



# When History Seems to Repeat Itself: Exposure to Perceived Lessons of the Past Influences Predictions About Current Political Events

RESEARCH ARTICLE

DJOUARIA GHILANI 

OLIVIER LUMINET 

OLIVIER KLEIN 

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

]u[ubiquity press

## ABSTRACT

The idea that the past holds lessons for the present, under the guise of *historical analogies*, is prevalent in political and public discourse. Those analogies are often accompanied by dire warnings befalling those who “forget” or otherwise neglect the powerful lessons of History—and would then be “doomed to repeat it”, as the saying goes. So, Would remembering history make it seem more OR LESS likely to repeat itself in the future? In other words, does exposure to specific lessons about past events, especially ones involving causal claims, affect how people expect real-life events to turn out? Four studies (three preregistered) tested this experimentally. In Studies 1 and 2, participants expected the same behavior (the US adopting a harsh stance against Iran in the Nuclear Treaty) to result in a more negative outcome when this current stance seemed to match a “lesson” they had read about the break-out of World War II (European leaders adopting a harsh approach against Germany in the 1919 Versailles Treaty vs. a conciliatory approach in the 1938 Munich Agreement). Studies 3 and 4 attempted to eliminate some confounds present in the first two studies and to generalize the effect to different events. While results varied across studies, an internal meta-analysis indicated that the analogical effect on predictions ( $d = -.08$ ) tended to become stronger as participants’ knowledge about the target situation decreased ( $d-1SD = -.24$ ). These findings support the possibility of analogical-based predictive effects for real-life political events, and are discussed in light of their research and political implications.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Djouaria Ghilani**

Université libre de Bruxelles (U.L.B.), Center for Social and Cultural Psychology, 50 Avenue F. Roosevelt, CP 122, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

[dghilani@gmail.com](mailto:dghilani@gmail.com)

KEYWORDS:

Historical analogies; predictions; politics; social cognition

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Ghilani, D., Luminet, O., & Klein, O. (2022). When History Seems to Repeat Itself: Exposure to Perceived Lessons of the Past Influences Predictions About Current Political Events. *Psychologica Belgica*, 62(1), pp. 89–107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/pb.1075>



































