Twitter Thread by Marcel Dirsus



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Now for something other than the United States: Germany's centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) are choosing their new leader next week. The winner has a very good chance of succeeding Angela Merkel as Chancellor of Germany. Here's what you need to know:

First, a little context. Merkel became leader of the CDU in 2000. After she stepped down in 2018, the party held a leadership contest in which Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK), Jens Spahn and Friedrich Merz fought to succeed her. AKK won.

AKK, who is Germany's Minister of Defence in addition to leading the CDU, really struggled to bring the party together. I don't want this thread to run to 400 tweets so I won't go into detail here but it's fair to say that some of the losers never accepted defeat

AKK decided to step down as leader of the CDU early last year. A new leader was supposed to be elected quickly but corona happened and the party kept delaying. Logistical challenges aside, a lot of people worried about doing too much party politics while the world burned

That's how we got here. So what's going on? There are three candidates running to become new leader of the CDU: Norbert Röttgen (left), Armin Laschet (middle), Friedrich Merz (right)

Armin Laschet is the Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state (see map). He's a folksy centrist with some odd foreign policy views. His supporters argue that he's the right man for the job because he appeals to people who like Merkel

Unlike Merz and Röttgen, Laschet actually leads a state. During the crisis, Laschet has tried to portray himself as a competent manager who can lead Germany through choppy waters while his competitors are busy giving speeches

Merz is by far the most conservative candidate in the race. After a long run in politics Merz left parliament to work in private industry. He ran (and lost) against AKK in 2018 after giving a surprisingly weak speech on the day of the vote

A lot of people within the CDU like Merz because they believe Merkel moved the party too far to the centre on issues like migration or nuclear energy. They might argue that this has created a political vacuum that has pathed the way for the

strength of the far-right AfD

Merz' critics would argue that the CDU has won so many elections under Merkel because the party has appealed to the centre. If that's the case the party can only lose by moving right, especially because the centre-left Greens are a much bigger threat than the far-right AfD

At the beginning of this it was mostly a contest between Merz and Laschet but that changed over the last couple of months because Norbert Röttgen has been getting a lot of attention. He's constantly on TV and playing social media comparatively well

Röttgen is an expert for foreign policy and an ex-Minister of the Environment. He's pitching himself as a moderniser who wants to make the party younger and more diverse. That said, he has also taken some positions to appeal to more conservative members within the party

All of the 11 people in the German foreign policy blob love Röttgen but that's also his biggest weakness. Elections are rarely won on foreign policy and it remains to be seen whether he can convince people that he's more than JCPOA, Huawei and Belarus

So who is going to win? I'd love to tell you but we don't know. The leader of the Christian Democrats isn't chosen by voters or even party members but by 1001 party delegates. There is no accurate polling and at this point I can see all of them win

Let's say we have a winner. Does that person automatically run to become the next Chancellor of Germany for the centre-right? No, because that would be too easy. Once the new leader has been chosen the CDU will talk to its sister party, the CSU, to agree to a common candidate

Sister party? What on earth is that?! Germany is comprised of 16 federal states and the CDU contests elections in 15 of them. The 16th is Bavaria, where the centre-right is represented by the Christian Social Union (CSU). Together, they are referred to as "the Union"

The common "Chancellor-Candidate" is usually the leader of the CDU but that's not always the case. Markus Söder, pictured below at Bavarian Carnival, is said to be interested in running. He's widely known across Germany and he could end up running on behalf of the Union

Those are the most probable options but there's one more realistic possibility. Jens Spahn, who lost against AKK a few years ago, is backing Laschet. But Laschet is struggling and Spahn has gained a lot of popularity during the crisis as Minister of Health. He might try something

In short: German Christian Democrats are picking a new leader. That's important because he will probably run to become Chancellor and then become Chancellor. Fun fact: Germany has had only 3 Chancellors since 1982 (Kohl, Schröder, Merkel).

This thread became way too long. I'll go back to enjoying lockdown now but I hope it's been a useful overview for some of you. Be safe.