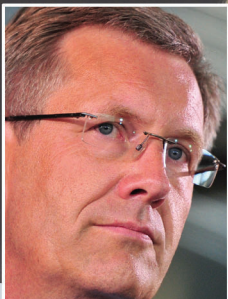


Merkel faces crucial presidential election

Defeat for Angela Merkel's candidate for the federal presidency would be a major blow to the German Chancellor, whose government is riven by rows over its handling of the debt crisis while its international image has taken a beating over Berlin's delays in approving aid for Greece



■ **Christian Wulff, 50.** Conservative Christian Democrat and Merkel's nominee for post

■ **Trained lawyer, CDU premier of state of Lower Saxony since 2003**

■ Wulff, who divorced wife and married long-time girlfriend in 2006, would be first Catholic president of Germany since Heinrich Lübke in 1959

■ **Despite Merkel's centre-right coalition having solid majority in federal assembly – body which elects president – some question whether Wulff is suited for role that is supposed to be above politics**



■ **Joachim Gauck, 70.** Backed by opposition Social Democratic party and Greens, has no links to any political party

■ **Former Protestant pastor whose father was sent by East Germany's communist authorities to gulag in Siberia**

■ **Earned recognition for exposing crimes of *Stasi* – East German secret police – after fall of Berlin Wall**

■ **Could win vote if enough of Merkel's allies broke ranks and members of *Linke* party – which includes former communists he used to oppose – could be persuaded to back him**

Merkel's coalition approval rating

