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The Davos party returns, with the shakes

By Lauren Silva Laughlin



A general view shows Davos Congress Centre, the venue of the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2023, in the Alpine resort of Davos, Switzerland, January 14, 2023. REUTERS/Arnd Wiegmann

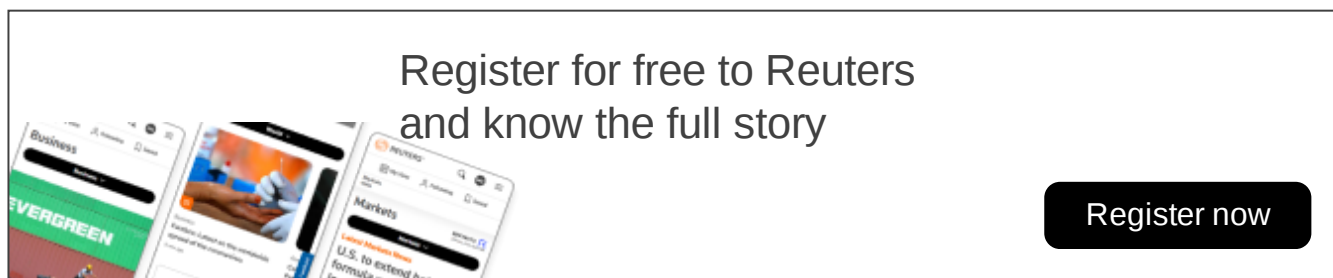


DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 16 (Reuters Breakingviews) - There's a hangover happening in Davos even though the party hasn't yet started. The World Economic Forum's annual winter shindig in the Swiss mountain resort, which kicks off on Monday, marks a return for glitzy parties and high-minded debates following a three-year hiatus. A record number of business leaders

are set to make the trip, and the passage of commercial, private and government aircraft through Zurich's airport suggests overall attendees are at pre-Covid-19 levels. Yet the direction for the future – and those who will lead it – is more clouded than ever.

Corporate and financial chieftains who skipped last May's low-key Davos gathering are back. JPMorgan ([JPM.N](#)) boss Jamie Dimon, a regular at the conference, will be joined by Wall Street leaders including David Solomon of Goldman Sachs ([GS.N](#)) and Morgan Stanley's ([MS.N](#)) James Gorman. Chevron ([CVX.N](#)) Chief Executive Mike Wirth and BP's ([BP.L](#)) Bernard Looney will represent resurgent oil majors. All in all, the WEF expects to welcome some 2,700 leaders from 130 countries, including 370 public figures.

Yet the apparent return to business as usual only serves to highlight the changes that have taken place since the last full gathering of the Davos elite. The global pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have added more friction to the already creaking globalised world that Davos epitomised.

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Meanwhile, the political leaders responsible for shaping the new order are mostly staying at home. U.S. President Joe Biden is not making the trip – unlike [his predecessor](#). Though a smattering of U.S. Congress members are expected to come they are hardly well-known international figures. China's most senior representative is Vice-Premier Liu He. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, grappling with a slowing economy and striking public sector workers, is also staying home.

A stroll down the Davos Promenade, the town's main drag where countries and corporations temporarily take over storefronts, underscores the shift. Poland and Indonesia have a prominent presence, but other national delegations have quieter messages on display. Saudi Arabia has a few conspicuous banners touting NEOM, its futuristic economic zone. The United Arab Emirates is touting tolerance.

The cryptocurrency firms that were at previous gatherings are mostly muted, replaced by companies promoting technologies like the blockchain. The Medical [Psychedelics House](#) has been replaced by the India Inclusivity Lounge. Established technology companies like Workday ([WDAY.O](#)), Salesforce ([CRM.N](#)), Cisco ([CSCO.O](#)), Qualcomm ([QCOM.O](#)) and Meta Platforms ([META.O](#)) dominate the street scene. Perhaps the most striking new tenant is Manchester United ([MANU.N](#)), the English Premier League club which is [seeking a buyer](#).

The shift is reflective of a world that has become introspective and less joined-up. As big companies diversify supply chains, governments and regions are competing hard for business. Biden's Inflation Reduction Act is dangling subsidies for American manufacturing, encouraging governors like J.B. Pritzker of Illinois to lure investment to their state. The WEF and its

founder Klaus Schwab acknowledged some of this by renaming the conference “Cooperation in a Fragmented World”.

Still, those returning to Davos for the first time in three years may feel like the cocktail is a little less potent.

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