

The Political and Geographic Context of Presidential Decision-Making

How do political and geographic contexts influence the presidential decision-making process?

Overview

Students compare maps of Europe before WWII and at the time the Helsinki Accords were signed to better understand the geographic context of the Helsinki Accords. They read and annotate three of President Ford's speeches about the Helsinki Accords. They then complete a table to analyze the influence each stakeholder had on President Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Accords.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/political-and-geographic-context-presidential-decision-making/>

Directions

1. Discuss students' experiences making a decision from a stakeholder's perspective in the previous activity.

Have students form new groups that include at least one student from each of the groups in Activity 1. Use the following prompts to facilitate discussion within these new groups:

- *What factors influenced your stakeholder to make the decision?*
- *Did you feel that your stakeholder's decision was balanced? Why or why not?*
- *Did you learn anything from another stakeholder that you didn't know or hadn't considered when making your decision?*
- *Do you think that new information may have persuaded your stakeholder to make a different decision? Why or why not?*

Have each small group write a brief summary of their discussion and share it with the whole class. Briefly discuss the summaries. Ask students to describe how a presidential decision would be different from the ones that they made as stakeholders. Elicit from students that presidents must consider the opinions of all stakeholders when making a decision.

2. Have students investigate the geographic context of President Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Accords by examining maps of Europe before and after World War II.

Have students work in their original small groups from Activity 1 to compare the 1939 map of Europe prior to the beginning of WWII with the 1977 one of Europe during the Cold War after WWII. Have groups open the maps in two separate windows on their computers to make comparison easier. Project the maps as well, and demonstrate how to zoom in and make the maps full screen. As groups compare the maps, ask them to create a list of the major differences they see. Then have them each write a summary of how the geography of Europe changed after WWII. Discuss the differences students noted between the two maps, referencing the projected map. Ask students to identify NATO and Warsaw Pact countries on the 1977 map. Point out where the "line" was that divided NATO countries and Warsaw Pact countries. Ask: *Which NATO countries border Warsaw Pact countries? Which Warsaw Pact countries and territories border NATO countries? Why would these places be strategically important?*

3. Model how to analyze a president's speech to gain additional understanding of the presidential decision-making process.

Explain to students that they can gain perspective on all the opinions and concerns Ford had to consider in his decision to sign the Helsinki Accords by analyzing speeches he gave on the subject to different audiences. Distribute to each student a copy of the press release version of President Gerald R. Ford's Address in Helsinki Before the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Ask them to follow along as they listen to an audio recording of Ford's speech and to pay particular attention to the reasons Ford gives for supporting the accords. Play the audio of the speech and have students highlight the written version as they listen. Distribute the Analyzing a Political Speech worksheet. Model how to analyze the speech by having students answer the questions posed on the worksheet as a class. Ask: *When did Ford give this speech? What was the context in which Ford gave this speech? What was the purpose of his speech? Who was his primary audience? Who was his secondary audience (if applicable)? What were some ideas, concerns, or declarations Ford made in this speech? How did the points Ford made in his speech address his audience and their concerns?*

4. Have groups analyze two additional speeches Ford gave related to the Helsinki Accords.

Distribute the text of President's Departure Statement, given on July 26, 1975, to half of the small groups and Presidential Remarks, Meeting With Americans of Eastern European Background, given on July 25, 1975, to the other half. Have each group read and analyze the speeches as they did in Step 3, using the Analyzing a Political Speech worksheet. When groups have completed their analysis, invite them to share their thoughts with the class. Discuss the similarities and differences among the three speeches. Ask: *Were there any points Ford made in one speech that he did not make in the others? Did any of the speeches push some themes more strongly than others? Why would that be the case? How did he change his speeches for different audiences?* Note students' responses on the board.

5. Have students explore stakeholders' influences on the president's decision-making process.

Ask students to think about the speeches they analyzed. Ask: *Looking at the speeches together as a whole, which stakeholders' concerns does Ford seem to be addressing in these speeches? What does this tell you about which stakeholders' opinions Ford was most concerned with?* Distribute the Stakeholder Table to each group. Model how to use the table by filling in the first row with the class. Then have groups complete the rest of the table. Return students' annotated copies of the case study from Activity 1. They can refer to the case study, maps, and speeches as they work.

6. Discuss which stakeholders have the most influence on the president's decision to sign the accords.

Ask groups to share which stakeholders had the most influence on the president's decision and which had the least. Have them offer evidence to support their ideas. This should provide the starting point for a discussion about stakeholder influence and presidential decision-making. Ask students to take notes throughout the discussion. Collect students' map notes, speech analyses, annotated case studies, and Stakeholder Tables for use in the final activity of this lesson.

Tip

In Step 2, note that because the borders of Soviet Socialist Republics are delineated on the 1977 map, students may not at first see that Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia are part of the Soviet Union. If necessary, clarify this for students.

Modification

In Step 3, consider having students use the annotated version of President Gerald R. Ford's Address in Helsinki Before the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. This version is on note cards and includes President Ford's original markings and annotations.

Alternative Assessment

Use students' summaries from Steps 1 and 2, Stakeholder Tables, speech

analyses, and notes as a formative assessment. Before moving on to the next activity, provide students with any additional support they may need.

Extending the Learning

- Have students identify the stakeholders in a current event involving an important presidential decision.
- Have students read or listen to a speech by the current president of the United States and analyze it as they analyzed Ford's speeches in this activity.
- Have students read through President Ford's annotated version of his speech in Helsinki, provided above. Discuss what the markings on the speech might mean to President Ford. Have students follow along on Ford's copy of the speech as they listen to the audio version. Discuss how the marks on the speech correspond with the President's delivery.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- Human Geography

Language Arts

- Reading
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- United States history
- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- describe the political and geographic context of President Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Accords
- identify and analyze the influence each stakeholder had on Ford's decision-

making

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Modeling
- Reading
- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- 21st Century Themes
 - Global Awareness
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Analyzing Geographic Information
 - Answering Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

- **Standard 1:**

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards

- **Theme 2:**

Time, Continuity, and Change

National Geography Standards

- **Standard 1:**

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- **Standard 13:**

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

- **Standard 17:**

How to apply geography to interpret the past

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

- **Standard 5:**

That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity

National Standards for History

- **Historical Thinking Standard 5:**

The student engages in historical issues-analysis and decision-making

- **U.S. History Era 9 (5-12) Standard 2:**

How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1:**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1:**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9:**

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.9:**

Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1:**

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses).

- **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Comprehension and Collaboration, SL.11-12.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Range of Writing, W.11-12.10

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Range of Writing, W.9-10.10

The College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- **Causation and Argumentation: D2.His.14.3-5:**

Explain probable causes and effects of events and developments.

- **Causation and Argumentation: D2.His.14.9-12:**

Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

- **D2.Civ.13.9-12:**

Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences

- **D2.Civ.14.9-12.:**

Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

- **D2.His.1.9-12:**

Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Highlighters
- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per small group, Projector, Speakers

Physical Space

- Classroom

Setup

Arrange the space so students can work in small groups.

Grouping

- Large-group instruction

Other Notes

In Activity 2, Step 2: Students will need to regroup into their original small groups from Activity 1 of this lesson.

In Activity 2, Step 6: Collect students' notes, speech analyses, annotated case studies, and Stakeholder Tables for use in Activity 4 of this lesson.

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- [Press Release: Address in Helsinki Before the CSCE](#)
- [President's Annotated Version: Address in Helsinki Before the CSCE](#)
- [Analyzing a Political Speech](#)
- [President's Departure Statement](#)
- [Presidential Remarks Meeting With Americans of Eastern European Background](#)
- [Stakeholder Table](#)

Resources Provided: Maps

- [Political Map: 1939 Central Europe and the Mediterranean](#)
- [Political Map: 1977 Europe](#)

Resources Provided: undefined

- [Address in Helsinki Before the CSCE](#)

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
Cold War	<i>noun</i>	(1947-1991) conflict between the Soviet Union (and its allies) and the United States (and its allies). The two sides never confronted each other directly.
consequence	<i>noun</i>	result or outcome of an action or situation.
intended consequences	<i>noun</i>	results of an action or situation that are deliberately brought about and/or anticipated.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
stakeholder	<i>noun</i>	person or organization that has an interest or investment in a place, situation or company.
unintended consequences	<i>noun</i>	results of an action or situation that are not deliberately brought about and/or anticipated.

For Further Exploration

Reference

- [National Geographic Education: Stakeholder Consequences Decision Making](#)

Video

- [National Geographic Channel: Gerald R. Ford: A Test of Character](#)

Websites

- [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum](#)
- [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation](#)
- [DeVos Learning Center at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum](#)

Partner



