

The Impact of Anthropogenic Forcing on ENSO Amplitude

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June 3, 2021

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What is El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO)?

- Drives extreme weather around the world
- Oscillation between warm and cold temperature in the Pacific Ocean
- Some events are more strong than others
- Significant effect on people: 2015-2016 event
- Major issue is prediction

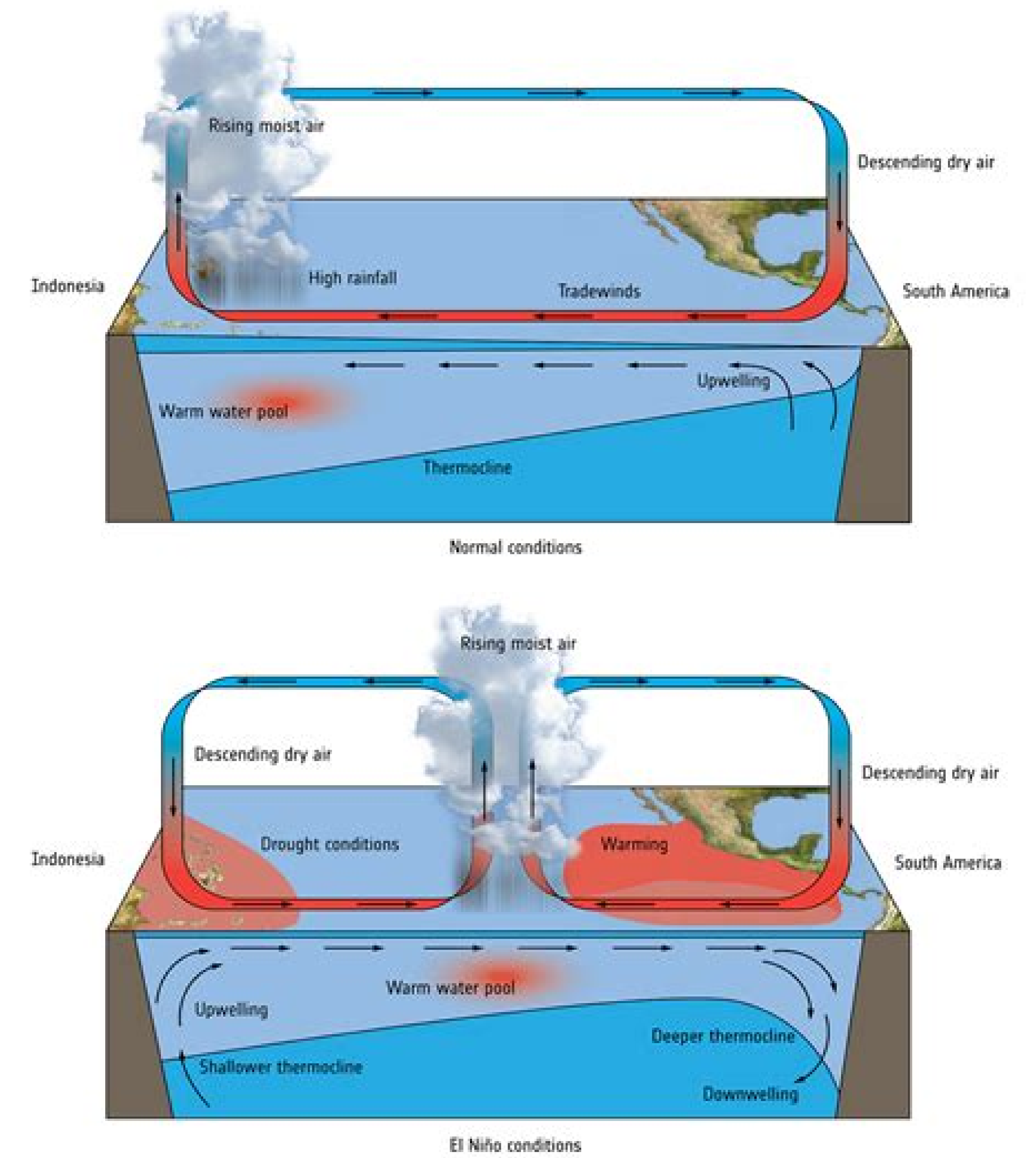


Figure: Changes to tropical Pacific climate during El Niño.
https://www.esa.int/ESA_Multimedia/Images/2018/08/El_Nino

Long-Term vs Short-Term Change

- ▶ Long-term change: climate change/global warming
 - ▶ Causes: greenhouse gasses, aerosols (smoke), land use, etc.
- ▶ Short-term change: climate variability
 - ▶ ENSO, seasons, AMO (Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation), etc.

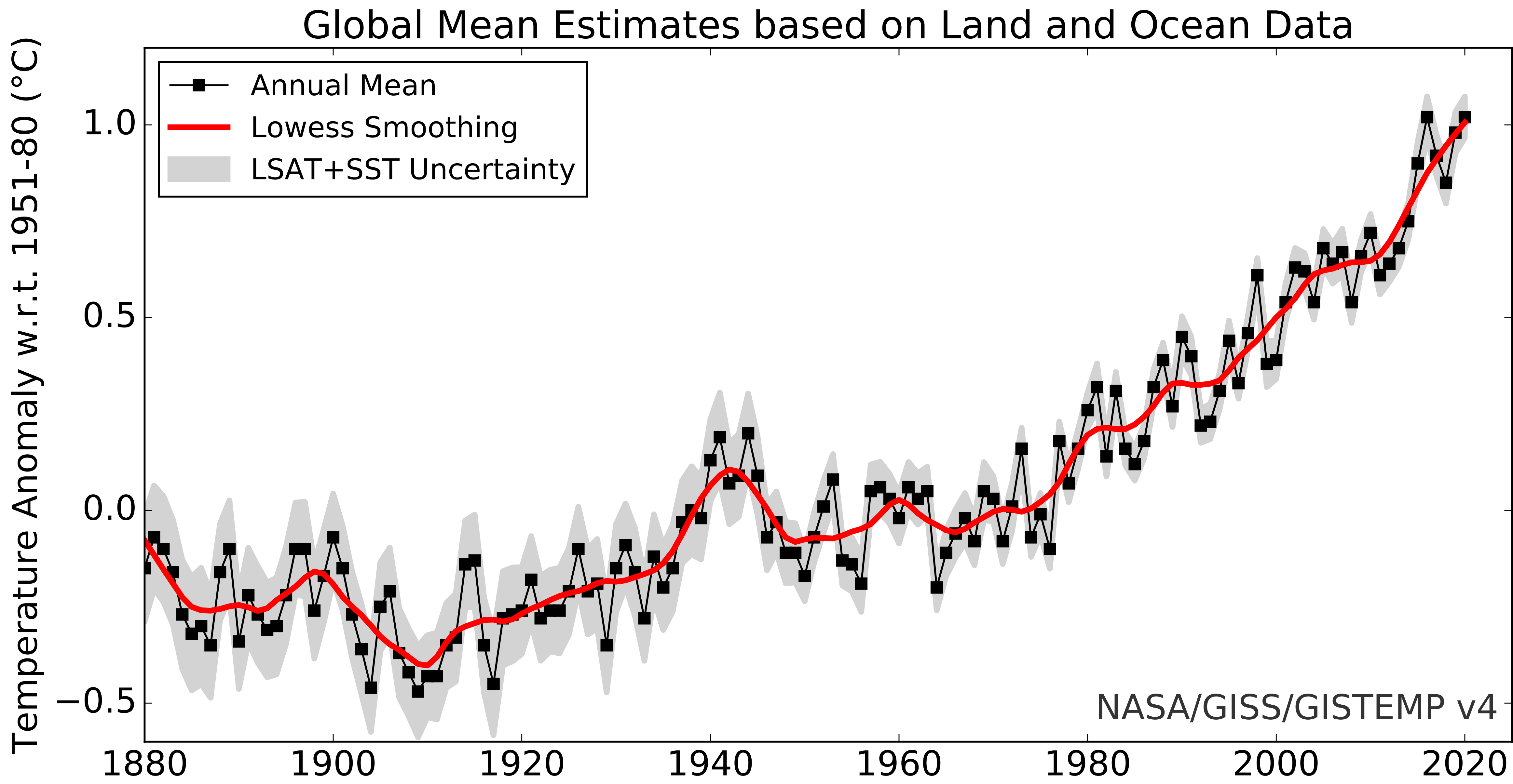


Figure: Global average temperature changes since 1880. Red line: smoothed average, black line: unsmoothed average. https://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs_v4

Review of literature

- ▶ Chen et al. (2017)
 - ▶ Past studies disagree about whether ENSO will strengthen or weaken.
 - ▶ Simulation discrepancy caused by modeling of ENSO mechanics.
- ▶ Maher et al. (2018)
 - ▶ Used a large dataset of climate predictions.
 - ▶ ENSO may become stronger in the future.
- ▶ Cai et al. (2018)
 - ▶ Found that models agree by using a more flexible way of defining ENSO events
 - ▶ ENSO is strengthening because global warming is leading to higher stratification.

Research Goals

- ▶ Overall changes to ENSO amplitude
 - ▶ Estimate future changes to ENSO amplitude using the CESM1 dataset.
- ▶ Role of individual factors
 - ▶ Compare contributions of greenhouse gasses, aerosols, land use, biomass burning, and ozone to ENSO intensity.
- ▶ Changes to ocean structure
 - ▶ Examine changes to correlation coefficient between ENSO intensity and ocean temperature for each simulation.

Data: the CESM1 Large Ensemble

- ▶ Explore hypothetical scenarios with a computer model Kay et al. (2015).
- ▶ Estimation of how the earth's climate actually works.
- ▶ Experimental group: Receives input of rising greenhouse gas and/or aerosol levels.
- ▶ Control group: Emissions fixed at levels before industrial revolution.

Niño 3.4 Variance

- ▶ How to calculate ENSO intensity in the model output?
- ▶ Step 1: Calculate sea temperature in Niño 3.4 region of tropical Pacific Ocean.
- ▶ Step 2: Convert temperature dataset to dataset representing change in temperature variation over time.
- ▶ Calculate variance around one point, move point forward slightly, repeat.

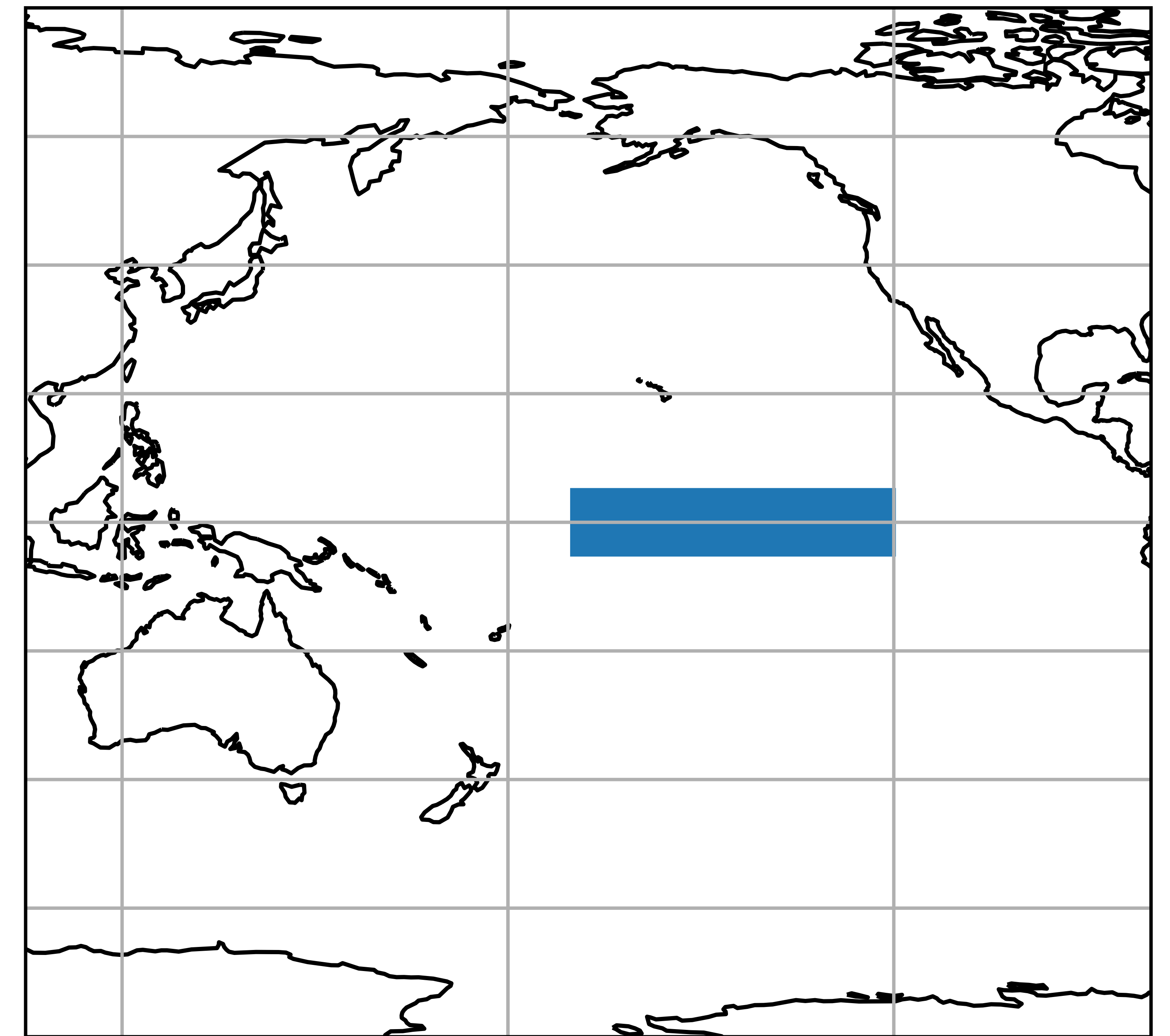


Figure: Nino 3.4 region is the shaded box.

Butterfly Effect: The Need for a Large Ensemble

- ▶ Butterfly effect: Small differences in initial conditions can become big differences in end result (Lorenz, 1963).
- ▶ Each simulation by itself is inaccurate.
- ▶ Repeat simulation with slightly different initial conditions.
- ▶ Due to larger sample size, noise can be filtered out by calculating the mean.

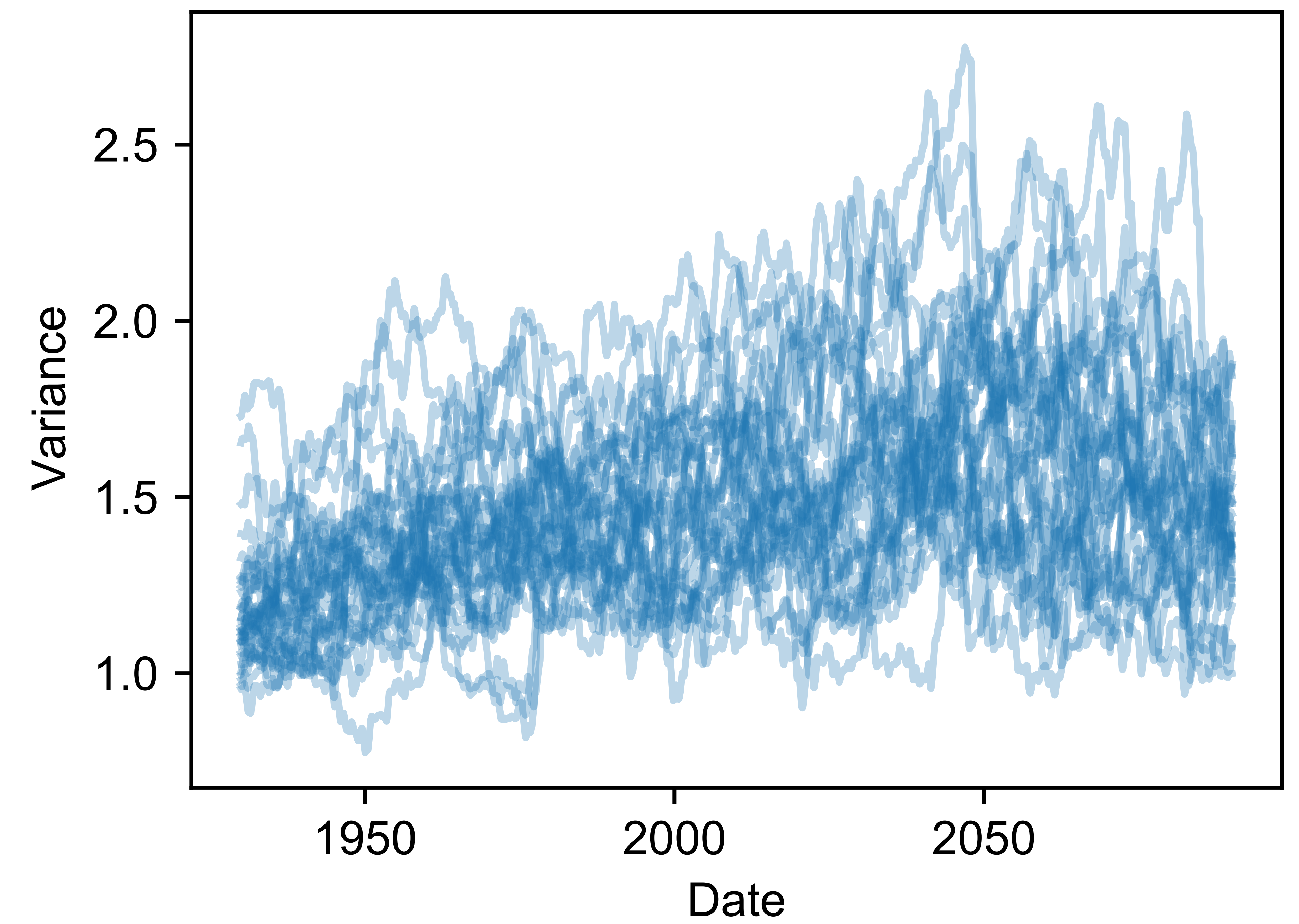


Figure: Nino 3.4 20-year variance for individual members in full forcing ensemble.

Model Predictions: ENSO in the Future

- ▶ Calculate mean and standard error of ENSO intensity in ensemble and control.
- ▶ ENSO is predicted to intensify in the 21st century!
- ▶ Statistically significant: exceeds 2 standard errors.
- ▶ Decreasing variance after 2060: still under investigation.

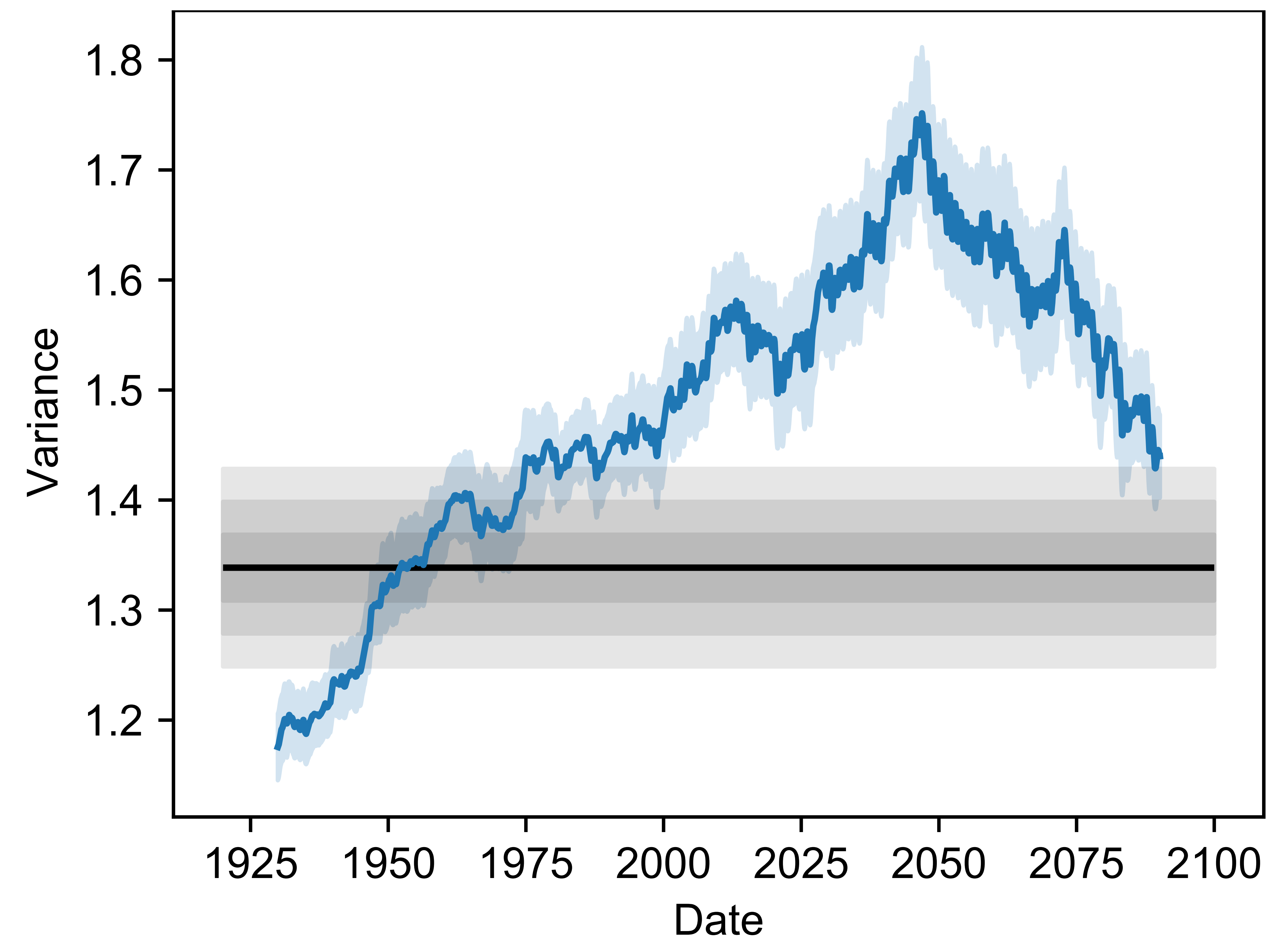


Figure: 20-year variance of Niño 3.4 index for fully-forced ensemble. Grey bar shows control mean and standard errors

Analysis of Individual Factors

- ▶ Why is ENSO predicted to intensify? What human impacts play the largest role?
 - ▶ Factors include: Greenhouse gasses, aerosols, natural factors.
- ▶ Separate out individual influences in model output.
- ▶ Single forcing ensembles: forced by all factors except for 1.
- ▶ Subtract “all-but-one” ensembles from original “full-forcing” ensemble.
- ▶ Resulting data represents influence of only one factor.

Role of Greenhouse and Aerosol Emissions

- ▶ Greenhouse gasses and aerosols contribute to increase in variance.
- ▶ Aerosols and greenhouse gasses have same sign: disagree with previous studies (Deser et al., 2020).
- ▶ Greenhouse gasses and aerosols are both human-produced.

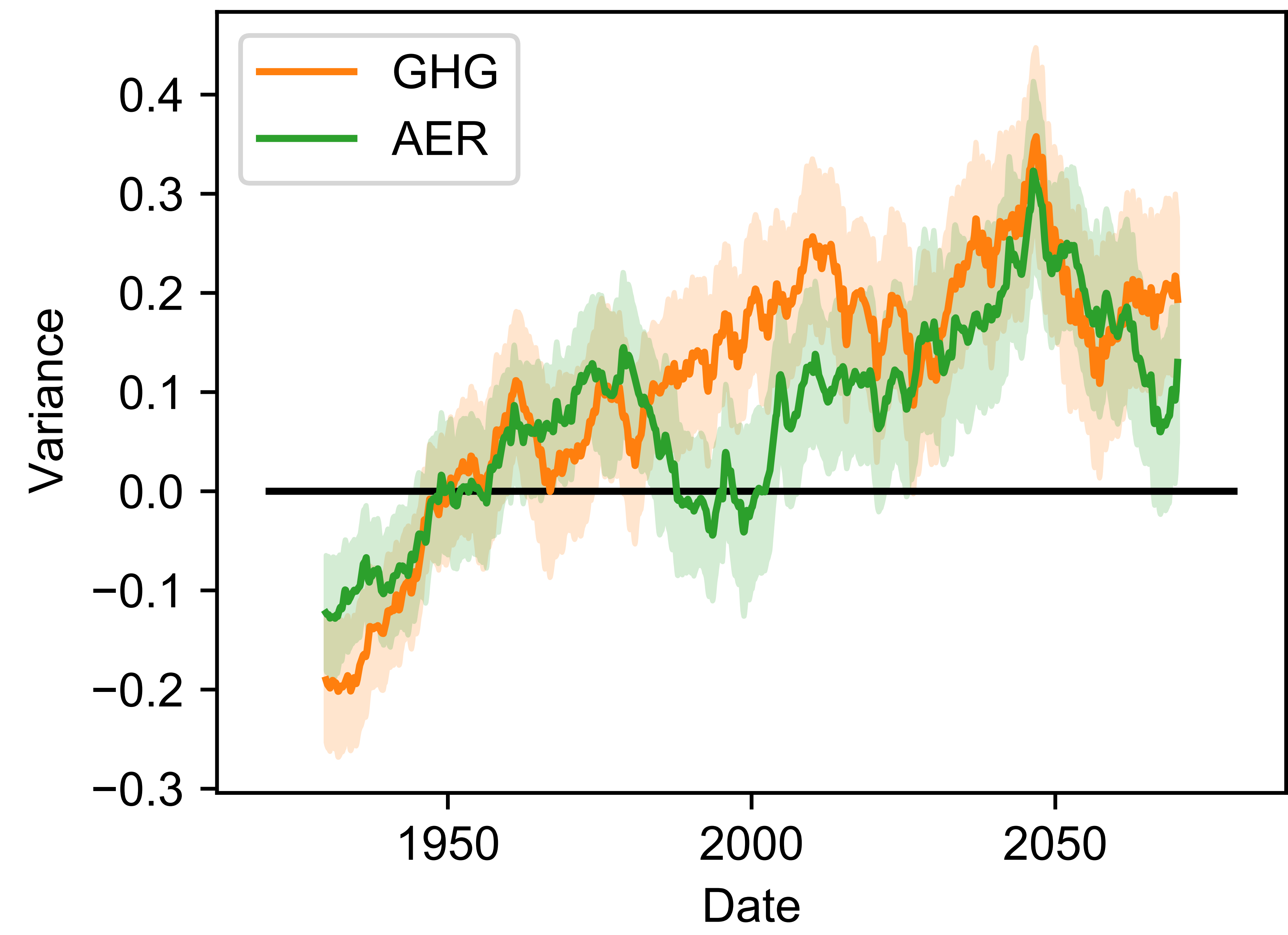


Figure: Influence of individual human factors. Yellow is greenhouse gasses, green is aerosols.

Correlation With Changes in Ocean Temperature

- ▶ Examine relationship between ocean temperature and ENSO intensity in each simulation.
- ▶ Calculate correlation coefficient between ENSO intensity and ocean temperature.
- ▶ Find correlation coefficient at each grid-point.

Physical Mediator: Heating Difference

- ▶ Strong negative correlation in fully forced ensemble below surface.
- ▶ Positive correlation in greenhouse ensemble and weak/zero correlation in aerosols ensemble
- ▶ Rising temperatures heat different layers of ocean at different rates, modifying heat transfer.

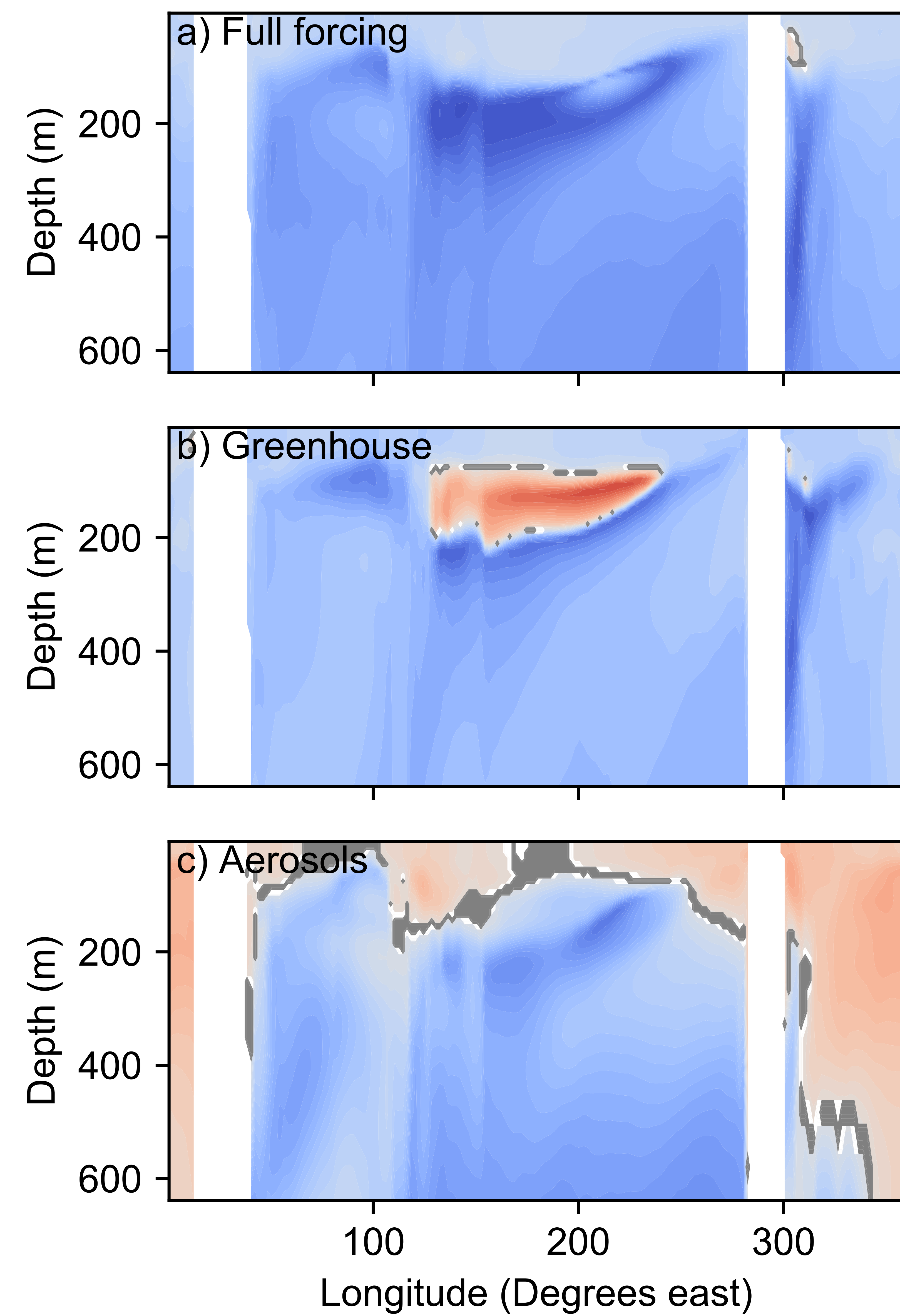


Figure: Correlation between ENSO intensity and ocean temperature in 3 major ensemble

Conclusion and Discussion

- ▶ Predicted increase in variance
 - ▶ There is likely to be an increase in ENSO strength over the next 100 years. Agrees with Cai et al. (2018).
- ▶ Greenhouse gasses and aerosols
 - ▶ Increase is likely caused by the combined influence of greenhouse gasses and aerosols.
- ▶ Heat transfer
 - ▶ Global warming increases ENSO intensity by warming upper layers of the Pacific faster than central layers.
- ▶ Notable disagreement
 - ▶ Greenhouse gasses and aerosols both increase ENSO amplitude, in contrast to Deser et al. (2020)

- ▶ Improve prediction ability to help people prepare for increased likelihood of extreme weather.
- ▶ Reduce danger by switching to renewable energy.
- ▶ Limitations:
 - ▶ Only used one climate model.
 - ▶ Niño 3.4 index may not be fully accurate for various models (Cai et. al. 2018).
- ▶ Next steps:
 - ▶ Work with other datasets, such as the new CESM2.
 - ▶ Examine other variables to further analyze mediator process.

Acknowledgements

- ▶ This material is based upon work supported by the National Center for Atmospheric Research, which is a major facility sponsored by the National Science Foundation under Cooperative Agreement No. 1852977.
- ▶ Thank you to my teacher, my family, and my mentor!
- ▶ Role of mentor:
 - ▶ Provide raw data from his facility
 - ▶ Suggest methods and interpretations
 - ▶ Provide feedback on results
 - ▶ Make similar calculations to check student's results

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