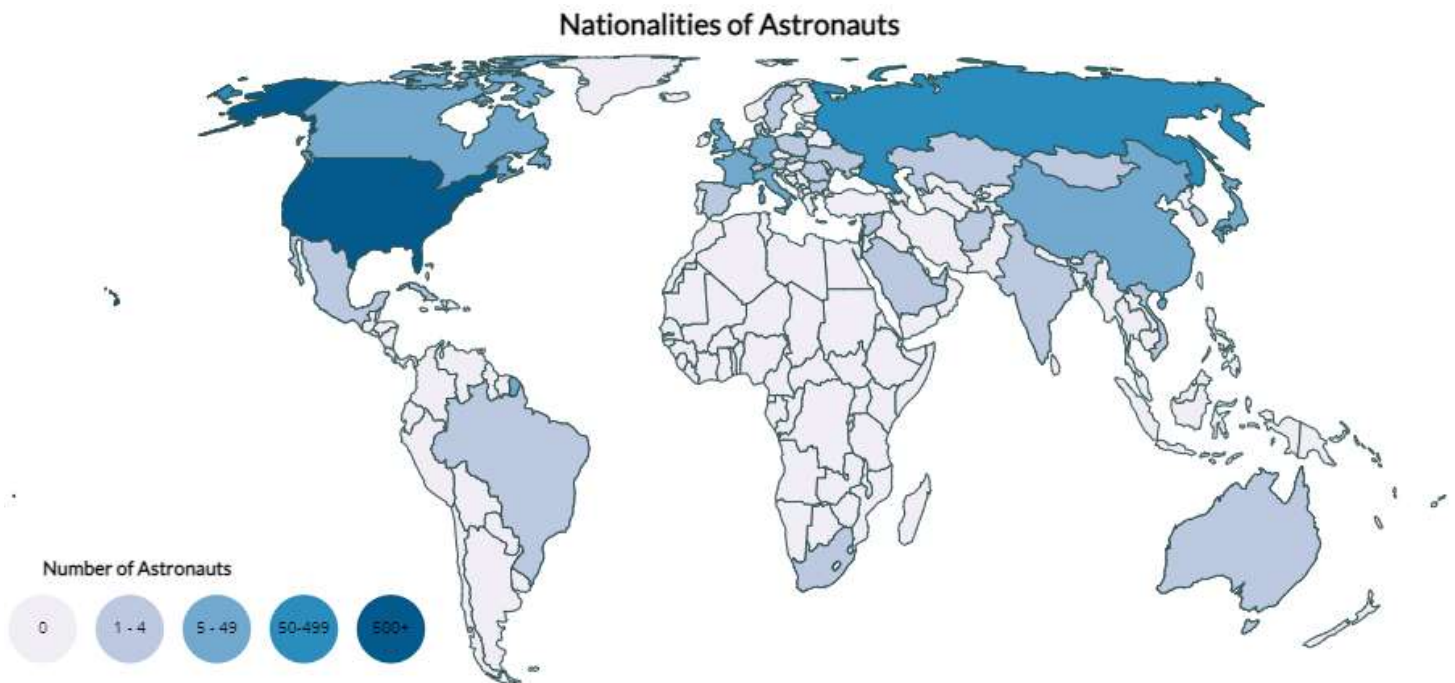


What makes an Astronaut?

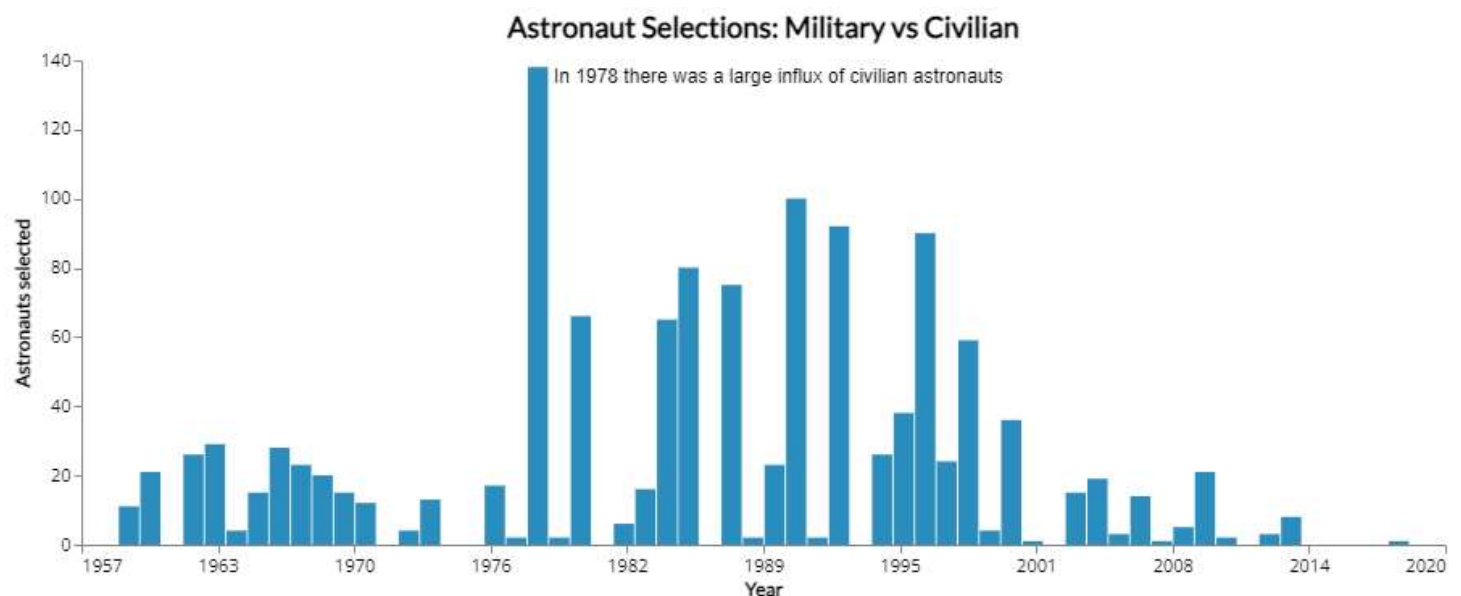
Between 1959 and 2020, 564 people travelled into space. These people were selected for 1277 positions on 362 separate missions.

With so much competition, what kind of people are actually chosen to explore the stars?



Early space travel was dominated by the international giants of the time, the United States and Russia. To this day, the vast majority of space exploration is carried out by one of these two countries.

In more recent years however, astronauts have been selected from a wider variety of nationalities, with every inhabited continent being represented in orbit.

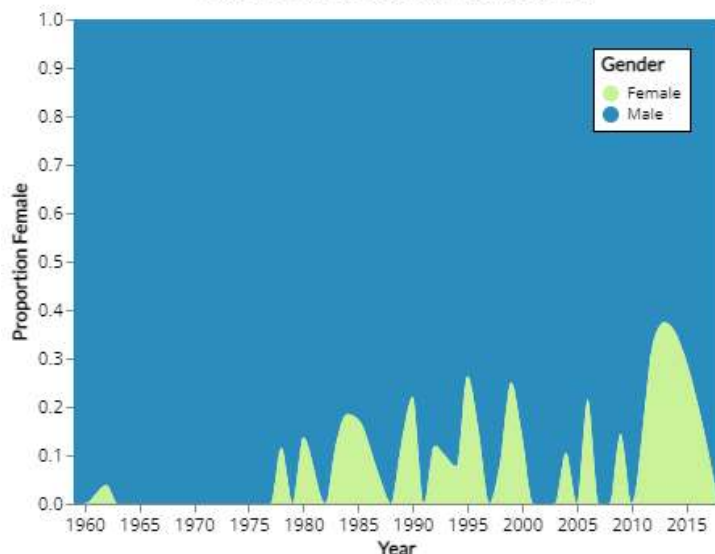


Use to filter by military status: All ▼

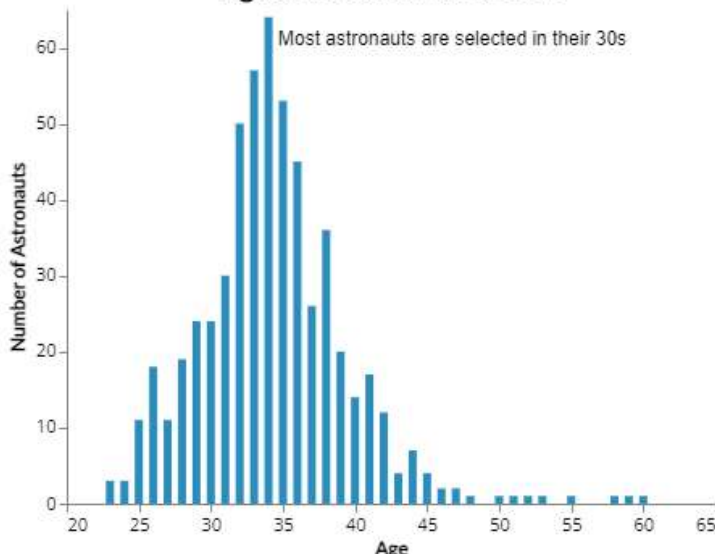
In the infancy of space travel, astronauts were almost exclusively selected from the military, usually test pilots from the various air forces. As the technology matured, the focus of missions moved towards scientific endeavours.

This shift also brought on a shift in astronaut demographics. Technical and scientific skills became a necessity so the candidate pool extended into civilians far more frequently. The advent of space tourism has also had an effect.

Gender of Selected Astronauts



Age of Selected Astronauts

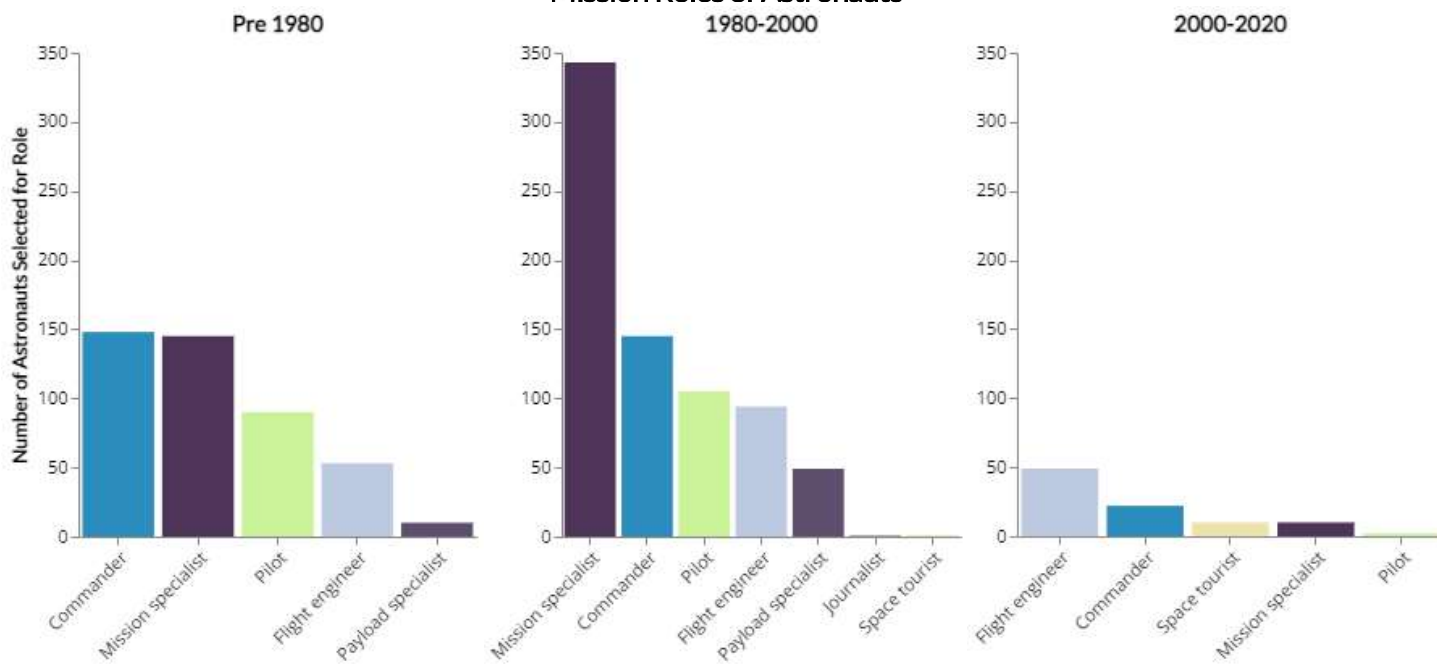


Males have been selected for space missions much more than females. In total, only 11% of astronauts have been female.

Gender equality in space travel is increasing over time but there is still a significant disparity.

The physical requirements of space exploration put an upper limit on the age of those able to partake in astronaut programs. The experience and intellectual requirements place limits on the other extreme though. This has resulted in the vast majority of astronauts being selected around the age of 35.

Mission Roles of Astronauts



The development of technology has had a significant impact on the skill sets required of astronauts. Initially, the crews were small so a large portion of astronauts took on a leadership role. Pilots were also commonplace onboard a space craft as manual control was often required.

As the systems matured, a larger portion of the crew was dedicated to specialists, able to perform scientific or engineering work.

The increase in computing power over time has resulted in less need for dedicated pilots and by the 2000s the role was almost entirely made redundant. Instead, flight engineers were required to maintain and operate the guidance systems rather than manually controlling flight.

In recent years, space tourism has enabled people to take part in space exploration without expert skills or knowledge, opening the door to a much wider pool of potential astronauts.