



Angela Merkel

Angela Dorothea Merkel MDB (née Kasner; born 17 July 1954) is a German politician who has served as Chancellor of Germany since 2005.

A member of the Christian Democratic Union, Merkel was the **first German female chancellor**. She was often described as the de facto leader of the European Union and recognised as the most powerful woman in the world.

Merkel was born in Hamburg in the then West Germany, moving to East Germany as a small child when her father, Horst, a Lutheran clergyman received a pastorate in Perleberg. Her mother, Herlind, was a teacher of Latin and English.

At that time most children growing up in the German Democratic Republic, participated in the state's youth organisations. She was a member of the Young Pioneers (from 1962) and the Free German Youth (from 1968). Her involvement with the Free German Youth has led to controversy, as some of her former colleagues from the Central Institute of Physical Chemistry claimed that she was active as a secretary for agitation and propaganda at the institute.

Merkel maintained that she was responsible for cultural affairs (e.g., procuring theatre tickets). East Germany's Stasi secret police tried to recruit her in later years when she was applying for a job at a university, but she quickly turned down the offer.

Merkel finished High School in 1973 then went to study physics at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig (now known as Universität Leipzig)

She has a doctorate in quantum chemistry and worked as a research scientist until 1989. Merkel entered politics in that same year and after the fall of the Berlin Wall she joined the newly founded Democratic Awakening. In February 1990 Merkel became the party's press spokesperson. That month the party joined the conservative Alliance for Germany, a coalition with the German Social Union (DSU) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Several days prior to East Germany's first and only free election in March 1990, it was revealed that Democratic Awakening's chairman, Wolfgang Schnur, had been working as a Stasi informant for years. Although the news shook Alliance supporters, the coalition was victorious, and Democratic Awakening became part of the government.

Merkel became deputy spokesperson of the government of Lothar de Maizière (CDU), joining the party in August 1990; that party merged with its western counterpart on October 1, the day before the reunification of Germany.

In 2005, **Merkel** was appointed Chancellor of Germany, leading a coalition of the CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD). Not only was she the first woman chancellor, she was the first East German, the first scientist and the youngest to hold the position. Merkel was re-elected in 2009, 2013 and 2018.

In 2007 Merkel hosted the G8 summit: 'I have been fighting for climate action for over 10 years now and I consider it to be a tough struggle.' Asked at the time about US President George Bush's reservation against a 2C Warming limit, she said, 'You can be assured that I won't accept trusted scientific findings to be watered down.'

Eventually, she persuaded leaders to accept the necessity of binding CO² reduction targets. Another nickname is 'Climate Chancellor' for her long-standing engagement for emission cuts.

By 2008, public debt for some European Union member states was growing, threatening the very existence of the euro as a currency. **Merkel's** offer to help came with austerity demands. That did not go down well, especially in Greece, where newspapers ran images comparing the moment to Nazi Germany's occupation in World War II. In Germany itself she fended off a long-term recession by introducing economic stimulus and shortening working hours. Workers did work less, but they had their earnings topped up by the government rather than business. These measures along with the country's strong position as an exporter helped Germany to flourish.

Her quiet pragmatism and down-to-earth modesty have won wide appeal, helping her run four governments. It is not unusual to see her grocery shopping on her own in downtown Berlin.

At some point in her long tenure, **Merkel** went from chancellor of the country to mother of the nation. She was often referred to by supporters and foes alike as 'Mutti' meaning 'Mama'.

Merkel is known for holding her hands together in a diamond form. She has said it helps her stand up straight. It also helped the CDU: The party used the diamond symbol on campaign posters for the 2013 general election. It became synonymous with trust and calm.

She has been the top of Forbes' most powerful women list no less than eight times and was named Person of the Year by Time magazine in 2015.



‘We can do this!’

Few of her statements have had such a lasting impact as the above. **Merkel** won widespread praise in 2015 for staying committed to EU open-border policy and allowing more than 1 million migrants and refugees, many escaping the Syrian war, to enter Germany and the bloc. A vocal minority, however, pushed back against open migration.

The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic has changed much in Germany and the world. The country — and other nations — turned to her for answers in the crisis. Her serious, fact-based style of confronting the crisis boosted her popularity to record highs. ‘This is serious — take it seriously,’ she told her compatriots. ‘Since German unification — no, since World War II — there has been no challenge to our country in which our acting together in solidarity matters so much.’

In October 2018, **Merkel** announced that she would not seek a fifth term as chancellor in the 2021 federal election. However, immediately after the election, **Merkel** and her cabinet will continue to run the country in a caretaker capacity until a new government can be built. If history is a guide, this could be anything from one to six months.



