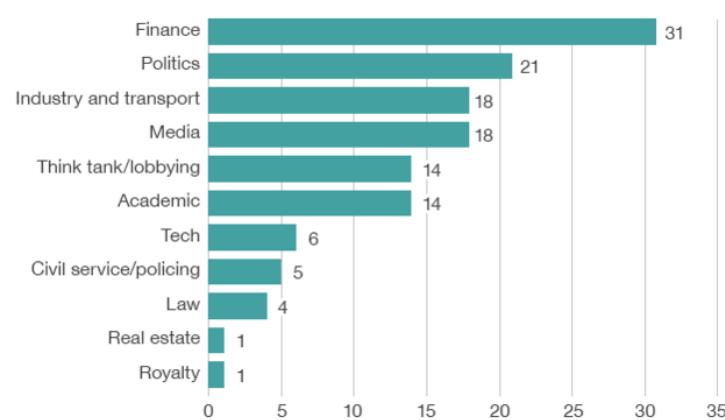
Image caption

The event's organisers describe its participants as "diverse". Still, only 27 women are due to come, compared with 106 men. Among them are Santander chairman **Ana Botin**, BBC Trust chairman **Rona Fairhead** and **Zanny Minton Beddoes**, editor-in-chief of The Economist. The last two are among 18 people from the media.

Think tanks and lobbying groups are sending 14 people, the same as the number of academics on Bilderberg's list.

The only royal due to take part is **Princess Beatrix** of the Netherlands, whose father Prince Bernhard co-founded the meetings, first held at the Hotel de Bilderberg in Oosterbeek, Netherlands, in 1954. Its stated aim was to "foster dialogue between Europe and North America".

The different backgrounds of the Bilderberg group



Source: Bilderberg

Graph

There's an emphasis on security issues, including chemical weapons, the Middle East, Iran, terrorism, Nato and cybersecurity. **David Petraeus**, the retired US general and former CIA director who was given two years' probation and fined earlier this year for [leaking classified materials](#) to his mistress, will be in Telfs-Buchen. He now works in the private sector.

[Former French Prime Minister Alain Juppe](#), who was once banned from politics for a year in 2004 his role in an illegal party-funding scandal, will be there too. He is often mentioned as a possible future president of the country.

The world of finance provides 31 attendees, with industry, mainly heavy, and transport accounting for another 18. Most are not household names, but one of the more colourful figures is **Michael O'Leary**, chairman of the budget airline Ryanair and known for his outspoken remarks. Unfortunately for him, he won't be able to discuss the goings on at Bilderberg, as proceedings are strictly guarded by the Chatham House Rule - meaning that the journalists and others are "free to use the information received", but neither the identity nor the affiliation of speakers nor of any other participant may be revealed.

Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State who first came to a Bilderberg meeting in the 1950s, returns. His country is top of the list of attendees with 33. It's followed by the UK on 12, France on 10 and Austria on nine. Altogether, people from 22 countries are coming.

One topic not on the outline list to be discussed this year is the environment. The [Breitbart website](#) calls this "stupid".

But the importance of the Bilderberg meeting is emphasised by the Guardian, which argues it's [more influential than the G7](#) meeting of leading economies that took place at the weekend, finishing with a call for [an end to the use of fossil fuels](#) by the end of the century.

The sense of importance is echoed in [the Irish Times](#), which says the invitation for Michael O'Leary means he can now take "his place among the chieftains of the world". Bilderberg might be secretive, but it's unlikely to be quiet this year.

