Future changes in seasonal climate predictability

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Abstract

Seasonal forecasts provide critical decision support tools for managing important socioeconomically-relevant resources. As the result of continued model development, the skill of such tools has improved over the years. However, further advancements are hampered by the climate's "potential predictability", a potential upper limit for how accurately we can predict different climate states. Recent studies have shown that potential predictability and actual forecast skill have varied throughout the historical record, primarily as a result of natural decadal variability. In this study, we explore whether potential predictability will change in the future as a distinct response to anthropogenic climate change. We estimate the potential predictability limits of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) as well as global surface temperature, precipitation, and upper atmospheric circulation anomalies from 1921-2100 within a perfect model framework. Simulated potential predictability changes by 2100 vary across five different coupled model large ensembles: depending upon the model, we find a robust increase, robust decrease, or no significant change in predictability. Yet, despite this large inter-model uncertainty, we find that predictability changes across the models are strongly linked to their projected change in ENSO amplitude, with a 10% change in Nino3.4 standard deviation giving rise to a 14% change in globally averaged forecast skill at 12-month lead. This common physical relationship suggests that changes in global potential predictability in the coming decades will be linked to anthropogenic climate change of ENSO. As a result, historical forecast skill relationships that depend on ENSO and its teleconnections may be altered as the climate continues to change.

1. Introduction

Seasonal climate forecasts provide important decision support tools to help stakeholders manage a variety of socioeconomically-relevant resources. For example, initialized dynamical forecasts are routinely used to provide seasonal outlooks of regional precipitation and surface temperature, tropical cyclone activity, and climate modes such as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). While recent advances in model physics, resolution, ensemble sizes, and data assimilation schemes have led to increases in seasonal forecast skill (Barnston et al. 2012; Barnston and Tippett 2017), prediction systems may still be limited by the so-called "potential predictability" of different climate states. Potential predictability is often thought of as a prediction limit intrinsic to the chaotic nature of the climate system (Sardeshmukh et al. 2000), the point when a forecast's initial uncertainty grows until any climate state randomly drawn from the climatological probability distribution could be expected to occur (Lorenz 1969). In practice, however, predictability is generally estimated from models, but model predictability may differ from nature's predictability due to model errors both in the distribution of climate states and their evolution. Systematic state-dependent seasonal forecast errors (e.g., Beverley et al. 2023) likewise suggest that some aspects of nature's predictability may be missed by all model predictability studies. Recent studies have even suggested that some models make forecasts in some regions with real-world skill that exceeds the model's own predictability, possibly a consequence of the signal-to-noise paradox (e.g., Scaife and Smith 2018; Weisheimer et al. 2024). However, regardless of whether estimates of a model's potential predictability represent a "hard" or a "soft" ceiling to its forecast skill, its presence suggests that further reduction of model biases may yield only incremental increases in forecast skill as these limits are reached (or slightly exceeded) for different aspects of the climate system (e.g., Newman & Sardeshmukh, 2017).

Recent studies have shown that potential predictability is not stationary or fixed in time (Newman & Sardeshmukh, 2017; Weisheimer et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2016). As a result, actual forecast skill has also varied substantially in the past (Derome et al., 2005; Kumar, 2009; MacLeod et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2017, 2019; Shi et al., 2015; Weisheimer et al., 2017, 2019), although overall secular trends in this skill may be harder to detect in the historical record (Ding et al. 2019). For example, Lou et al. (2023) and Weisheimer et al. (2022) showed that long-lead ENSO forecast skill was higher at the beginning and end of the twentieth century, with a multidecadal period of lower skill from the 1930s-1950s. Further, Weisheimer et al. (2020) found that past seasonal

predictability of extratropical atmospheric circulation patterns such as the Pacific-North American (PNA) pattern and the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) have also experienced pronounced decadal variations. While these past changes in prediction skill may result from varied model performance relative to historical observations (e.g., Weisheimer et al., 2022), these skill changes may also be driven by changes in the intrinsic predictability of the climate system itself (Becker et al. 2014; Newman and Sardeshmukh 2017).

Given these historical changes, it is reasonable to expect that potential predictability and actual prediction skill may similarly vary in the future, whether as a result of natural decadal variability (Weisheimer et al., 2020), a possible response to anthropogenic climate change (Zheng et al. 2022), or some combination of both. In particular, some general circulation models (GCMs) project that ENSO and its remote impacts may change in response to an increase in greenhouse gasses (e.g., Cai et al., 2021). For example, some models project significant changes in ENSO variability (Maher et al. 2023; Heede and Fedorov 2023), frequency (Berner et al. 2020), flavor (i.e., central vs eastern Pacific; Capotondi et al., 2015), and teleconnection strength/position (Gan et al. 2017; McGregor et al. 2022; O'Brien and Deser 2023; Zhou et al. 2014), although there is substantial uncertainty in the sign and intensity of these changes across models. Still, through its far-reaching teleconnections, ENSO is the single most important source of predictability on seasonal timescales for much of the globe (e.g., Barnett & Preisendorfer, 1987; Jacox et al., 2019; Quan et al., 2006), suggesting that any future changes to ENSO's strength and/or its connectivity to the rest of the climate system could significantly impact the potential predictability of many socioeconomically-relevant climate parameters.

It is crucial to assess how potential predictability may evolve as climate continues to change. Many previous studies have used hindcast systems to estimate potential predictability in the past (e.g., Shi et al., 2015; Weisheimer et al., 2019, 2020, 2022). However, model hindcasts are not useful for quantifying possible future changes in predictability as they are by definition retrospective and depend on past observations for their initialization. A different technique that can overcome these limitations and assess time-varying climate predictability in the past and the future is the "model-analog" approach. In the traditional analog framework, past observed climate states are found that closely match the current state and their subsequent evolution are treated as forecasts (Lorenz 1969). Alternatively, coupled GCMs allow for analogs to be drawn from climate simulations (often pre-industrial control runs; Ding et al., 2018), with the model evolution of these

analogs then treated as the forecast. This method increases the "library" of possible climate states to compare against the current observed state, resulting in closer analog matches and allowing for the generation of forecast ensembles. Such model-analog forecasts have been shown to be as skillful as initialized dynamical forecasts (Ding et al. 2018, 2019), with the added benefit of being more computationally efficient.

The "perfect model-analog" technique utilizes these same methods, but whereas the goal of a traditional model-analog is to leverage climate simulations to forecast the real world, the goal of the perfect model framework is to instead forecast the climate simulation itself. This is accomplished by treating a portion of a climate simulation as "observations", and then drawing the analog forecasts from a different, independent portion of the same climate simulation. The resulting ensemble forecast is "perfect" in that it has no unconditional or conditional biases (von Storch & Zwiers, 1999). Thus, the forecast skill in a perfect model framework is a measure of the potential predictability (or equivalently, "potential skill") in the climate system. Since the perfect model framework does not depend on real-world observations, it can be readily applied to past and future climate simulations to explore how these predictability limits change over time.

In this study, we estimate how seasonal climate predictability varies from 1921-2100 by applying the perfect model framework to five coupled model initial condition large ensembles (LEs) that are each forced with time-varying radiative forcing. Model LEs have been widely used in climate science studies to separate the response to external forcing from internal climate variations (see review by Maher et al., 2021). In our analysis, the large number of ensemble members provided by each model LE (ranging from 30-100 depending on model) allows us to generate hundreds of thousands of perfect model forecasts with which to assess any future changes in potential predictability. In particular, we generate 24-month forecasts of global surface temperature, precipitation, and upper atmospheric circulation anomalies as well as for ENSO. The forecasts are then verified against independent portions of the same large ensembles using anomaly correlation coefficient (ACC). We then relate future changes in potential predictability to future ENSO changes in each model. Finally, we assess how well the model LEs predict the real world.

2. Data and Methods

(a) Climate model large ensemble simulations and observations

We apply the perfect model framework to five coupled model initial condition LEs that span the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 5 (CMIP5) and CMIP6 eras (Table 1). Such a comparison across models allows us to test the sensitivity of our results to inter-model uncertainty found in the climate response to increased radiative forcing. For efficiency, all model data output was first interpolated to a common 2.5˚ x 2.5˚ grid.

The models used in our analysis include: the Community Earth System Model version 1.2 LE (CESM1-LE; 40 members; (Kay et al. 2015), CESM version 2 LE (CESM2-LE; 100 members; Rodgers et al., 2021), the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory Seamless System for Prediction and Earth System Research Medium Resolution Simulation (GFDL-SPEAR; 30 members; Delworth et al., 2020), the GFDL Earth System Modeling version 2M (GFDL-ESM2M; 30 members; Burger et al. 2020, 2022), and the Max-Planck Institute Grand Ensemble (MPI-GE; 100 members; Maher et al., 2019). The analysis period is 1921-2100, during which each model uses a specified external forcing scenario: (1) historical + representative concentration pathway 8.5 (RCP8.5), (2) historical + shared socioeconomic pathway 3-7.0 (SSP3-7.0), or (3) historical + SSP5-8.5. Within a given model, each ensemble member starts from a different initial condition. Over time, the ensemble members diverge due to the chaotic nature of the coupled climate system. As a result, once the memory of the initial condition fades, each ensemble member can be treated as an independent sample of the climate that has its own unique sequence of internal variability superimposed on a common forced response. We compare a portion of our model results to monthly mean data from four different observational sea surface temperature (SST) datasets: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Extended Reconstructed Sea Surface Temperature version 5 (ERSSTv5; Huang et al., 2017), Hadley Centre Sea Ice and Sea Surface Temperature (HadISST; Rayner et al. 2003), Centennial in situ Observation-Based Estimates versions 1 (COBE; Ishii et al. 2005) and 2 (COBE2; Hirahara et al. 2014). We primarily compare these observational products during the period 1921-2023. Differences in data streams and gap filling methods lead to differences between each observational estimate during the early part of the 20th century. However, the observations are in better agreement during a more recent period (e.g., 1980-2023).

Dataset	Forcing (ens. size)	$\sigma_{3.4}$ trend (˚C dec^{-1}) 1950-2023	$\sigma_{3.4}$ trend (˚C dec^{-1}) 1950-2100	Reference
CESM1-LE	HIST+RCP8.5 (40)	0.04 ± 0.03	0.02 ± 0.02	Kay et al. (2015)
CESM2-LE	HIST+SSP3-7.0 (100)	0.03 ± 0.04	0.00 ± 0.02	Rodgers et al. (2021)
GFDL-SPEAR	HIST+SSP5-8.5 (30)	0.02 ± 0.03	0.03 ± 0.01	Delworth et al. (2020)
GFDL-ESM2M	HIST+RCP8.5 (30)	0.02 ± 0.05	-0.02 ± 0.02	Burger et al. (2020), (2022)
MPI-GE	HIST+RCP8.5 (100)	0.00 ± 0.04	0.00 ± 0.01	Maher et al. (2019)
ERSSTv5		0.03		Huang et al. (2017)
HadISST		0.07		Rayner et al. (2003)
COBE		0.07		Ishii et al. (2005)
COBE2		0.06		Hirahara et al. (2014)

Table 1 Observational and model datasets used in this study. First column: radiation forcing scenario used by each model. The number of ensemble members available in each model is in parentheses. Second column: December-February averaged Nino3.4 standard deviation ($\boldsymbol{\sigma_{3.4}}$) trend (˚C decade^{-1}) in 30-year running windows (i.e., Figure 1) for the period 1921-2023. For climate models, the ensemble mean trend is reported along with +/- one standard deviation. Third column: As in the second column, but for the period 1921-2100. Fourth column: Dataset references.

(b) Perfect model-analog framework

In each LE, perfect model forecasts are generated and evaluated for different 30-year periods spaced every 10 years from 1921-2100 (e.g., 1921-1950, 1931-1960…2071-2100). The forecasts are produced within each of these 30-year periods separately using the following method. For a given model and 30-year period:

(1) We extract monthly mean SSTs from each ensemble member for the 30-year period of interest.

(2) We then remove the long-term monthly mean SSTs at each grid point based on the contemporaneous climatology calculated using all ensemble members (i.e., anomalies in 1921-1950 are relative to a 1921-1950 climatology).

(3) We further remove the ensemble mean SST anomaly (SSTA) (i.e., the model-specific externally-forced signal) at each grid point from each of the model's individual ensemble members.

(4) We arbitrarily treat the 1st ensemble member as the "truth" or "observations". Because each ensemble member is independent from one another, a data library of possible analog matches to the "observations" can then be constructed for each calendar month using the remaining ensemble members. For example, the data library for January in CESM1-LE consists of 39 ensemble members x 28 years = 1092 samples. Note that it is only 28 years because we aim to generate 24-month forecasts, so any possible analog matches in the final two years would extend beyond our 30-year window of interest. Thus, the final two years in each 30-year window are excluded from our data libraries.

(5) For a given month, we choose analogs by minimizing the distance between the climate state in the "observed" ensemble member and those found in the corresponding monthly data library (i.e., by comparing an "observed" January to the January data library). The distance between climate states is estimated by calculating the total root-mean-squared (RMS) difference between the "observed" SSTAs from 60˚S-60˚N and at all longitudes and those from every possible match in the data library. Note that we do not area weight the RMS difference calculation used in our analysis (see following section for more details). The distances are then ranked in descending order. The 10 closest states from the data library and their subsequent 24-month evolution are chosen as the forecast ensemble for that month.

(6) We repeat (4)-(5) by treating each other model ensemble member as "observations" and constructing the monthly data library using the remaining ensemble members.

This procedure generates a 10-member forecast for every month and every ensemble member in a given model LE. For example, applying this perfect model framework to CESM1-LE for a given 30-year period generates 40 (ensemble members) x 12 (calendar months) x 28 (years) = 13,400 10-member, 24-month forecasts with which we can estimate seasonal climate predictability. Although we use SSTAs to identify analogs, we are not limited only to SSTA forecasts for analysis. Once the nearest climate states are selected, the evolution of any model variable can be treated as a forecast and subsequently verified against the corresponding variable from "observations" (e.g., Ding et al., 2019). In this way, we assess the forecast anomalies of the following monthly mean variables from each model, with the CMIP standard variable name shown in parenthesis: SST (tos), 2m air temperature over land (tas), precipitation (pr), and the 500mb streamfunction, which was calculated using the U/V wind components at 500mb (ua, va). As

previously mentioned for SST, anomalies for all other variables are derived by removing both the long-term monthly means of the contemporaneous 30-year period and each model's respective ensemble mean.

(c) Perfect model-analog sensitivities

There are several arbitrary choices that must be made when adapting the perfect model-analog technique for LEs. Here, we briefly discuss these decisions and how they might influence our results or conclusions. (1) We remove a given model's ensemble mean from each of its members in order to isolate the internal component of each parameter, while still allowing for the rectification of the forced response on climate variability. Doing so allows us to focus on possible forced changes in the predictability of climate variations, as opposed to the more trivial exercise of predicting the forced trend. (2) Ding et al. (2018) showed that for data libraries of several hundreds of years, analog forecast ensembles of 10-20 members produced the most accurate forecasts. This is because larger forecast ensembles include increasingly poor analog matches, resulting in lower skill over the length of the forecast. We choose the top 10 analogs for our forecast ensembles for computational efficiency; however, our results and conclusions are not qualitatively impacted when increasing the forecast ensemble size to the top 15 or 20 matches. (3) We do not area weight the RMS difference calculation so as not to overweight the tropics when drawing analogs. We find that this choice increases the overall forecast skill in the mid-latitudes without overly decreasing it in the tropics. We select analogs based on SSTAs from 60˚S-60˚N and at all longitudes for similar reasons (i.e., to improve the representation of the extratropics when selecting analogs). Our results and conclusions are not qualitatively impacted by these decisions.

(d) Potential predictability metrics and signal-to-noise

To assess lead-dependent potential skill in each model, we calculate N_e estimates of the anomaly correlation coefficient (ACC) between each ensemble mean forecast and the corresponding "observations", where N_e is the number of ensemble members in a given LE (i.e., the number of "observed" timeseries used to generate analogs). For example, there are 40 estimates of the ACC for 1921-1950 when evaluating CESM1-LE. We repeat this procedure for each 30-year period separately, and we report the ensemble mean ACC in our results. We test the significance of the ensemble mean ACC using a 95% confidence interval based on two-sample *t*-

test. We further determine the robustness of the change in ACC between 30-year periods by indicating where 80% of a given model's ensemble members agree on the sign of the change. Note that all of our results are consistent with each other when using probabilistic skill metrics (e.g., Brier Skill Score or reliability). However, for brevity, we only show skill based on ACC.

We assess the lead-dependent signal-to-noise (S2N) ratio in our forecasts following Sardeshmukh et al. (2000). For each model ensemble member N_e, the S2N ratio at lead l is:

$$S2N(N_e, l) = \left(\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \overline{x_f}^2}{\frac{1}{K} \sum_{i=1}^{m} x_f'^2} \right)^{1/2} \quad (1)$$

Where $x_f' = x_f - \overline{x_f}$ is the deviation of each individual forecast member (x_f) from the ensemble mean forecast ($\overline{x_f}$) for each monthly initialization (i). The numerator in Eq. (1) represents the signal, and is calculated as the square of $\overline{x_f}$ summed over all monthly initializations in a given 30-year period (n). The denominator represents the noise, and is calculated as the square of x_f' summed over m, where m is the total number of monthly initializations from all forecast ensemble members K (in our analysis K = 10). Therefore, for a given 30-year period, n = 12 (calendar months) x 28 (years) = 336 and m = 3360. As with ACC, we calculate N_e estimates of the S2N ratio for each LE (one for each ensemble member), and report the ensemble mean values in our results. A higher S2N ratio indicates that there is a larger ensemble mean anomaly and/or less spread among the forecast ensemble, which results in a more skillful forecast in the perfect model framework (Sardeshmukh et al. 2000).

Future changes in ACC and S2N are shown relative to a reference period of 1921-1950. This reference was chosen as it is the earliest common period among the model LEs and because it allows us to quantify the largest possible radiatively forced change in each model. Note that while CESM2-LE, GFDL-ESM2M, and MPI-GE were initialized in the mid-19th century, CESM1-LE and GFDL-SPEAR were initialized in 1920 and 1921, respectively. Since the ensemble members in GFDL-SPEAR were initialized from different years of a pre-industrial control simulation with different ocean states, they are already well separated. However, since the ensemble members in CESM1-LE were initialized with a similar ocean state, it is possible that the ocean memory of the initial condition is present in this model for the earliest 30-year period over which we quantify predictability (i.e., 1921-1950). However, we have repeated our analysis using 1991-2020 as the reference period and found that our results and conclusions are not qualitatively impacted by this choice.

(e) Observed model-analogs and dynamical forecasts

In Section 3d, we compare model-analog forecasts of observed SSTA to seasonal SSTA forecasts obtained from six global climate models contributing to the North American Multimodel Ensemble (NMME; Kirtman et al. 2014; Becker et al. 2022). Each of the NMME models consist of an ensemble of forecasts that are initialized each month (see Table S1 for model details). We calculate forecast skill in NMME based on a set of reforecasts (also known as retrospective forecasts or hindcasts) available for each model. Reforecasts are forecasts of past periods, using information that was only available at the time of forecast initialization. The historical skill derived from these reforecasts provides an important evaluation of the skill inherent to each forecast system. The SSTAs from each NMME model are relative to a lead-dependent climatology from 1991-2020. Before calculating skill, the lead-dependent linear trend is also removed from all NMME SSTA forecasts.

We produce observed model-analog forecasts from each LE following the methods outlined in Section 2b, except analog forecasts are drawn by matching observed SSTA from ERSSTv5 for every month from 1991-2020. Additionally, for each model LE, the data library that model-analog forecasts are drawn from includes all ensemble members (i.e., none are left out as the "truth" is taken to be ERSSTv5). For example, the data libraries in CESM1-LE consist of 40 ensemble members x 30 years = 1200 samples for each calendar month. The result is a 10-member model-analog reforecast for each of the five model LEs. Forecast skill for both NMME and the observed model-analogs is then evaluated by comparing to ERSSTv5 from 1991-2020. This period was chosen as it is the longest overlapping record available for the NMME models.

3. Results

(a) Forced changes in ENSO amplitude

Given ENSO's dominant role in driving seasonal climate predictability, we first assess the simulated response of ENSO amplitude to historical and future radiative forcing in each LE. The CESM1-LE shows a consistent increase in Nino3.4 (i.e., SSTA averaged 5˚S-5˚N, 170˚W-120˚W) standard deviation from 1921-2060, after which it levels off (Figure 1 and Table 1). The Nino3.4 amplitude in GFDL-SPEAR is relatively stable from 1921-2020, after which it increases until about 2080 before decreasing slightly. In contrast, the ENSO variability in CESM2-LE rises

consistently through 2040 before decreasing consistently through 2100. In GFDL-ESM2M, Nino3.4 standard deviation is relatively stable until about 2040, after which it sharply decreases through the end of the century. In MPI-GE, there is little change in Nino3.4 variability throughout the record. The large inter-model uncertainty in future ENSO variability is consistent with Maher et al. (2023, see their Figure 4).

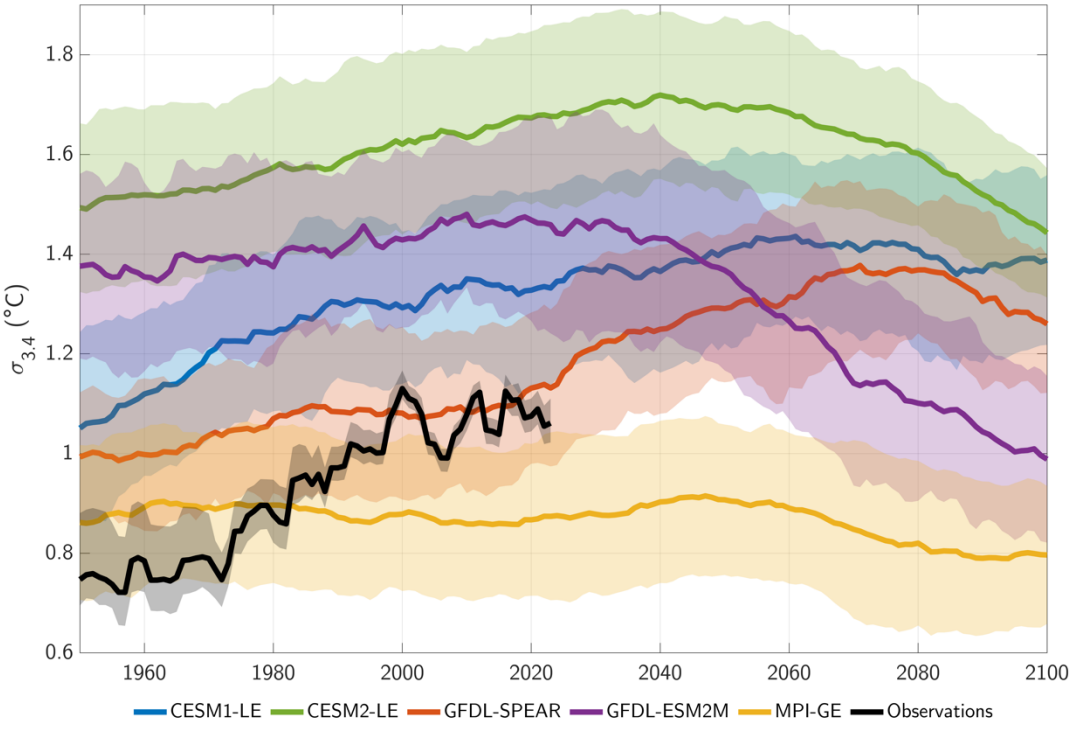

Figure 1 Standard deviation of December-February averaged SSTA in the Nino3.4 region in running 30-year windows from 1921-2100. Years indicate end of the window (e.g., 1960=1931-1960). Colors represent different model large ensembles, with thick curves for ensemble mean values and shading for one standard deviation spread across the ensemble. Black shading shows the range of observed values from 1921-2023 from four different observational products (ERSSTv5, HadISST, COBE, and COBE2), with the black curve representing the observed average. See Figure S1 for individual observational estimates.

With the exception of MPI-GE in the early 20th-century and GFDL-SPEAR in the later 20th-century, each model LE exhibits positive variability biases relative to observations (Figure 1 black line). Given these biases and other known climate model errors concerning observed trends in the tropical Pacific (Wills et al. 2022), it is reasonable to wonder whether these LEs are reliable tools for diagnosing future changes in climate variability or, by extension, predictability. Despite the variability biases, however, we find that the simulated historical change in Nino3.4 amplitude is well within each model's ensemble spread (Table 1 and Figures S1-S2), suggesting that the

forced response in Nino3.4 amplitude as simulated by any of these climate models could plausibly exist in observations given the correct combination of internal variability. As a result, the projected changes from one (biased) climate state to another (biased) climate state in these LEs can inform our real-world expectations of the future, with the largest source of uncertainty coming from the different modeled forced responses. Based on these results, we primarily focus on CESM1-LE, MPI-GE, and GFDL-ESM2M when evaluating the forecast skill of our perfect model-analogs as these LEs span the range of possible changes in future ENSO amplitude (i.e., increasing, no change, and decreasing, respectively).

(b) Potential predictability and future changes

1) Sea surface temperature and surface air temperature

Perfect model-analog forecasts (hereafter referred to as "forecasts") of SSTA for 1921-1950 in CESM1-LE show significant potential skill (hereafter referred to as "skill") at 0-month lead (i.e., the "initialization" or the month that was used to determine the analogs) for most of the globe (globally averaged ACC = 0.62), with the tropical Pacific exhibiting the highest skill (ACCs > 0.9; Figure 2a). There is also significant skill of surface air temperature anomalies over land (SATA) at 0-month lead in most regions. However, SATA skill is generally weaker than for SSTA (global average ACC = 0.48), especially in mid-latitudes. The higher overall SSTA skill or "potential predictability" (hereafter referred to as "predictability") at 0-month lead is expected since our analogs are chosen by minimizing the distance between the "observed" SSTA and the data library. Indeed, the high 0-month lead SSTA skill gives us confidence that the perfect model framework is reliably drawing analogs that closely correspond to the "observed" climate states at each initialization. Results are similar for the other LEs (Figures S3-S7).

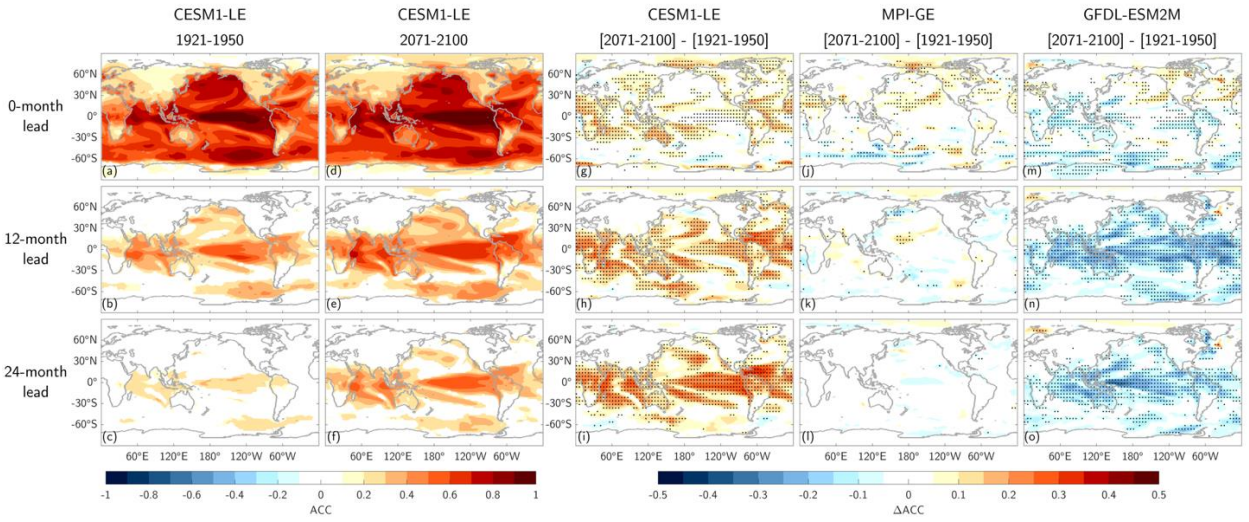

Figure 2 Surface temperature potential predictability. (a)-(c) Ensemble mean skill of surface temperature anomalies in CESM1-LE as measured by ACC calculated across all months in the period 1921-1950. (d)-(f) As in (a)-(c), but for the period 2071-2100. (g)-(o) Change in ACC between past and future periods for (g)-(i) CESM1-LE (j)-(l) MPI-GE (m)-(o) GFDL-ESM2M. Skill values in (a)-(f) are only shown when 95% significant. Stipples in (g)-(o) indicate where 80% of a respective model's ensemble agrees on the sign of the change. See Figures S3-S7 for the full surface temperature anomaly skill in the other large ensembles.

We further assess the predictability at increasing lead times; however, for brevity, we only show the skill at 12-month and 24-month leads (Figure 2b-c; see Figures S3-S7 for skill maps at additional lead times). Skill of surface temperature decreases with increasing lead time, although this reduction is more apparent for SATA than for SSTA. This difference is consistent with the higher thermal capacity of the ocean relative to the atmosphere, which typically leads to higher predictability at longer leads for SSTA than for SATA. In particular, SSTA ACCs at 12-month lead exceed 0.6 in the tropical Pacific, consistent with previous model-analog forecast studies (e.g., Ding et al., 2018). There is also significant SATA predictability over tropical land surfaces, as well as significant SSTA predictability throughout most of the North Pacific, the tropical Atlantic, the tropical Indian Ocean, and the Southern Ocean west of the Drake Passage. These regions are known to be influenced by large-scale ENSO teleconnections (e.g., He et al., 2020; Horel & Wallace, 1981; Mo & Ghil, 1987), suggesting that ENSO is a key source of long-lead predictability in our forecasts. Skill further degrades out to 24-month leads (Figure 2c); however, there is still the significant SATA skill over northern South America and significant SSTA skill in the tropical and South Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

In CESM1-LE, there is a robust increase in SSTA and SATA predictability in the future at all leads, with only a few small regions of decreasing predictability (Figure 2d-i). In particular, the

0-month lead SSTA skill increases in the western tropical Pacific as well as the Indian and Atlantic Oceans (Figure 2i). Similarly, there is a robust increase in future SATA predictability at 0-month lead over much of Africa, portions of eastern Asia, equatorial South America, and all of Australia. An increase in forecast skill at 0-month lead implies that the distance between the "observed" and analog climate states decreases in the future (i.e., the analogs more closely match the "observations"). Further, the widespread ensemble agreement (black stipples) indicates that these predictability changes are a "robust" (defined here as 80% ensemble agreement on the sign of the change) part of the model's forced response and not due to chance.

The CESM1-LE changes in SSTA/SATA predictably are starker at 12- and 24-month leads (Figure 2h-i), with robust increases in ACC throughout the global tropics in an ENSO-like pattern. The increased predictability along the equatorial Pacific, in particular, suggests that ENSO itself is more predictable in the future in CESM1-LE. We will explore ENSO predictability in more detail in Section 3d. There are also robust long-lead increases in SSTA and SATA predictability in the mid-latitudes. For example, there is an increase in SSTA skill in the North Atlantic in a pattern reminiscent of the SSTA footprint generated by the NAO (i.e., a horseshoe shape from southern Greenland to the tropical North Atlantic; Kushnir et al., 2006). There are also pronounced increases in SSTA skill in the North Pacific and along the U.S. west coast and SATA skill in the American Southwest, which may be associated with an eastward shift in ENSO's teleconnections to the Pacific North America region (O'Brien and Deser 2023). Other LEs generally disagree with CESM1-LE on the sign and magnitude of future predictability changes (Figure 2j-o and Figures S3-S7). The MPI-GE at 0-month lead shows some isolated regions of increasing and decreasing SSTA/SATA skill, but without a clear pattern. At longer leads, the skill change in MPI-GE is close to zero nearly everywhere and there is little agreement among the ensemble on the sign of the change. In contrast, GFDL-ESM2M shows a robust decrease in SSTA/SATA predictability for most the globe (Figure 2m-o) in a similar ENSO-like pattern as seen in CESM1-LE (pattern correlation = -0.68 at 12-month lead), though with less loading in the Northeast Atlantic. This suggests that ENSO predictability decreases in the future in GFDL-ESM2M.

2) Precipitation

Forecasts of precipitation anomalies for 1921-1950 in CESM1-LE show peak skill over the tropical oceans (Figure 3a-c; see Figures S8-S12 for other models). For example, 0-month lead

precipitation skill is highest over the central equatorial Pacific, with ACCs exceeding 0.9. There is also significant skill at 0-month lead over tropical land surfaces and in the mid-latitudes along the U.S. west coast. Precipitation predictability similarly decreases with increasing lead, with only the equatorial Pacific and Indian Oceans displaying any significant skill at 12-month lead. By 24-month lead, precipitation predictability is generally insignificant, except for isolated regions in the Indo-Pacific warm pool.

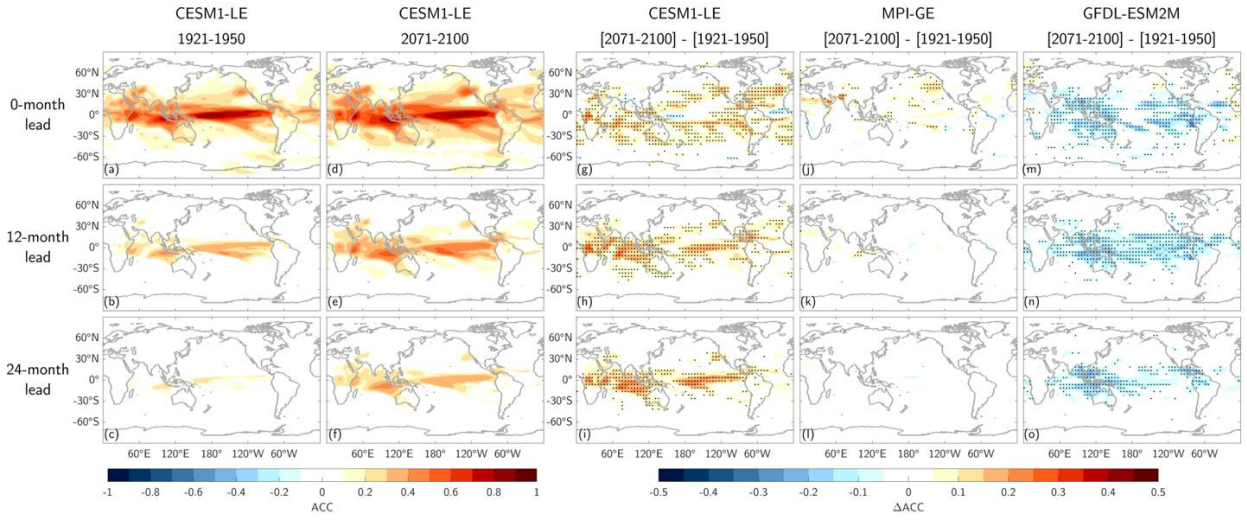

Figure 3 As in Figure 2, but for precipitation predictability.

Similar to SSTA/SATA, there are robust increases in future precipitation predictability at all leads in CESM1-LE (Figure 3d-i), with centers of action in the Indian Ocean, the equatorial Pacific, the Caribbean, and the U.S. west coast. The North Atlantic also shows robust increases in predictably at 0- and 12-month lead. The increase in predictability at 24-month lead is of particular note given that there is virtually no significant skill in the past. In the future, however, there is significant predictability over the equatorial Pacific and Indian Oceans. Additionally, the region of highest skill along the equatorial Pacific shifts eastward from about the dateline in the period 1921-1950 to about 140˚W in the period 2071-2100. This eastward shift may be related to CESM1-LE simulated El Niño events shifting eastward in the future (O'Brien and Deser 2023; Williams and Patricola 2018). The sign and relative magnitude of the skill changes in the other LEs are also consistent with their respective SSTA/SATA predictability changes (Figure 3j-o). Specifically, MPI-GE once again shows isolated regions of robust precipitation skill change at 0-month, but no

significant change at longer leads. Similarly, GFDL-ESM2M shows a robust decrease in precipitation predictability at all leads throughout the tropics.

3) Upper atmosphere circulation

Forecasts of 500mb streamfunction anomalies (ψ_{500}) during the period 1921-1950 in CESM1-LE show significant skill at 0-month and 12-month leads (Figure 4a-c; see Figures S13-S17 for other models). In particular, there are regions of high ACC in the subtropical and mid-latitude North and South Pacific as well as over North America. These centers of action are consistent with the locations of the PNA and Pacific-South American (PSA) patterns (Horel and Wallace 1981; Mo and Ghil 1987). Combined, these two results suggest that the forecasts are successfully capturing the upper atmospheric wave train response to tropical heating anomalies associated with ENSO.

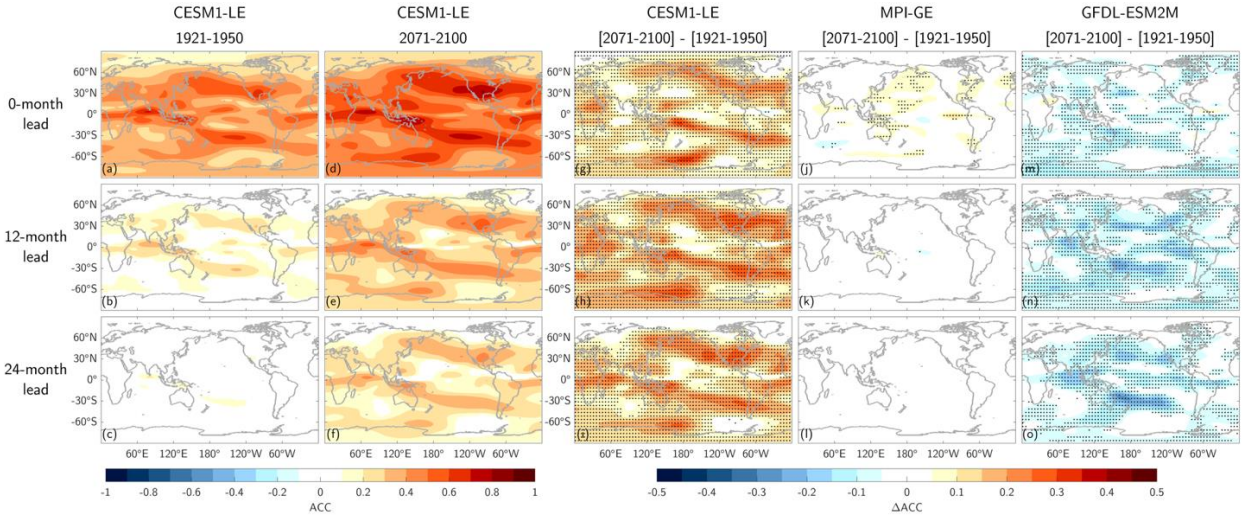

Figure 4 As in Figure 2, but for 500mb streamfunction (ψ_{500}) predictability.

In the future, there is a near-global increase in CESM1-LE ψ_{500} predictability at all leads (Figure 4d-i). Of note are the increases in ψ_{500} ACC in the PNA and PSA regions, respectively, which may be an indication of stronger ENSO teleconnections in CESM1-LE in the future (O'Brien and Deser 2023). The robust predictability increases in the PNA region are also consistent with the increases seen in both SSTA/SATA and precipitation predictability along the U.S. west coast (see Figures 2g-i and 3g-i). Similar to precipitation forecasts, long-lead ψ_{500} predictability is especially impacted in CESM1-LE, with significant increases in predictability nearly everywhere at 24-month lead. As with SSTA, SATA, and precipitation, the other LEs

457 disagree with CESM1-LE on the sign of future ψ_{500} predictability changes (Figure 4j-o). MPI-GE
458 shows no regions of robust predictability changes beyond 0-month lead, and GFDL-ESM2M once
459 again produces a decrease in ψ_{500} skill for most of the globe. In particular, GFDL-ESM2M shows
460 a decrease in predictability in the PNA and PSA regions of the North and South Pacific, which
461 may suggest that ENSO-related teleconnections in this model are weaker in the future.
462
463 *(c) Linking future predictability changes and ENSO amplitude*
464 **1) Signal-to-Noise**
465 To briefly summarize the above results, seasonal climate predictability in the future
466 generally increases in CESM1-LE, does not change in MPI-GE, and decreases in GFDL-ESM2M,
467 as measured by ACC across multiple variables (SSTA, SATA, precipitation, and ψ_{500}). While the
468 models disagree on the sign of future predictability changes, they are each self-consistent with
469 their projected change in future ENSO amplitude (i.e., Figure 1). The link between future climate
470 predictability and future ENSO amplitude may be related to ENSO's role as the dominant internal
471 climate mode, allowing one to detect its influence across much of the globe despite the presence
472 of other forms of variability (e.g., weather or other climate modes). For example, if ENSO
473 amplitude increases in the future (e.g., as projected by CESM1-LE), then that may lead to an
474 increase in the signal-to-noise (S2N) ratio of ENSO and its teleconnections, which would tend to
475 contribute to an overall more deterministic climate system and more skillful forecasts (e.g.,
476 Sardeshmukh et al., 2000). To test this hypothesis, we calculate changes in the S2N ratio (Eq. 1)
477 for surface temperature as a function of lead time in each of the two time periods (Figure 5). During
478 the period 1921-1950, the S2N ratios in CESM1-LE forecasts at 0-month lead follow an ENSO-
479 like pattern, with the highest values in the equatorial Pacific (maximum value = 1.94). Weaker
480 (but still elevated) values are seen in the Indian Ocean, the South Pacific, the Northeast Pacific
481 along the U.S. west coast, the North Atlantic, and over the tropical African and South American
482 land surfaces (Figure 5a). The S2N decreases with increasing lead time (Figure 5b-c); however,
483 the ENSO-like pattern of elevated S2N persists at 12-month lead before mostly dissipating at 24-
484 month lead.
485

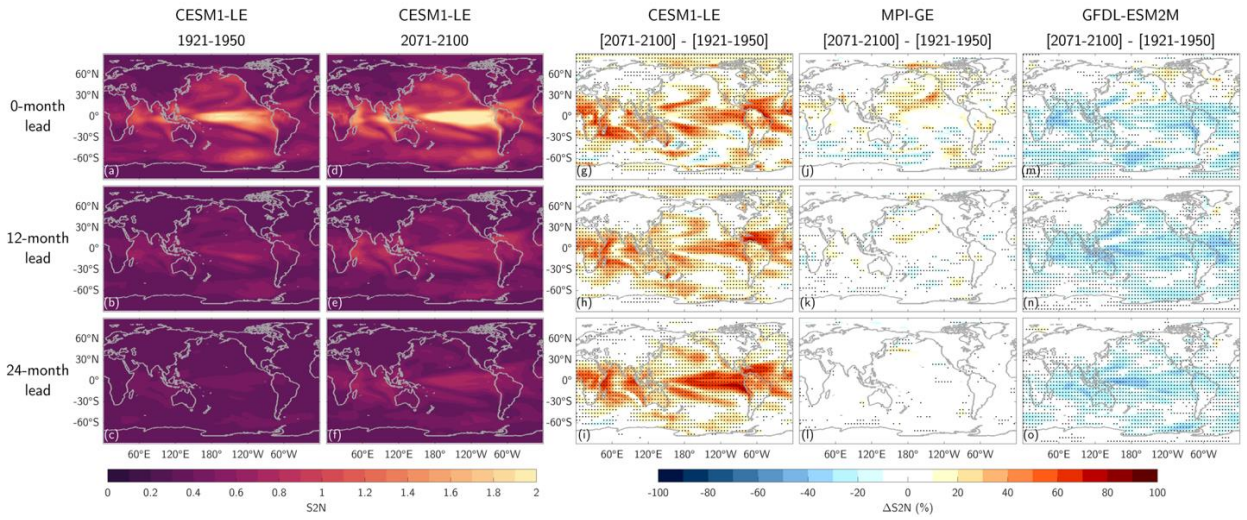

Figure 5 Signal-to-noise (S2N) ratios for surface temperature anomaly forecasts. (a)-(c) Ensemble mean S2N of surface temperature forecasts in CESM1-LE calculated across all months in the period 1921-1950. (d)-(f) As in (a)-(c), but for the period 2071-2100. (g)-(o) Percent change in S2N between past and future periods for (g)-(i) CESM1-LE (j)-(l) MPI-GE (m)-(o) GFDL-ESM2M. Stipples in (g)-(o) indicate where 80% of a respective model's ensemble agrees on the sign of the change.

The patterns of future S2N change in each of the LEs are remarkably similar to the surface temperature ACC changes seen in Figure 2 (Figure 5d-o), with pattern correlations between the ACC and S2N maps at 0-, 12-, and 24-month lead of 0.86, 0.97, and 0.98 for CESM1-LE, 0.76, 0.90, and 0.83 for MPI-GE, and 0.69, 0.95, and 0.95 for GFDL-ESM2M, respectively. Decomposing the S2N equation into a signal and noise component (i.e., the numerator and denominator of Eq. 1, respectively), we find that the changes in the signal are over five times larger than changes in the noise for much of the globe (Figures S18-S19). For example, the signal change averaged 60˚S-60˚N at 12-month lead in CESM1-LE is 27%, compared to just a 4.7% change in the noise. In the case of CESM1-LE, this indicates that the amplitude of a typical ensemble mean forecast anomaly is larger in the future without a substantial increase in the average forecast spread (i.e., the forecast uncertainty). These results are consistent with previous studies linking ENSO amplitude to S2N and/or climate predictability (Capotondi et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2004; Gu & Philander, 1997; Sardeshmukh et al., 2000; Suarez & Schopf, 1988; Weisheimer et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2016).

2) Time-varying potential predictability changes, Nino3.4

To further relate changes in ENSO amplitude to global predictability, we explore skill changes as a function of time. A time-varying perspective of predictability is important given the

non-monotonic changes in ENSO amplitude seen in most LEs (e.g., Figure 1). Such variability in each model's forced ENSO response may give rise to periods of predictability that differ not only from the historical period, but also from the total changes seen at the end of the 21st century (i.e., Figures 2-4). Further, by evaluating whether time-varying skill changes are robust across a given model's ensemble, we can quantitatively estimate the "time of emergence" for forced changes in predictability within each model.

To illustrate, we show the forecast skill of SSTAs averaged in the Nino3.4 region for six different 30-year periods from 1921-2100 (Figure 6). In addition to CESM1-LE, MPI-GE, and GFDL-ESM2M, we also include CESM2-LE and GFDL-SPEAR in this analysis as ENSO amplitude changes in these models are particularly varied, with prolonged periods of increasing and decreasing variability. Treating 1921-1950 as the base period, Nino3.4 skill tends to be highest (exceeding 0.8) at leads of less than ~6 months and for forecasts initialized in boreal fall and winter (Figure 6; left column). For boreal spring and summer initializations, predictability tends to be similarly elevated at leads that encompass boreal winter in the forecast.

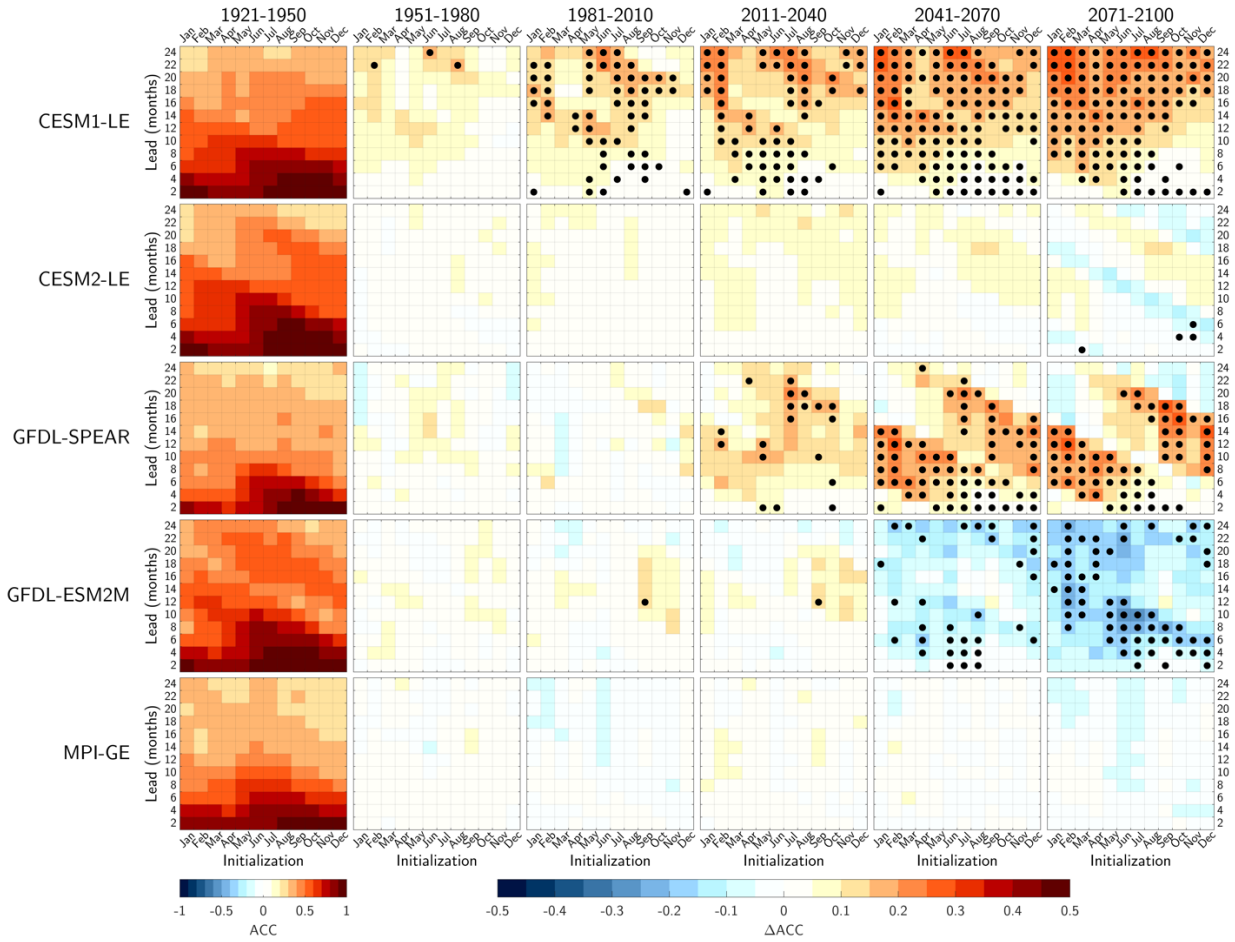

Figure 6 First column: Ensemble mean Nino3.4 potential forecast skill (ACC) as a function of initialization month (x-axis) and lead time (y-axis) for each model large ensemble. Second-fifth columns: Difference in Nino3.4 skill between the base period 1921-1950 and different 30-year periods. For example, the second column shows the difference in skill between the periods 1951-1980 and 1921-1950. Stipples indicate that 80% of the respective model ensemble agrees on the sign of the change.

There is little change in Nino3.4 skill in any of the models for the adjacent 30-year period (1951-1980). However, by the period 1981-2010, CESM1-LE shows a robust increase in Nino3.4 predictability at short leads for May-September initializations and at longer leads for much of the year. This suggests that forced changes in CESM1-LE ENSO predictability begin to emerge above the internal noise inherent to each ensemble member during this period. In 2011-2040, CESM1-LE Nino3.4 skill continues to increase, while GFDL-SPEAR begins to show some robust increases in predictability. Forecast skill in CESM2 also increases slightly during this period, but there is not widespread agreement among its ensemble on the sign of this change. We see the largest period-to-period changes in Nino3.4 skill between 2011-2040 and 2041-2070 (Figure 6; fifth column). For example, forced changes to ENSO forecast skill in GFDL-SPEAR fully emerge

during this period, with diagonal bands of increased predictability associated with forecasts that verify in boreal summer to winter. In GFDL-ESM2M, robust decreases in predictability begin to emerge, but without a clear pattern. Finally, by the period 2071-2100, CESM1-LE and GFDL-SPEAR largely maintain the increases in ENSO predictability observed in the previous epoch, while forced decreases in Nino3.4 forecast skill are now fully evident in GFDL-ESM2M.

3) Time-varying potential predictability changes, global

There is clear model diversity in the simulated change of ENSO predictability, both in the sign and intensity of end-of-21st century changes and in the apparent time of emergence for each model's forced response (i.e., Figure 6 black dots). However, similar to our previous results (e.g., Figures 2-4), the sign and timing of ENSO predictability changes in each of the LEs is consistent with their respective time-varying ENSO amplitudes (Figure 1). For example, there are no robust changes in Nino3.4 forecast skill in GFDL-SPEAR until the period 2011-2040, which closely corresponds to the timing of the strongest increasing trend in this model's ENSO amplitude (comparing third row of Figure 6 to orange line in Figure 1). Similarly, ENSO predictability in GFDL-ESM2M remains relatively stable until the period 2041-2070, at which point both the forecast skill and GFDL-ESM2M's ENSO amplitude start to sharply decrease (comparing fourth row of Figure 6 to purple line in Figure 1). The ensemble mean Nino3.4 skill in CESM2-LE also shows hints of a close link to its time-varying ENSO amplitude, with a slight increase in skill/amplitude through 2040 followed by a decrease through the end of the century, though these predictability changes are not robust across the CESM2 ensemble.

The relationship between time-varying ENSO amplitude and climate predictability extends beyond the Nino3.4 region, manifesting on global scales via ENSO-driven changes in the S2N ratio (as previously suggested in Figure 5). Indeed, we find a high correspondence in each LE between their respective time-evolving Nino3.4 amplitude, globally averaged ACC, and globally averaged S2N ratio (Figure 7). For example, at 12-month lead, the globally averaged SSTA skill in CESM1-LE increases roughly linearly over time with increasing ENSO amplitude (Figure 7a circles; R = 0.95), with over 80% of the model ensemble agreeing on the sign of both the ENSO amplitude and global predictability changes beginning in the period 1961-1990 (i.e., circles with thick black outline). A similar linear relationship is seen in other LEs with different ENSO amplitude trends. For example, in GFDL-ESM2M, there is a decrease in skill over time that closely

corresponds to this model's decrease in ENSO amplitude (Figure 7a triangles; R = 0.97), although its forced changes in predictability are not apparent until the period 2031-2060.

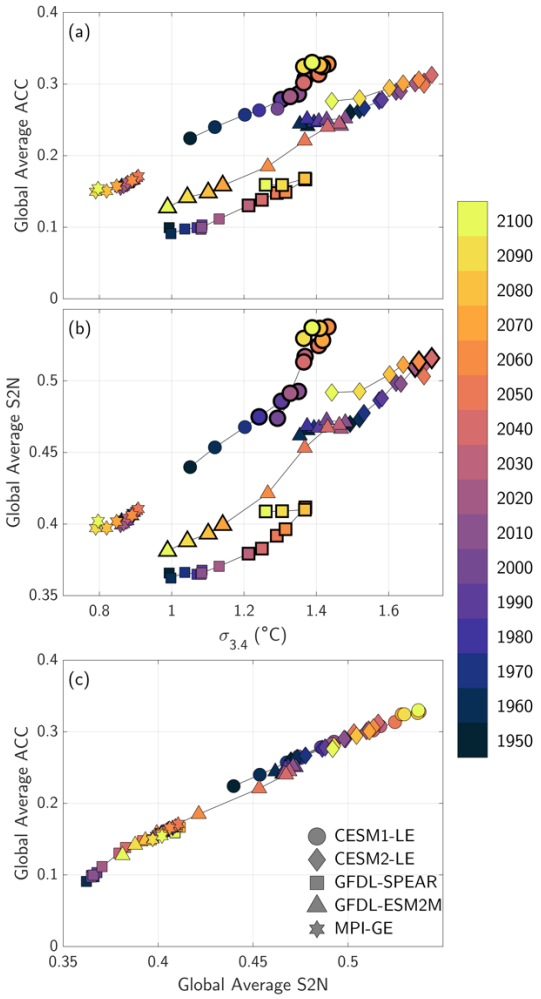

Figure 7 (a) Global average ensemble mean potential skill at 12-month lead (y-axis) versus December-February averaged Nino3.4 standard deviation (x-axis) in different 30-year periods. (b) As in (a), but for global average forecast S2N ratio versus Nino3.4 standard deviation. (c) As in (b), but for global average ACC versus global average S2N ratio. All ACC and S2N values are based on ensemble mean SSTA forecasts from each model (i.e., different shapes). Shading of each shape indicates the 30-year window over which the forecast skill, S2N ratio or Nino3.4 standard deviation are calculated, with the year indicating the end of the window. For example, the shading for 1950 corresponds to 1921-1950. Markers with bold outlines in (a)-(b) indicate 30-year windows in which 80% of a given model's ensemble agree on the sign of the change (relative to 1921-1950) for both the ACC/S2N and Nino3.4 standard deviation.

Globally averaged S2N is also highly correlated in time with each model's projected ENSO amplitude (Figure 7b), consistent with the S2N maps discussed earlier. There is also a near-perfect linear relationship between globally averaged S2N and ACC (Figure 7c), consistent with previous studies relating perfect model skill to S2N (Sardeshmukh et al. 2000). Finally, by calculating the

592 regression coefficient between globally averaged ACC/S2N and Nino3.4 amplitude (i.e., by fitting
593 a line to each model's scatter in Figure 7a-b), we can estimate the skill/S2N changes for a given
594 change in ENSO amplitude. Averaging the regression coefficients across models, we find that a
595 10% increase in Nino3.4 amplitude is associated with a 14% and 7% increase in globally averaged
596 forecast skill and S2N, respectively, at 12-month lead.
597 Combined, the results shown in Figure 7 further support our hypothesis that time-varying
598 changes in predictability are driven by same-sign changes in global S2N ratios, which in turn are
599 driven by each respective LE's projected change in ENSO amplitude. The close link between
600 ENSO amplitude, S2N, and forecast skill is consistent across models (different marker types in
601 Figure 7), lead times and variables (not shown).
602
603 *(d) Model-analog forecasts of the real world*
604 While our analysis to this point has focused on perfect model predictability in the past,
605 present, and future, it is interesting to also consider whether model-analog forecasts drawn from
606 LEs can skillfully predict the real world. Such an evaluation would provide an important
607 assessment of whether these tools and techniques might be useful for real-world seasonal
608 forecasting. For example, Ding and Alexander (2023) showed that, for much of the globe, model-
609 analogs from CESM1-LE can predict observed SST variability in Years 2 and 3 at rates that match
610 or even slightly exceed those from traditional initialized dynamical forecasts (see their Figure S2).
611 However, to our knowledge, there are no studies that have quantified the hindcast skill of observed
612 model-analogs drawn from a multi-model ensemble of LEs. Here, we present a preliminary
613 verification of observed SSTA forecasts drawn from the five model LEs from 1991-2020.
614

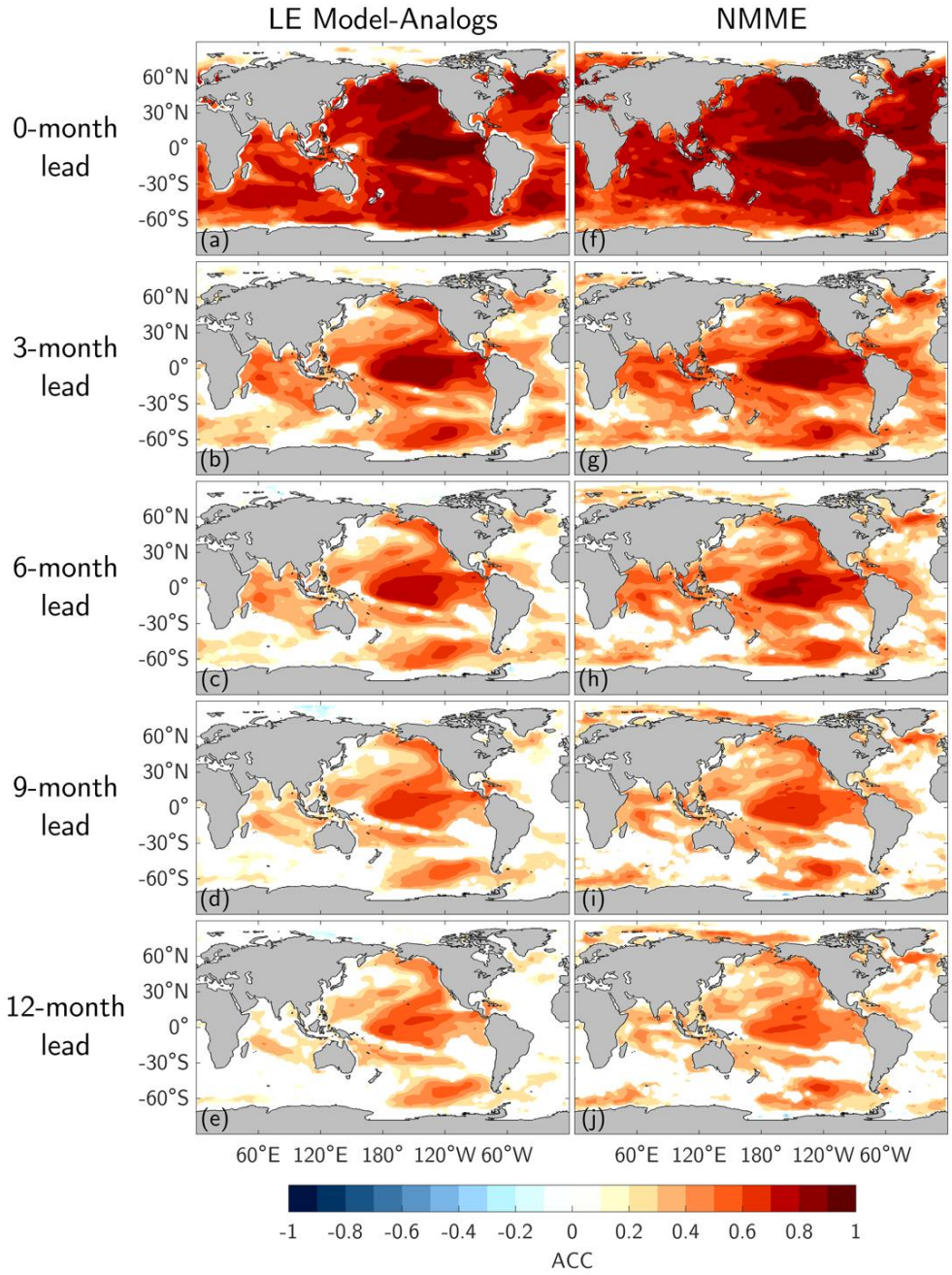

Figure 8 Observed SSTA forecast skill from model-analogs and the NMME. (a)-(e) Seasonal skill of multi-model mean (MMM) model-analog forecasts drawn from each of the five model LEs. (f)-(j) As in (a)-(e), but the seasonal skill of MMM forecasts from the six NMME models. Skill is measured as ACC with observations from ERSSTv5 calculated across all months in the period 1991-2020. Skill values are only shown when 95% significant.

The multi-model mean (MMM) forecast from the five LEs shows significant skill at predicting real-world SSTAs at 0-month lead, indicating that the model-analog approach is accurately selecting climate states that are similar to the observations (Figure 8). As expected,

forecast skill of the observed model-analogs decreases everywhere with increasing lead time. However, even at 12-months there is significant skill throughout the tropics, as well as in regions well-known to be influenced by ENSO's teleconnections (e.g., the Northeast Pacific). The LE model-analog MMM skill compares favorably to MMM forecasts from traditional dynamical forecasts contributing to the NMME, matching the NMME skill for much of the globe (Figure 8f-j). While globally averaged model-analog skill from the individual LEs does tend to be lower than globally averaged skill from individual NMME models (Figure 9), it is likely that the model-analog skill could be further improved by optimizing the methods for selecting analogs. For example, some studies have incorporated other variables (such as sea surface height) in addition to SST when selecting analogs (Ding et al. 2018, 2019; Ding and Alexander 2023). Doing so may generate analogs that more closely match the observed climate state over the length of the forecast, thereby increasing skill. Similarly, other recent studies (Toride et al. in review; Rader & Barnes, 2023) have used machine learning techniques to create spatial weights that are used to aid in analog selection and are optimized to maximize forecast skill in a specific region (e.g., Nino3.4). Regardless, the observed skill shown here further suggests that model-analog forecasts drawn from free running climate simulations can provide reliable predictions comparable to state-of-the art initialized forecasts, but at a fraction of the computational expense.

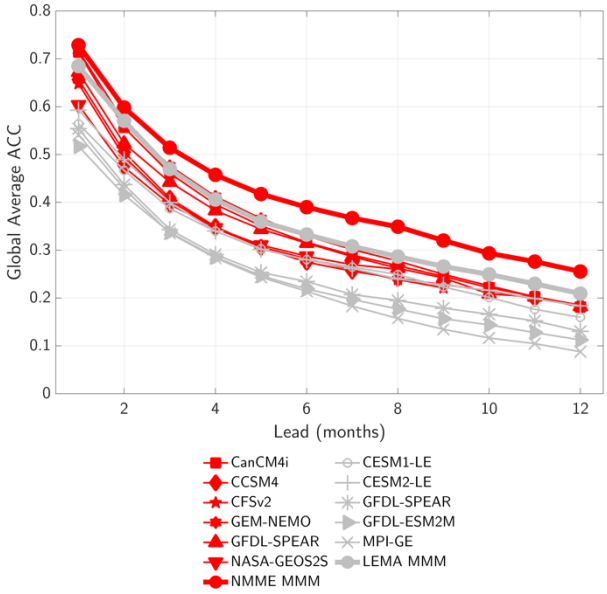

Figure 9 Global average SSTA forecast skill for all months derived from dynamical forecasts from six NMME models (red) and observed model-analog forecasts drawn from the five model LEs (gray). Skill is based on comparisons to ERSSTv5 from 1991-2020. The MMM skill for NMME and the LE model-analogs (LEMA) are shown in bold.

4. Summary and Discussion

In this study, we investigated possible future changes in seasonal potential predictability across five coupled GCM LEs. Using a perfect model-analog technique, we generated hundreds of thousands of synthetic seasonal forecasts to estimate predictability changes from 1921-2100. CESM1-LE consistently showed a robust increase in predictability in the future, while predictability in GFDL-ESM2M consistently decreased (e.g., Figures 2-4). These predictability changes were largest at longer leads. In contrast, seasonal predictability in MPI-GE did not exhibit significant changes. This large inter-model uncertainty in the sign, magnitude, and timing of future climate predictability changes could be the result of any number of design choices unique to each modeling center, including different grid resolutions, parameterizations, physics packages, model components, or some combination thereof. Moreover, ENSO variance is a delicate balance between many competing processes, leading to uncertain forced changes in the near future (see Figure 1 of our study, as well as Maher et al., 2023; Cai et al., 2022; Yun et al., 2021; Fredriksen et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2016; Stevenson, 2012; Collins et al., 2010; Latif & Keenlyside, 2009). However, this makes our central result even more striking—a common physical relationship among the models emerges that allows us to anticipate how real-world predictability might change in the coming decades. In particular, the predictability changes in each model were driven by a same-sign change in their respective ENSO amplitude. For example, forecasts from models with increasing ENSO amplitude trends (e.g., CESM1, GFDL-SPEAR, and CESM2 until ~2040) were associated with a higher S2N ratio in the future, which led to an overall more deterministic climate system and increased potential for significant forecast skill. The higher S2N ratio resulted from a larger ensemble mean forecast anomaly (i.e., signal), owing to ENSO's role as a bigger "hammer" to the climate system. The opposite was true for models with decreasing ENSO trends (e.g., GFDL-ESM2M and CESM2 after ~2040). Overall, when averaged across models, a 10% increase in ENSO amplitude was associated with a 14% and 7% increase in globally averaged skill and S2N, respectively, at 12-month lead.

Of course, our study is based upon "perfect model" predictability analysis of imperfect climate models, with demonstrated mean and variability biases (e.g., Maher et al. 2023; Wills et al. 2022). While perfect model predictability is sometimes a reasonable proxy for "actual" skill (e.g., skill derived from a dynamical forecast system or traditional model-analog methods; Wheeler et al. 2017; Newman and Sardeshmukh 2017) this may not always be the case (e.g., Kumar et al.

679 2014; Weisheimer et al. 2022; Scaife and Smith 2018). As a result, we cannot necessarily expect
680 that predictability changes in the remainder of this century will match future changes in the
681 predictability of these models. Still, model-analog forecasts drawn from the LEs have comparable
682 real-world SSTA skill (Figures 8-9) to that of operational seasonal forecast models (i.e., NMME),
683 whose forecast errors are similar to climate model errors (e.g., Beverley et al. 2023). Therefore,
684 our results are likely relevant to how prediction skill of current seasonal forecast systems might
685 change in the future. For example, the observed trend in ENSO amplitude is positive since 1970
686 (Figure 1). Should this trend persist into the future, we might also expect seasonal forecast skill to
687 increase in regions strongly influenced by ENSO and its teleconnections as these portions of the
688 climate system become more deterministic. However, if ENSO variability were to decrease in the
689 future as suggested by several recent studies (Wengel et al. 2021; Callahan et al. 2021; Peng et al.
690 in review), then historical forecast skill relationships that depend on ENSO and its teleconnections
691 may become less reliable as the climate changes.
692 While our analysis takes an important first step towards understanding future climate
693 predictability changes, there are a number of important questions that remain. First, is there a
694 strong seasonality to future global predictability changes? Our study focused primarily on potential
695 skill computed across all months; however, there were some seasonal differences in ENSO
696 predictability changes (Figure 6). Additionally, Maher et al. (2023) showed that ENSO amplitude
697 changes in the LEs analyzed here are stronger in some seasons (typically boreal winter) than others
698 (see their Figure 4). Therefore, it is possible that ENSO's impact on future predictability may be
699 seasonally dependent. Next, what other ENSO-related factors impact future climate predictability?
700 Many studies have shown that ENSO frequency (e.g., Berner et al., 2020), flavor (i.e., central vs
701 eastern Pacific; Capotondi et al., 2015), and asymmetry (i.e., the duration of El Niño versus La
702 Niña events; Maher et al., 2023) may change in the future. Changes to these characteristics may
703 alter ENSO's influence on the rest of the climate system and thereby climate predictability.
704 Additionally, there may be changes in the background mean state (e.g., the strength of the east-
705 west temperature gradient in the equatorial Pacific) that impact the overall climate response to
706 ENSO (Cai et al. 2021). While we did not find a significant relationship between predictability in
707 our forecasts and each LE's time-varying ENSO frequency or flavor preference (not shown), we
708 encourage future studies to investigate these mechanisms in more detail.

Although ENSO is a dominant driver of seasonal forecast skill for much of the globe, there are likely other mechanisms that contribute to the predictability limits of different regions and variables. For example, Shi et al., (2022) showed that long-term shoaling of the mixed layer in the future may reduce the thermal inertia of the ocean, thereby decreasing ocean memory and year-to-year SST persistence, especially in the mid-latitudes. Similarly, Kumar et al., (2023) found that global warming decreases soil moisture memory over North America due to an increase in potential evapotranspiration. In both cases, the reduction in climate memory increases variability at less predictable high frequencies (e.g., weather timescales) while decreasing variability at lower frequencies (e.g., seasonal and longer), thus "whitening" the power spectrum and contributing to a decrease in persistence-related predictability. However, it is still unclear to what extent these changes may be offset by dynamical drivers of predictability change related to ENSO. More research is needed to unpack the dynamic versus thermodynamic contributions to future climate predictability change.

Acknowledgements

We thank Friedrich Burger and Thomas Frölicher for providing us with the GFDL-ESM2M data used in this study. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions that improved the quality of this work. This research was supported in part by the Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award DE230100315 and the NOAA cooperative agreement NA22OAR4320151.

Data Availability Statement

Large ensemble datasets are available as follows:

CESM1-LE: https://www.cesm.ucar.edu/projects/community-projects/MMLEA/

CESM2-LE: https://www.cesm.ucar.edu/projects/community-projects/LENS2/

GFDL-SPEAR: https://www.gfdl.noaa.gov/spear_large_ensembles/

GFDL-ESM2M: Provided by Friedrich Burger and Thomas Frölicher at the University of Bern.

MPI-GE: https://esgf-data.dkrz.de/projects/mpi-ge/

ERSSTv5, COBE, and COBE2 are available at https://psl.noaa.gov/data/gridded/tables/sst.html

HadISST data are available at https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/hadobs/hadisst/data/download.html

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