# Daring More Democracy (October 28, 1969)

## Abstract

After a change of government that many saw as historic, Willy Brandt, the newly elected chancellor, promised both democratic continuity and political renewal. Addressing the younger generation in particular, Brandt emphasized the importance of political participation and announced his plans to lower the voting age.

## Source

### Policy Statement by the Federal Government

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, we are determined to protect the security of the Federal Republic of Germany and the cohesion of the German nation, to preserve peace and to work together for a peaceful Europe, to expand the civil rights and liberties and the prosperity of our people, and to develop our country such that its status in the world of tomorrow will be recognized and safeguarded. The policies of this government shall stand as a sign of both continuity and renewal.

We give our respect to everything that has been achieved in the past years—in the federal government, in the federal states [*Ländern*], and in the communities, by all the people, from all social strata. Let me mention the names Konrad Adenauer, Theodor Heuss, and Kurt Schumacher as representatives of many others with whom the Federal Republic of Germany has travelled a path that we can be proud of. No one will deny, question, or disparage the **accomplishments of the last two decades**. They have become history.

The resilience of our free basic [democratic] order was once again confirmed on September 28, [1969]. I would like to thank the voters for their clear **rejection of extremism**, which we must continue to combat. (Applause from the government coalition parties as well as the CDU/CSU.)

Twenty years after its founding, our **parliamentary democracy** has proven its ability to change with the times and thus has withstood its test. This has also been noted beyond our borders and has helped to bring our state new trust from around the world.

Strict observance of the forms of parliamentary democracy is a given for political communities that have fought for a good 100 years for German democracy, defending it with great sacrifice, and rebuilding it with great effort. With objective criticism and national cooperation, the government and the opposition share the responsibility and task of securing a good future for this Federal Republic.

The federal government knows that this requires loyal cooperation with the legislative bodies. For that, it offers its goodwill to the German Bundestag and, of course, also to the Bundesrat. Like all others, our nation needs its internal order. In the 1970s, however, we will have order in this country only to the extent that we encourage the sharing of responsibility. Such a democratic order needs extraordinary patience in listening, and it needs to exert extraordinary effort on behalf of mutual understanding.

We want to dare more democracy. We will reveal how we work and want to satisfy the critical need for information. We will give every citizen the opportunity to participate in reforming the state and society, and not only through hearings in the Bundestag (Rep. Barzel: Hearings?), but also through our constant contact with representative groups within the population and by offering transparency about government policies. (Rep. Barzel: So the government wants to hear us graciously?!—Rep. Wehner: Calm

down! In “new German,” they use the English word “hearing.” That’s all it is!—Rep. Barzel: Then he should say it correctly!)

We turn to the generations that have grown up in peace, which are not, and should not be, weighed down with the burden of the elders’ guilt; [to] those young people who want to—and should—believe what we say. But these young people need to understand that they, too, have obligations towards the state and society.

We will be presenting a bill to the High House [Bundestag] that will lower the **voting age** from 21 to 18 and the minimum age to run for office from 25 to 21. (Applause from the government parties.) We will also review the legal age [of majority].

Participation and **sharing responsibility in different areas of our** society will be a driving force in the coming years. We cannot create a perfect democracy. We want a society that grants greater freedom and demands more joint responsibility. This government seeks out communication and a critical partnership with everyone who bears responsibility, whether in the churches, the arts, science and industry, or other areas of society.

This applies not least to the trade unions, and we are striving to gain cooperation on the basis of trust. We do not need to give them confirmation of their outstanding significance for this state, for its further development into a social welfare state under the rule of law.

If we are to accomplish all that must be accomplished, then we will need all the active forces in our society. A society that wants to be open to all worldviews and religious convictions needs ethical stimuli that are proven in **service and solidarity towards our neighbors**. It cannot be a matter of merely accepting what the churches accomplish for the family, in work with young people, or in education. We see common tasks, especially where the elderly, sick, and physically or mentally disabled, in their need, require not only material assistance but also human solidarity. In the service of people—not only in one’s own country, but also in the developing world—the work of church and social groups comes together with political activities.

We will continually work towards bringing together the justified wishes of forces in society and the political will of the government.

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Source: Willy Brandt, Policy Statement of October 28, 1969. Deutscher Bundestag — 6. Wahlperiode — 5. Sitzung. Bonn, 28. October 1969, pp. 20–21. Available online at: https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/06/06005.pdf

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