**Bilderberg Group**

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| Bilderberg Group |
| [Bilderberg Hotel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilderberg_Hotel) in the [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands), name-giving location of the first conference in 1954 |
| **Formation** | 29 May 1954; 60 years ago (1954-05-29) |
| **Membership** | ~150 invitees, smaller core group |
| **Chairman of the Steering Committee** | [Henri de Castries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_de_Castries) |
| **Website** | [www.bilderbergmeetings.org](http://www.bilderbergmeetings.org/) |

The **Bilderberg Group**, **Bilderberg conference**, **Bilderberg meetings** or **Bilderberg Club** is an annual private conference of approximately 120–150 political leaders and experts from industry, finance, academia and the media. About two thirds of the participants come from Europe and the rest from North America; one third from politics and government and the rest from other fields.

**Origin**

The original conference was held at the [Hotel de Bilderberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilderberg_Hotel) in [Oosterbeek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oosterbeek), [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands), from 29 to 31 May 1954. It was initiated by several people, including [Polish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poles) politician-in-exile [Józef Retinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B3zef_Retinger), concerned about the growth of [anti-Americanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Americanism) in Western Europe, who proposed an international conference at which leaders from European countries and the United States would be brought together with the aim of promoting [Atlanticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanticism) – better understanding between the cultures of the United States and Western Europe to foster cooperation on political, economic and defense issues.

Retinger approached [Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Bernhard_of_Lippe) who agreed to promote the idea, together with former [Belgian Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Belgium) [Paul Van Zeeland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Van_Zeeland), and the head of [Unilever](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unilever) at that time, Dutchman Paul Rijkens. Bernhard in turn contacted [Walter Bedell Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Bedell_Smith), then head of the [CIA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency), who asked [Eisenhower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_Eisenhower) adviser [Charles Douglas Jackson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Douglas_Jackson) to deal with the suggestion. The guest list was to be drawn up by inviting two attendees from each nation, one of each to represent conservative and liberal points of view. Fifty delegates from 11 countries in Western Europe attended the first conference, along with 11 Americans.

The success of the meeting led the organizers to arrange an annual conference. A permanent steering committee was established with Retinger appointed as permanent secretary. As well as organizing the conference the steering committee also maintained a register of attendee names and contact details with the aim of creating an informal network of individuals who could call upon one another in a private capacity. Conferences were held in France, Germany, and [Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark) over the following three years. In 1957 the first U.S. conference was held on [St. Simons Island, Georgia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Simons%2C_Georgia), with $30,000 from the [Ford Foundation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford_Foundation). The foundation supplied further funding for the 1959 and 1963 conferences.

**Organizational structure**

[Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Bernhard_of_Lippe-Biesterfeld) in 1942

Meetings are organized by a steering committee with two members from each of approximately 18 nations. Official posts, in addition to a chairman, include an Honorary Secretary General. There is no such category in the group's rules as a "member of the group". The only category that exists is "member of the Steering Committee". In addition to the committee, there also exists a separate advisory group, though membership overlaps.

Dutch economist [Ernst van der Beugel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_van_der_Beugel) became permanent secretary in 1960, upon Retinger's death. Prince Bernhard continued to serve as the meeting's chairman until 1976, the year of his involvement in the [Lockheed affair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_bribery_scandals). The position of Honorary American Secretary General has been held successively by [Joseph E. Johnson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_E._Johnson) of the [Carnegie Endowment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_Endowment_for_International_Peace), [William Bundy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Bundy) of [Princeton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princeton_University), [Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_L._Eliot%2C_Jr.), former [U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Ambassador_to_Afghanistan), and [Casimir A. Yost](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Casimir_A._Yost&action=edit&redlink=1) of [Georgetown University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgetown_University)'s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.

A 2008 press release from the "American Friends of Bilderberg" stated that "Bilderberg's only activity is its annual Conference. At the meetings, no resolutions are proposed, no votes taken, and no policy statements issued" and noted that the names of attendees were available to the press. The Bilderberg group's unofficial headquarters is in [Leiden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leiden) in the [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands).

According to the American Friends of Bilderberg, the 2008 agenda dealt "mainly with a [nuclear](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapon) free world, [cyber terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberterrorism), Africa, Russia, finance, [protectionism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protectionism), US-EU relations, [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan) and [Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan), Islam and [Iran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran)".

**Chairmen of the Steering Committee**

* [Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Bernhard_of_Lippe-Biesterfeld) (1954–1975)
* [Walter Scheel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Scheel) (1975–1977)
* [Alec Douglas-Home](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alec_Douglas-Home) (1977–1980)
* [Eric Roll, Baron Roll of Ipsden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Roll%2C_Baron_Roll_of_Ipsden) (1986–1989)
* [Peter Carington, 6th Baron Carrington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Carington%2C_6th_Baron_Carrington) (1990–1998)
* [Étienne Davignon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89tienne_Davignon) (1998–2001)
* [Henri de Castries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_de_Castries) (since 2001)

**Participants**

Main article: [List of Bilderberg participants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Bilderberg_participants)

Historically, attendee lists have been weighted towards bankers, politicians, and directors of large businesses.

Heads of state, including [King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Spain) [Juan Carlos I of Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Carlos_I_of_Spain) and [Queen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_Netherlands) [Beatrix of the Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrix_of_the_Netherlands), have attended meetings. Prominent politicians from North America and Europe are past attendees. In past years, board members from many large publicly traded corporations have attended, including [IBM](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IBM), [Xerox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerox), [Royal Dutch Shell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Dutch_Shell), [Nokia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nokia) and [Daimler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daimler_AG).

The 2009 meeting participants in [Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece) included Greek prime minister [Kostas Karamanlis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostas_Karamanlis), Finnish prime minister [Matti Vanhanen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matti_Vanhanen), Swedish foreign minister [Carl Bildt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Bildt), U.S. Deputy Secretary of State [James Steinberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Steinberg), U.S. Secretary of the Treasury [Timothy Geithner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Geithner), World Bank president [Robert Zoellick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Zoellick), President of the European Commission [José Manuel Barroso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Manuel_Barroso), [Queen Sofia of Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Sofia_of_Spain), and Queen [Beatrix of the Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrix_of_the_Netherlands).

In 2009 the group hosted a dinner meeting at the [Château of Val-Duchesse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau_of_Val-Duchesse) in Brussels on 12 November to promote the candidacy of [Herman Van Rompuy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_Van_Rompuy) for [President of the European Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_European_Council).

In 2013, a source involved in the planning for the group's meeting that year in Watford, UK, was reported to have said that people whose names are not publicly issued may sometimes turn up "just for the day".

**Recent meetings**

Main article: [List of Bilderberg meetings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Bilderberg_meetings)

* 2014 (29 May – 3 June) at the Marriott hotel in [Copenhagen, Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copenhagen%2C_Denmark)
* [2013 (8–9 June)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Bilderberg_Conference) at the Grove Hotel, [Watford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watford), United Kingdom
* 2012 (31 May – 3 June) at Westfields Marriott hotel in [Chantilly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chantilly%2C_Virginia), Virginia, USA
* 2011 (9–12 June) at the Suvretta House in [St. Moritz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Moritz), Switzerland
* 2010 (3–7 June) at the Hotel Dolce in [Sitges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitges), Spain
* 2009 (14–17 May) at the Astir Palace resort in [Vouliagmeni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vouliagmeni), Greece
* 2008 (5–8 June) at the Westfields Marriott in [Chantilly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chantilly%2C_Virginia), Virginia, USA
* 2007 (31 May – 3 June) at the [Ritz-Carlton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritz-Carlton) Hotel, in [Şişli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Ei%C5%9Fli), [Istanbul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul), Turkey.
* 2006 (8–11 June) at the [Brookstreet Hotel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brookstreet_Hotel) in [Kanata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanata%2C_Ontario), [Ottawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottawa), Ontario, Canada
* 2005 (5–8 May) at the Dorint Sofitel Seehotel Überfahrt in [Rottach-Egern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rottach-Egern), Germany

**Criticism**

According to chairman [Étienne Davignon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89tienne_Davignon), a major attraction of Bilderberg group meetings is that they provide an opportunity for participants to speak and debate candidly and to find out what major figures really think, without the risk of off-the-cuff comments becoming fodder for controversy in the media. However, partly because of its working methods to ensure strict privacy, the Bilderberg Group has been criticized for its lack of transparency and accountability. Concerns about [lobbying](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lobbying) have also arisen. Due to its privacy, Bilderberg is also accused of conspiracies. This outlook has been popular on both extremes of the [political spectrum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_spectrum), even if they disagree about the exact nature of the group's intentions. Some on the left accuse the Bilderberg group of conspiring to impose capitalist domination, while some on the right have accused the group of conspiring to impose a [world government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_government) and [planned economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planned_economy).

In 2001, [Denis Healey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denis_Healey), a Bilderberg group founder and, for 30 years, a steering committee member, said: "To say we were striving for a one-world government is exaggerated, but not wholly unfair. Those of us in Bilderberg felt we couldn't go on forever fighting one another for nothing and killing people and rendering millions homeless. So we felt that a single community throughout the world would be a good thing." In 2005 Davignon discussed these accusations with the [BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC): "It is unavoidable and it doesn't matter. There will always be people who believe in conspiracies but things happen in a much more incoherent fashion... When people say this is a secret government of the world I say that if we were a secret government of the world we should be bloody ashamed of ourselves."

In a 1994 report *Right Woos Left*, published by the [Political Research Associates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_Research_Associates), investigative journalist [Chip Berlet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chip_Berlet) argued that [right-wing populist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right-wing_populism) conspiracy theories about the Bilderberg group date back as early as 1964 and can be found in [Phyllis Schlafly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis_Schlafly)'s self-published book *A Choice, Not an Echo*, which promoted a [conspiracy theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory) in which the [Republican Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Party_%28United_States%29) was secretly controlled by elitist intellectuals dominated by members of the Bilderberg group, whose [internationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism) policies would pave the way for [world communism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_communism). Paradoxically, in August 2010 former Cuban president [Fidel Castro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro) wrote a controversial article for the Cuban Communist Party newspaper [*Granma*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granma_%28newspaper%29) in which he cited [Daniel Estulin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Estulin)'s 2006 book *The Secrets of the Bilderberg Club*, which, as quoted by Castro, describes "sinister cliques and the Bilderberg lobbyists" manipulating the public "to install a world government that knows no borders and is not accountable to anyone but its own self".

Proponents of Bilderberg [conspiracy theories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory) in the United States include individuals and groups such as the [John Birch Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Birch_Society), political activist [Phyllis Schlafly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis_Schlafly), writer [Jim Tucker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Tucker_%28journalist%29), political activist [Lyndon LaRouche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyndon_LaRouche), radio host [Alex Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Jones_%28radio_host%29), and politician [Jesse Ventura](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_Ventura), who made the Bilderberg group a topic of a 2009 episode of his [TruTV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TruTV) series [*Conspiracy Theory with Jesse Ventura*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_Theory_with_Jesse_Ventura). Non-American proponents include [Russian-Canadian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians_in_Canada) writer [Daniel Estulin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Estulin).

**Former members of Steering Committee**

* [Jens Christian Hauge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jens_Christian_Hauge)

**See also**

* [Council on Foreign Relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_on_Foreign_Relations)
* [List of Bilderberg Group participants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Bilderberg_participants)
* [Trilateral Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trilateral_Commission)
* [World Economic Forum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Economic_Forum)

**Further reading**

* [Ronson, Jon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon_Ronson) (2001). [*Them: Adventures with Extremists*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Them%3A_Adventures_with_Extremists). London: Picador. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-330-37546-6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-330-37546-6).
* Eringer, Robert (1980). *The Global Manipulators*. Bristol, England: Pentacle Books. [OCLC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OCLC) [26551991](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/26551991).
* [Estulin, Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Estulin) (2007). *The True Story of the Bilderberg Group*. Oregon, United States of America: Trine Day. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-9777953-4-9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-9777953-4-9).
* [Hodapp, Christopher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Hodapp); Alice Von Kannon (2008). *Conspiracy Theories & Secret Societies For Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-470-18408-6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-470-18408-6).
* Richardson, Ian N.; Andrew P. Kakabadse; Nada K. Kakabadse (2011). *Bilderberg People: Elite power and consensus in world affairs*. Hoboken, NJ: Routledge. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [978-0-415-57635-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/978-0-415-57635-2).
* Klimczuk, Stephen; Gerald Warner (2010). [*Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_Places%2C_Hidden_Sanctuaries)*: Uncovering Mysterious Sites, Symbols and Societies*. Sterling. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [1-4027-6207-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/1-4027-6207-0).

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