



 BetterPolitics *Foundation*



Robert Bosch
Stiftung

Elected. Now What?

The first year in the Bundestag,
between commitment and overwhelm

Introduction



"The father of a friend of mine was a member of the Bundestag from the 1970s until the early 1990s. In the mornings, he would sit alone in his office and simply read a newspaper for an hour and check the news. My morning looks different. I also check the news. But 80 Signal messages come in, maybe also a call on my cell phone. Then the emails ring as push notifications, so to speak. And maybe there is already a Zoom call early on."

MP (f), Die Grünen

Twenty-first-century politics places new demands on political leaders. Those who take on the responsibility of elected office face more complex demands, increased public scrutiny, faster political communication and tense public opinions towards institutions. Most new members of parliament are high-performing, resilient, and motivated. Yet, many say that the start of the parliamentary mandate and the political day-to-day push them to their limits.

In 2025, the Better Politics Foundation published the Better Politics Index for the first time. It measured the support and opportunities for political development across ten countries. Germany (to the surprise of numerous German partners) took first place, pointing to a democratic infrastructure that is stable by international comparison. This result is cause for celebration, but it should not prevent us from looking more closely. Even where democratic structures function, the people who work within them can be supported better.

The need for ongoing support is particularly evident at the individual level. Our international study *Mere Mortals* (Better Politics Foundation, 2023) shows that the mental wellbeing of politicians is in some cases lower than that of emergency responders. The expectation of permanent availability, an accelerated media cycle, an increasingly confrontational culture of debate, and personal hostility shape the daily lives of many mandate holders. Chronic overload impairs precisely the capabilities that democratic action requires: differentiated judgment, cooperative negotiation, and long-term thinking. Those who work permanently in crisis mode make poorer decisions, with consequences that reach far beyond the individual person. Permanent overload is therefore not only an individual problem but a structural weakness for our democracy. Being a member of parliament is a job with massive responsibility. Members are part of the democratic infrastructure that holds societies together and keeps states capable of acting. Investment in development, training and mental resilience have long been standard in other fields of high responsibility and public pressure, such as elite sports and business. In politics, however, this awareness and targeted investment are still largely missing.

Democratic institutions are shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of people within them. This study therefore asks how we can better support people who take on political responsibility in the Bundestag. It is a contribution from political practice and civil society research, funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung. It is an action-oriented inquiry naming who can do what to ensure a smoother entry into parliamentary work in the interest of a democracy capable of acting in the 21st century.

Objectives of the Study

This study addresses a question that has so far received little attention: how do newly elected members of the Bundestag acquire the capabilities they need to exercise their mandate effectively, and how can they be better supported in doing so? Subject expertise is important for members but is not sufficient alone. The focus is therefore on cross-cutting capabilities that are decisive for translating knowledge into political action: knowledge of parliamentary procedures, negotiation, network building, communication, team leadership, personal role and goal definition, and resilience. These abilities are often taken for granted in political life but are not systematically developed or supported.

The aim is to identify concrete starting points for structurally improving the transition into the mandate and for strengthening political leadership in the long term.

Three guiding questions are central:

1. What particular challenges do newly elected members of parliament experience at the start of their mandate?
2. Which capabilities (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics) do they need to exercise their mandate successfully, particularly with regard to resilience and mental health?
3. How do existing offerings, in particular cross-party programs that we call Political Leadership Entrepreneurs (PLEs), support this acquisition of capabilities and where do the strengths and limits of these support structures lie?

What This Report Is

- ▶ An examination of the situation of new members of parliament from different parties across the democratic spectrum in their first year in the Bundestag, which makes observations and derives recommendations.
- ▶ An insight into the reality of the people who receive a Bundestag mandate, into their complex onboarding situation, and into the experience of the first parliamentary term.
- ▶ A basis for discussion for those who consider the acquisition of capabilities by members of parliament and who design offerings. It is aimed at everyone who considers the acquisition of capabilities by members of parliament, designs support offerings, or wants to strengthen the democratic system.
- ▶ A contribution to a better understanding of what targeted support can look like for those who shape and negotiate political decisions amid declining levels of trust in democratic negotiation processes
- ▶ A contribution to portraying the experiences of political representatives as human beings and to contextualizing their experiences.

What This Report Is Not

- ▶ A detailed account of the offerings of the parliamentary groups and their support services. We do not carry out a comparison or an evaluation of the approaches of the individual parties and parliamentary groups.
- ▶ A place for recommendations specific to a parliamentary group or party.
- ▶ A detailed depiction of all processes and staff involved in the start of the mandate. We know that, alongside the members of parliament, a large number of actors play a role in decision-making, negotiations, strategy development, and so on. Within the members' teams alone there are people with strong networks and extensive knowledge of structures and processes. Because of the research design, our focus in the conversations with the members of parliament was on the members themselves.
- ▶ An evaluation of the cross-party programs of JoinPolitics, Brand New Bundestag, or "Politik Gestalten im 21. Jahrhundert (Doing politics in the 21st century)" by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Top Insights



1. The first year is a marathon run at sprint pace.

Setting up an office, hiring staff, parliamentary onboarding, public presence: the entry into office is complex. The widespread hope that the burden will normalize after the first few months is rarely fulfilled. Structural demands remain high, calendars are full from early morning until late at night, spheres of influence keep growing, and the intensity remains.



2. Learning happens almost exclusively through experience, not through training.

Across all capability fields capabilities are developed informally on the basis of experience, and dependent on context. The system presupposes capability and leaves too little room for targeted further development. Structured learning offerings often play a subordinate role, even though the need is high.



3. Networks are infrastructure: those who do not have them are structurally disadvantaged.

Informal networks, both within the party and across party lines, determine access to knowledge, influence, and support. Those who bring good networks and have an experienced team learn faster and navigate more confidently. Those who do not are left more to their own devices. Informal learning works, but it reproduces existing inequalities.



4. The demand for mentoring is strong. Supply remains a matter of chance.

Mentoring arises by chance through office proximity, familiar faces, and old alliances. Even in an informal setting, new members of parliament have to actively ask questions and request information. Structured mentoring programs would accompany and ease the start of the mandate and are wished for by many.



5. Learning needs are changing. Support must keep up.

At the start of the mandate, practical questions are in the foreground: communication, public appearances, and setting up the office. As experience grows, the needs shift: strategic press work and effective prioritization become the focus. In the long term, members of parliament benefit from formats that repeatedly address self-care, strategic orientation, and role understanding. Continuous and diverse offerings that develop with needs are required.



6. Leadership capability is a central, systematically underestimated success factor.

With the mandate, members of parliament become employers overnight, often without any preparation. Poor team leadership wastes energy, creates friction, and impairs political capacity to act. Almost all interviewees in their second term name this area as a central and underestimated learning need.



7. Structurally overburdened but held individually responsible.

The burden in the mandate exceeds what many members of parliament consider sustainable in the long term. And yet exhaustion is framed as individual failure not as a structural problem. Those who show weakness risk their career. In the context of the parliamentary group, and even more so in public, the topic remains largely taboo. In the cross-party offerings this is already taken into account. On the institutional side, concrete support offerings and structural changes are lacking, beyond initiatives for the reconciliation of family and work.



8. Politics-specific capabilities: always assumed, rarely developed

Negotiation, role and goal definition, and political judgment are political skills and abilities that members of parliament generally take for granted in themselves. They are rarely articulated as a learning need. However, those who have taken part in formats on these topics consistently assess this as valuable and relevant for their (own) political practice. Offerings in this area have the potential to noticeably strengthen the political effectiveness of members of parliament and contribute to better political outcomes.



9. Cross-party programs: learning and networking at once

Cross-party programs offer something that is barely possible in a party context: a space in which candidates and members of parliament from different parliamentary groups can learn and speak openly with one another. Participants describe precisely the cross-party exchange and the emerging network as the central added value, often even ahead of the concrete further-training offerings. The framing of shared development and the design of the programs are, however, what first make this quality of networking possible.



10. Change requires collective action not just individual strength.

The structural challenges of the mandate, such as initial overwhelm, missing learning structures, and the tabooing of overload, cannot be managed through individual effort alone. What is missing is a coordinated interplay of the actors in the support ecosystem, working together on norms, structures, and offerings, so that systematic further training becomes a self-evident part of the mandate.

Our process

50
INTERVIEWS

with

39
INDIVIDUALS



STRUCTURED WITH
GUIDING QUESTIONS



BETWEEN 50 AND
100 MINUTES



FROM JUNE 2025
UNTIL MARCH 2026

30

(first-) interviews with MPs

11

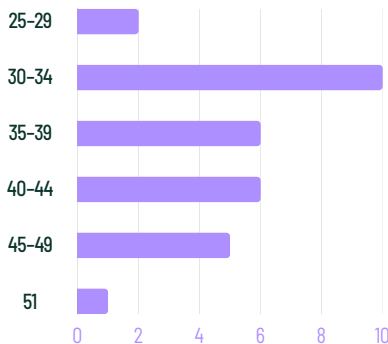
Follow-up interviews with MPs

9

Interviews with staff members in MPs' offices and parliamentary groups

The MPs

Age (Years)



Gender

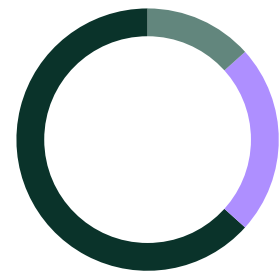


53%
Female



46%
Male

Membership in the Bundestag



- Former MPs
(Member of the 20th Bundestag)
- Current MPs
(Member of the 20th & 21st Bundestag)
- New MPs
(Member of the 21st Bundestag)

Interview Timeline

Interviews with new MPs



Initial Interview
19 MPs

approx. 6 Months after start of mandate



Follow-up Interviews
11 out of 19 MPs

approx. 12 Months after start of mandate

Interviews with former and current MPs



11 Interviews

approx. 4 years after start of mandate

Participation in non-partisan programs

16

No participation in any program

6

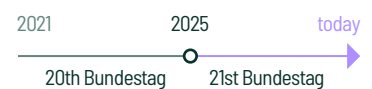
Participated in a program at Robert Bosch Foundation between 2021-2025

5

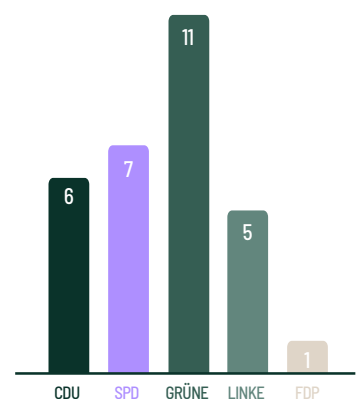
Participated in a program from Brand New Bundestag in 2021 and 2025

4

Participated in a program from JoinPolitics 2024/2025



Parteizugehörigkeit



Our Approach

To better understand which capabilities new members of parliament need and how they can develop them, we conducted 50 interviews: 41 interviews with members of parliament in their first and second parliamentary terms and nine with staff in members' offices and in the parliamentary groups. We conducted the interviews with representatives of the parties from the democratic spectrum¹ that were represented in the 20th and 21st Bundestag. The guided interviews concerned, on the one hand, the entry into the work of a member of parliament and experiences in the Bundestag. On the other hand, with regard to the following capability fields, they concerned how the members acquired the capabilities and which support or learning offerings they were able to draw on for this. We conducted the conversations anonymously to enable an open account of personal experiences.¹

Based on our guiding "21st-Century Political Leadership Capabilities" concept, we identified ten capability areas for this study that are particularly relevant for the mandate in the German Bundestag. These ten areas cover central requirements of Political Leadership, especially at the start of taking on the mandate.

Capability areas

1. **Knowledge of parliamentary work** (procedures, committees, rules of procedure, motions)
2. **Negotiating** (strategic negotiation and compromise-building, e.g. in committees, with coalition partners, or within the parliamentary group)
3. **Networking and relationship building** (in parliament, with associations, civil society, within the party/parliamentary group, etc.)
4. **Communication and press** (social media and "traditional media", speeches, rhetoric, public appearance)
5. **Personal role and goal definition** (political goals, personal profile, one's own political vision, etc.)
6. **Political judgment and decision-making** (handling dilemmas, fact-based decisions, crisis management, dealing with complex situations)
7. **Team and office building** (strategic team composition with a view to subject expertise and parliamentary experience)
8. **Staff leadership** (staff appraisals, work planning, team communication, etc.)
9. **Digital competence** (platform navigation, digital organization, cybersecurity, knowledge management)
10. **Personal resilience** (dealing with pressure, stress, hate speech, reconciling the mandate and private life, etc.)

Capabilities Analysis in Short

Politics-specific Capabilities

Members of parliament acquire parliamentary knowledge mainly on the basis of experience, through observation, conversations, and networks, in addition to the formal offerings at the start. Members, including those with parliamentary experience, consistently describe communication and press work as an area with a high need for development. Negotiation is regarded as central but rarely trained for. Methodical support for the capability area of political judgment and decision-making is largely missing, as are offerings for introspective reflection on the role.

Employer Capabilities

Members of parliament become employers overnight, and their team is the central resource. Office and team building at the start proceed under time pressure and uncertainty. Almost all interviewees in their second term describe staff leadership as a central and systematically underestimated learning need.

Resilience and Mental Wellbeing

The burden is high from the start and does not normalize. Within parliamentary groups, being open about difficulties can risk careers. Existing coping strategies are therefore predominantly self-organized. Institutional support is almost entirely lacking.

Cross-party Programs (PLEs)

Brand New Bundestag, JoinPolitics, and the program "Politik Gestalten im 21. Jahrhundert" offer support in acquiring capabilities and, beyond that, trust-based networks and spaces for reflection outside the logics of the parliamentary groups. For almost all participants we interviewed, the emerging cross-party network is the most important added value. At the same time, the programs come up against structural limits: they reach only a small part of all members of parliament, their effect presupposes small groups, and it cannot be scaled at will.

¹ As a matter of principle, the Better Politics Foundation stands for non-partisanship and therefore for the inclusion of all elected parties. The original research design provided for the inclusion of members of parliament from all parties represented in the Bundestag. The online survey was sent on 1 July 2025 to all members of parliament newly elected to the Bundestag in 2025. In addition, members of all parties were invited to participate in interviews.

Following the legally binding classification of the AfD as a suspected far-right extremist organisation (Federal Administrative Court, Press Release No. 54/2025 of 22 July 2025), the Better Politics Foundation decided to refrain from including the AfD any further steps of the research project.

Our Recommendations at a Glance

1

Formalize Mentoring

The desire for experienced conversation partners in the first weeks is clear and shared across parliamentary groups. Parliamentary groups and cross-party programs should develop structured mentoring offerings that take effect immediately after the election and accompany the first months, not as an informal gesture but as a reliable program with clear expectations on both sides. Experienced and former members of parliament as well as PLE alumni can be involved.

4

Structured Methods for Political Decision-making

Methods such as scenario development, foresight, or design thinking are barely anchored in parliamentary day-to-day life, even though they would help to prepare complex decisions in a more structured way. Parliamentary groups, cross-party programs, and political foundations should increasingly develop practical formats that convey these methods and make them tangible.

2

Leadership Capabilities as a Mandatory Topic

Parliamentary groups should anchor leadership capabilities as an onboarding topic and coordinate external training and coaching to help new members who have become employers overnight and often for the first time. Cross-party programs, too, should pay greater attention to leadership capabilities and the employer role.

5

Designing Cross-party Formats for the Long Term

Trust across party lines does not arise from individual encounters. It requires time, continuity, and spaces deliberately reserved for informal exchange. Structured learning offerings provide a good framework for this. Cross-party formats should accordingly be conceived for the longer term and offer room for exchange and encounter.

3

De-tabooing the Burden Institutionally, Strengthening Resilience Individually

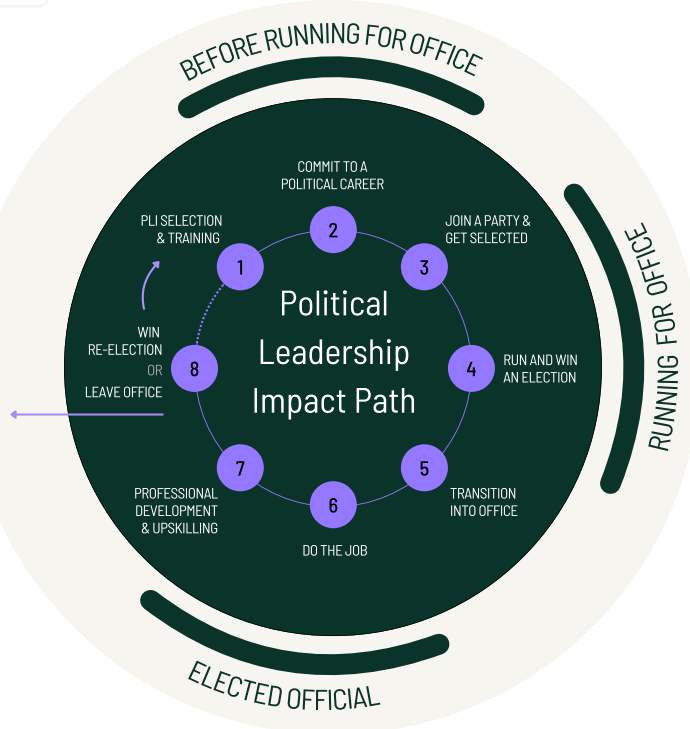
The burden in the mandate is structurally high and underestimated. Parliamentary group leadership bears responsibility for creating a culture in which exhaustion can be raised without fear of career disadvantages. Those who speak openly about the burden lower the threshold for everyone else. Concretely, this means: creating psychological points of contact and making them visible, establishing coaching and peer-consultation formats, and bringing resilience as a topic out of the private sphere. The other actors, too, should address mental wellbeing and build content on resilience development into their offerings.

6

Coordination in the Support Ecosystem

Parliamentary groups, the Bundestag administration, foundations, and civil society organizations often work alongside one another rather than with one another. Offerings rarely build on one another. Under the existing rules parliamentary groups and political foundations may not finance further training for members of parliament. An active coordination of the actors involved is needed so that offerings build on one another better and continuous and diverse further training becomes possible.

The Support Ecosystem

DD
D.

Political Leadership Impact Path

The Better Politics Foundation works with the Political Leadership Impact Path (PLIP), which describes eight different points of elected political leadership. Political leaders may pass points in the model numerous times.

For this study we look specifically at members of the German Bundestag and relate the Political Leadership Impact Path to them accordingly.

In the development of capabilities of members of the Bundestag, various organizations and institutions play roles at different points in time.

Actor	Contribution to the Acquisition of Capabilities
Party	▶ Political socialization and orientation ▶ Formal qualification: Many parties or party-affiliated institutions offer seminars, academies, online courses, and trainings, for example on municipal law, budget matters, election campaigning, rhetoric, media work, social media, negotiation, or chairing meetings. ▶ Practical learning in everyday party life ▶ Networks and mentoring
Youth wings of the parties	▶ Early political practice ▶ Experience with roles of responsibility ▶ Political education and training: seminars, academies, weekends, or workshops on party platform, rhetoric, campaigning, social media, municipal politics, or European politics ▶ Networks and mentoring

Actor	Contribution to the Acquisition of Capabilities
Political foundations	▶ Subject-specific qualification on topics such as Europe, municipal politics, foreign policy, the economy, climate, social policy, administration, or political communication ▶ Methodical and communicative skills: seminars on rhetoric, facilitation, negotiation, conflict management, strategic communication, campaign work, media appearances, or the digital public sphere (legal requirement is to be suitable for all public leaders beyond elected officials) ▶ Networks between politics, academia, and civil society
Parliamentary group	▶ Introduction to parliamentary procedures and the use of parliamentary instruments ▶ Media and public relations work: offerings on press work, social media, and public appearances ▶ Mentoring by experienced members of parliament: informal learning about parliamentary processes ▶ Coordination of further-training offerings
Bundestag administration	▶ Administrative and legal foundations: administrative procedures, legal framework conditions, and organizational responsibilities ▶ Training offerings for staff in members' offices
Cross-party offerings	▶ Entry support for the politically interested and talent development beyond party lines ▶ Trainings in political craft: skills training such as rhetoric, campaigning, social media, networking, resilience, strategic communication, or dealing with the public ▶ Protected space outside intra-party power logics: cross-party spaces can be attractive as a space for learning and reflection

Cross-party Offerings

Various civil society organizations offer support along different phases of a political career. We call these Political Leadership Entrepreneurs (PLE). For this study we looked at the three cross-party programs known to us with an exclusive focus on Germany that offer support for people who are seeking or newly hold a Bundestag mandate: Brand New Bundestag, JoinPolitics and "Politik Gestalten im 21. Jahrhundert (Doing Politics in the 21st century)" by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

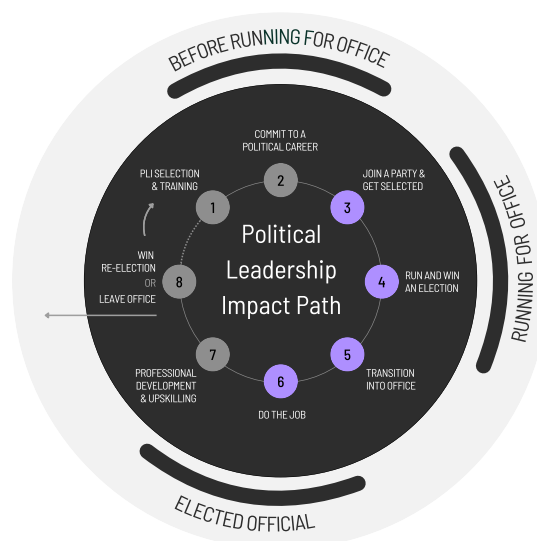


Brand New Bundestag (BNB) is a cross-party organization that aims to make politics at the federal and state level more effective, cooperative, and future-proof. At its center is the targeted support of political candidates who want to act in a solution-oriented and cross-party manner and not strictly along party lines. This work is complemented by the building of a cross-party network of members of parliament for peer learning, networking, and joint political action.

Its support begins at point 3 of the Political Leadership Impact Path and extends into the parliamentary term. The program supports candidates individually (coaching) and in groups (workshops) in acquiring capabilities. So far, 24 BNB-supported members sit in the Bundestag; five took part in an interview.

Program content:

- ▶ Rhetoric and speeches
- ▶ Press and public relations work
- ▶ Social media and digital campaigns
- ▶ Emotional resilience
- ▶ Self-assertion and safety
- ▶ Fundraising



JoinPolitics is a nationwide organization for the promotion of political talent that finds, supports, and connects exceptional personalities, with the goal of making politics more solution-oriented, willing to compromise, and future-proof. At its center is a cross-party talent program that supports people on their paths into political responsibility, both through candidacies and through political initiatives. As a former participant and current federal minister, Verena Hubertz (SPD) is the program's most prominent alumna.

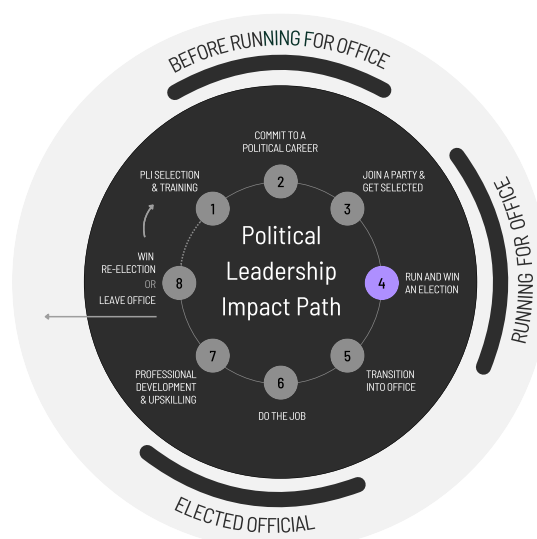
Early-phase offerings such as the Politischer Kopfsprung [Political Plunge] also address points 1, 2, and 3. In the case of candidacies, JoinPolitics's talent program begins at point 4 of the Political Leadership Impact Path and combines workshops, individual support, and community building. The support formally ends with the end of the election campaign. JoinPolitics is expanding the support of alumni at points 5, 6, and 7 within the framework of its alumni work.

Because of the early federal election in 2025, JoinPolitics was able to run the talent program only in a shortened version. The focus therefore lay on developing the talents' profiles in terms of political message, storytelling, and recognizability, including video and photo material. There is also the possibility of taking up individual coaching to strengthen resilience.

Four JoinPolitics alumni who are now members of the 21st Bundestag agreed to interviews.

Program content:

- ▶ Leadership & self-leadership
- ▶ Campaigns & strategy (for candidates)
- ▶ Communication, media, storytelling
- ▶ Debate and disagreement culture
- ▶ Resilience strengthening





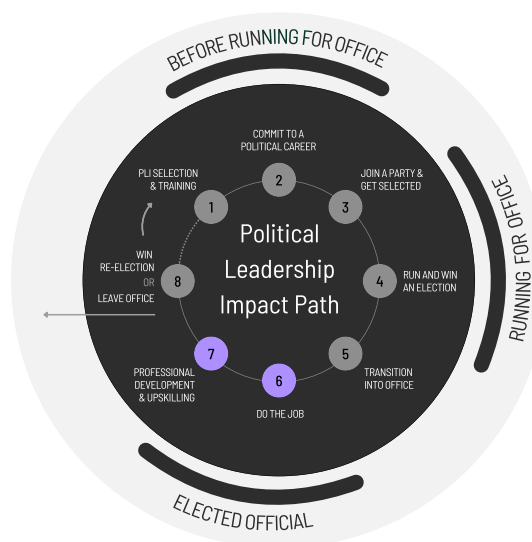
Politik Gestalten im 21. Jahrhundert ("Doing Politics in the 21st century") is a Robert Bosch Stiftung cross-party qualification and networking program for members of the Bundestag in their first and second terms. It continues throughout a parliamentary term (point 6 and 7 on the Political Leadership Impact Path). In a protected trusting setting, the program supports members of parliament in dealing with complex questions of the future; getting to know international perspectives; and strengthening their political judgment, shaping, and cooperation abilities. The central goal is to promote cross-party networking and cooperation in the democratic center and thereby contributing in the long term to a constructive political culture in the Bundestag.

The members of parliament undertake joint study trips and have the opportunity to take part in workshops on acquiring capabilities.

From the program cohort of the 20th Bundestag, 6 members of parliament agreed to an interview.

Program content:

- ▶ Cross-party cooperation and dialogue ability
- ▶ Network and relationship building
- ▶ Dealing with complexity and the future, working with future scenarios
- ▶ Political judgment and decision-making ability
- ▶ Role and self-understanding in the mandate; Resilience & mental health
- ▶ Communication and political appearance



About us

The Better Politics Foundation works to renew leadership, reimagine politics, and rebuild trust. As the world's leading convener of political leadership entrepreneurs and innovators, we're here to accelerate a bold reset: We find what works. We test ideas. We scale innovations. Non-partisan by design, global in reach.

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