

Social Psychological Bulletin

Psychologia Społeczna

Turning Points at the Round Table Talks

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Social Psychological Bulletin, 2020, Vol. 14(4), Article e2329, <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.v14i4.2329>

Received: 2019-09-15 • Accepted: 2019-11-24 • Published (VoR): 2020-03-11



Handling Editor: Mirosław Kofta, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

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Related: This article is part of the SPB Special Issue “From Conflict to Dialogue? Lessons of the Polish Round Table ‘89”; Guest Editors: Mirosław Kofta, Michał Bilewicz, & Stephen Reicher, *Social Psychological Bulletin*, 14(4), <https://spb.psychopen.eu>

Abstract

At the beginning of the 1990s the “winds of change” blew through Europe, leading to the fall of Communism and regime change in several Eastern-European countries. The domino effect started in Poland with the Round Table negotiations that ultimately led to democratization of the country. The context that allowed this historical event to occur has been studied, but the talks themselves have not been analyzed in detail. In this article, we undertake this task. Using several complementary analytical approaches – negotiation theory, turning points analysis and dynamical systems – we study the process of getting to an agreement, focusing on the seven key issues of the negotiations. We treat the Round Table Talks both as a unique case of negotiations, given its structure and the context in which it happened, as well as an event comparable to other negotiations and connecting to the broader negotiation literature. Results of our inquiries show the importance of procedures during the talks and highlight the role played by motivation in propelling the negotiating parties to an agreement. We discuss the implications of our findings for negotiation theory and for the broader context of the historical event.

Keywords

dynamical analysis, negotiation theory, Round Table Talks, procedures, process traces, turning points analysis

At the beginning of the 1990s the “winds of change” blew through Europe, leading to the fall of Communism and regime changes in several Eastern-European countries.



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As is often emphasized, Poland was the first country to start the process of regime change. Although the context of these changes has been broadly analyzed by historians (Skórzyński, 2009) and, more recently, social psychologists (Kofta & Leszczyński, 2019), the way in which the negotiation process unfolded has received less attention. Referred to as the Polish Round Table, this case can be understood broadly in the context of negotiation theory. Focusing more specifically on process dynamics, an analysis of negotiation turning points yields additional insights. The analysis aims to answer questions about the dynamics of the Round Table Talks as well as about the more general lessons that can be drawn from these negotiations. In this empirical article we situate the case in the literature on negotiation, looking at it through the lens of three theoretical frameworks, including a process analysis of turning points that occurred for each of the discussed key issues. The article concludes with lessons learned from the analyses. Our decision to perform analyses of the negotiation process is driven by a desire to contribute to a broader scholarly literature on international/intra-national negotiation. However, we also situate these analyses in a broader political context and draw on the articles prepared for this issue by Reykowski (2020) and Grzelak (2020).

We begin with a discussion of the historical conditions and background factors that shaped the way the negotiation occurred. The imminent fall of the Soviet Union placed the Polish Communist regime in peril of losing its power. The opposition, led by Lech Wałęsa, was becoming increasingly popular and regarded by many Polish citizens to be a plausible replacement for the regime. With no place to go – for instance, due to the tough economic situation in the country, as described by Janusz Reykowski's (2020), target paper (this issue) – the government accepted the opposition's proposal to initiate the Round Table Talks, which began on February 6th, 1989 at the Polish Council of Ministers office. These conditions provided a strong impetus to seek an agreement that would lead to a peaceful transition from a Communist to a democratic political system. Both parties were keen to avoid violence, as emphasized in the target articles. Each was strongly motivated to work through the difficult issues that needed to be resolved for a smooth transition that would minimize backlash or spoiler dynamics from the Polish population.

Motives and Structure

The parties' motives can be understood in terms of risks and alternatives. Two concepts are relevant: best alternatives to negotiated agreements (BATNAs) and risk propensities. The negotiation structure can be understood in terms of Iklé's (1964) typology of international negotiation objectives. The Round Table Talks correspond to aspects of the profiles of both redistributive and innovative negotiations. The interplay between motives and structures sets the stage for our analysis.

With regard to motives, alternatives to negotiation were unattractive for both parties – this is a point that Janusz Grzelak also made in his target paper in this issue. As a result, the parties were mutually dependent on reaching an agreement. Strong

inter-dependencies, mentioned by Grzelak in his article, have been found to encourage cooperation and re-framing by the negotiators (Druckman & Olekalns, 2013). As will be discussed, a good deal of the negotiations consisted of reframing the issues. But the talks were asymmetrical with regard to risk with the government being largely risk averse while the opposition was risk seeking. The government aimed to protect its status as the ruling party by making concessions while saving face. The opposition strove to maximize its gains by making the minimum number of concessions needed to get an agreement. This difference is similar to the distinction between prevention and promotion orientations in regulatory fit theory, which was also mentioned by Janusz Reykowski in his article (Higgins, 2000). Both orientations seek a fit between aims and tactics. For the government this was between minimizing losses and making concessions. For the opposition this was between maximizing gains and avoiding concessions. These dynamics are evident in the analyses to follow.

With regard to structure, the Round Table Talks can be seen as a combination of distributive and innovative goals. The redistributive features include an emphasis on interests and bargaining trade-offs, media exposure, compromise solutions, a deadline, and less than a comprehensive agreement (see Druckman et al., 1999, Table 4, Column 3). Innovative features include the bilateral structure, asymmetrical power, long-term relationships, relatively few key issues, and an outcome that could be considered as integrative (see Druckman et al., 1999, Table 4, Column 2). Central to the talks were issues of transition with an expectation for regime change, although it was not clear from the beginning that regime change was possible, as emphasized by both Reykowski and Grzelak. Unlike civil-war termination talks between rebels and the government in power, where the rebels make gains, but the regime holds on to its power (Druckman & Wagner, 2019), the Round Table set in motion a process where the opposition would become a new regime. The mix of these types of talks is enlightening. With the end of the Communist regime in sight, an optimistic opposition would be the beneficiary of distributive gains which could only be realized by negotiating an innovative package. The tactics to be discussed in this article shed light on these dynamics.

Motives and structures can be depicted as part of the larger set of context and process variables as shown in Figure 1.¹ As we noted above, the Round Table Talks were initiated in an atmosphere of political change. The impending fall of the Soviet Union impelled its satellite countries to reconsider their political systems with the possibility of a democratic system replacing the Cold War dictatorial regimes. Poland took the lead and became a model for the other Eastern European countries. An emboldened Polish opposition promoted the talks and entered with an optimism characteristic of the more powerful party. The optimism was further reinforced by an opponent (the government)

1) This figure places the talks in a broader political context as discussed in the paper by Reykowski (2020, this issue). It connects macro with micro-level variables. Our following turning points analyses focus on the details of the negotiating process. We return to a consideration of the political context in the discussion section.

that had unattractive alternatives to negotiating with them. Nonetheless the negotiation process was difficult with swings between impasses and agreements as we will show in the following turning points analysis.

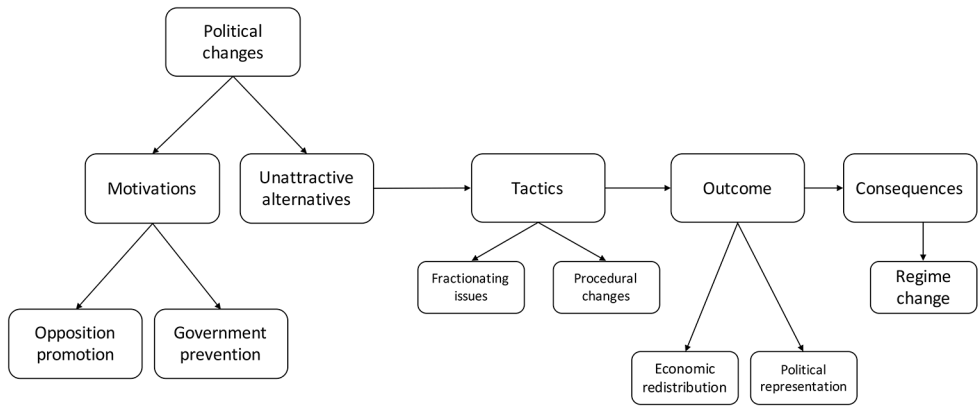


Figure 1. Round Table negotiation dynamics.

The parties' tactical maneuvering managed to move the talks forward, particularly the decisions made to address the easier issues early while putting off the larger, less tractable, issues. Referred to as fractionation (Fisher, 1964), this tactic was aided by a deadline that effectively postponed further discussion of the most sticky issue, indexation. Along with this fractionating approach, the negotiators made many procedural decisions that turned impasses into agreements. In the end, the parties settled on a re-distribution of access to the economy and political representation leading eventually to regime change (see Figure 1). These dynamics are captured in the turning points analysis below.

A solution had to be found by the negotiating delegations. Although there may have been a sense of inevitability about the political future of Poland, the Round Table process was fraught with starts (the promise of progress) and stops (the threat of dissolution). The Communist regime was reluctant to concede in an effort to prevent losing its control of government. In the end, some issues were not settled while others were worked out through compromises that provided both benefits and losses to all the parties. This sort of wrestling in the context of a shared desire for an agreement can be understood by analyzing the way in which turning points emerged from impasses that were caused by the negotiators. The analysis to follow is organized in terms of the seven key issues discussed in the talks.

Turning Points Analysis

A framework for analyzing turning points consists of three parts: precipitants, departures, and consequences (short and long term). Precipitants occur in the immediately preceding period prior to a departure and can take three forms: procedural (inside the process), substantive (inside the process) and external (outside the process). Procedural precipitants are defined as decisions made to change the structure or format of the talks, including working committees, changing the compositions of delegates at the table, and changing the topic. Substantive precipitants refer mainly to new ideas or concepts introduced by the negotiating parties – here the emphasis is on the issues and proposals rather than the structure of the talks. External factors consist of events occurring outside of the negotiations, such as policy or leadership changes or third-party interventions as well as events that occur elsewhere but have possible global implications. Departures, or turning points, can be understood as more or less abrupt changes in the ongoing negotiation process. Abrupt departures are sudden changes and include (but are not limited to) final agreements, unexpected transitions or deadlocks. Less abrupt departures may take the form of new proposals that develop gradually over time. Departures can lead to either positive, de-escalatory or negative, escalatory consequences.

These three parts form a process trace that is largely understood in qualitative terms. Several process traces can be identified in any negotiation as shown by Druckman (2001) and Crump and Druckman (2016). The first step in performing a process tracing analysis is to develop a detailed chronology of events that occurred and decisions that were taken during the negotiation. Key departures are identified in the chronology. The next step consists of identifying the precipitants. It is worth noting that any departure can be preceded by more than one type of precipitating event. Lastly, a decision is made about the consequences of the key departures, distinguishing between escalatory and de-escalatory events.

Another perspective on turning points comes from dynamical systems analysis. We used a Dynamical Negotiation Network model (Jochemczyk & Nowak, 2010; Jochemczyk, Pietrzak & Zawadzka, 2016), which helped us to understand the dynamics of the Round Table negotiation process in the form of an attractor landscape (see Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007; Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2003; Nowak et al., 2010).

The key concepts of this perspective are the energy of the negotiation system and an attractor landscape. System energy is a measure of the number of inconsistencies between the issues discussed by the parties. The larger the number of inconsistencies, the higher the energy in the system. Thus, if the negotiators make progress by agreeing on issues, the energy of the system decreases. When the negotiators are stuck in a deadlock, the energy stays at the same level. If the negotiators start to escalate their demands, then the energy of the system increases.

The idea of an attractor landscape is derived from mapping all the possible energy states of the negotiation system. An observed negotiation system evolves toward its local minimum level of energy, which is referred to as its attractor. When negotiators aspire to a better solution, they need to “tweak” the system in order to surpass the local maximum level of energy, referred to as a repeller. This idea of tweaking is consonant with the turning points concept. An example of this situation is presented in [Figure 2](#) where we demonstrate the negotiation system’s behavior in the context of free elections to the Senate.

Both approaches to turning points are used to analyze each of the key Round Table issues.

Analysis of the Round Table Talks

We created a chronology of the Round Table Talks using two primary sources: 1) the 43 press releases written by the Lech Wałęsa’s Organizational Office for the Round Table describing the official events of each day of the negotiation and 2) Jan Skórzyński’s book (2009), describing both the official and unofficial events, often outside of the main negotiation process. The chronology began on July 21, 1988, when Wałęsa agreed to come to the table, and concluded on April 5, 1989 with an agreement. A total of 137 events were recorded. The plenary sessions were divided into three issue areas: the Economics and Social Issues Table and its sub-tables; the Political Reform Table and its sub-tables; and the Union Pluralism Table. This focus is sufficient for our analyses. Meetings of various task forces would unnecessarily complicate the analysis and were thus excluded. However, events outside of the main negotiations, such as the meetings in Magdalenka, were included.

Next, we identified seven key issues: the issue of mass media, free elections to the Senate, the role of the president, the role of the Sejm (lower house of the Polish parliament) and Senate (upper house of the Polish parliament) regarding vetoes, the fate of the Gdańsk Shipyard, rehabilitation of the workers fired after martial law, and indexation. We chose these areas since they were recurring themes throughout the negotiations and were sources for major stalemates. Having identified the crucial issues, we traced their development. Each issue is briefly described in chronological order followed by a process trace and dynamical representation.

Free Elections

The problem of free elections to the Senate occurred during the meeting in Magdalenka on March 2nd, when Aleksander Kwaśniewski proposed this idea to the delegates. His proposition, understood as a substantive precipitant, was a way of dealing with the stalemate regarding the role of the president. The change of topic from the president’s

role to the elections was a procedural precipitant. After a long discussion of the issue, an abrupt departure occurred and was followed by a de-escalation in the form of continued talks about a new political order. These developments are represented by the following process trace:

substantive precipitant + procedural precipitant → abrupt departure → de-escalation

From a dynamical perspective, the free elections issue can be represented as three points in time: 1) initial deadlock, 2) concessions made by the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP)², which followed the external precipitant, and 3) abrupt departure – evolution of the system into lower energy states along with a number of consecutive agreements. As we can see in Figure 2, the initial energy of the system is relatively high (Point 1). Then, after the involvement of PUWP leaders (an external precipitant), the system turned into a basin of attraction for a different attractor (Point 2). Then the system evolved into the new attractor (Point 3).

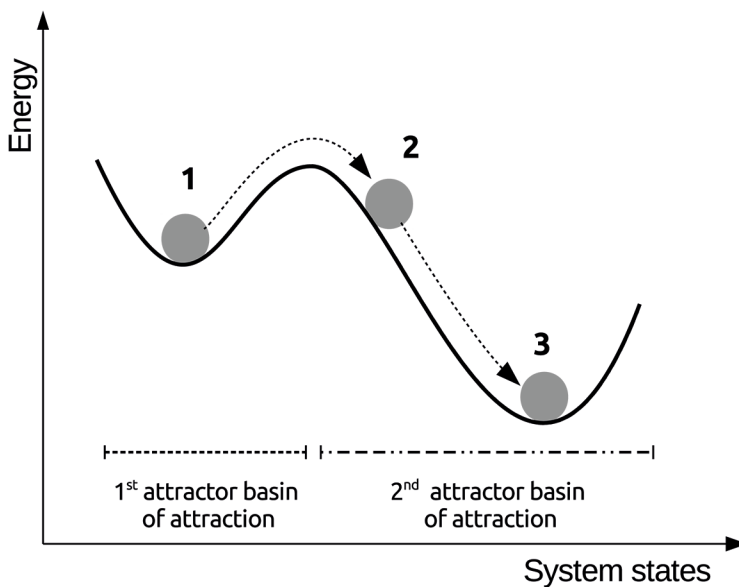


Figure 2. Free elections issue from a systemic perspective.

Mass Media

The issue of mass media was resolved when air time for the opposition and other aspects of media participation, such as oppositional press, were ultimately decided. This turning point was precipitated by two procedural events. The first was the meeting at Magdalenka on March 2nd, where the government agreed to an oppositional press and

2) At this time, the ruling communist party in Poland.

private radio stations. The other precipitant happened during a meeting of the mass media sub-table, when, in the wake of a stalemate, three task forces were established to deal with the issues of radio and television, underground publishing and media legal problems. An abrupt departure was followed by an escalation, namely the meeting of the Table for Politics on March 23rd concluding with a dissatisfied opposition. A long break followed. These developments are captured by the following process trace:

procedural precipitant 1 + procedural precipitant 2 → abrupt departure → escalation

From a dynamical perspective, participants faced a deadlock (state Number 1), leading them to change the venue of the talks to Magdalenka, resulting in state Number 2 – de-escalation. Next, in the face of a subsequent deadlock (state Number 3), they established another procedural precipitant – creating special task forces to solve their problems, resulting in another de-escalation (state Number 4). This pattern is shown in Figure 3.

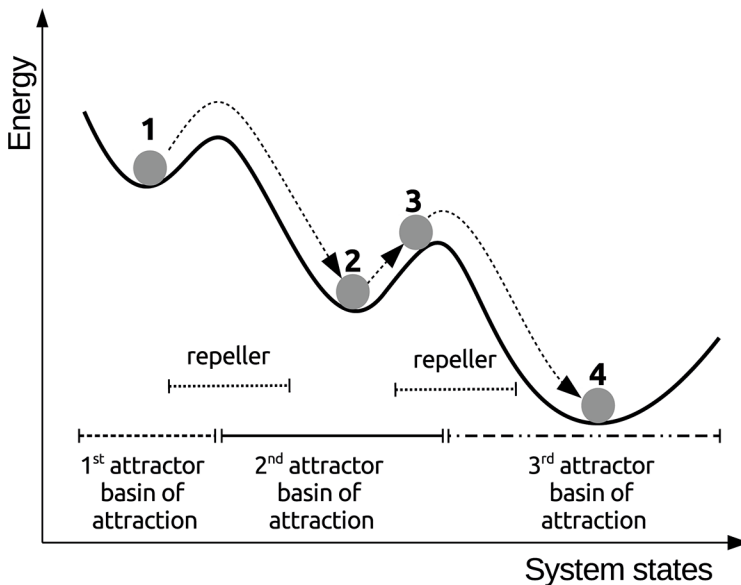


Figure 3. Mass media issue from a systemic perspective.

Veto

The number of votes needed in the Senate to overthrow the veto of the president was one of the most problematic issues of the talks, reoccurring throughout most of the negotiation. It was finally resolved during a meeting in Magdalenka on April 3rd. The abrupt departure was precipitated by the decision to organize this meeting. After long debate, the government agreed to the opposition's proposal of 66.6% of the votes needed in the Senate to overthrow the veto of the president. In exchange, the opposition agreed that the same amount of votes would be needed in the Sejm in order to introduce

changes to the constitution. This would overthrow the veto of the president and put the president in front of a State Tribunal. This sequence of events occurred at the end of the negotiations and it was followed by a key de-escalation, which consisted of signing the final document. These decisions are captured in the following process trace:

procedural precipitant + substantive precipitant → abrupt departure → de-escalation

These dynamics follow the same systemic pattern as the free elections issue (see Figure 2). In the face of deadlock, the negotiating parties decided on a change in procedures coupled with substantive decisions in the form of an exchange of offers. The PUWP agreed to the percent of votes necessary to change the constitution, whereas Solidarity agreed to the same percent of votes necessary to put the president in front of a State Tribunal.

Role of the President

Having decided on free elections to the Senate, the negotiating parties returned to the problem of the role of the president in the new political regime. The government side advanced the proposition of providing the president with considerable power. The opposition did not agree. The long, reoccurring discussion did not lead to any solutions. The debate was finally settled at the end of March, when two key figures of the negotiations – Cypryniak and Gdula – went to see the leaders of the PUWP in order to get more power of attorney. This led to an abrupt departure – the final decision on the role of the president – which resulted in a de-escalatory event, which was the meeting in Magdalenka on March 29th. This pattern is captured by the following process trace:

external precipitant → abrupt departure → de-escalation

On this issue, an external precipitant led to an abrupt departure and de-escalation. From a systemic perspective, there was an increase in tension between the parties, in other words, the energy of the system increased. Next, an external precipitant occurred – the PUWP negotiators went to their constituencies and came back with concessions. Those concessions were followed by agreements on most of the issues discussed at the political table. Thus, we have a de-escalation. The external precipitant led the negotiation beyond the high energy point (a repeller is visualized as a hill between Point 1 and 2 in Figure 3). The PUWP concessions moved the system into a different basin of attraction (Point 2 in Figure 2), and the system evolved (abruptly) to the new attractor (Point 3 in Figure 2).

The Gdansk Shipyard

The next issue was less about political and social order of the new regime, and more about the identities of the negotiating parties. The abolishment of the Gdańsk Shipyard was a sensitive subject for the government and the opposition, and although the parties managed to find a partial solution, it was a band aid rather than a permanent fix.

The turning point was precipitated by Kiszczak's promise to ask the Sejm to have a special commission look into the matters of the Gdańsk Shipyard. This occurred during a meeting in Magdalenka on April 3rd. The departure was followed by a de-escalatory signing of the final document as shown in the following process trace:

procedural precipitant → *departure* → *de-escalation*

This issue followed the same dynamic pattern as shown for the free elections issue (see Figure 2). In the face of a deadlock, the parties arranged procedures in a manner that changed the negotiation system. It flipped to another attractor, which resulted in a de-escalation.

Rehabilitation

The problem of rehabilitation of fired workers, resulting from martial law, was also a sensitive subject that none of the parties wanted to negotiate. It was put off until the end of the negotiations. During the meeting in Magdalenka on March 29th it was decided that those who were fired could come back to work. If their initial workplace president did not accept their re-entry, the workers could file a complaint to a special commission. This substantive precipitant led to a non-abrupt departure, which consisted of a discussion about the rules of the commission during the meeting of the Table for Union Pluralism on March 30th. This turning point, namely the decision of how to handle the issue of rehabilitation, had de-escalatory consequences as shown in the following process trace:

substantive precipitant + procedural precipitant → *non-abrupt departure* → *de-escalation*

From a dynamical perspective, this issue follows the same pattern as the four previous issues (see Figure 2). Facing stagnation, the negotiating parties were pressured to come up with a new idea that would lead to procedural adjustments in the form of a new commission, thus resolving the rehabilitation issue. In dynamical terms, this solution produced a reduction in the energy level in the negotiation system and a de-escalation of the conflict.

Indexation

The issue of indexation was the most problematic matter. It was not resolved. During the meeting at Magdalenka on April 3rd, OPZZ, the third official actor of the negotiations, did not agree to the indexation solution jointly proposed by Solidarność and PUWP. For a while it seemed that this decision might ruin the Round Table agreement. Solidarność saved the agreement by bringing the Round Table to an end without resolving this issue. They realized that this solution was in the best interest of Poland. They had one condition: to sign the final document regardless of OPZZ's opinion on the issue of indexation. Fortunately, this led to a departure, which was the signing of the final

protocol of the Economics Table and the final Round Table agreement. With this signing the talks were brought to an end.

procedural precipitant → *departure* → *de-escalation*

From a dynamical perspective, Figure 4 shows the energy landscape for the indexation issue. The figure shows the system states at three points in time: 1) initial deadlock, 2) escalation by OPZZ, which followed a procedural precipitant, and 3) returning to the previous state, which was no agreement on the issue. As we can see in this figure, the initial energy of the system is relatively low (Point 1), because other issues were resolved at this point of negotiation. The system remained in the same attractor (Point 3), which did not undermine the agreement. The level of energy of the whole system was low enough to reach the final agreement.

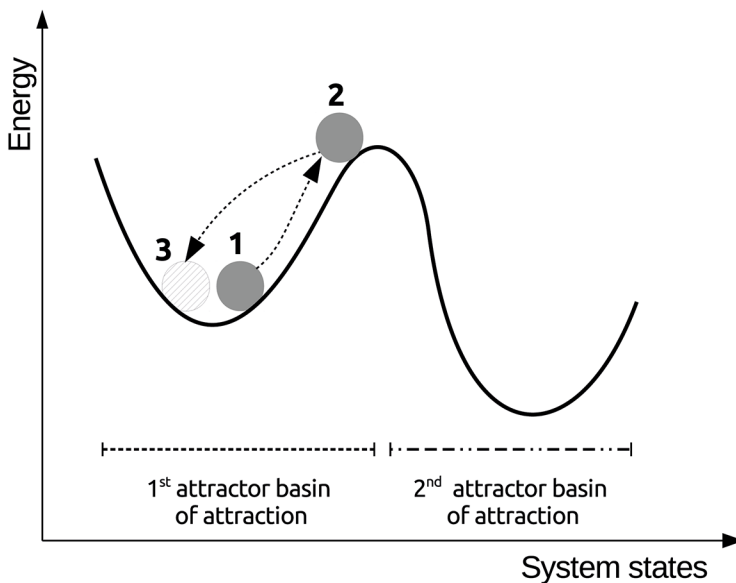


Figure 4. The indexation issue from the systemic perspective.

Summary of the Turning Points Analyses

In the seven process traces that we created, 60% of the precipitants were procedural. They included consultation with third parties, informal (unofficial) meetings, changing the composition of delegates at the table, and changing the topic. Most of these occurred as a means to avoid a crisis or stalemate. We offer two explanations for the predominance of procedures in these talks. One is that there was a limited pool of substantive issues to discuss with clear positions taken by the opposing parties. As a result, substance may have been a less important trigger for departures. This explanation is, to some extent, suggested by Janusz Grzelak in his paper. Another refers to the importance of small,

informal meetings away from the table. These meetings may have reduced the tension of the formal talks and provided new ideas that would surface in those talks. They may indeed have been critical to the progress that was made. As Janusz Reykowski put it, those meetings helped to build more informal relationships, that allowed for constructing a more heterogeneous view of the opposing party.

As for the departures, 57% of them were abrupt. This may have been due to the looming elections scheduled for June 1989. The elections presented an opportunity for the kind of system change that the opposition desired. In effect, these were deadline pressures that spurred progress in the form of quick departures at more than half of the turns. Abrupt departures may also be explained by the idea of tension between promotion and prevention. The PUWP tried to protect their main issues and thus attempted to block other arrangements. As soon as the PUWP conceded on a crucial issue, the other issues were easier to resolve, leading to de-escalatory consequences.

Interestingly, most of the consequences (86%) were de-escalatory. We offer two possible explanations for this finding. One refers to the observation that most of the major departures occurred during the latter part of the talks. Thus, it is conceivable that a successful resolution was in sight. This optimism is reflected in the spate of de-escalations that occurred. Another refers to the first departure in the talks, the decision to hold free elections to the Senate. This may well have changed the energy in the negotiation system as will be shown in [Figure 5](#) below. The reduced energy may then have influenced the departures to follow, which also led to de-escalatory consequences. Further, the free election agreement was the key decision that paved the way for eventual regime change. These explanations can be considered as hypotheses to be evaluated as next steps in the research.

A summary process trace results from our attempt to aggregate across the seven traces. It takes the following form:

procedural precipitant (60%) → abrupt departure (57%) → de-escalatory consequences (86%)

This trace is a shorthand depiction of the dominant pattern for the Round Table Talks. It shows that procedures were important for producing abrupt departures and that most of the turning points resulted in de-escalatory consequences. It is worth noting that this summary trace is similar to those that occur more generally in political negotiations ([Druckman, 2001](#)).

A System of Interacting Issues

[Figure 5](#) shows all of the issues in a two-dimensional attractor landscape. Two pieces of information are contained in the figure. One is that the level of energy steadily decreased through time, culminating in the resolution of the indexation sticking point and the final agreement. As the level of energy reflects the number of disagreements between the

parties, the low level of energy shown in the figure means that the parties agreed on many issues that produced a path toward the eventual agreement.

Another shows a chronology of the overlapping issues. Note that most of the early discussion focused on the mass media and free election issues. Both were resolved. Considerably less time was spent on the other issues with the most difficult ones – the Gdansk Shipyard and Indexation – broached at the end of the talks. This may be regarded as a fractionation tactic, where the easier issues are discussed early to build confidence in tackling the more difficult issues (see Figure 1 in the earlier section on Motives and Structure). This tactic was combined with procedural changes and time pressure to move the talks in the direction of an agreement that the parties could accept.

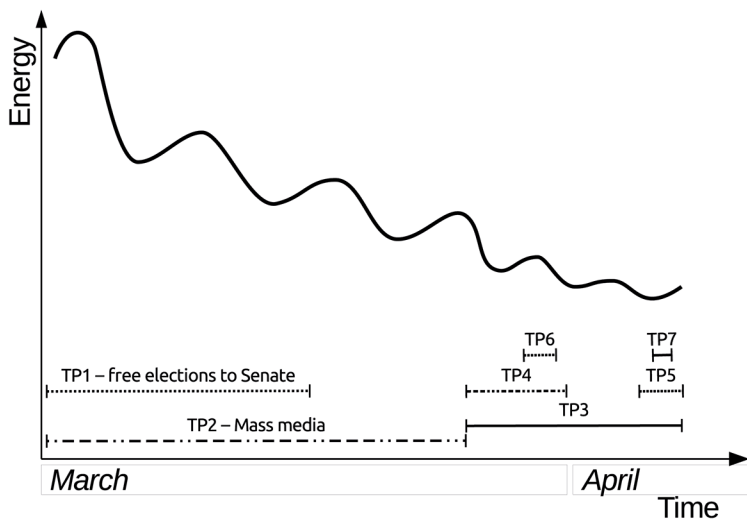


Figure 5. Level of energy through time with a chronology of the issues.

Discussion

The Round Table Talks were analyzed through the lens of three frameworks. We began with a broad analysis that placed these talks in the context of negotiation theory as shown above in Figure 1. Key features of this body of work include motivations, structures, and tactics. The parties were strongly motivated to come to the table and reach an agreement. Their different motivations, referred to as risk prevention and promotion, with the government seeking to prevent a loss of power and the opposition promoting an agreement that would eventually lead to regime change. The tactics used were intended to achieve both re-distributive and innovative goals. These goals were mostly achieved.

This analysis is similar to other enhanced case study approaches to negotiation (see Druckman, 2005). One advantage of this approach is that the analyst has an opportunity

to understand the case through the lens of concepts. In our analysis the case is described in terms of a chronology of events, which is regarded as the ‘data’ used for the interpretive and process tracing analyses. By superimposing a framework on these events (see Figure 1), we contribute to the theoretical relevance of this particular case: the case connects to the larger negotiation literature. Another advantage of the approach is that the Round Table process is brought to the attention of the larger scholarly community as an important historical process. The insights gleaned from our analyses also contribute to the further development of negotiation theory and methodology.

The process tracing results contribute additional insights. In particular, they highlight the importance of procedures in moving the process toward agreements. Conceivably, agreement on procedures sets the stage for discussion of divisions on the substantive issues: note that several departures followed from a combination of procedural and substantive precipitants. They also resolve the dilemma in these talks between mistrust and high inter-dependence. The parties were aware that breaking off the talks was not a feasible option. Thus, it was instrumental for them to develop a working relationship based on conditional trust, a concept mentioned by Janusz Grzelak in his target paper. The first issue that was discussed, free elections, may have increased their confidence in moving the process forward. Agreement on procedures facilitated a discussion and eventual resolution of this issue. Realizing that constructive solutions were possible – or, using Janusz Reykowskis’ words, changing the orientations from purely competitive to more cooperative – the parties developed the working procedures needed to tackle the issues to come. The resolution of most of these issues were triggered by procedural precipitants (see the summary process trace above).

More broadly, agreement on procedures have been shown to increase negotiators’ flexibility or willingness to make concessions (Druckman, 1993). When procedures take the form of transparency and fair treatment, they have been shown to produce stable agreements and durable peace (Druckman & Wagner, 2019). The Round Table Talks provide another example of the connection between adherence to agreed procedures and the development of trust. This connection is reflected in the decreased system energy as the talks evolved (see Figure 5).

The concept of system energy provides further insight into readiness to reach an agreement. The parties found a way around the indexation issue to bring the talks to a close with an agreement. Simply put, there was not enough energy in the system to continue bickering about their differences. The other systemic concept, attractor dynamics, illuminates shifts from high to low energy. These shifts are shown for each issue in the figures above. They can also be regarded as turning points. Indeed, the connection between the evolution of attractor dynamics and process tracing is worth further exploration. The question is whether structural changes in communication co-occur with or trigger the turning points that were identified in the process analyses.

Conclusion

We used the turning points framework to perform a descriptive analysis of the nine-month Round Table Talks. The insights gained are limited to the negotiating patterns that emerged from events and decisions made by the government and opposition leadership. These patterns were set in motion by the broader political environment in which they occurred (see Figure 1 above). This environment includes both country-specific and global features. Without a readiness for change from authoritarian rule (or coerced identities) to democracy (or voluntary identities) by the Polish population there would have been no Round Table. Without Gorbachev's opening or perestroika, the seeds for change would not have been planted. Historical trends were moving in the direction of liberation. The Polish union movement aggressively challenged the long-existing Communist system of governance. These may be construed as a balance between systemic forces and agency. This balance may also have set the stage for the contagious domino effect witnessed by the way the Polish "experiment" was imitated in other countries of the Former Soviet Bloc. Our analyses and interpretations are attempts to capture both this unique historical event and the more general features of these talks in terms of negotiation and turning points theory.

Funding: The authors have no funding to report.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments: The authors have no support to report.

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Social Psychological Bulletin is an official journal of the Polish Social Psychological Society (PSPS).



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