Twitter Thread by Jeremy Cliffe



Jeremy Cliffe
@JeremyCliffe



Thanks Stewart! Election day at CDU's conference is just beginning. Speeches by candidates Laschet, Merz, Röttgen start at 9:45 (Berlin time, so in 10 mins), then the 1,001 delegates begin voting at 11:10.

> Fantastic analysis of today\u2019s \u2066@CDU\u2069 leadership election and Germany\u2019s September federal election by \u2066@JeremyCliffe\u2069. https://t.co/xOuB4FpTXu
>
> — Stewart McDonald MP (@StewartMcDonald) January 16, 2021

First up is Armin Laschet, the continuity candidate. Key messages: US example of dangers of polarisation; CDU can't take "Merkel voters" for granted; change requires experience, trust and teamwork rather than just big ideas; namecheck for his more-popular running mate Jens Spahn.

Verdict: not a bad speech tbh, nicely organised around theme of trust and teamwork that marked his father's work as a miner; the warning about the dangers of polarisation captured Laschet's own strengths and the risk of electing Merz

Next up is Friedrich Merz, the right-wing veteran. Climate change, digitisation, ideas blah-blah [aka I'm not a blast from the past]; don't fear the future; "consensus and compromise" require more contest; CDU must return to the "real centre"; no left-wing majority in Germany.

Verdict: weak, weak, weak. No organising theme, no coherence, just buzzwords over substance. And coming from Merz, the (genuinely valid) case for more robust political debate in Germany just comes across as cynical and reactionary.

Last up is Norbert Röttgen, the moderniser. Key messages: Merkel good but party must turn to future; younger, greener, more female, more digital; beware risks of hate & populism; CDU can revive transatlantic relations (only one to nod to Biden); I can integrate CDU's tendencies

Verdict: lacked Laschet's folksy charm and narrative but easily the most convincing about the realities facing CDU and Germany

Now Q&A session, which is not entirely going according to plan... Painfully prolonged technical problems with one questioner (did someone mention digitisation?). And health minister Jens Spahn uses his question slot to deliver a political ad for his running mate Laschet.

Spahn's stunt is a risky move. He is popular and an asset to the Laschet ticket, and sought to remind CDU delegates of that, but some may take badly to his breaking with the supposed neutrality of the party conference.

Now for the voting...

We'll see if the delegates see it this way but the CDU's leadership conference - too male, too pale, digitally incompetent - is itself a ringing endorsement of Röttgen's argument about the party's need to move faster towards future.

Voting is over. Result of 1st round imminent...

Laschet: 380
Merz: 385
Röttgen: 224

992 delegates voted

Better than expected for Laschet, worst than expected for Merz. The two now go through to runoff round.

Röttgen's votes are expected to break towards Laschet, so this is now Laschet's to lose. 2nd round runoff voting has started.

Quick recap of who Armin Laschet is: folksy state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany's most populous); continuity candidate who supported Merkel's refugee policies; backed by much of CDU establishment; economically centrist; dovish on Russia and China

...but some questions as to whether he is really fit to be chancellor candidate. The alternatives are health minister Jens Spahn (Laschet's running mate, he of the Q&A stunt) and Bavarian state premier Markus Söder. Selection expected in spring.

2nd runoff round of voting over. Final result imminent...

Final CDU leadership result:

Laschet 521
Merz 466

Armin Laschet, state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia, is new CDU leader and thus frontrunner to be the party's candidate to succeed Angela Merkel as German chancellor at September general election.

Question now is whether he takes the CDU/CSU chancellor candidacy when that's decided in the spring. Focus on party's polling and particularly its performance at two key state elections in March. The alternatives are health minister Jens Spahn and Bavarian premier Markus Söder.

But notable and welcome that Merz, the worst of the possible candidates for ■■ and ■■, has been ruled out.

More on Laschet's win, and what comes next, on @NewStatesman shortly...

Armin Laschet: the personification of Rhineland joviality and Christian democratic consensus politics. But can he, should he, be the next chancellor of Germany?

My @NewStatesman piece on the new leader of the CDU:

https://t.co/yXgwygvfVi