

FIG 2: Seven chancellors from nine scenarios: before and after 16 January CDU vote

1. Merz wins and unifies

Thanks to weeks of skilful telephone lobbying, Merz triumphs by an impressive majority on 16 January, heals party divisions. Following relatively successful CDU state election showing in March, Merz is hailed as CDU/CSU candidate, putting him on course to win in September. Söder decides to stay in Bavaria to assure CSU victory in 2022 state elections.

2. Laschet wins, makes way for Söder

Laschet becomes chairman on 16 January after setbacks for Merz. Middle-of-the-road CDU leadership fails to inspire. Soon apparent that he will not succeed in general election. Laschet prompts CDU and CSU to nominate Söder, who triumphs in September inaugurating Bavarian-French partnership. As an alternative (see below) Laschet seeks to boost Spahn.

3. Merz crashes, allows in Röttgen

Merz loses in first round as delegate lobbying fails. Lack of support from women a big factor as anti-Merz wives browbeat home-voting CDU functionaries. Second-round support flows to Röttgen who becomes surprise chairman. Laschet & Söder stay in NRW and Bavaria. Röttgen – rejuvenating centrist moderniser – open to Green coalition after September.

4. Laschet crashes, Spahn rises

NRW prime minister crashes out in first round. Merz or Röttgen emerge as victor, with a less than clear-cut majority. Spahn engages with party leaders, boosted by his status as health minister and favourable German vaccination performance. CDU/CSU decides Spahn has best chance as candidate to secure conservative victory in September.

5. Merz wins but fails, Söder benefits

The CDU's economic expert wins on 16 January by small majority, profiting from tactical voting in second round, falls victim to party sniping, with old antagonism with Merkel still alive. Polarisation and infighting force him to accept that the CDU/CSU candidature goes to a reconciliatory Söder.

6. Laschet wins, keeps on winning

Laschet's pro-Merkel, 'business as usual' credentials prove crucial, giving him big majority on 16 January. Party unified, does relatively well in March elections. Laschet secures CDU/CSU candidature, wins comfortable majority in September, has choice of coalitions with Greens, liberal Free Democrats or Social Democrats, partner with Merkel in current Berlin grand coalition.

7. Laschet wins, makes way for Spahn

Laschet becomes chairman on 16 January profiting from his unifying persona and 'middle-of-the-road' appeal. Spahn – in the joint ticket with Laschet for the 16 January poll – and Laschet jointly prompt CDU and CSU to nominate Spahn as the party moderniser who can appeal to a potential Green coalition partner.

8. Merz wins, lets in Green Baerbock

Dominant Merz defeats rivals on 16 January, secures chancellor candidacy but polarises electorate in September. He wins back votes from far right AfD, loses moderates to 'gentrifying' Green party supported by Social Democrats, opening way to left-wing coalition under Germany's first Green and second female chancellor, co-chair Annalena Baerbock.

9. Laschet narrow victor, Merkel stays on

No clear-cut result. Laschet a narrow winner in second round, Spahn decides not to enter race. Party infighting intensifies. Söder stays in Bavaria. Merkel attempt to unify CDU has failed. CDU leaders convince her to rescind decision to quit. She accepts CDU and CSU nomination to fight for a record fifth term in September. She resets departure for 2023.