Decadal Climate Variability and Prediction

1. Introduction to Decadal Climate Variability

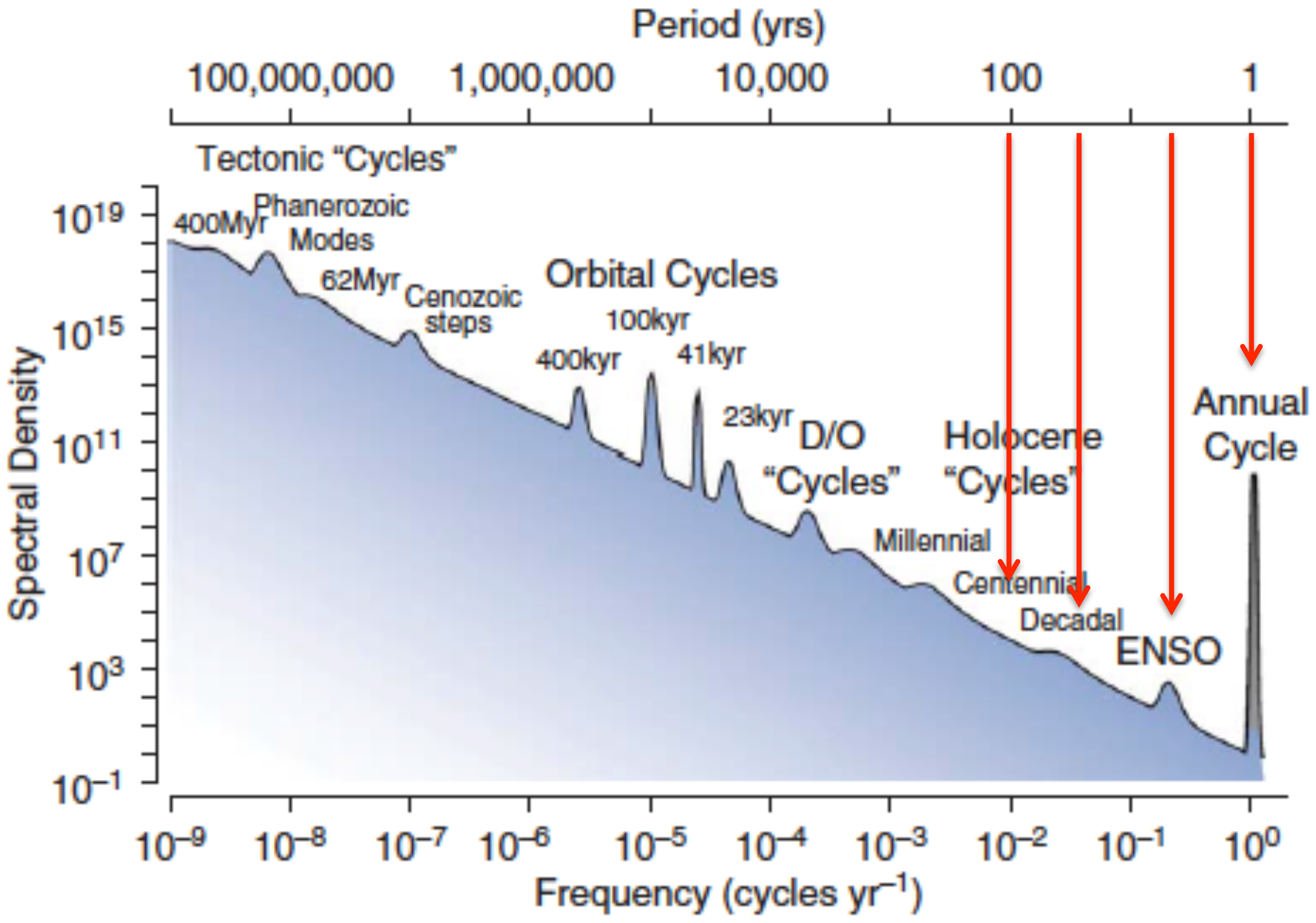
2. The AMO

3. The PDO

4. Decadal Prediction

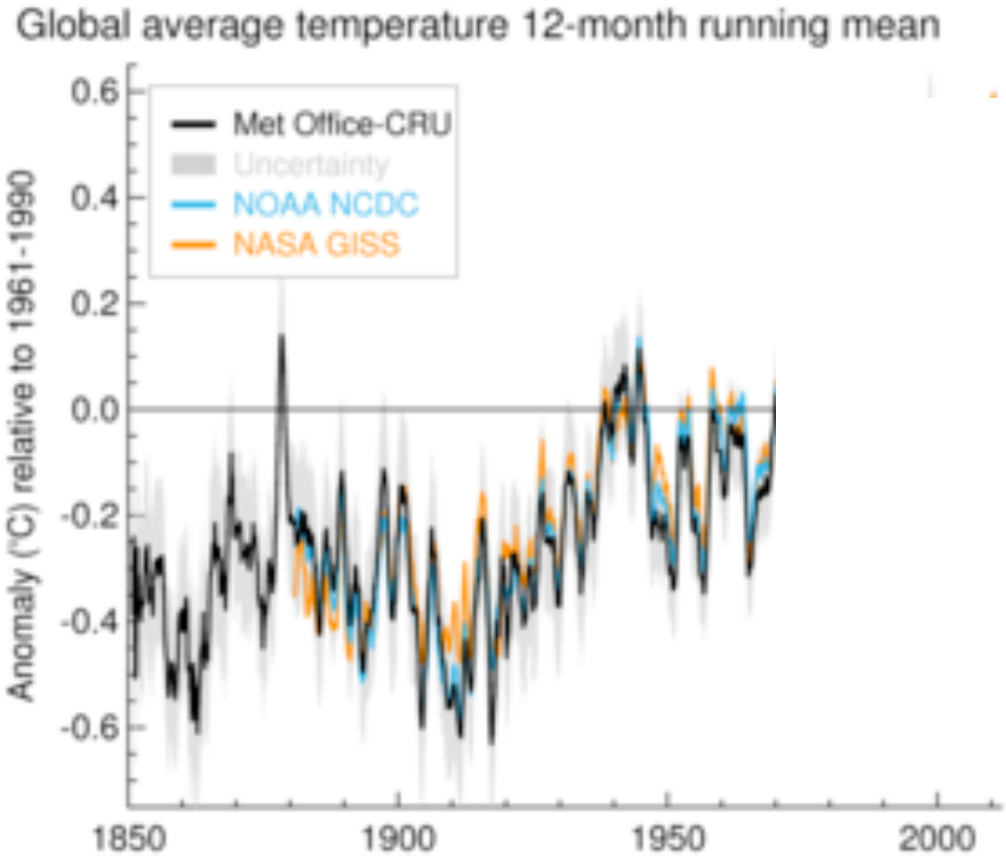
“Climate is now recognized as being continuously variable, on all scales of time”

J. Murray Mitchell Jr., Quaternary Research, 1976



Bartlein, Encyclopedia of Quaternary Science, 2006

Example 1: Global temperature

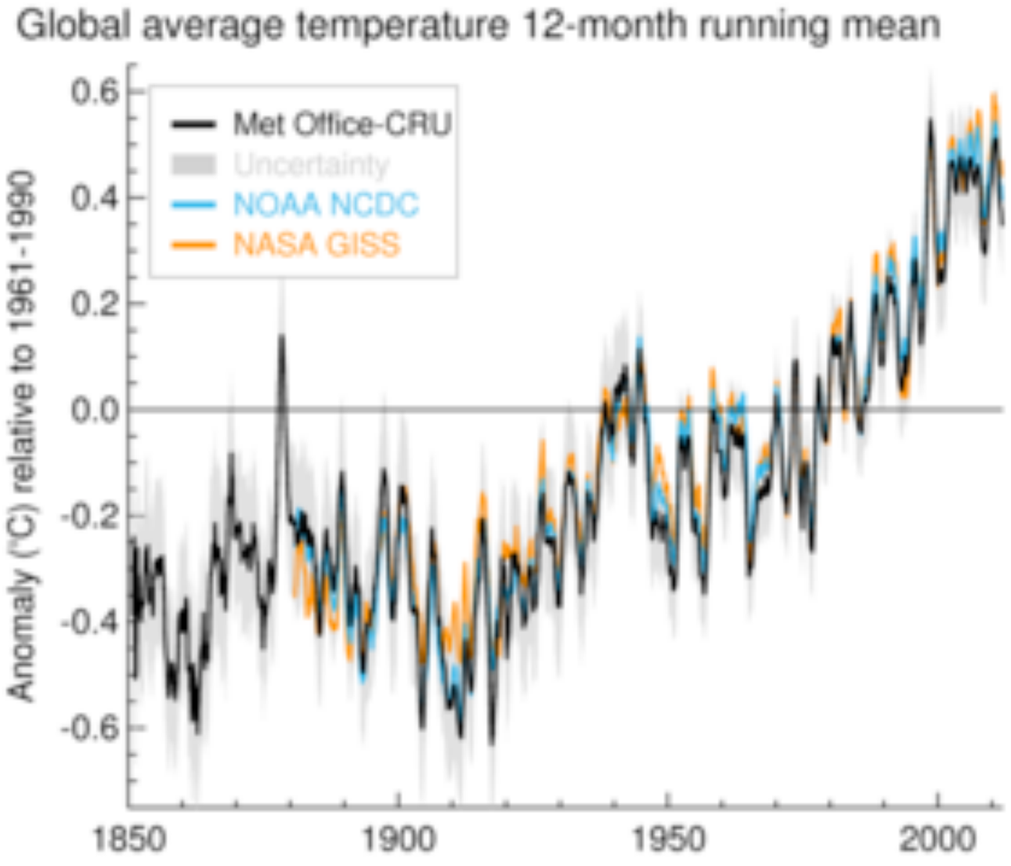


From www.metoffice.gov.uk

NEWSWEEK published an article in 1975 worried about global cooling and a new ice age!!

*this was not the *scientific* consensus at the time though

Example 1: Global temperature



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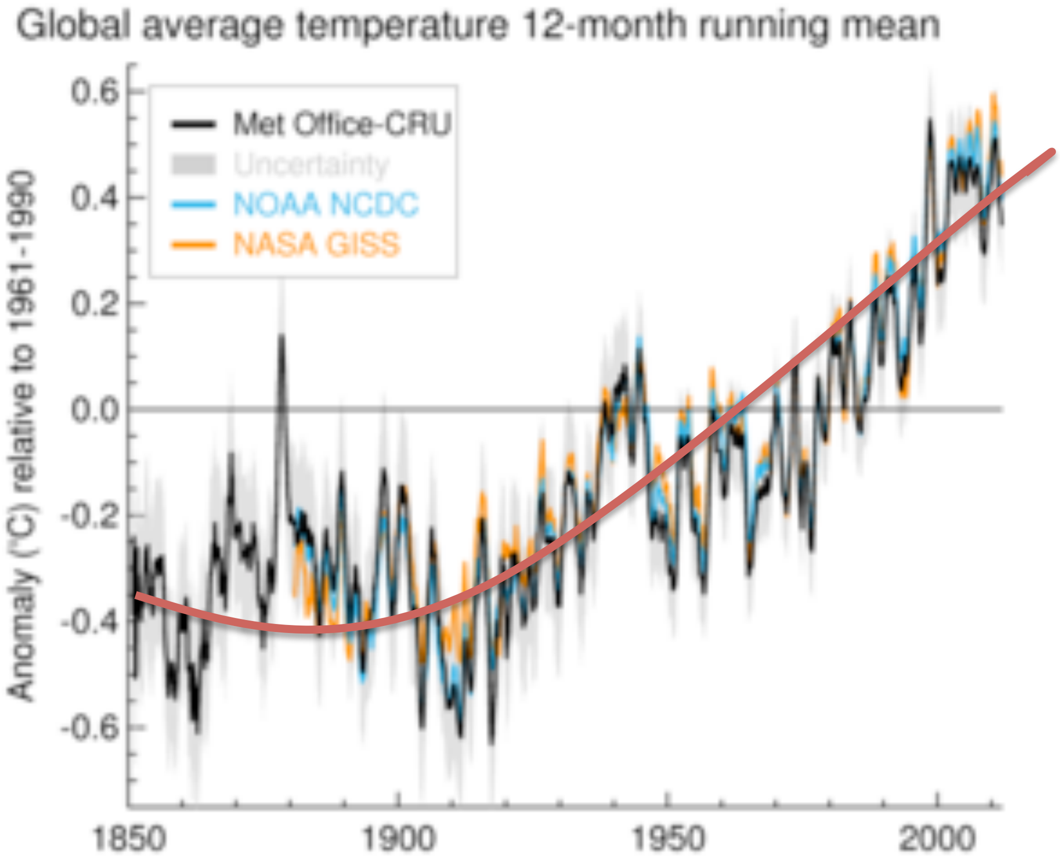
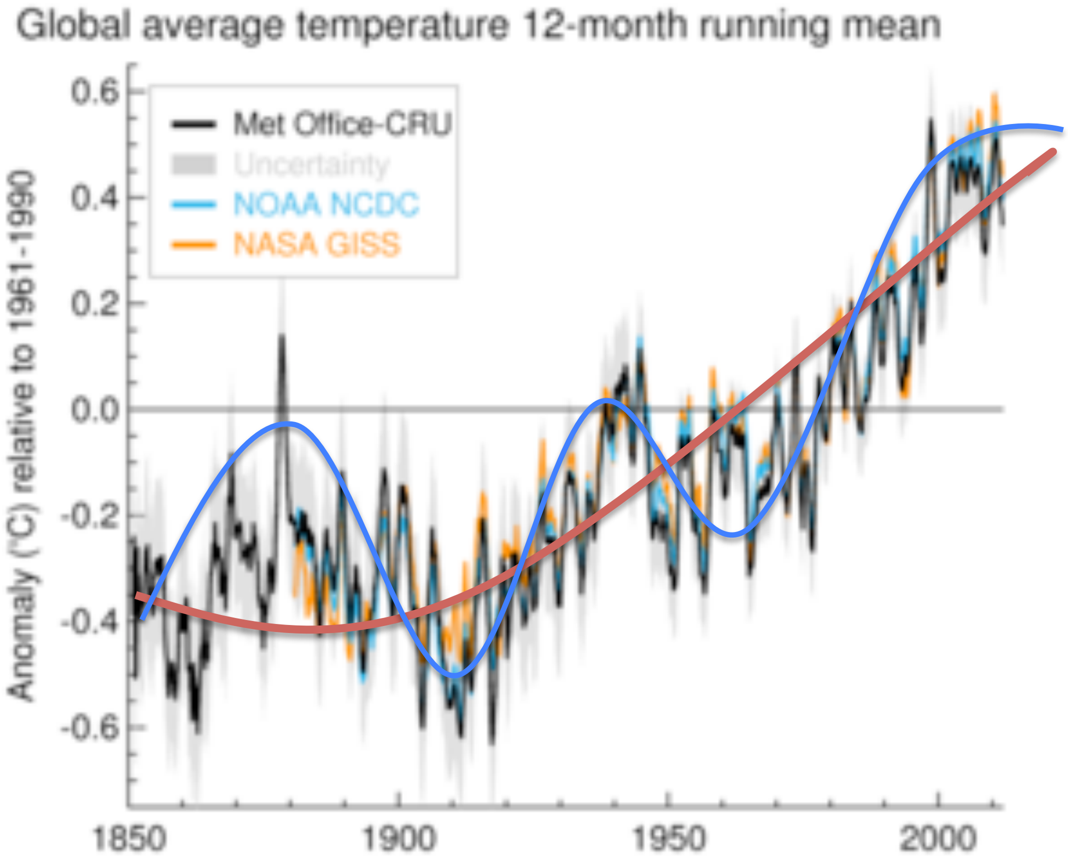


It is important to consider decadal variations on top of any long term trend

From www.metoffice.gov.uk

Example 1: Global temperature



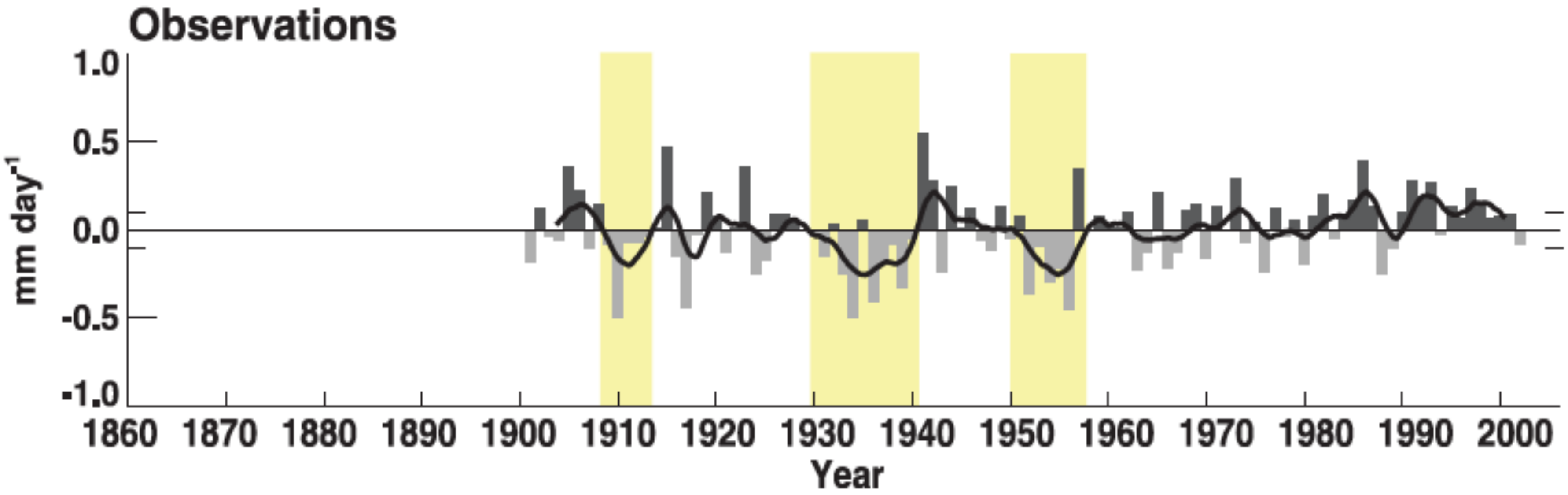
It is important to consider decadal variations on top of any long term trend

Decadal variability alternately disguises and accentuates the secular warming trend

From www.metoffice.gov.uk

Example 2: The US Dust Bowl

Rainfall

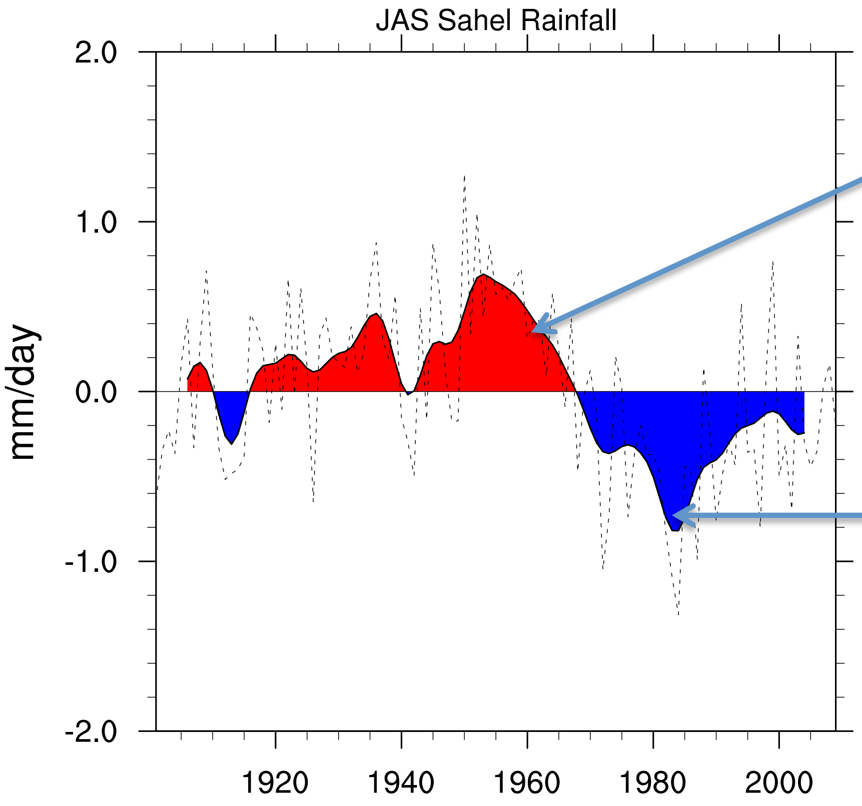


McCrary and Randall, J. Climate, 2010

During 1930s, US experienced one of the most devastating droughts of the past century. Affected ~2/3 of US, parts of Mexico and Canada

Drought is a example of decadal climate variability that the public understand. Multiple years of low rainfall reduce the amount of available water in the earth system (water table, rivers, soil etc.)

Example 3: Sahel Drought



Wet conditions in 50s and 60s

Drought in 70s and 80s:

* Affected 20 countries, 150 million people
*30 million were in urgent need of food aid
*10 million refugees seeking food and water
*100,000 to 250,00 deaths

“An improved understanding of decadal climate variability is very important because stakeholders and policymakers want to know the likely climate trajectory for the coming decades for applications to water resources, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure development.”

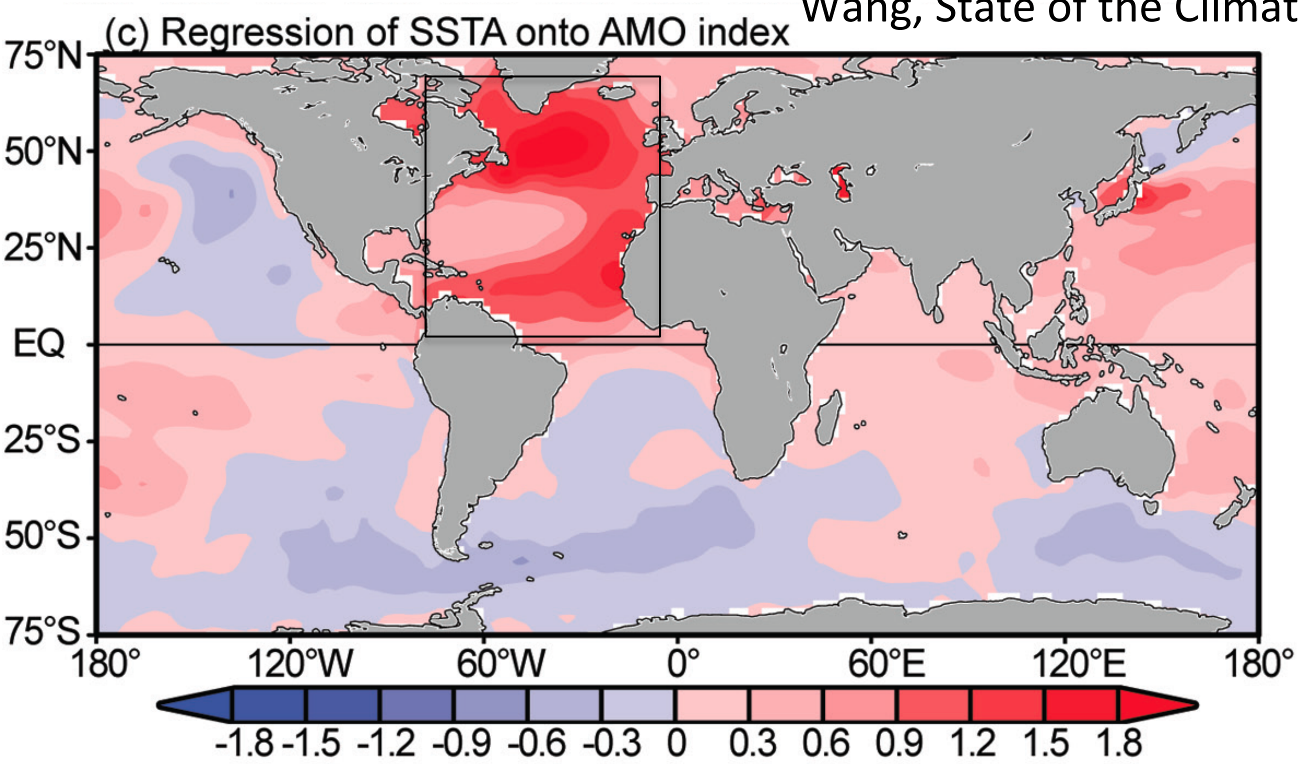
Mehta et al., BAMS, 2011

2) The AMO:

Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation

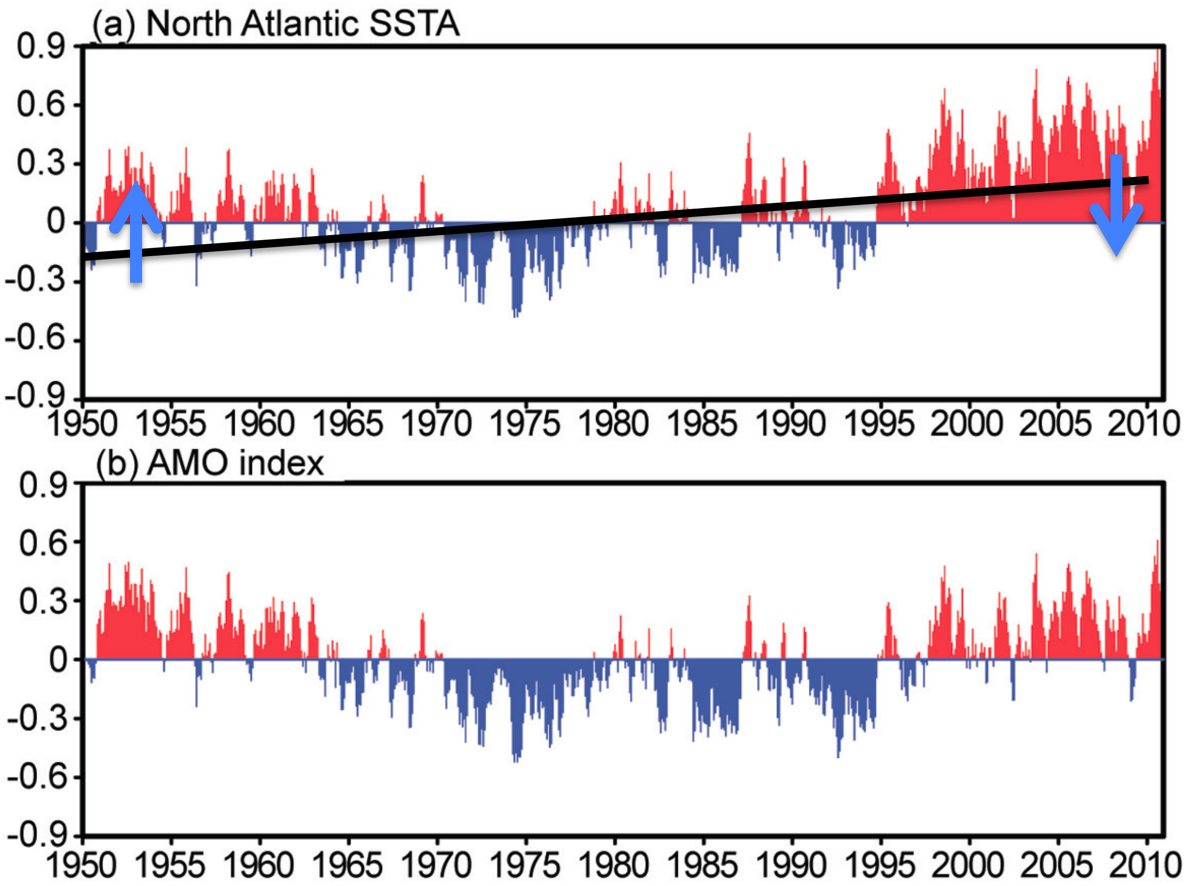
AMO Spatial Signature

Wang, State of the Climate 2010, BAMS, 2011



Positive signal over whole North Atlantic – horseshoe pattern
Weak SST signal across over global ocean regions

The AMO Index

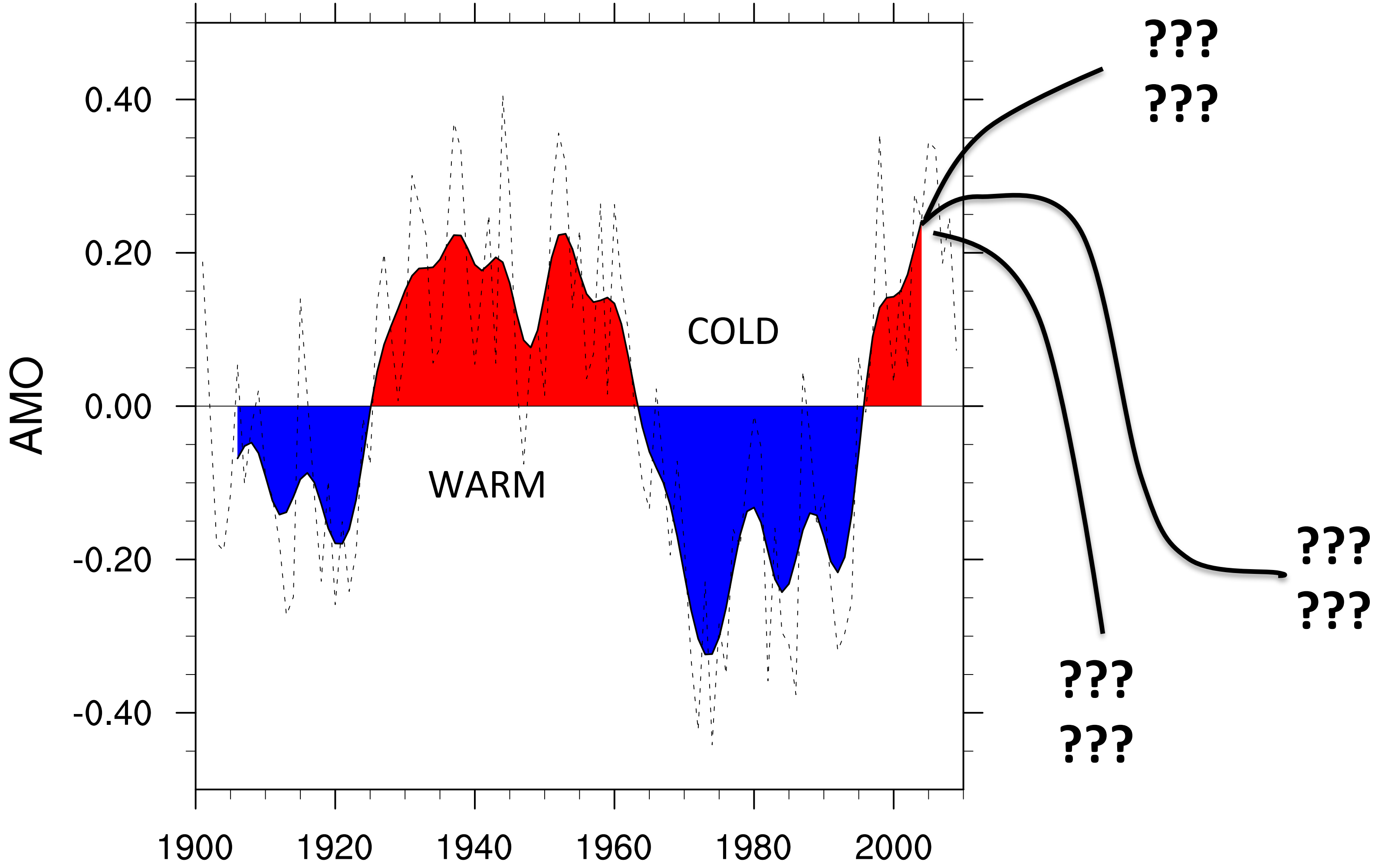


The AMO index is the ***detrended*** SST anomalies in the North Atlantic

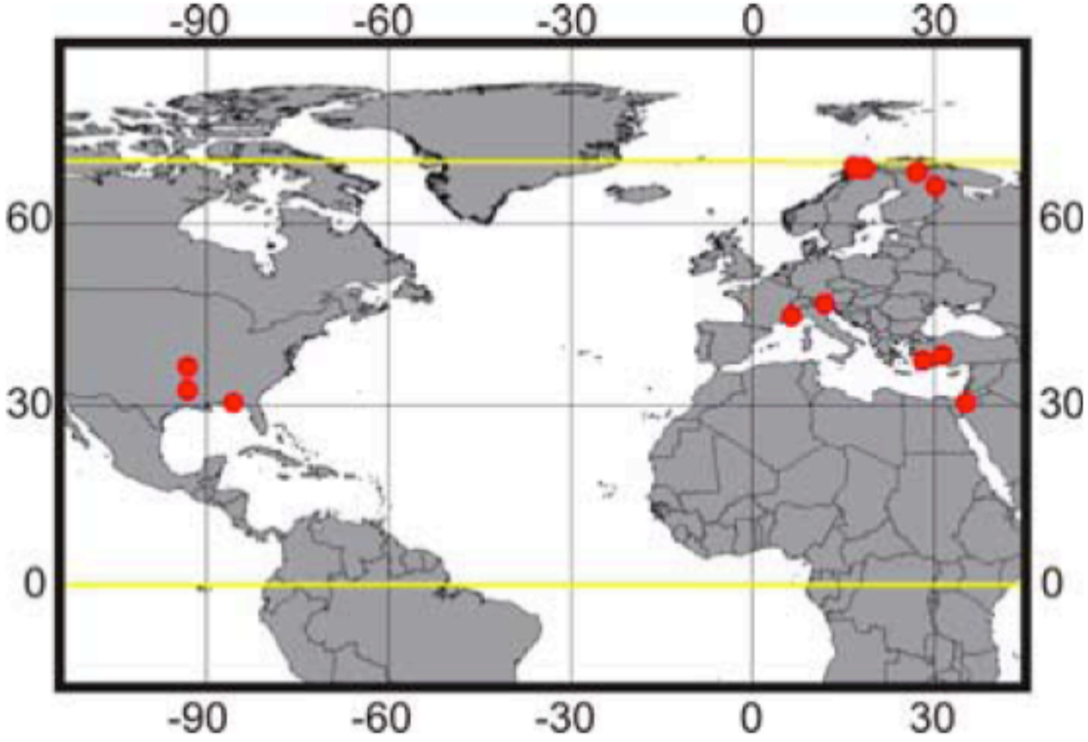
Removing basic global warming signal – we want the decadal climate variability

Wang, State of the Climate 2010, BAMS, 2011

The AMO index: SST anomalies averaged over 0° - 70°N, 75° - 10°W
detrended
low-pass-filtered (extracts the decadal variations)



Did the AMO exist before 1900?



12 tree ring sites
(1567-1990), detrended

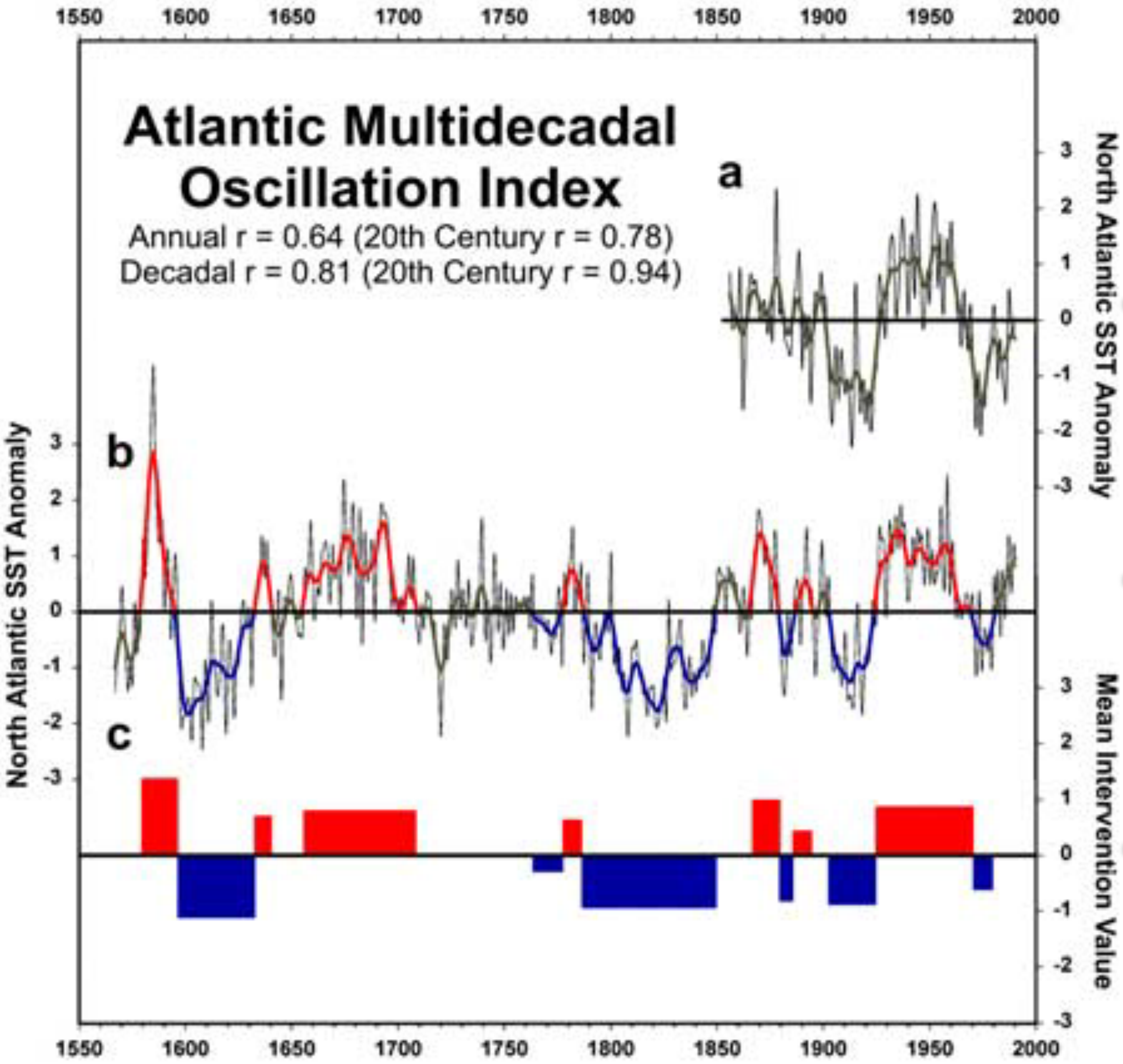
Calibration period (1922-1990)

Verification period (1856-1921)

Reconstruct a time series of the AMO index that agrees with SST instrument measurements but can be extended back in to the past

Gray et al., Geophys. Res. Lett., 2004

AMO Reconstruction from Tree Ring Data



SST observations (in-situ/satellite)

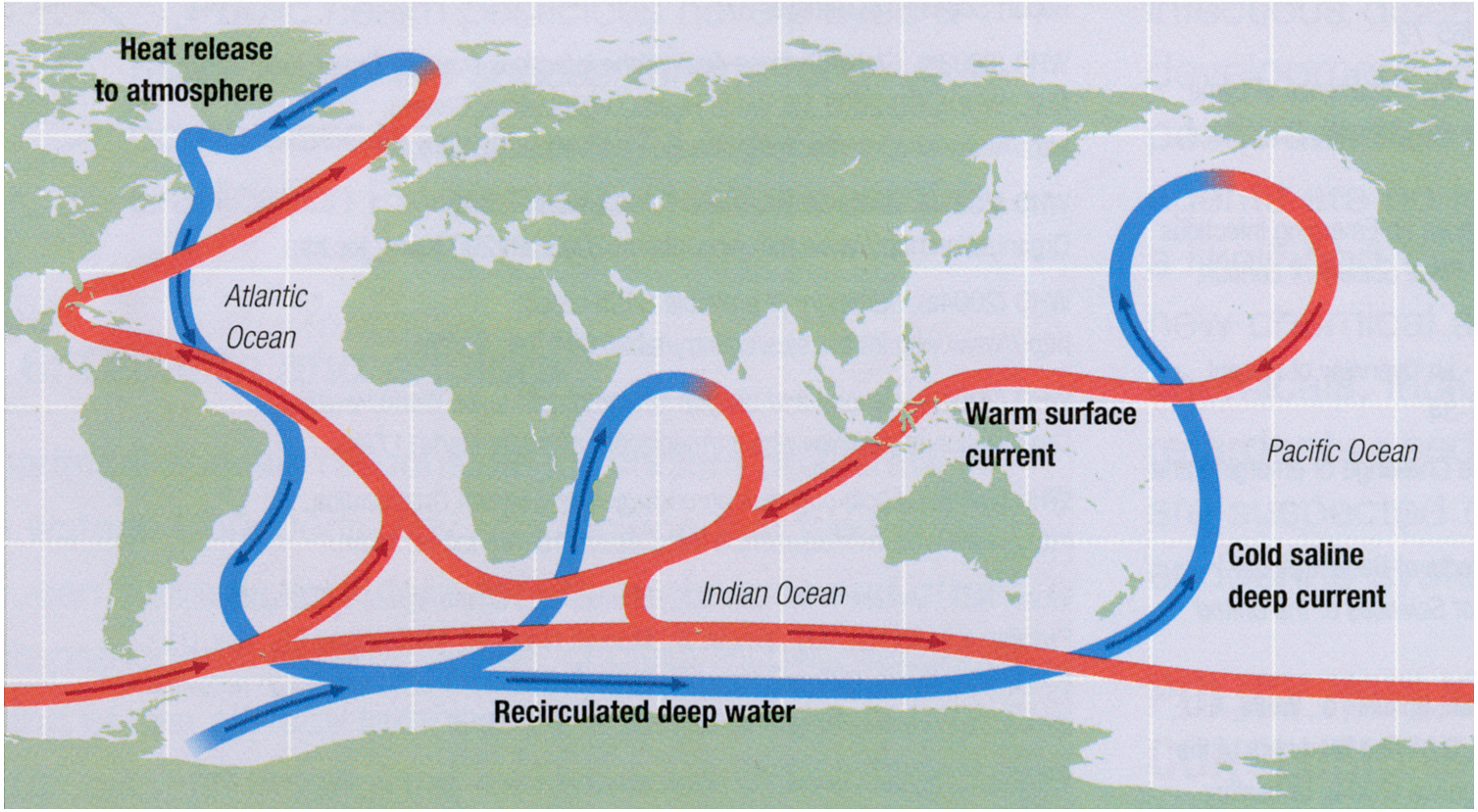
AMO Index from tree rings

Warm/Cold AMO periods

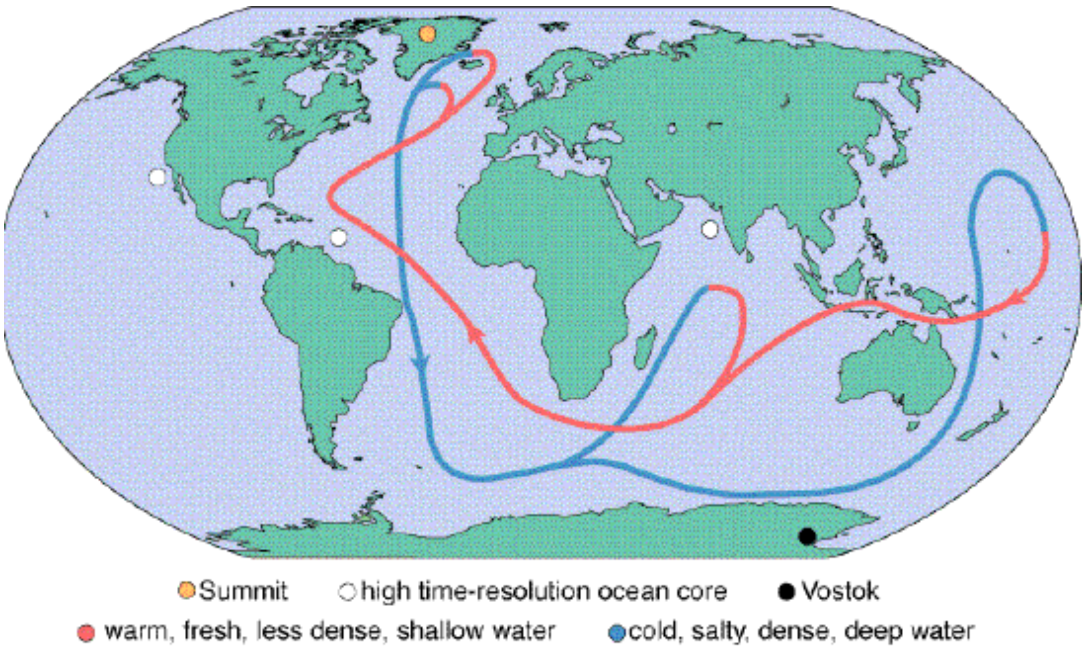
The Thermohaline Circulation (THC)

Meridional Overturning

Global Ocean Conveyor Circulation



In order to balance the excess heating in the Tropics, the oceans transports heat (in the from of warm, salty water) from low to high latitudes



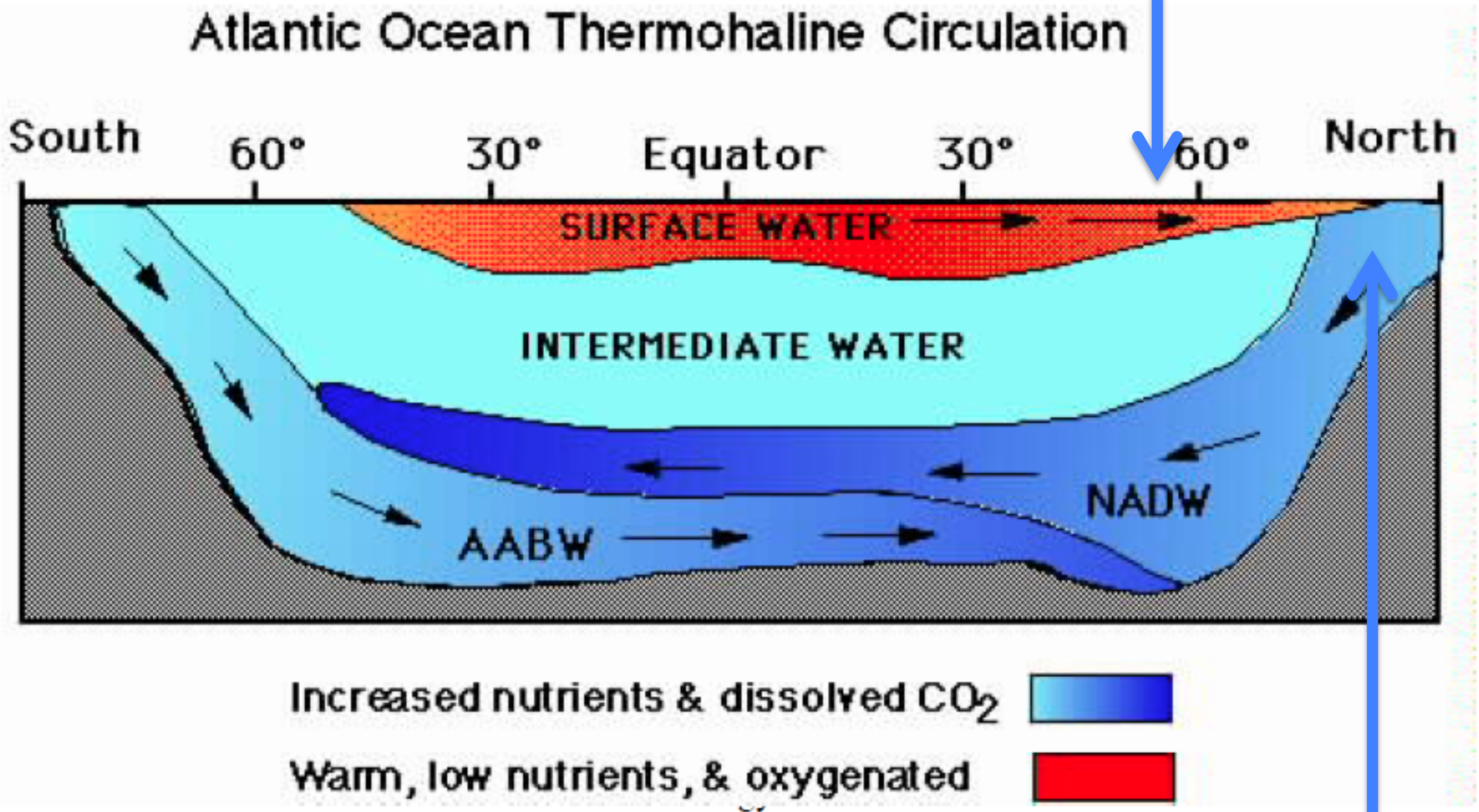
Current mode:

1) warm water (red) flows northward n the upper ocean along the East Coast of the U.S. toward Iceland

2) Warm water exchanges heat with the cooler air, becoming cooler and saltier

3) Near Iceland, water becomes more dense (cool and salty) than the water below and sinks, flowing southward along the floor of the Atlantic = North Atlantic Deep Water Formation

Warm N. Atlantic



Sinking in N. Atlantic

What can General Circulation Models models tell us?

Long (~1400 year) model integrations with HadCM3 able to simulate the observed pattern and amplitude of the AMO (Knight et al., 2005)

Model did not include any fluctuations in external forcing (greenhouses gases, aerosols, etc.)

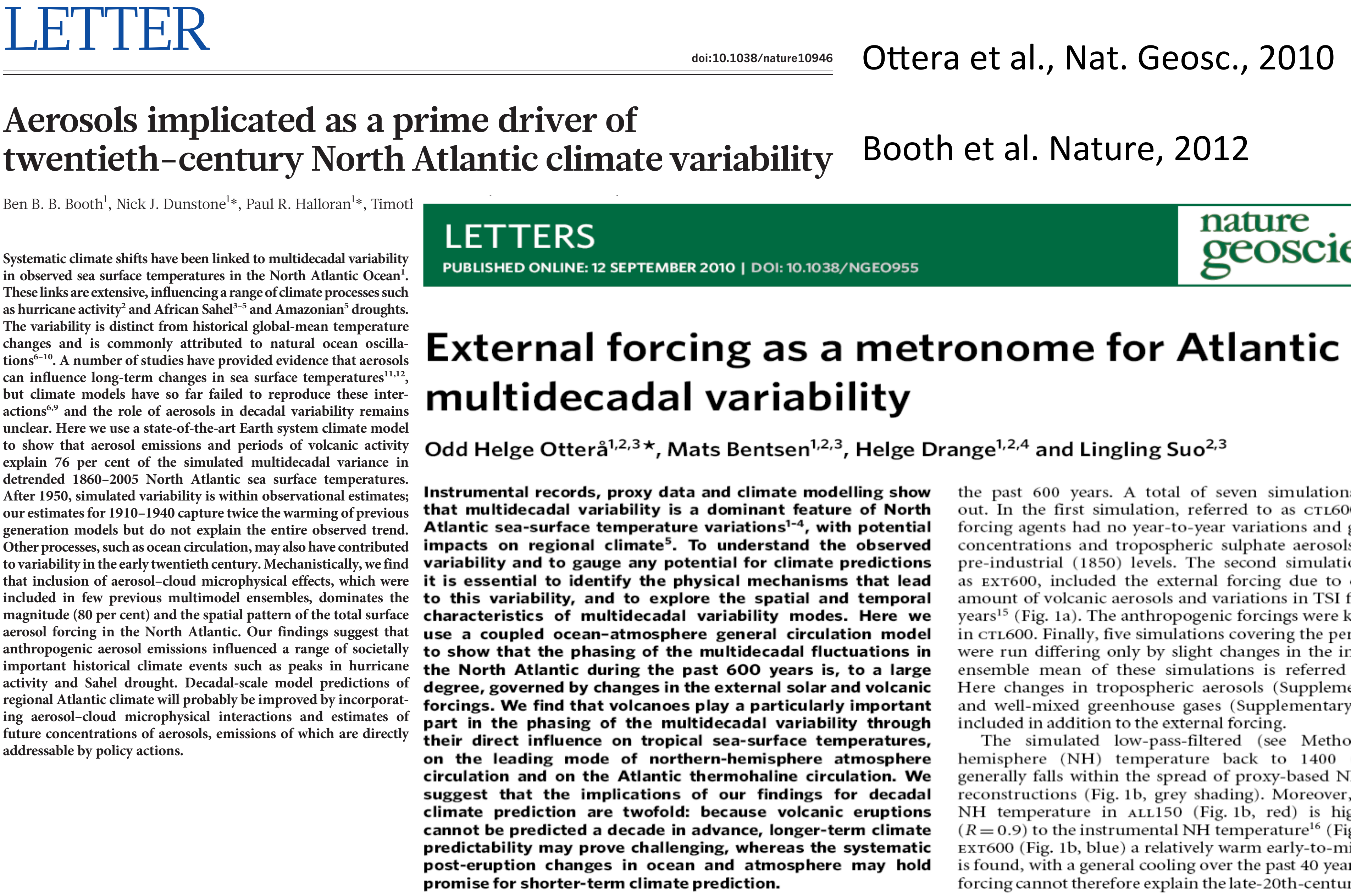
→ suggests AMO is a genuine quasi-periodic cycle of internal climate variability persisting for many centuries

→ Model hints that AMO results from variability in the oceanic THC

Is it all natural?

Ottera et al., Nat. Geosc., 2010

Booth et al. Nature, 2012



LETTER

doi:10.1038/nature10946

Aerosols implicated as a prime driver of twentieth-century North Atlantic climate variability

Ben B. B. Booth[1], Nick J. Dunstone[1]*, Paul R. Halloran[1]*, Timotl

Systematic climate shifts have been linked to multidecadal variability in observed sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic Ocean[1]. These links are extensive, influencing a range of climate processes such as hurricane activity[2] and African Sahel[3–5] and Amazonian[5] droughts. The variability is distinct from historical global-mean temperature changes and is commonly attributed to natural ocean oscillations[6–10]. A number of studies have provided evidence that aerosols can influence long-term changes in sea surface temperatures[11,12], but climate models have so far failed to reproduce these interactions[6,9] and the role of aerosols in decadal variability remains unclear. Here we use a state-of-the-art Earth system climate model to show that aerosol emissions and periods of volcanic activity explain 76 per cent of the simulated multidecadal variance in detrended 1860–2005 North Atlantic sea surface temperatures. After 1950, simulated variability is within observational estimates; our estimates for 1910–1940 capture twice the warming of previous generation models but do not explain the entire observed trend. Other processes, such as ocean circulation, may also have contributed to variability in the early twentieth century. Mechanistically, we find that inclusion of aerosol–cloud microphysical effects, which were included in few previous multimodel ensembles, dominates the magnitude (80 per cent) and the spatial pattern of the total surface aerosol forcing in the North Atlantic. Our findings suggest that anthropogenic aerosol emissions influenced a range of societally important historical climate events such as peaks in hurricane activity and Sahel drought. Decadal-scale model predictions of regional Atlantic climate will probably be improved by incorporating aerosol–cloud microphysical interactions and estimates of future concentrations of aerosols, emissions of which are directly addressable by policy actions.

LETTERS

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 12 SEPTEMBER 2010 | DOI: 10.1038/NGEO955

nature geoscie

External forcing as a metronome for Atlantic multidecadal variability

Odd Helge Otterå[1,2,3]*, Mats Bentsen[1,2,3], Helge Drange[1,2,4] and Lingling Suo[2,3]

Instrumental records, proxy data and climate modelling show that multidecadal variability is a dominant feature of North Atlantic sea-surface temperature variations[1–4], with potential impacts on regional climate[5]. To understand the observed variability and to gauge any potential for climate predictions it is essential to identify the physical mechanisms that lead to this variability, and to explore the spatial and temporal characteristics of multidecadal variability modes. Here we use a coupled ocean–atmosphere general circulation model to show that the phasing of the multidecadal fluctuations in the North Atlantic during the past 600 years is, to a large degree, governed by changes in the external solar and volcanic forcings. We find that volcanoes play a particularly important part in the phasing of the multidecadal variability through their direct influence on tropical sea-surface temperatures, on the leading mode of northern-hemisphere atmosphere circulation and on the Atlantic thermohaline circulation. We suggest that the implications of our findings for decadal climate prediction are twofold: because volcanic eruptions cannot be predicted a decade in advance, longer-term climate predictability may prove challenging, whereas the systematic post-eruption changes in ocean and atmosphere may hold promise for shorter-term climate prediction.

the past 600 years. A total of seven simulation
out. In the first simulation, referred to as CTL60
forcing agents had no year-to-year variations and
concentrations and tropospheric sulphate aerosol
pre-industrial (1850) levels. The second simulati
as EXT600, included the external forcing due to
amount of volcanic aerosols and variations in TSI f
years[15] (Fig. 1a). The anthropogenic forcings were k
in CTL600. Finally, five simulations covering the per
were run differing only by slight changes in the in
ensemble mean of these simulations is referred
Here changes in tropospheric aerosols (Suppleme
and well-mixed greenhouse gases (Supplementary
included in addition to the external forcing.

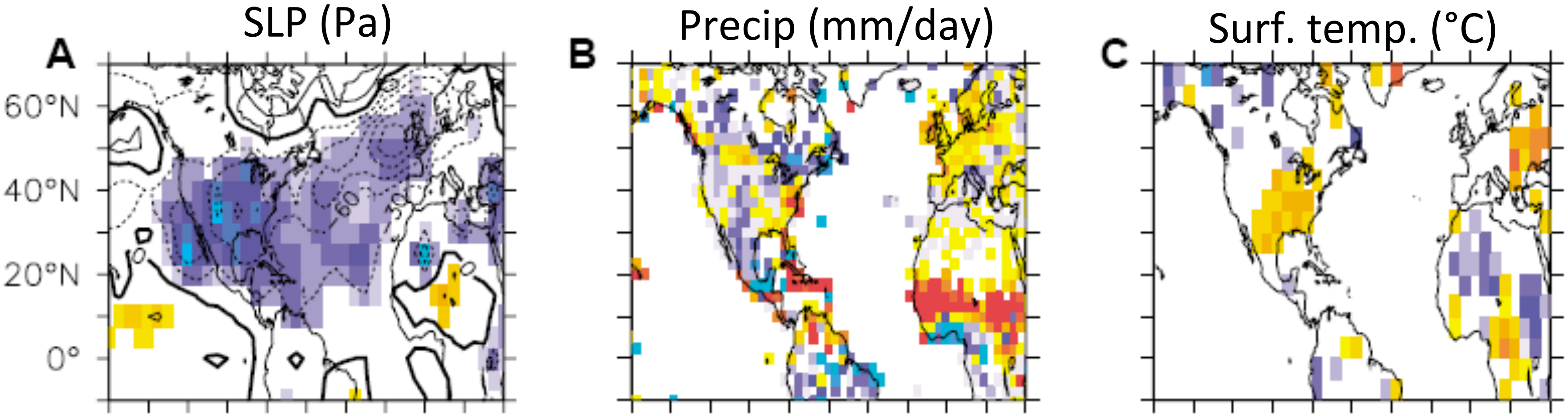
The simulated low-pass-filtered (see Metho
hemisphere (NH) temperature back to 1400
generally falls within the spread of proxy-based N
reconstructions (Fig. 1b, grey shading). Moreover,
NH temperature in ALL150 (Fig. 1b, red) is hig
($R = 0.9$) to the instrumental NH temperature[16] (Fig
EXT600 (Fig. 1b, blue) a relatively warm early-to-mi
is found, with a general cooling over the past 40 year
forcing cannot therefore explain the late-20th-centur

AMO Impacts

- Warm SSTs over N. Atlantic
- What potential impacts are there on surrounding regions?

One method of looking at impacts is to make composite (or averages) of warm and cold period and take the difference (e.g. 1931/60 – 1961/90)

So, <u>when the AMO is in a warm period</u>:



SLP (Pa)

Precip (mm/day)

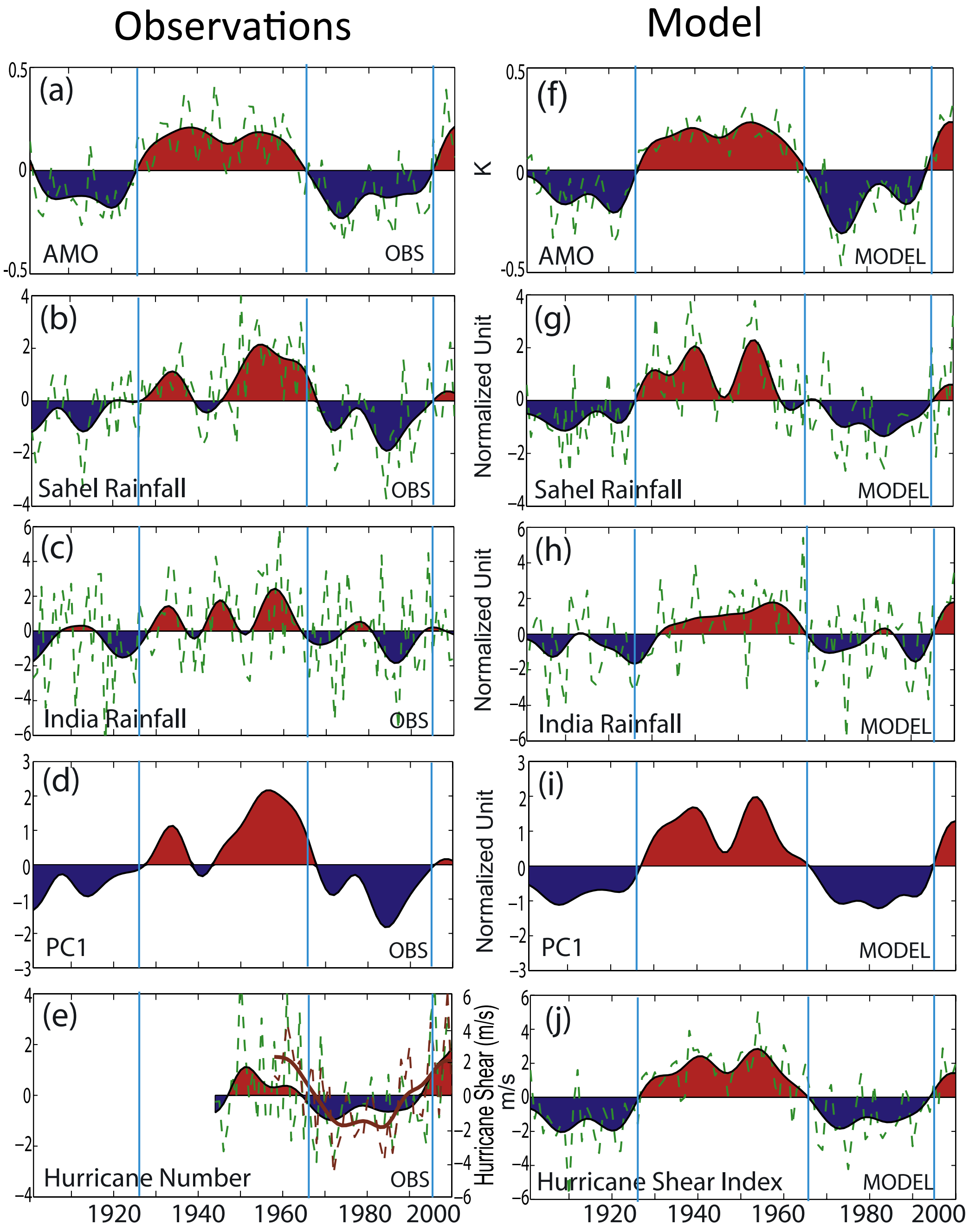
Surf. temp. (°C)

Low SLP across Atlantic and N. America

Wet in West Africa, Europe, dry in central US

Warm in East US

Sutton and Hodson, Science, 2005



Zhang and Delworth, Geophys. Res. Lett., 2006

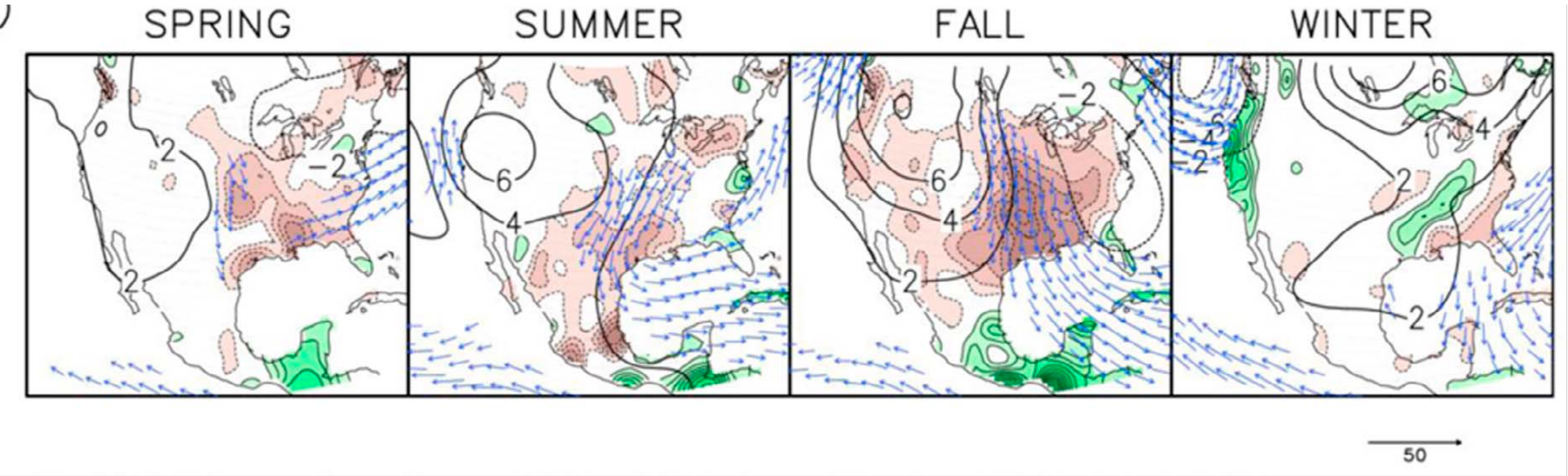
AMO Impacts Globally

You can also look at correlations between time series….

- Sahel rainfall
- Indian monsoon rainfall
- Hurricane numbers?

AMO Impacts in the US

So, <u>when the AMO is in a warm period</u>:

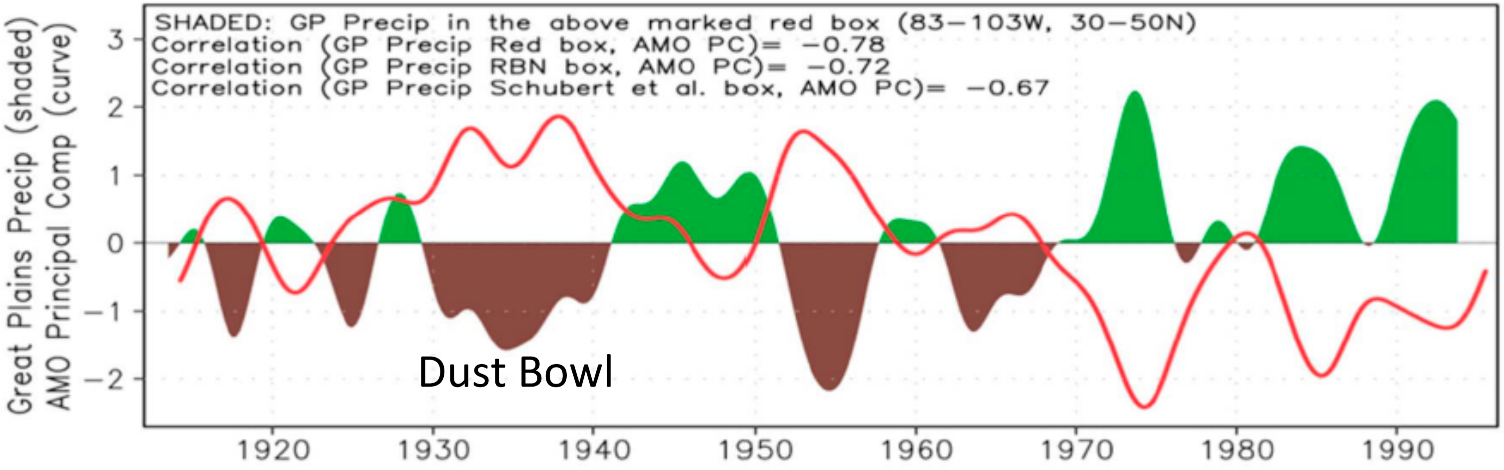


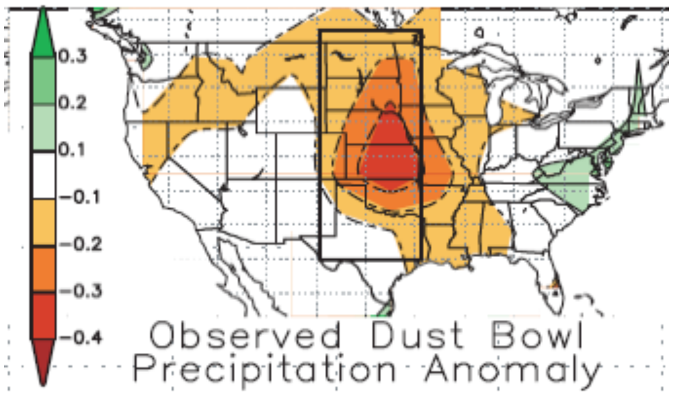
- Dry conditions in Central US, especially in Fall
- Wet conditions in Central America and Florida
- Changes in wind accompany rainfall changes

Nigam et. al., Geophys. Res. Lett., 2011

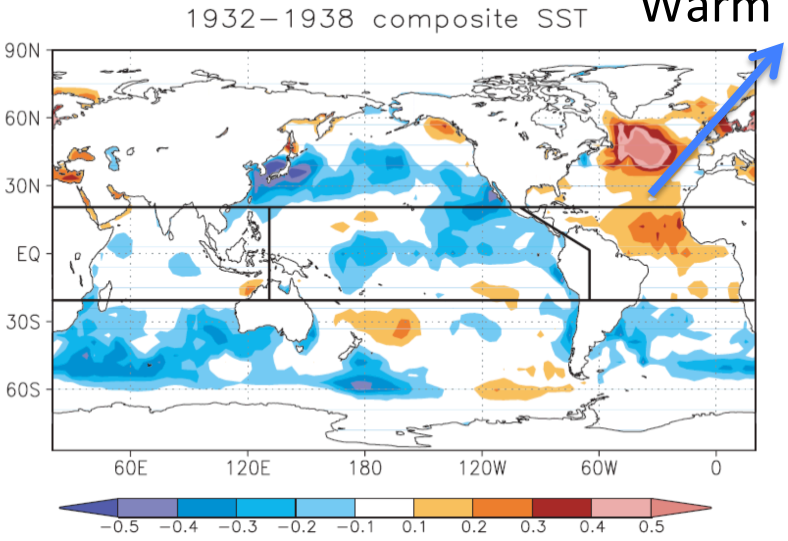
The AMO and the The Dust Bowl

Nigam et. al., Geophys. Res. Lett., 2011





Warm N. Atlantic

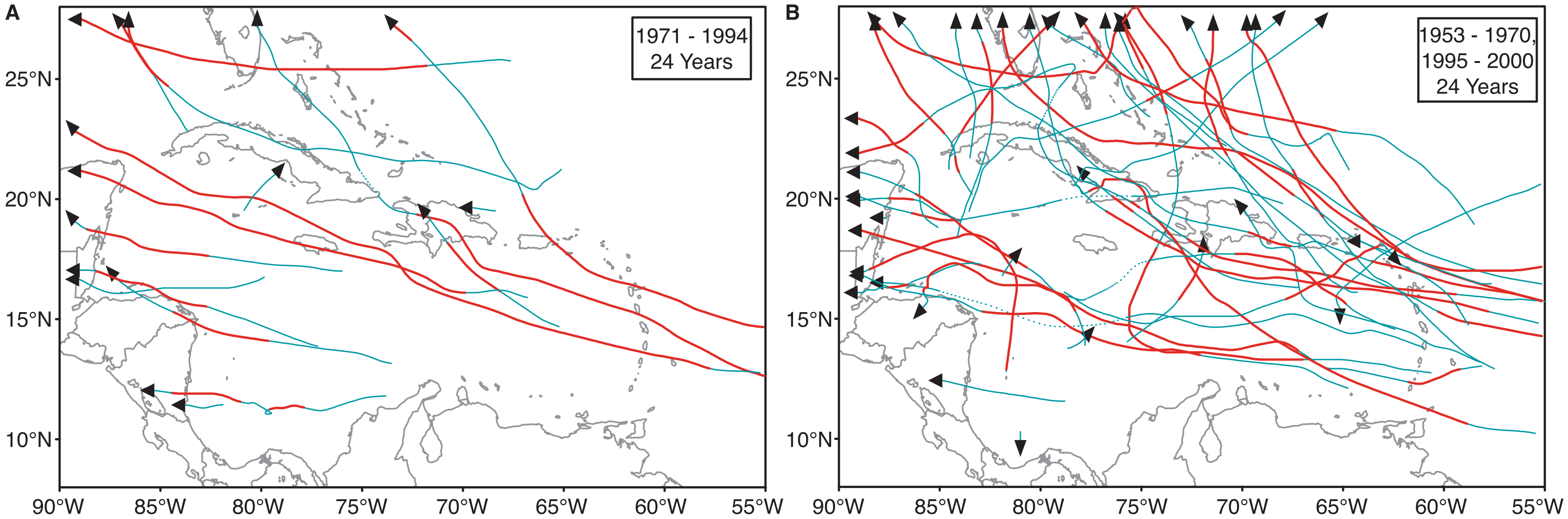


Schubert et al., 2004

The AMO and Hurricanes

Cold AMO period

Warm AMO period



Goldenberg et al., Science, 2001

1971 – 1994
Cold N. Atlantic and small Atlantic warm pool
15 major hurricanes, few hit US
Cheap insurance
Little public and industry awareness of climate risk shifts

1953 – 1970 & 1995 - 2000
Warm N. Atlantic and large Atlantic warm pool
33 major hurricanes, lots hit US
Expensive insurance
More public and industry awareness of climate risk shifts

**** Essential to consider decadal changes in hurricanes when assessing impact of climate change ****

Summary: AMO Impacts on Climate

- AMO plays an important role in modulating climate on multidecadal time scales in US and Europe, especially during boreal summer and fall
    - Low pressure centers over SE US and UK
    - Enhanced rain in western Europe, Florida, Sahel and N. Africa
    - Reduced rain central US and Mexico
    - Warm surface temperature anomalies over US and central Europe
- May affect not only mean climate but also frequency of extreme events (US droughts, hurricanes, heat waves)
- Phase change of AMO around 1960 may have caused summertime cooling in US and Europe
- Most recent phase change (around 1990) may have contributed to rapid warming

<u>MUST CONSIDER THESE DECADAL CHANGES WHEN ASSESSING CLIMATE CHANGE</u>

3) The PDO:

Pacific Decadal Oscillation

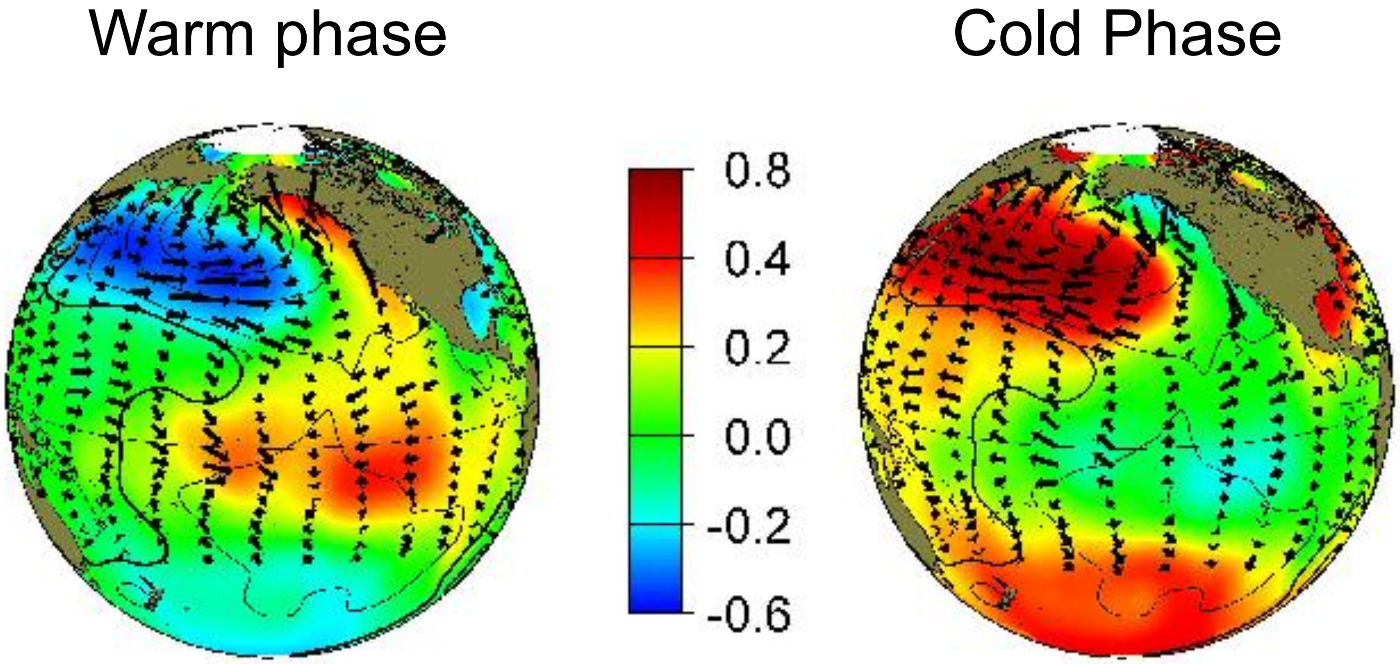
- The PDO is a long-lived El Niño-like pattern of Pacific climate variability.

- The term PDO was first used in 1996 by a fisheries scientist researching connections between Alaska salmon production cycles and Pacific climate.

- When considering the pattern for the whole Pacific ocean it is often called the IPO: Inter-decadal Pacific Oscillation

- There is no scientific consensus for the cause and dynamics of the PDO

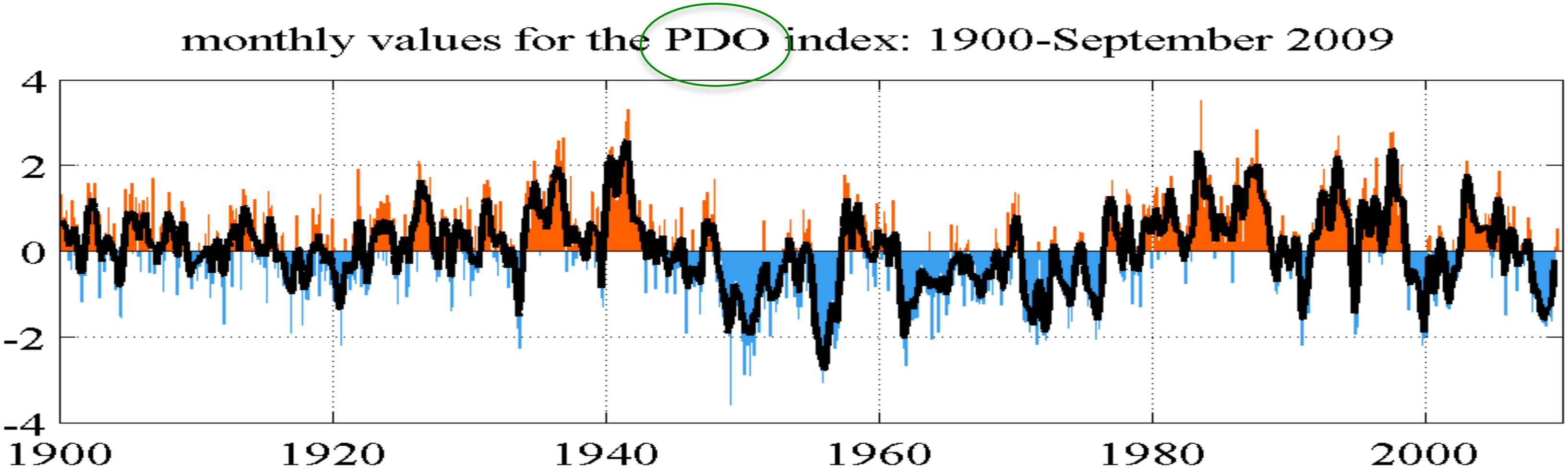
Pacific Decadal Oscillation: SST Pattern



ENSO-like pattern but strongest SST changes in extratropics

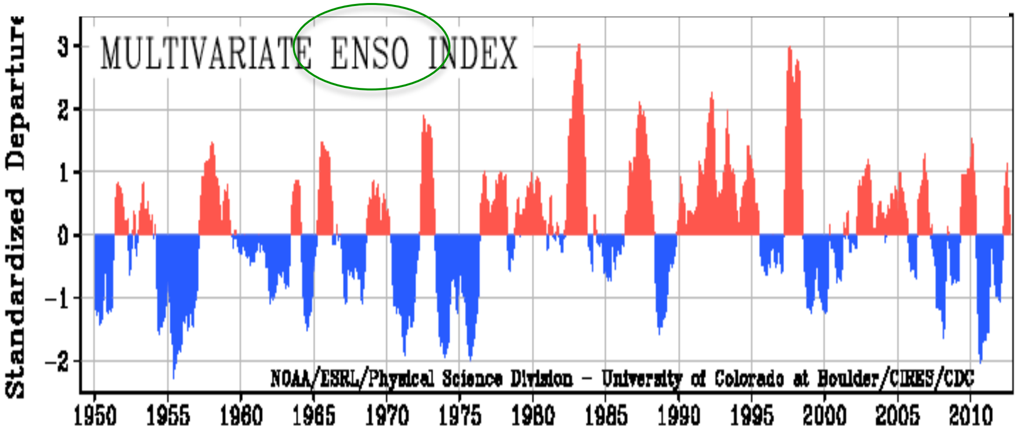
See http://jisao.washington.edu/pdo

Pacific Decadal Oscillation: Timeseries

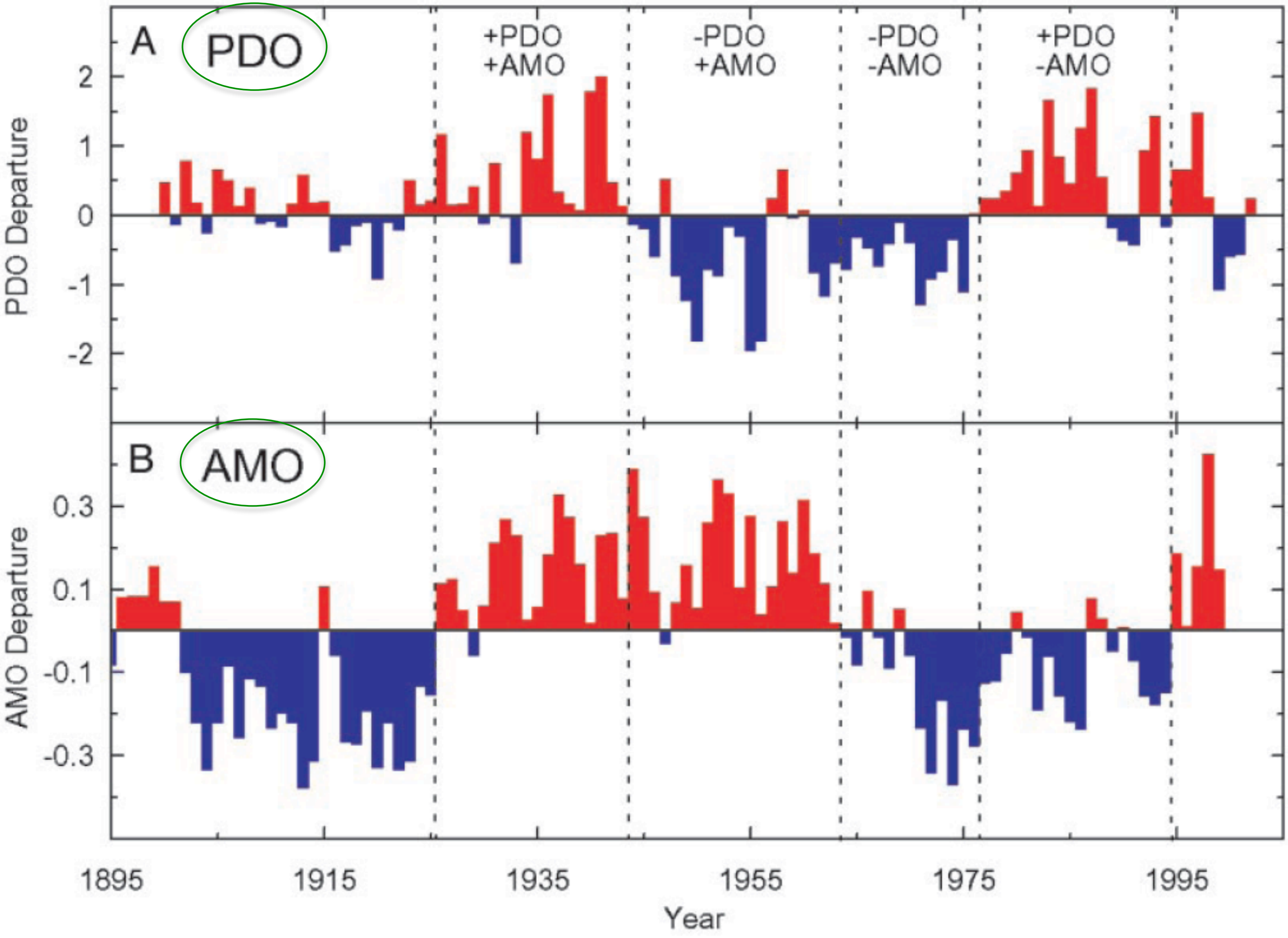


PDO and ENSO are on different time scales

Time series have similarities but are not identical



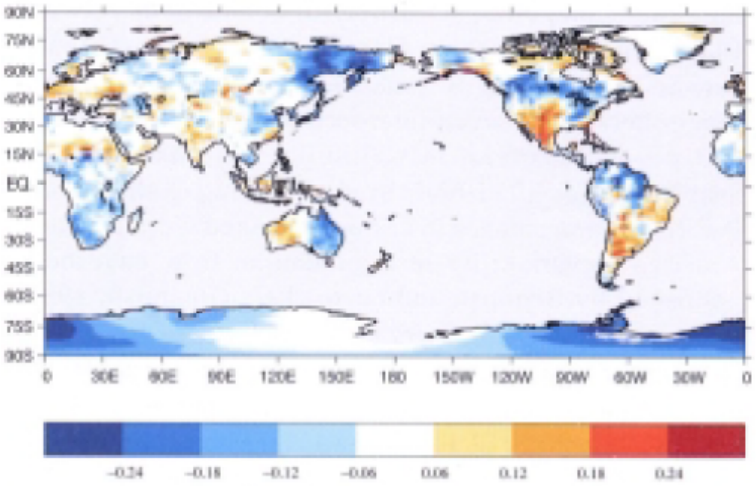
McCabe et al., PNAS, 2004



Note that the PDO and AMO operate on different time scales too!

PDO Impacts in US

0.5 Degree Grid November-April Precipitation correlated with November-April PDO index: 1950-96



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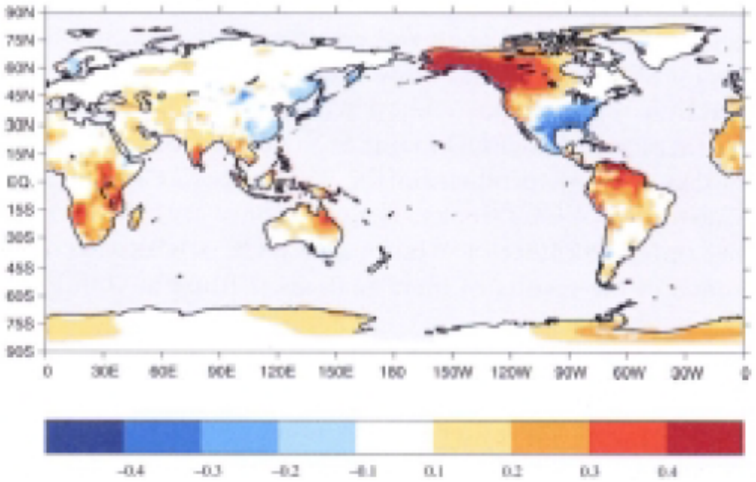


Warm PDO:

- Wet S, SW US
- Dry in NW, Great Lakes

- Warm in E. Canada, Alaska
- Cold in E US

- Snow pack and streamflow in NW US is reduced
- Winter and spring flood risk in NW US is reduced

Mantua and Hare, J. Oceanog., 2002

Combined Impacts

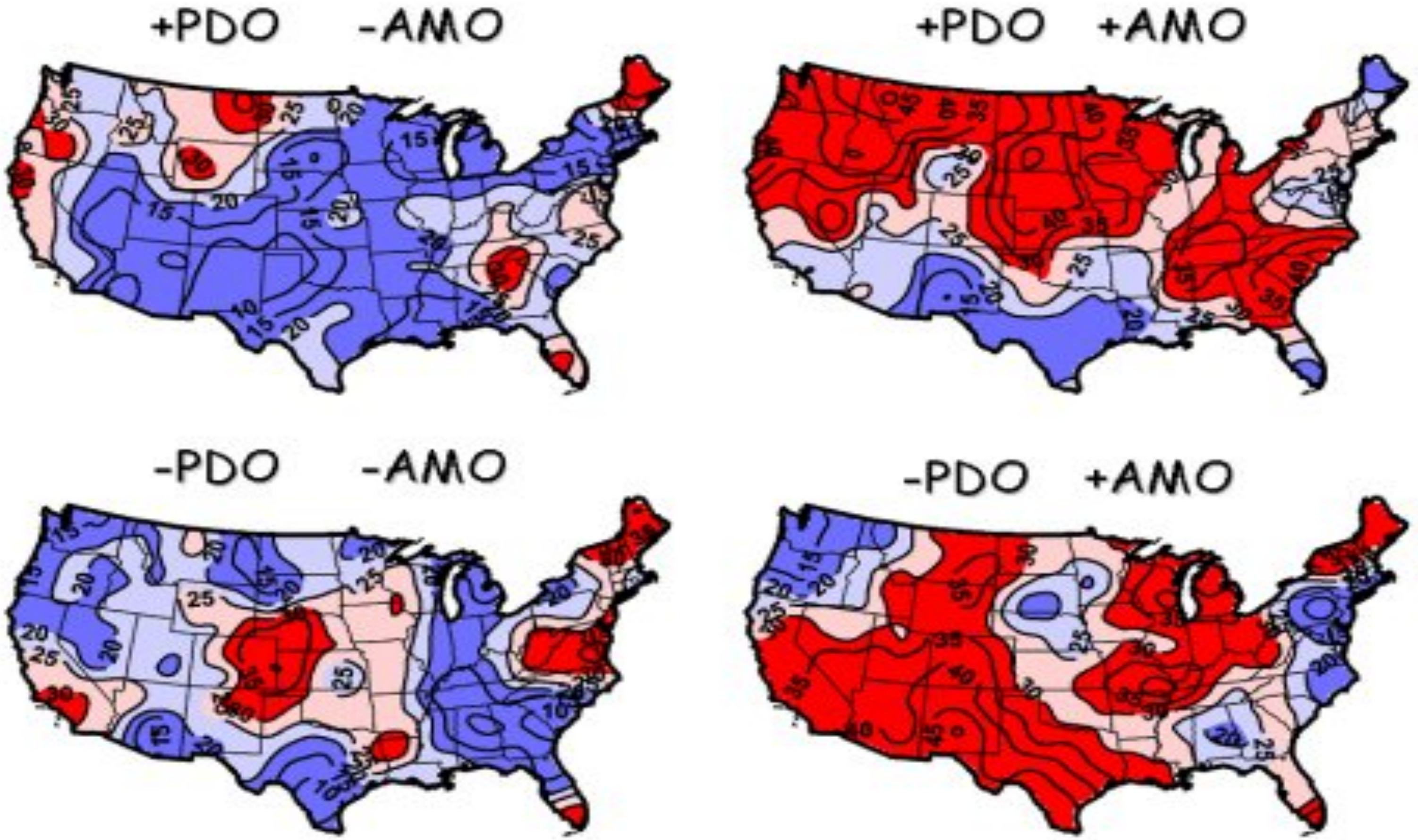
- PDO, AMO and ENSO all impact US climate on different timescales

- Need to consider phase of each to make a forecast or decadal prediction

e.g. Will they act together to cause a mega drought or cancel each other to make average conditions?

The PDO and AMO combined: Drought Frequency

McCabe et al., PNAS, 2004



25% = normal drought frequency

PDO vs. AMO impacts in the US

- AMO+ (warm) : much of US under drought conditions, regardless of PDO state

More than half (52%) of spatiotemporal variance in multidecadal drought frequency over US attributable to combined PDO / AMO influence

Recent US droughts (1996, 1999–2002) associated N. Atlantic warming (positive AMO) and NE and tropical Pacific cooling (negative PDO)

→ Much of the long-term predictability of drought frequency may reside in the multi-decadal behavior of the N. Atlantic

McCabe et al., 2004

"The decadal time scale offers a critical bridge for informing adaption strategies as climate varies and changes"

Meehl et al., BAMS, 2009

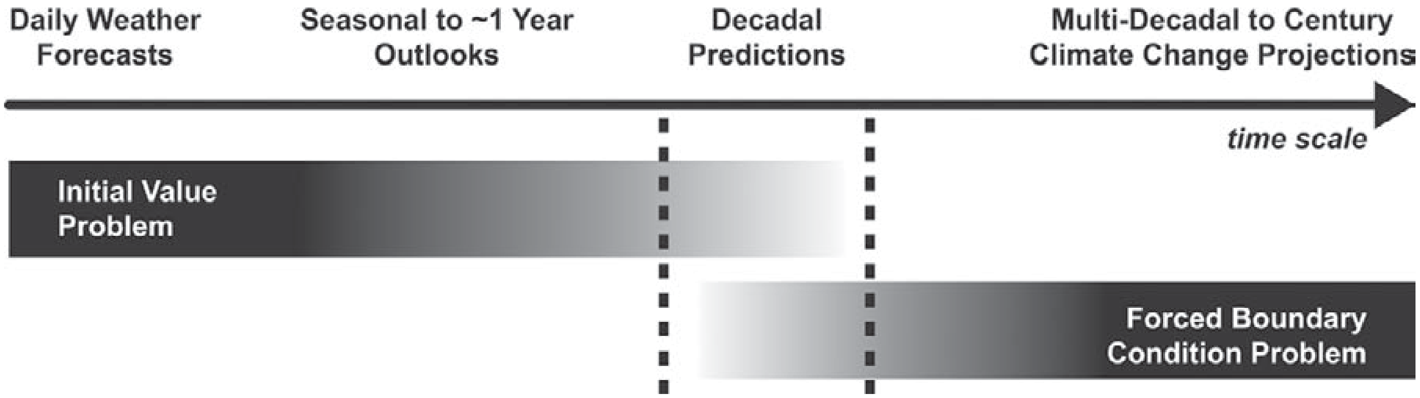
Decadal Prediction

Now we know about ways the climate varies on decadal timescales so the next questions are:

  - Is it predictable?
  - Can we predict it?

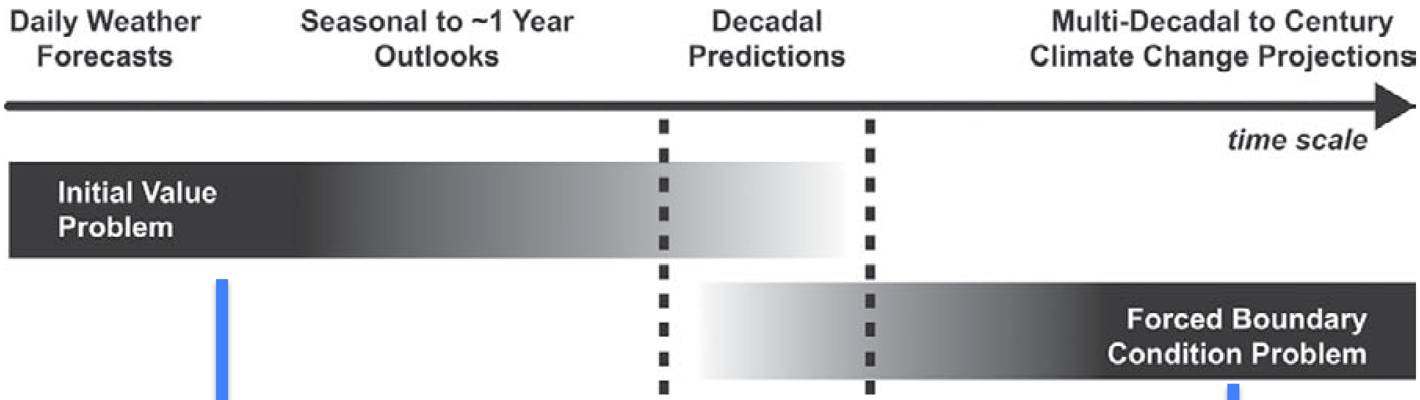
The decadal time scale is widely recognized as a key planning horizon for governments, businesses, and other societal entities

Decadal Predictability



Meehl et al., BAMS, 2009

Decadal Predictability



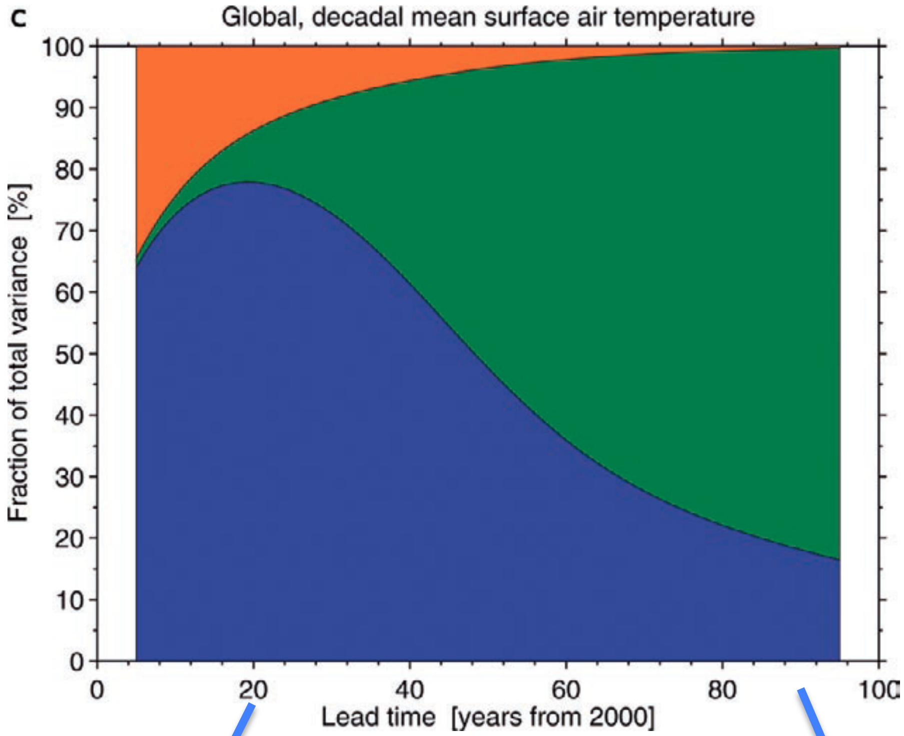
Predictability of the 1st kind

Predictability of the ?? kind

Predictability of the 2nd kind

Meehl et al., BAMS, 2009

Decadal Predictability



ORANGE
Internal Variability: Natural fluctuations in the climate system. AMO, PDO, ENSO etc.

BLUE
Model Uncertainty: Different models respond differently to the same forcing

GREEN
Scenario Uncertainty: Changes in future greenhouse gas emission

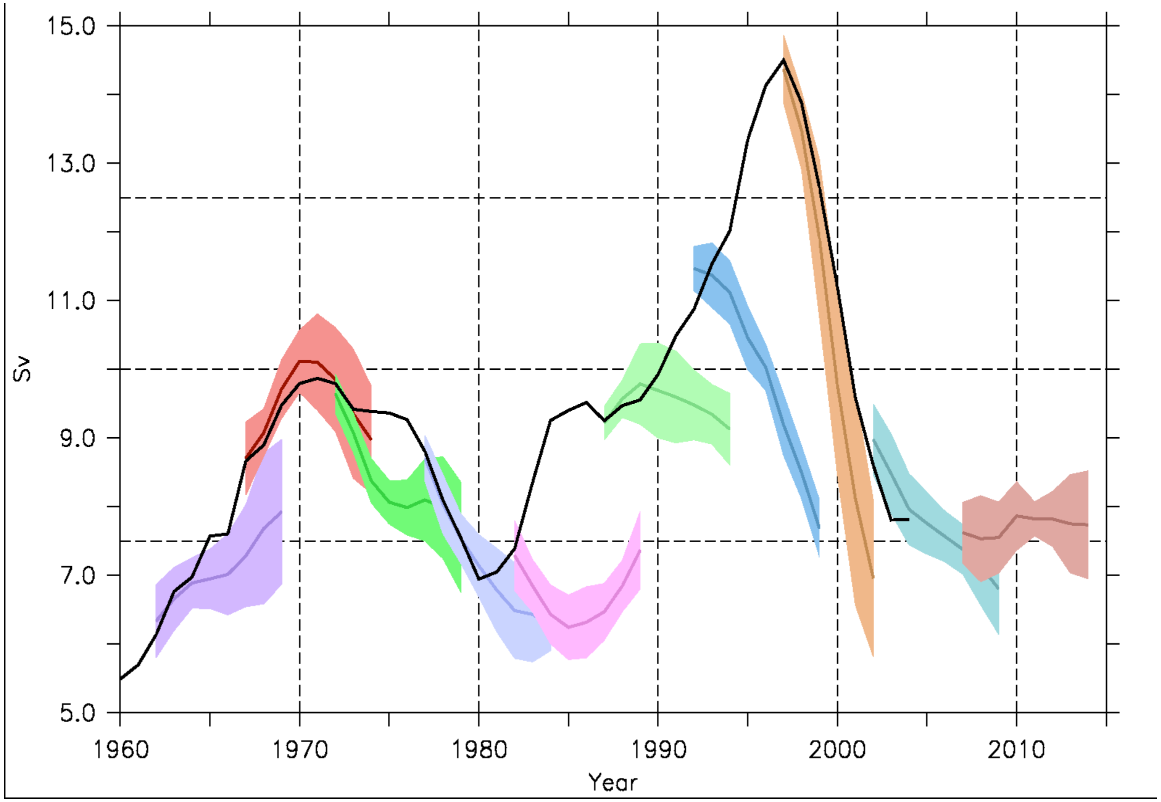
At decadal scales:
Internal variability and model uncertainty have more importance than scenario

At centennial scales:
Scenario uncertainty is dominant

Hawkins and Sutton, BAMS, 2009

Decadal Hindcast Example

Hindcast: run a model to assess how well it predicts what has already happened. Compare results to the real world



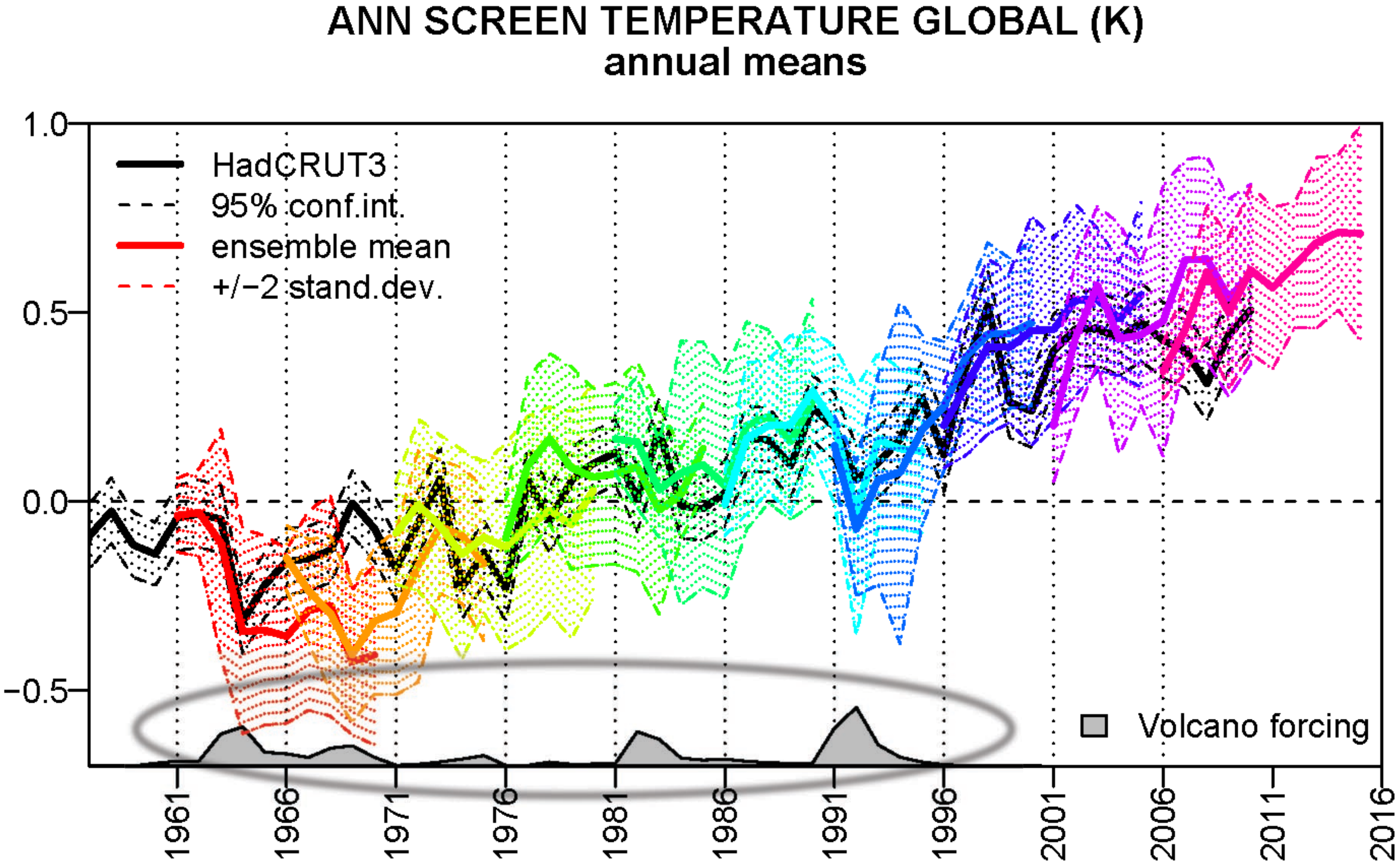
10 year hindcasts of the Atlantic meridional circulation:

Some are better than others!

Are some periods more predictable than others?

Mignot et al., 2011

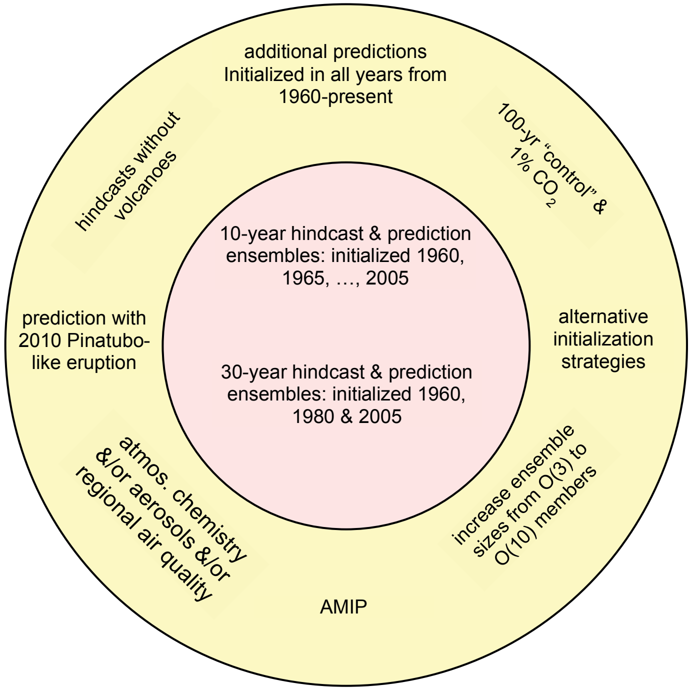
Decadal Hindcast Example



Kirtman, 2011

Decadal Prediction and the IPCC
(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

They have begun exploring decadal predictions with lots of new model experiments in the newest climate change models (CMIP5). However…



"Users of CMIP5 model output should take note that decadal predictions with climate models are in an exploratory stage…. The experiments aim to advance understanding of predictability"

Taylor et al., BAMS, 2012

Decadal Prediction Challenges

1) *Initializing*: we need to know the current conditions of the atmosphere and ocean

2) *Improved climate models*: Need climate models to be more accurate, especially in regions with high decadal variability

3) *Ensembles and Uncertainty*: How to represent errors in the initial conditions

4) *Hindcasts and Evaluation*: How to measure how good or bad a prediction is

5) *Providing regional information to users*: Even if we can make a perfect prediction, how do we tell the people who need to know (governments, water managers, businesses etc.)

Murphy et al., 2012

“An improved understanding of decadal climate variability is very important because stakeholders and policymakers want to know the likely climate trajectory for the coming decades for applications to water resources, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure development.”

Mehta et al., BAMS, 2011