

### Mutti Merkel: For Better or For Worse

With the appearance of an absent-minded professor, Angela Merkel (Ph.D.) stepped into the world of German politics following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Just under 32 years later, in 2021, she will step down from her position as the German chancellor, one she has held for half of her political career. A member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), she is a part of Germany's center-right and is the first chancellor since reunification to have been raised in what was East Germany. She came into her position as the first female chancellor and has established both herself and Germany as forces to be reckoned with in modern political theaters. She has not had a smooth road and saw a few major speed bumps, including the Eurozone financial crisis and the refugee crisis; however, she has persevered. While her tenure as Chancellor was not perfect, Angela Merkel's authentic and charismatic leadership coupled with her conservative yet effective policy decisions makes her one of the better leaders in German history.

Merkel's authentic leadership is best shown through her handling of the refugee crisis in 2015. This crisis led to the greatest amount of migration, both refugees and economic migrants, to Europe since World War II (Oliviero). Her most impactful decision during this time was to have an open door policy for Syrian refugees, which led to Germany receiving the highest number of asylum applicants that year (Oliviero). This decision was praised globally and initially even in Germany. Now, it is one of the most polarizing decisions a German politician made, given the social consequences of the mass influx of refugees into Germany (Le Blond). However, Merkel has stood by her decision showing her authenticity and her want for the best for the people. Following one of the tenets of authentic leadership, the open door policy and other future decisions involving the refugee crisis in Germany have been rooted in a need to do what is good for her people, not just what politicians encourage of her (Authentic). She has a sense of duty which guides her leadership above all (Lagarde).

Merkel's authentic style has helped give her power in the international political theater. She is not motivated by power but by people. Angela Merkel "puts other people's best interests forward" and she's "not always looking for the votes (Pazzanese). This has also, however, lead to polarization in Germany and the rise of Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), a right wing nationalist party. The same refugee crisis which gained her praise globally, also lowered her popularity in Germany. Younger members of the CDU noted that while they "wholeheartedly agreed with Merkel's initial humanitarian decision to offer shelter to refugees, they resented the resulting chaos and division that followed" (Le Blond). Following her decision to allow an open border policy for Syrian refugees, the CDU started to lose seats throughout Germany to the AfD (Müller). As an authentic leader, her most ineffective moment was this

crisis, but that was not all her fault. Merkel was not expected to predict what exactly would happen, especially not the radical shift in German public opinion towards refugees which also helped enable the rise of the AfD (Kellerman).

Angela Merkel's charismatic leadership is much more subtle compared to her authentic style. However, it has still played an important role in shaping her time as Chancellor. She is known as Mutti Merkel (Mummy Merkel) in Germany, both as an endearing and a patronizing nickname. On one hand, why should a grown woman, with an impressive political career and absolutely no children of her own, be reduced to mother? On the other hand, it speaks to the power she holds with German and international politics. A young member of the CDU recounts, "it was like the whole of Germany was a family [...] discussing something, [...] when Mutti banged on the table and says that's enough, then it was all over. That was her power" (Le Blond). Merkel had to establish herself as a capable woman and fight to be heard which is why her charisma is not obvious, but rather always in the background. Her ability to engage the people with confidence and policy is what has given her the name "Mutti." Merkel's cooperative and reason based politics have given her considerable influence within global politics without having much of a physical presence (Ulrich). Former Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns also noted that "if you took a private poll of the G20 leaders [...] and you asked, 'Who do you respect the most in this group?'" Merkel wins the poll" (Pazzanese). Angela Merkel's understated charisma has helped enable her policy decisions.

Angela Merkel is not a bold politician. She is not a "big performer" or a "huge visionary," she is the stability that Germany and the European Union needed when she came into her position as chancellor (Pazzanese). This, combined with her scientific background, has made her policy decisions very conservative. Take the Eurozone financial crisis. Merkel opted for a much more austere and Germany-first approach (Kellerman). She stayed within her limits and made decisions she knew would not cause major problems. Despite the outcry against her, she stuck to her moral compass, also showing her authentic leadership. That crisis was not her best work, and shows that at the end of the day, Merkel is not an all knowing deity, simply a politician doing her duty. The true consequences of her conservatively pragmatic decisions then are not clear, but they can be seen both ways. One can say that flexibility on Merkel's part, recovery could have been easier, while others can argue that her "fiscal conservatism" saved the Euro (Kellerman). Her conservative policies have also caused tensions within the European Union. In past crises, "the German government was widely accused of pushing through its own agenda against the wishes and interests of other EU member states" (Puglierin). However despite these tensions, Angela Merkel became "Europe's go-to leader during the eurozone crisis" (AFP). Angela Merkel's "personal behavior" and "the way she drills down on issues" (Pazzanese) which have led to her conservative policy choices have also made her choices effective, especially in the long term.

Conservative policy making does have its drawbacks, including protest and push back from spectators, but it can also be highly effective. Angela Merkel saw push back during her conservative handling of the Eurozone crisis, but looking at it from the future, she did manage to stay true to her authenticity and help Europe. Merkel's duty made her put Germany first, but she didn't forget about Europe. While she did demand strict economic reforms in exchange for aid (Oliviero), she also "helped galvanize joint efforts to provide unprecedented support to crisis-hit countries" (Lagarde). In the long term, "fiscal rules were strengthened, and new vital institutions were created—think of the European Stability Mechanism" (Lagarde). Angela Merkel's conservative yet effective policy motif is also prevalent in her foreign policy interactions. She is described as "never indulges in grandstanding" and "is never authoritarian" (Ulrich). Her conservative approach allowed her to create space for "a cooperative, reason-based, network-oriented style of leadership in Europe" (Ulrich). Merkel's goal is described as "that all-important compromise which, by definition, leaves everyone a little bit dissatisfied but vastly better off" (Lagarde). Merkel does not try to take center stage, but rather works towards making policy which helps best solve many people's problems. This conservatism has led to effective policies that have given Merkel the image of "leader of the free world," one she has also rejected, circling back to her authentic leadership style (AFP).

Merkel has had a rough time since 2015, with many calling for her to leave, including members of her own party who are happy she won't be pursuing reelection (Le Blond). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Angela Merkel has strengthened support for herself all while being a lame duck Chancellor. These unprecedented times have given her the platform to tie together her dutiful authentic leadership, subtle charisma, and conservative yet effective policy to lead Germany through the pandemic, without many negative effects. Once again, Merkel has been put into the European spotlight to help lead them through another crisis. This time, Merkel, "was keen to make the federal government's measures transparent and to ask for the people's support. She [...] succeeded in conveying security, stability, and trust" (Puglierin). She has also embraced her strong, but silent charisma. While she is not a great orator, she addressed the entire nation about this crisis, something she only does once a year (Kottasová). Merkel used her scientific background and her conservative decision making to create policy that helped Germany come out of the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the better faring countries. Merkel has once again been hailed as a global leader and been the voice of reason for Germany and the European Union, much like the Eurozone crisis, just with better results.

Merkel's career path was not paved with gold, but she made the best of what was thrown at her. Her hard work has led to a stable Germany, which has been able to remove itself from the historically negative image attached to it. Merkel has been Europe's greatest crisis manager, dealing with everything from the Eurozone crisis to the Russian crisis and the Refugee crisis (Pazzanese). At times her authentic leadership and commitment to duty added to her conservative policy did have its negative repercussions, especially in the political theater, those

same traits enabled her to forge ahead. Her understated charismatic leadership gave her a powerful image in both the German and international political theaters. She also used her conservative and pragmatic policy making to gain power and make Germany and herself powerful entities in foreign politics. She will be exiting politics after a career filled with ups and downs and ending on the note of success with the While her tenure as Chancellor was not perfect, Angela Merkel's authentic and charismatic leadership coupled with her conservative yet effective policy decisions makes her one of the better leaders in German history. Angela Merkel started as Helmut Kohl (former German Chancellor)'s Mädchen (girl) in 1990 and has now become the iconic Mutti Merkel. When Angela Merkel exits the center stage in Fall 2021, she will leave behind an impressive legacy that will enable Germany to sustain its liberal democratic values.

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