

ANGELA MERKEL; CDU'S CANDIDATE FOR CHANCELLORSHIP

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Christian Democratic Union (CDU) named today Angela Merkel as their candidate to challenge Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder at an early election that might make her the country's first woman leader.

CDU is widely expected to win the vote, according to opinion polls, as Merkel faces off against the Social Democratic leader who has seen his popularity shrink after the heavy loss at the regional election of North Rhine-Westphalia last week.

Merkel's nomination came after a meeting with officials from the CDU's sister party, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), whose leader Edmund Stoiber said: "*Angela Merkel has the full confidence and support of the CDU and CSU.*"

German national elections are expected to take place on September 18.

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