

## **Summary of doctoral thesis**

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**“Political careers in the Federal Republic of Germany”**

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## **Abstract**

How does one become a front-rank politician? What does it take to get to the top in German parties and parliament – and remain there?

In five case studies, this doctoral thesis analyses the careers of politicians in various decades of the Federal Republic of Germany: Max Reimann, the last leader of the German Communist Party (KPD), Rainer Barzel, the first opposition leader of the German Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Oskar Lafontaine, at first leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and then of the 'Left Party' (Linkspartei), Angela Merkel, the most successful newcomer and East German of her generation, and finally Sigmar Gabriel, current leader of the SPD.

The overall picture thus presents a chronological summary from 1945 until present. The paper examines to what extent the demands on political careers have changed over time, with the party and in the light of the prevailing political climate.

Accordingly, political careers are perceived and analysed as context-related phenomena. The thesis takes an interactionistic approach and refers to the three factors that are also applied in leadership research: institutions, environments, and individuals. Furthermore, the thesis focuses on political careers that have benefited from political change: the politicians examined only assumed leadership of their respective parties after these had lost power in federal government. The hypothesis asserts that the balance of power shifts during times of political change. New hierarchies and courses of action arise for the political players. Deep-rooted changes can advance their careers or stop them in their tracks.

One of the thesis central underlying assumptions is, that the aforementioned structural circumstances dictate the framework for political careers. However, at the same time, politicians also enjoy a considerable personal scope of actions and can often choose from various courses of action. For this reason, the case studies also examine which personality traits have proven useful in furthering the political careers of top politicians, and what could cause their failure.

The comparative conclusion addresses the changing contextual conditions of political careers again. For instance, the prevailing circumstances are decisive: while it was relatively easy to climb the political career ladder after the World War II because of the desperate search for politically untainted professionals, this became considerably more difficult with the expansion of popular parties, due among other things to the sudden rise in the number of potential rivals.

The conclusion also elaborates on party-specific peculiarities, environmental factors and power-specific circumstances. In closing, the thesis addresses the personality traits, in particular those that apply to the careers of numerous politicians: in addition to a pronounced personal ambition, these are primarily tenacity, insensibility and a certain unscrupulousness, rhetorical talent, the ability to rally supporters and forge coalitions at an early stage, and especially the willingness to adapt to changing