

What enables (political) violence?

CDSN4002 POLITICAL VIOLENCE

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Agenda

- ▶ Why do people engage in (political) violence?
- ▶ What enables or constraints people from being violent?

Human nature

- ▶ To what extent is violence a biological necessity or a human invention, a learned behaviour that could be unlearned?

Human nature in political thought

- ▶ Thomas Hobbes: *“a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceaseth only in death”*
 - ▶ Experience of the English Civil War (1642-1649)
- ▶ Humans as inherently violent (in line with a Christian tradition – i.e., sin)
- ▶ → we can have little confidence in ethics, law or human rationality to save us from violence

Aggression, drives, and instincts

- ▶ Aggression and violence as human instincts?
- ▶ Violence and war traced to our biological heritage – genetic, hormonal, neurobiological, and/or evolutionary mechanisms
- ▶ Often compared to animal behaviour

The Lorenzian Approach

- ▶ Instinctive behaviour: animal behaviour is genetically fixed and unvarying from one individual to other
- ▶ Purpose of aggression for some species:
 - ▶ Providing an opportunity for competition within species
 - ▶ Achieving spacing and population control,
 - ▶ Establishing a means whereby the pair bond can be strengthened

Criticism of human nature theories

- ▶ Justifies violence and war by diminishing human responsibility
- ▶ An excuse for maintenance of large military forces; leads to distrust of others
- ▶ Because animals behave in certain ways doesn't mean humans do so
- ▶ War, as an expression of violent nature, is not a universal trait. Certain cultures like the South African Bushmen or the Inuit apparently never engaged in war (but interpersonal violence is common)

Sociobiology

- ▶ Ecological competition (for food, etc.), male-male competition (for dominance), the role of kinship patterns in directing aggressive behaviour in particular ways
- ▶ Men tend to be more aggressive and more involved in violence than women
- ▶ Individuals who share genes are likely to behave benevolently toward each other
- ▶ Behaviour results from the interaction of genetic potential with experience

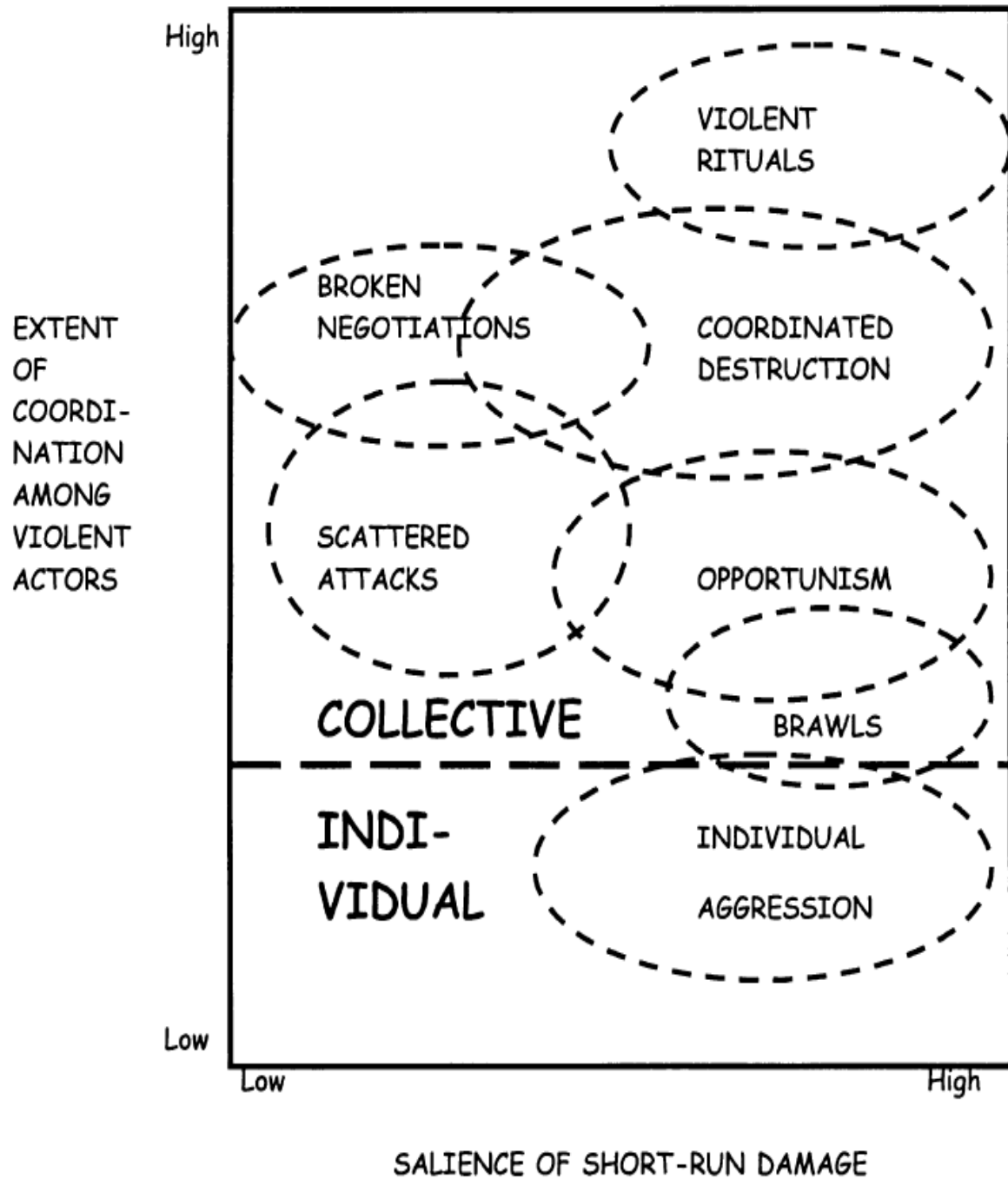
Social learning theories

- ▶ Frustration-aggression (scapegoats)
- ▶ Violence arises in response to *experiences*: observing others' behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours
- ▶ Individuals are likely to be violent if they have been violent in the past and it brought them some success
- ▶ *Instrumental aggression* (oriented towards attaining a goal rather than causing injury as such)
- ▶ Some cultures encourage aggressiveness from early childhood (e.g., the Fulani people of northern Nigeria)
- ▶ Obedience to authority (Milgram's experiment)

Collective violence

▶ Charles Tilly

- ▶ immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects;
- ▶ involves at least two perpetrators of damage; and
- ▶ results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts.



Varieties of (collective) violence

Mechanisms of collective violence

- ▶ *Environmental*: alter relations between social circumstances and their external environment,
- ▶ *Cognitive*: operate through alterations of individual and collective perceptions,
- ▶ *Relational*: change connections among social units