

# FRIEDRICH MERZ

**IMPACT:** Friedrich Merz is a German politician. In 2022, he became the leader of the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and leader of the CDU parliamentary group in the German federal parliament, the Bundestag. He has made anti-Muslim comments and represents the conservative right-wing camp within his party.

- Friedrich Merz joined the Young Union, the CDU's youth wing, in 1972. He is said to be a member of the 'Andean Pact,' a powerful network of ambitious members of the Young Union that was made in 1979 during a trip to the Andes. After finishing law school, he worked as a judge. In **1989, he was elected to the European Parliament**. In **1994, he became a member of the German national parliament, the *Bundestag*. Merz represents the conservative and economic-liberal camp within his party, being a Catholic and multimillionaire.**
- When Angela Merkel became chairwoman of the CDU in 2002, he became her main rival for the leadership position, acting as vice chairman of the political group in the Bundestag until 2004. He then left politics but fully returned again in 2018. **He lost two leadership elections in 2018 and 2021, but finally became the elected chairman of the CDU in December 2021.** He has been chairman of the Atlantik-Brücke, a non-profit association in service of German-American Friendship, and is a staunch supporter of the European Union and NATO, having **described himself** as **"a truly convinced European, a convinced transatlanticist."** In 2018, Merz advocated for "an army for Europe."
- In **2000, Merz was a staunch supporter of the highly racialized debate on so-called German 'guiding culture' (*Leitkultur*) that supposes to connote an essence of Germanness that needs to be safeguarded amidst immigration.** The term was originally coined in 1996 by the political scientist Bassam Tibi, who claimed that Europe needs a "European guiding culture" in the face of Muslim immigration. The Greens called Merz's campaign for German Leitkultur a "racist campaign."
- In 2018, Merz ran against two rivals, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and Jens Spahn, for the leadership of the CDU. The German Der Spiegel characterized the race as follows: "What does the CDU of the future want to be? A conservative, Islamophobic, economically liberal power, as embodied by Spahn and Merz? Or the humanitarian, centrist party that unites rather than polarizes?"
- **During his rivalry with Angela Merkel in 2018, Merz said that Muslims in Germany had to accept the German constitutional order, saying: "There is no Shari'a Law on German soil," even though not a single Muslim organization had made such a claim,** as the German Muslim website IslamIq noted. **Merz also urged for more control of so-called 'Koran-schools,'** stating: "We must have better government oversight of Koran schools. We can't have our children being taught in government schools and indoctrinated in Koran schools." He further argued: "A religion like Islam does not have the right to let children grow up in a cultural area where they are aligned against the Federal Republic."
- **While the CDU/CSU has ruled out cooperating with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Merz has played a role in the mainstreaming of the party.** In 2019, he said: "I would also have elected a vice president of the AfD in the German Bundestag long ago." Merz also criticized the decision of the Protestant Church not to invite the AfD to panel discussions at the church congress in Dortmund with the words: "You could have excluded certain people, but not the whole party." In 2018, Merz argued that the CDU had simply shrugged off the rising success of the AfD. A 2018 piece in Tablet magazine noted that when coming to power, **Merz pledged that the "support for the AfD would be cut in half under his leadership as former CDU voters upset by Merkel's migrant policy return to the fold," signaling that he would be supporting stricter immigration policies.**
- Amidst his rivalry with Angela Merkel in 2020, the Philadelphia Trumpet, a news source that claims to "show how current events, trends and developments are fulfilling specific Bible prophecies that describe world conditions prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ," said "Merz could bring Germany closer to fulfilling" prophecies outlined in the Bible. As Trumpet editor-in-chief Gerald Flurry wrote in The King of the South, "Europe is prophesied to confront radical Islam."

- In **Merz's 2020 book, 'New Times, New Responsibilities' (Neue Zeit, Neue Verantwortung), he rejected former Federal President Christian Wulff's (CDU) statement "Islam belongs to Germany" as "too simple" (unterkomplex).** This statement has been one of the most contested sentences in contemporary Germany. This debate is very symbolic about the place of Muslims in Germany today.
- A February 2020 piece in Foreign Policy noted that "it is ostensibly centrist leaders like Merz who present the greatest threat. [...] Indeed, there are many figures in the party who may be to the right of Merz. [...] That a centrist party like the CDU might be led by a politician making nativist claims and praising his own business acumen can hardly be seen as unprecedented, either within Germany or in the midst of a global shift to the right."
- In January 2021, Merz tweeted: "In recent years, we have underestimated right-wing #terror as well as the terror of political #Islam. We must take action against this with all the means of the rule of law - just as, by the way, against #left-wing extremism. In this, we can rely on our #police."
- On November 3, 2020, he tweeted: "Whether Nice and Paris, Dresden or #Vienna - the Islamist #terror threatens all of Europe. My sympathies go out to the victims and their families. As party chairman, I will advocate consistent, joint European action against this threat to our freedom."
- Following **violence during the New Year's Eve in January 2023, Friedrich Merz called the perpetrators "young people from the Arab world who don't want to follow the rules here in Germany, who like to challenge this state,"** and further calling them "little pashas," a "term mainly refers to men who are naturally served by a woman." Following this statement, **a German Muslim youth group criticized him for his "divisive language." Journalist Tarek Bae called Merz a "populist Islamophobe."** The integration commissioner of the German government, Reem Alabali-Radovan, called Merz's statement racist: "This remark fuels racist resentment and can also lead to the stigmatization of entire groups." Additionally, the Council for Migration (Rat für Migration), an association of around 200 academics from various disciplines, published a statement, criticizing that the debate revolves around a "a certain type of perpetrator who, in a racist style, was given the attributes Muslim and supposedly 'non-German-looking.'"
- **Following his first year as chairman of the CDU, parliamentary director of the social democratic SPD parliamentary group Katja Mast said: "Friedrich Merz is deliberately keeping a flank open to the right.** In his first year as leader of the opposition in the Bundestag, Friedrich Merz has expended a lot of energy on dividing our country. [...] Friedrich Merz has deliberately overstepped boundaries and defamed groups of people time and again."
- After **Merz became leader of his party in 2022, the party submitted a proposal in May the same year (next to the far-right Alternative for Germany) to renew a pilot project called 'Independent Expert Commission on Political Islamism' (Unabhängiger Expertenrat Politischer Islamismus)** of the Union parties (CDU and CSU). Amongst others, Mouhanad Khorchide and Susanne Schröter had been members of this commission that was **initially intended to be similar to the Austrian Documentation Center Political Islam.** But the new coalition government between the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Liberals that was formed in December 2021, did not accept the proposal. During the parliamentary debate, Matthias Hauer of the Christian Union parties argued that "radical states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia finance Islamism here in Germany during a time when brave people in Iran fight for their freedom from Islamism." Similarly, MP Christoph de Vries, who was informed by the lobbyist group Alp Servies, warned of Qatar and called to dry up funding for so-called "Islamism".
- The **CDU/CSU had already pushed for more control of Muslim organizations, lamenting** that "authorities have insufficient powers with regard to financial activities in the field of non-violent Islamism and that it is almost impossible to detect financing from abroad under the existing framework conditions." **Members of the governing coalition such as MP Lamya Kaddor of the Greens countered the CDU/CSU, saying that they want "Muslims without Islam" and calling attention to their silence in March on the United Nations International Day Against Islamophobia.**

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