

Detection and Explanation of Shifts in the Climatic Controls of Norwegian Glaciers

An Empirical-Statistical Approach

by **Syed Danish Ali**

MSc Marine Environment & Resources

Supervised by Dr. habil. Sebastian G. Mutz

School of Geographical & Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow

01 Introduction

Background

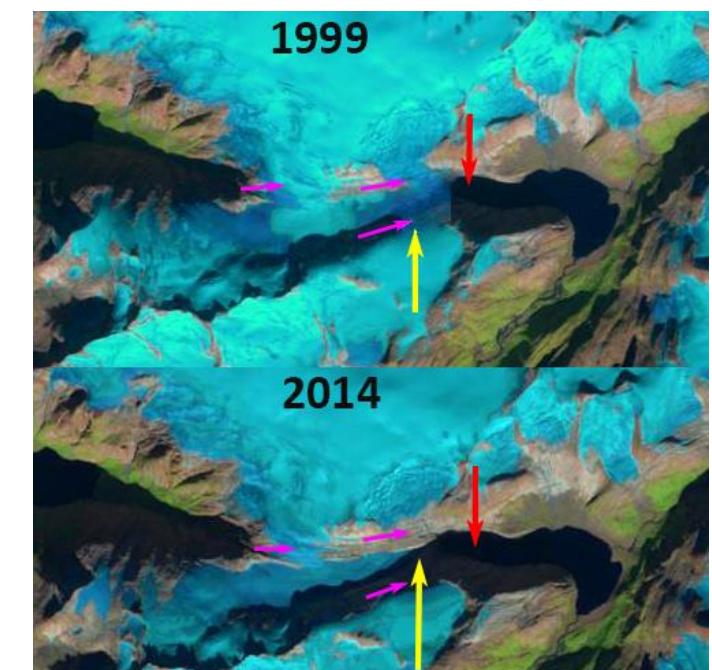
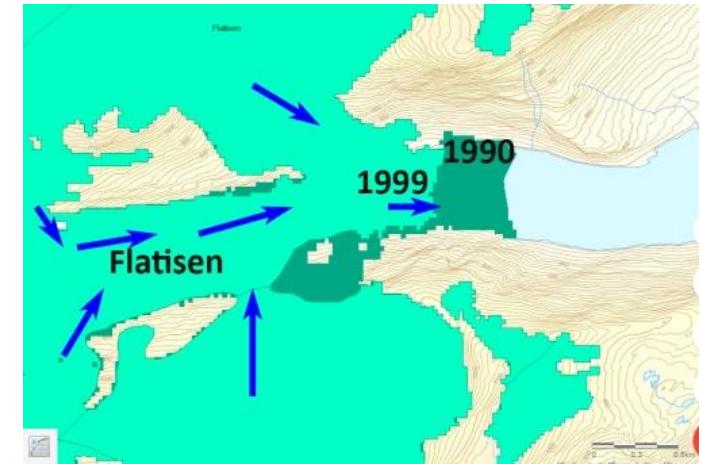
- Norway— largest share of ice-covered land in mainland Europe.
[1]
- Glaciers occupy $\sim 0.8\text{--}0.9\%$ (mainland Norway) $\approx 2,692 \pm 81\text{ km}^2$ ($\pm 3\%$ uncertainty). [2, 3]
- 2,534 glaciers have been identified in the latest inventories. [3]
- Proportionately high glacier coverage than rest of Europe. [4, 5]
- Substantial economic potential: hydroelectric power generation $\sim 92\%$ of the total power production in April 2025. [6]



Austdalsbreen on 31 August 2023.
Picture source: Hallgeir Elvehøy

Impacts of Glacier Mass Loss

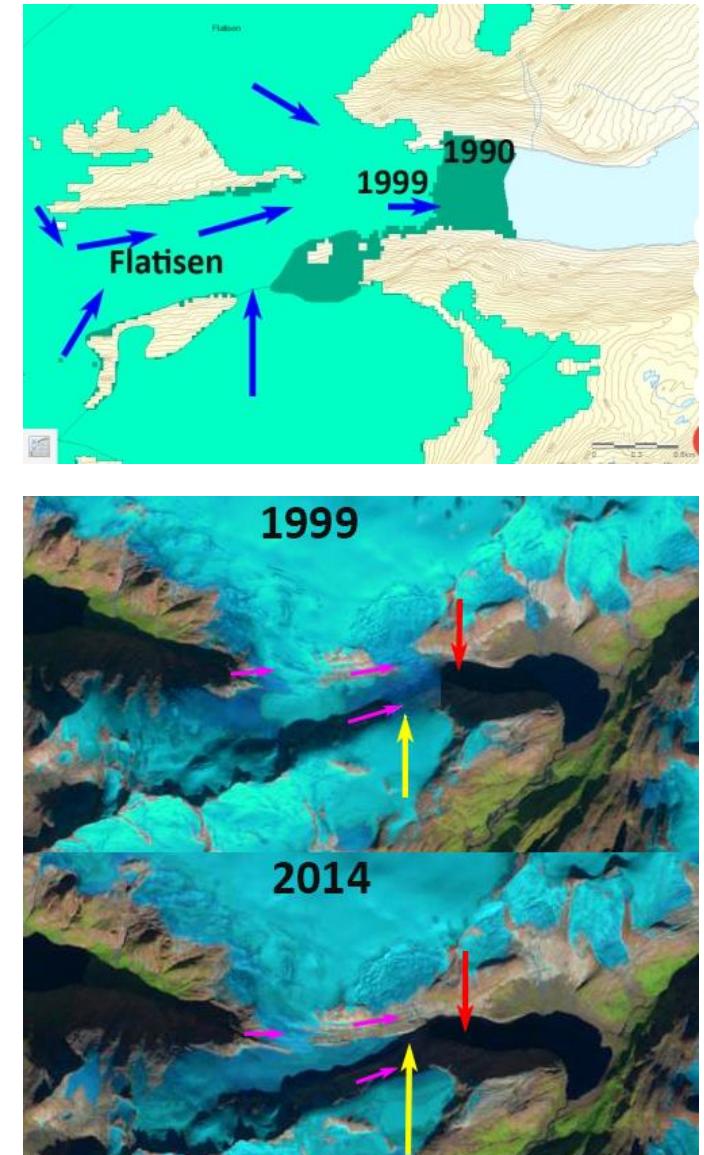
- 27 ± 22 mm global mean sea-level rise (1961–2016). Glaciers in Scandinavia contributed to SLR by $+0.47 \pm 0.23$ m w.e. [7]
- Severe consequences for river runoff, water temperature, sediment transport regimes, etc. [8]



Flatsisen Glacier, Norway (1999 vs 2014)
Figure credits: Prof. Mauri Pelto

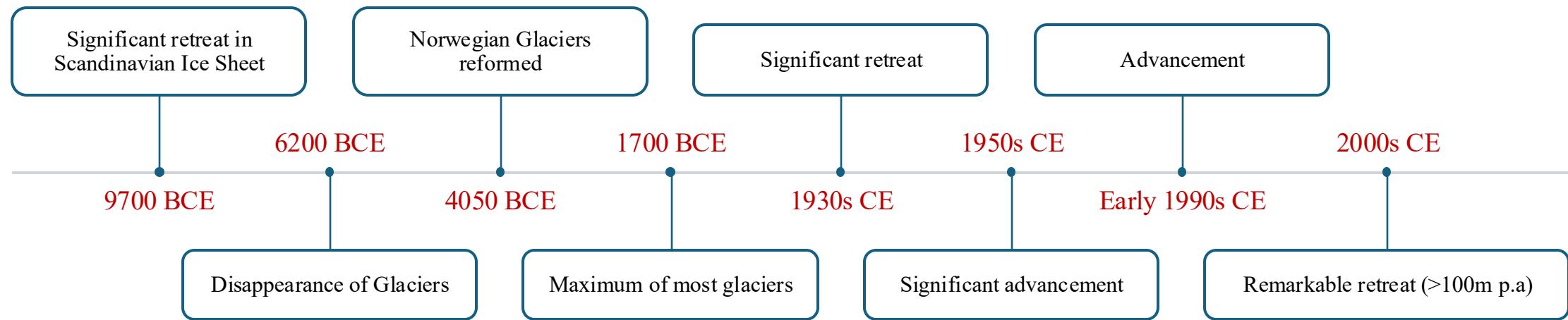
Impacts of Glacier Mass Loss

- 27 ± 22 mm global mean sea-level rise (1961–2016). Glaciers in Scandinavia contributed to SLR by $+0.47 \pm 0.23$ m w.e. [7]
- Severe consequences for river runoff, water temperature, sediment transport regimes, etc. [8]
- Sudden outburst floods (jökulhlaups) due to destabilization of ice or glacio-fluvially dammed water bodies. Example: Søndre Folgefonna in 2002 & at Flatbreen in Fjærland in 2004. [8]
- Meltwater can be a potential source of anthropogenic contaminants like POPs, black carbon, trace elements, etc. [8, 9, 10]



Flatisen Glacier, Norway (1999 vs 2014)
Figure credits: Prof. Mauri Pelto

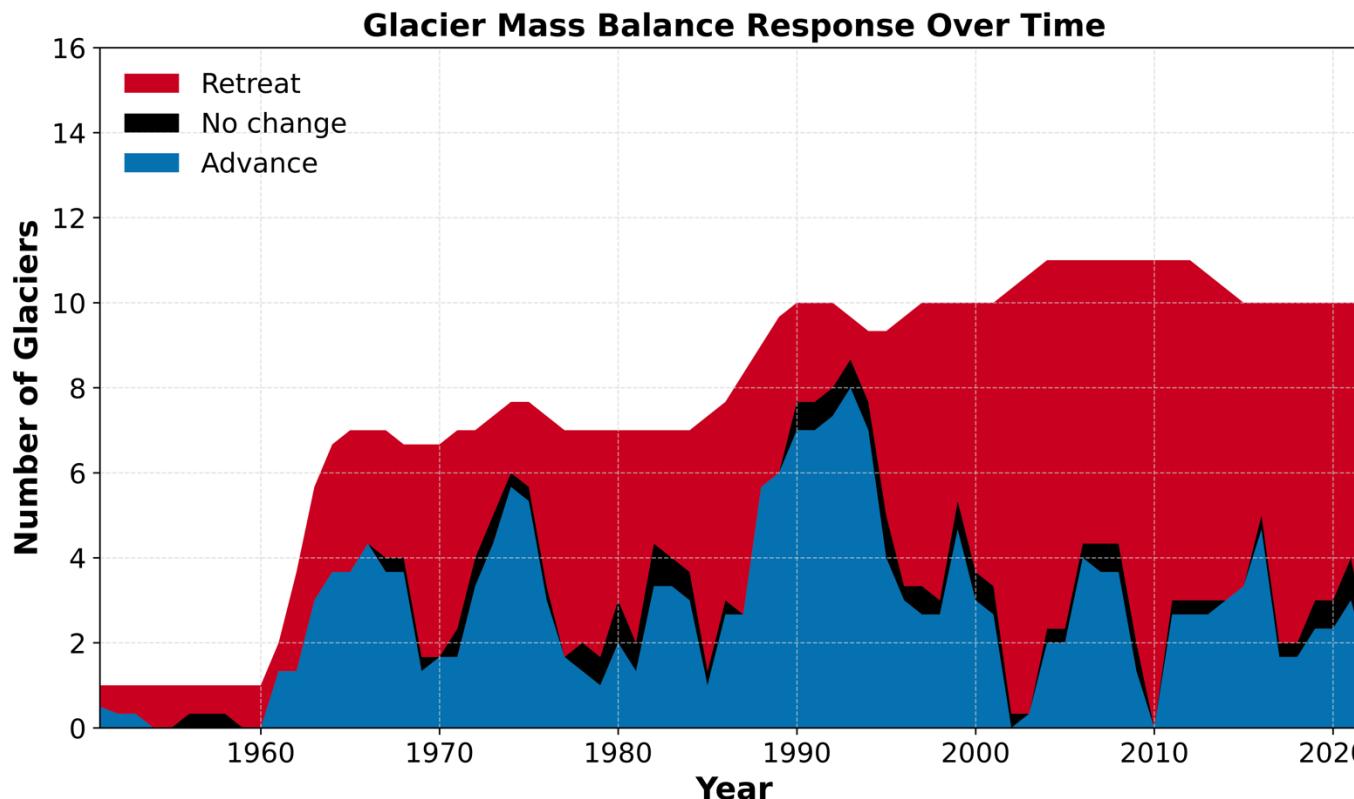
Historical Context



- A ‘regime shift’ has been reported; all Norwegian glaciers exhibiting remarkable mass-balance deficits.^[11, 12]
- This shift—most negative mass balance period on record due to accelerated retreat rates, driven by increased summer temperatures. ^[13]

Hypothesis

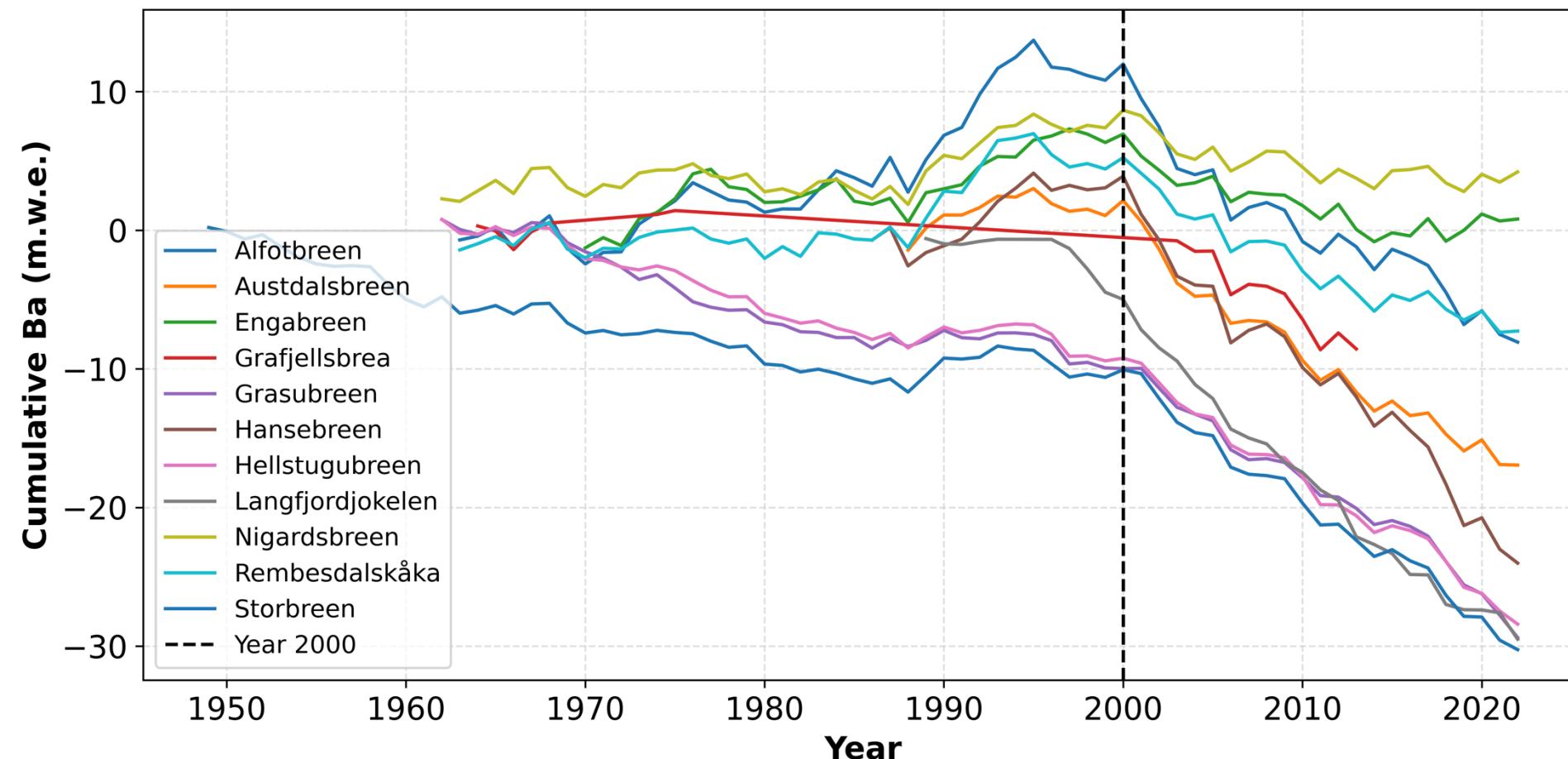
A Regime Shift in the Climatic Controls on Norwegian Glaciers in 2000...?



- Stacked area plot showing the response of Norwegian glaciers between 1950 and 2023.
- Glaciers are categorized as:
 - Advance (blue): $ba > +0.05$ m w.e.
 - No change (black): $-0.05 \leq ba \leq +0.05$ m w.e.
 - Retreat (red): $ba < -0.05$ m w.e.
- Distinct advance phases in the early 1960s, 1970s, and early 1990s.
- Periods of dominant retreat are visible post 2000.

Hypothesis

A Regime Shift in the Climatic Controls on Norwegian Glaciers in 2000...?



Aims

1

Detect & explain regime shifts in glacier–climate relationships (pre-2000 vs post-2000).

&

2

Develop an empirical-statistical model framework for glacier mass balance.

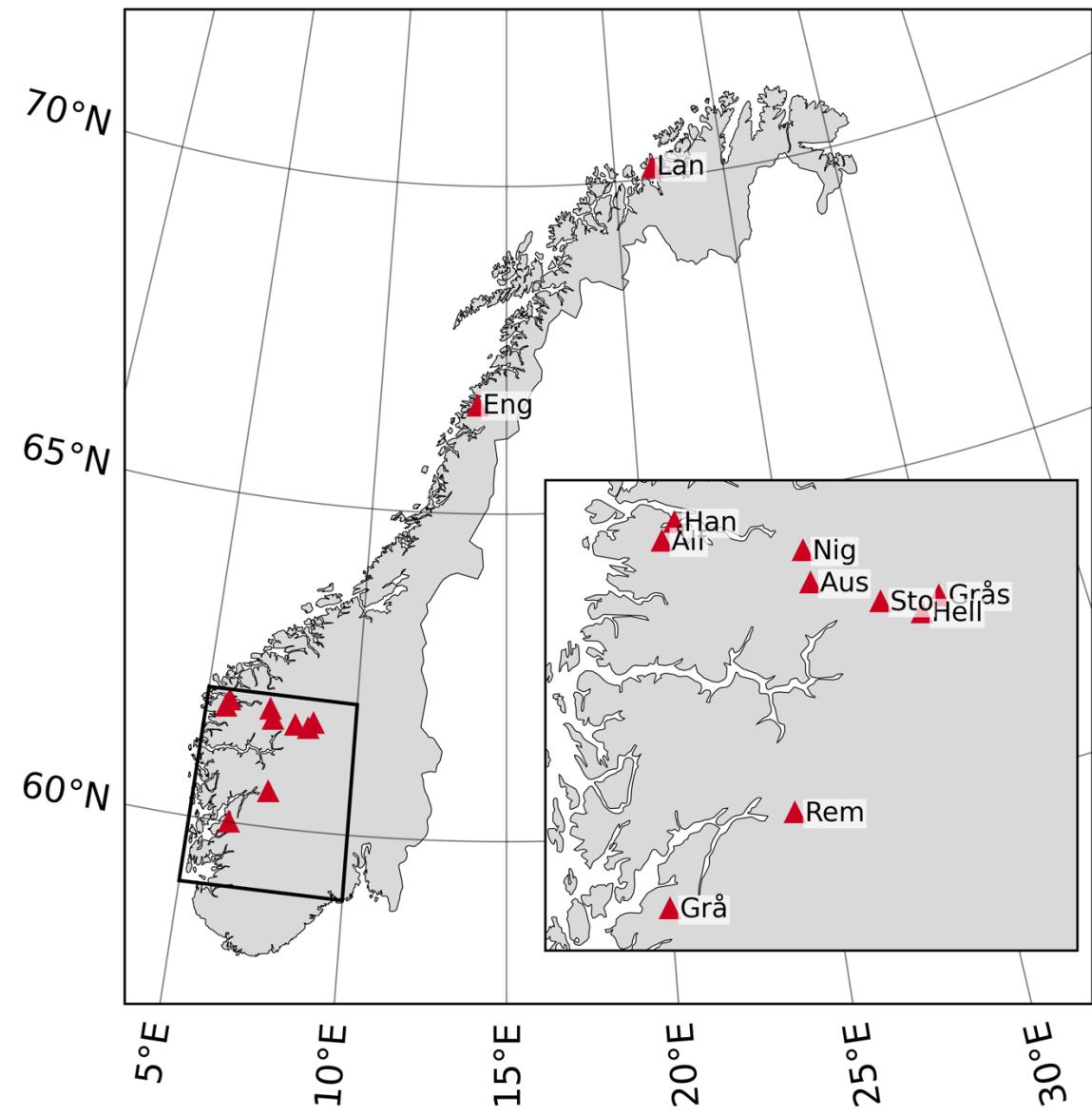
02

Methodology

Study Sites

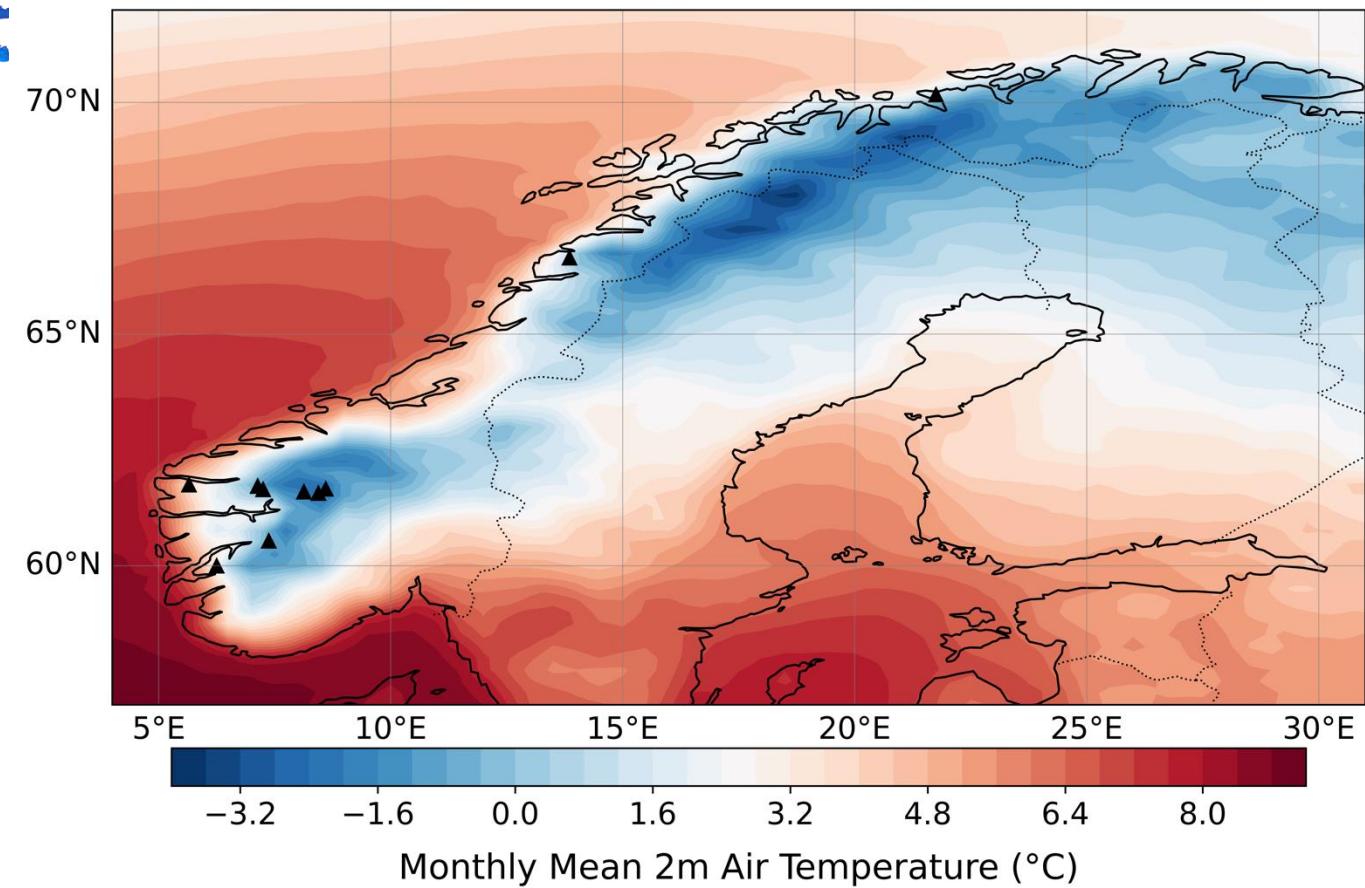
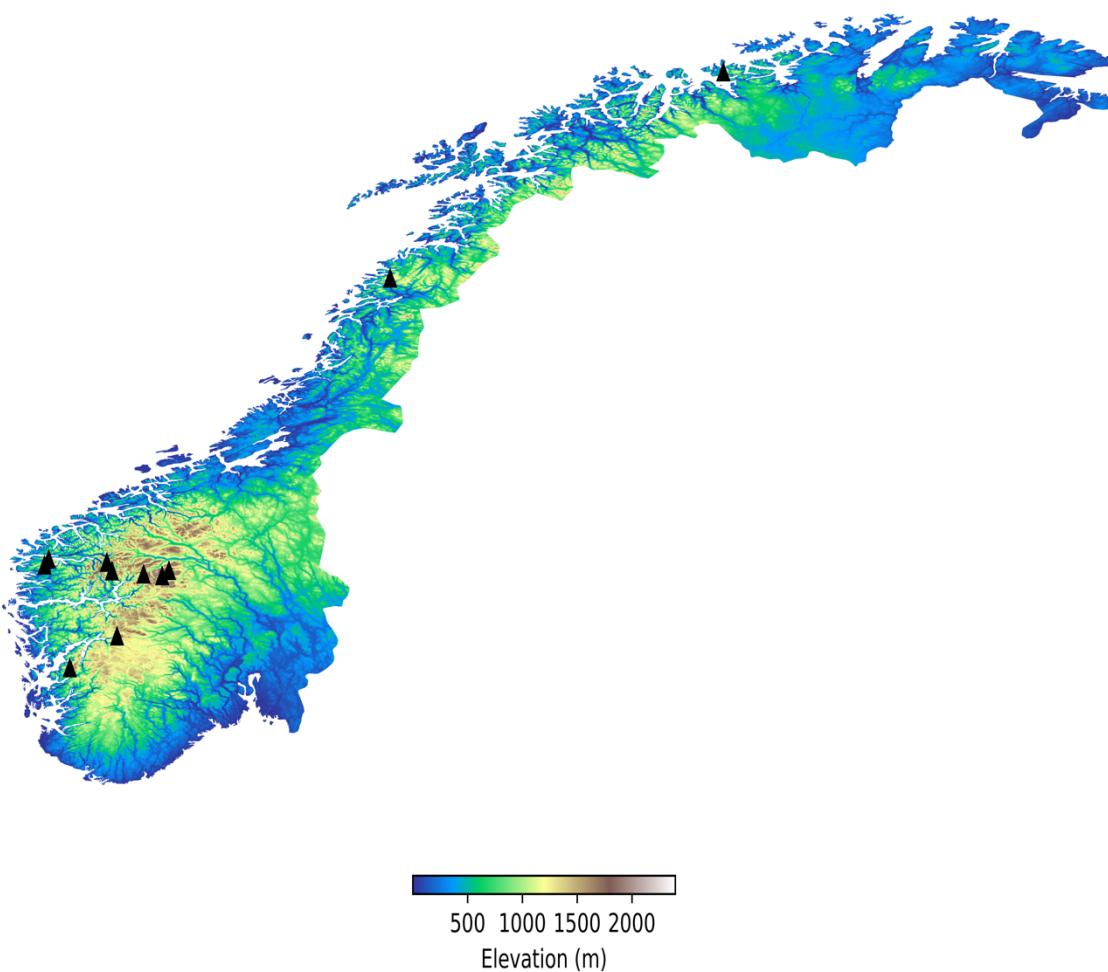
- Ålf- Ålfotbreen (*S*)
- Aus- Austdalsbreen (*S*)
- Eng- Engabreen (*N*)
- Gråf- Gråfjellsbrea (*S*)
- Grås- Gråsubreen (*S*)
- Han- Hansebreen (*S*)
- Hell- Hellstugubreen (*S*)
- Lan- Langfjordjøkelen (*N*)
- Nig- Nigardsbreen (*S*)
- Rem- Rembesdalskåka (*S*)
- Sto- Storbreen (*S*)

N- North, S- South



Climatic Context

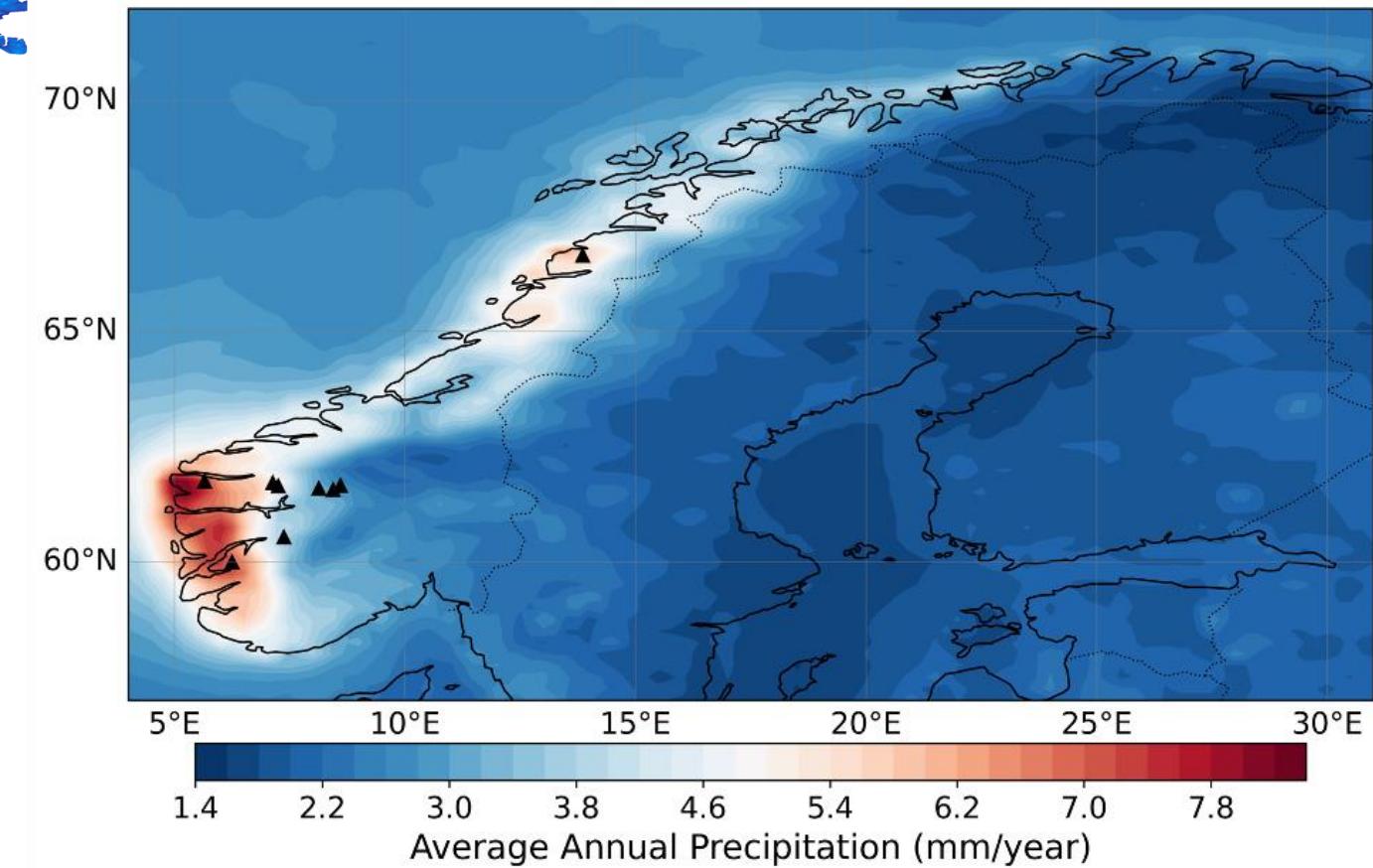
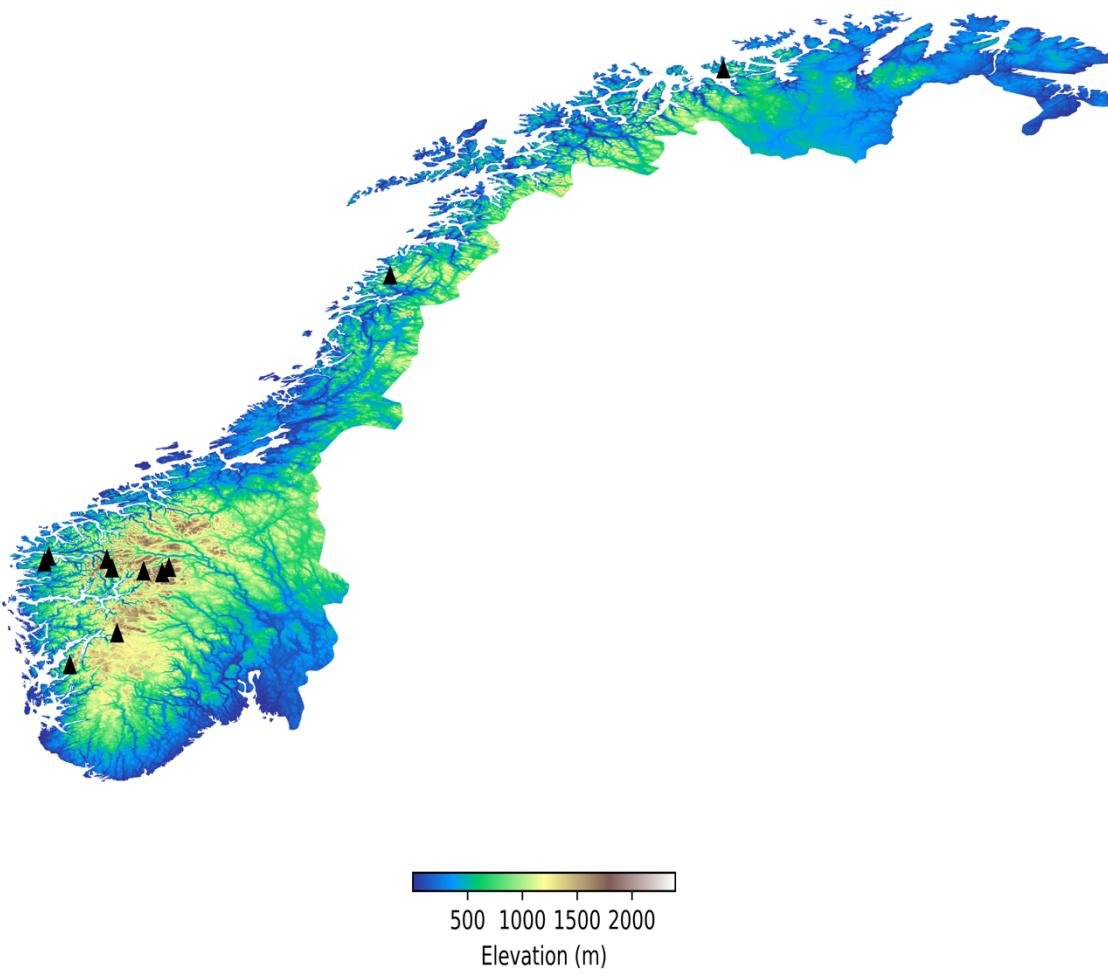
12



Data Source: ECMWF

Climatic Context

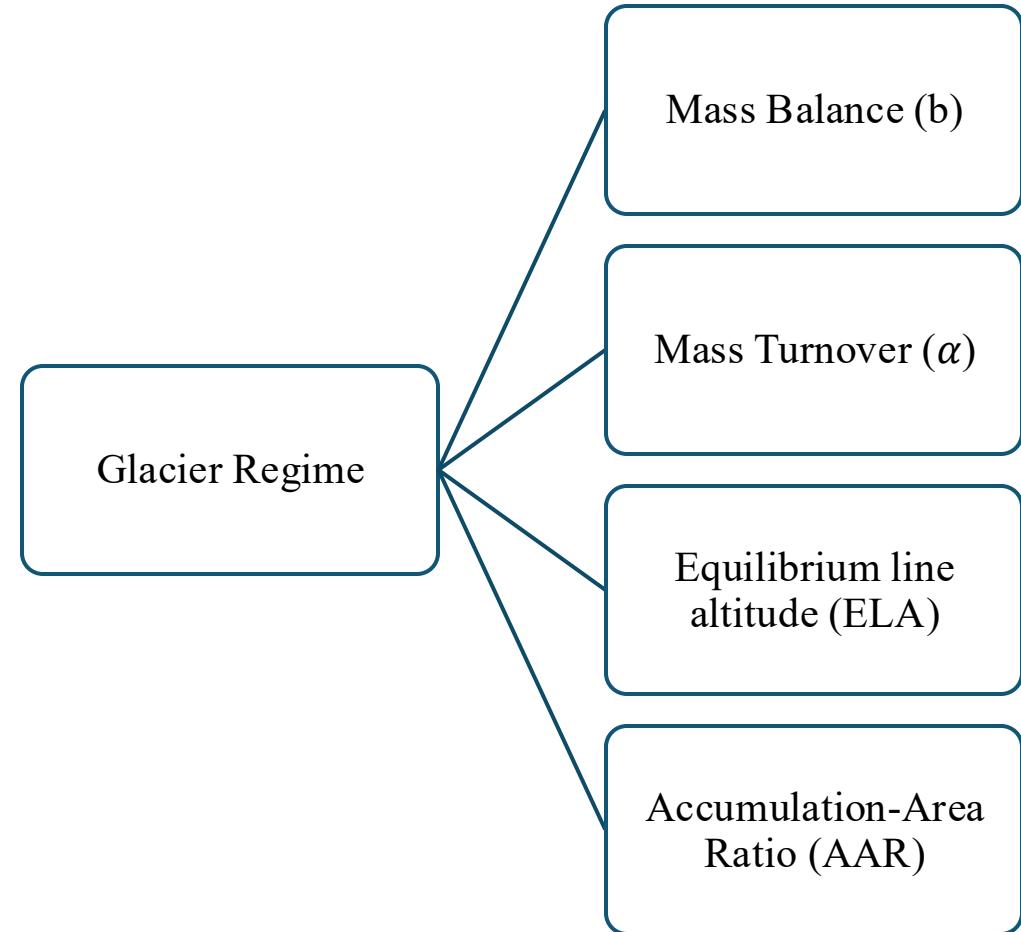
13



Data Source: ECMWF

Mass Balance ‘Regime’

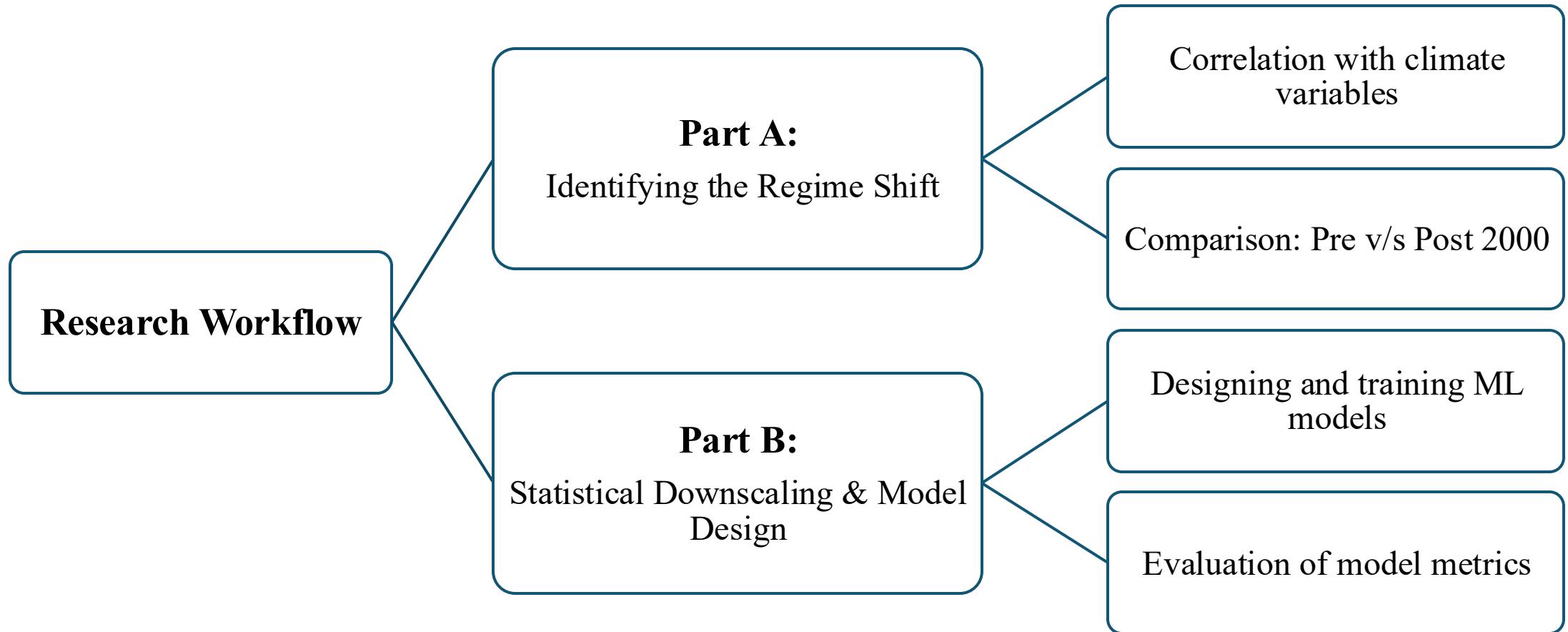
- Mass balance measurements comprise of accumulated snow (winter balance: bw) and measurements of snow and ice removed by ablation (summer balance: bs). [2, 14]
- The net balance: $ba = bw + bs$
- Generally, $bs < 0$ and $bw > 0$
➤ $ba > 0$ if $bw > bs$
- Unit used: metres water equivalent (m w.e.)
- Glacier loss of 0.5 m w.e. = ice loss equivalent to loss of 50 cm thick sheet of water spread evenly across its surface.



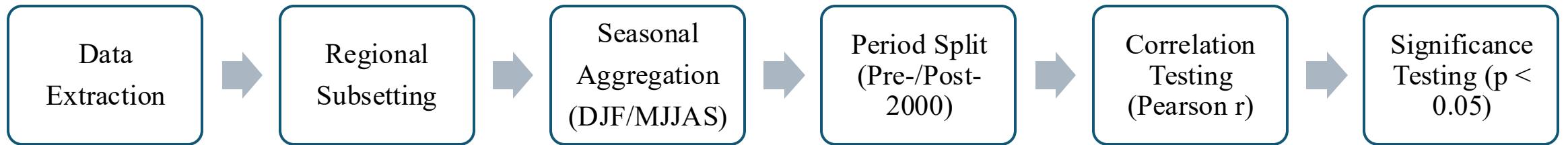
Classification from: M. Dyurgerov (2003)

Methodology Overview

15



Overview: Part A



Key Climate Drivers: chosen based on known physical relevance to glacier mass balance dynamics:

- 2m Air Temperature ($t2m$)
- Total Precipitation (tp)
- 10m Wind Components ($u10, v10$)
- Surface Solar Radiation Downwelling ($ssrd$)
- Large-scale Teleconnections:
 - North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO)
 - Arctic Oscillation (AO)

Analysis Design: correlated climate variables with mass balance components (B_w, B_s, B_a) over two distinct periods:

- Pre-2000 (historical/regime-1)
- Post-2000 (recent/regime-2)

Overview: Part B

17

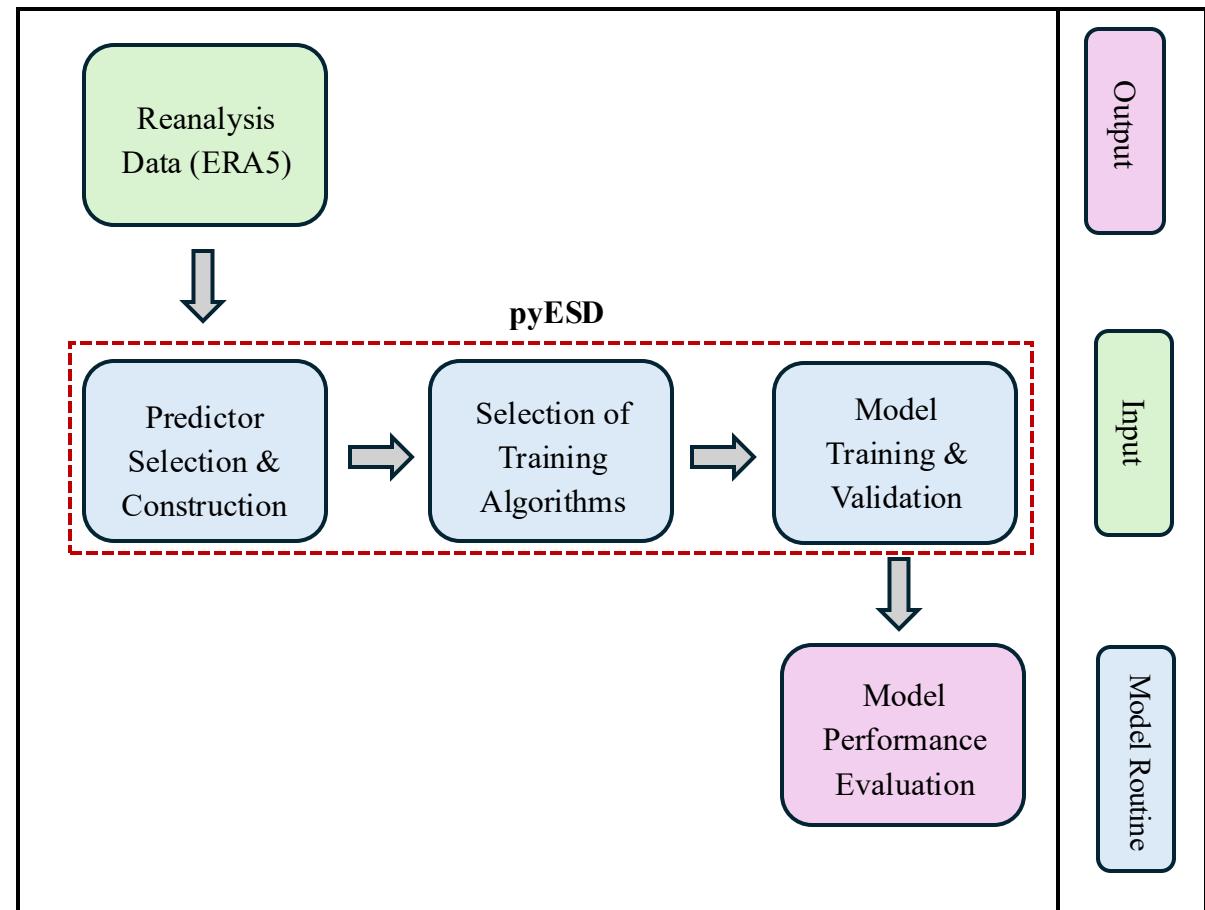
Objective: Develop an empirical-statistical model framework to predict individual mass balance components (B_w , B_s , B_a).

Model Setup:

- Regressors (6):
 - RidgeCV, Bagging, ARD, Random Forest, XGBoost, & Bayesian Ridge.
 - Feature Selectors (3):
 - Recursive, Tree-Based, Sequential.

Evaluation Metrics:

- R^2 & RMSE used to assess prediction skill across glaciers and models.

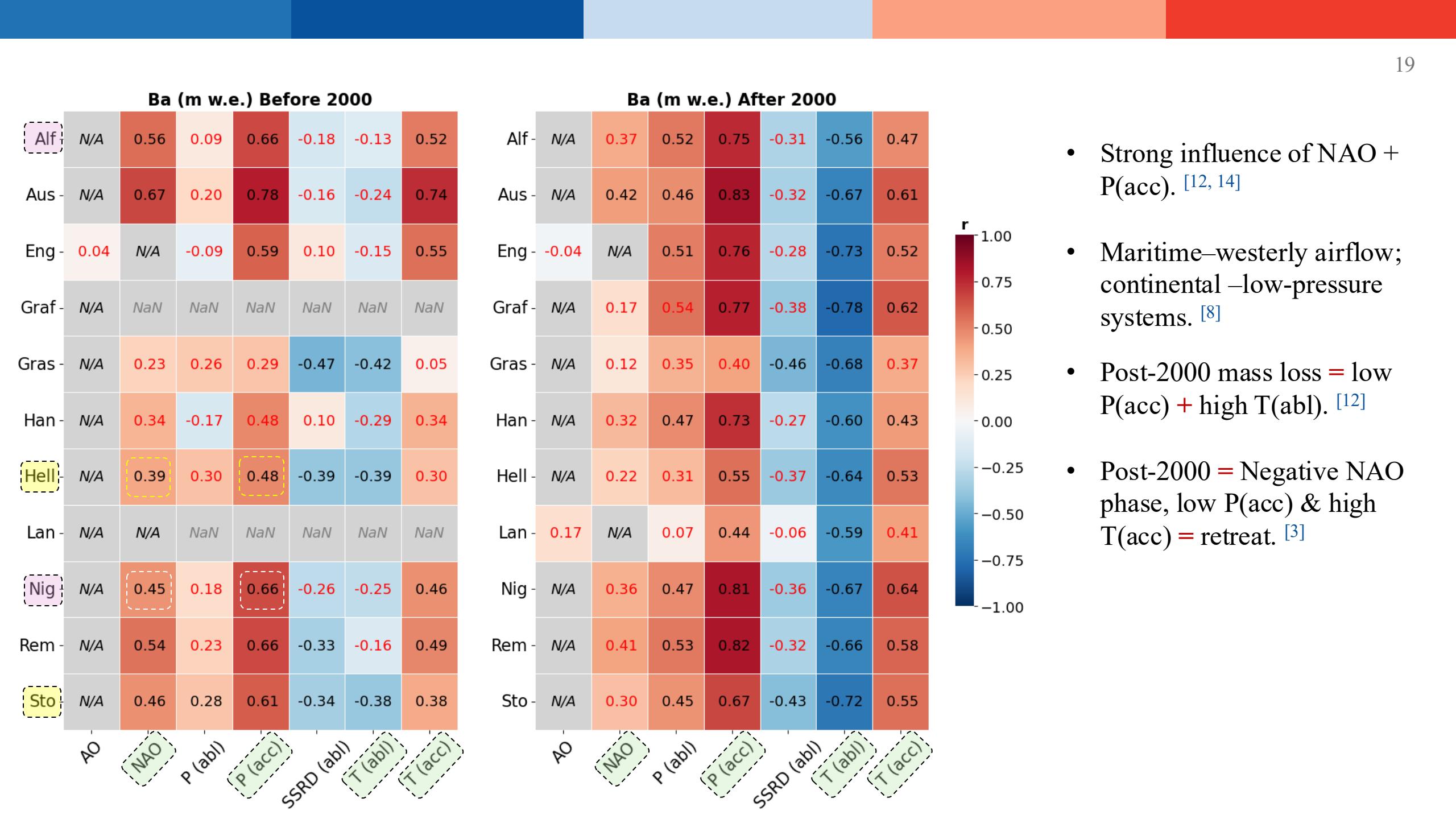


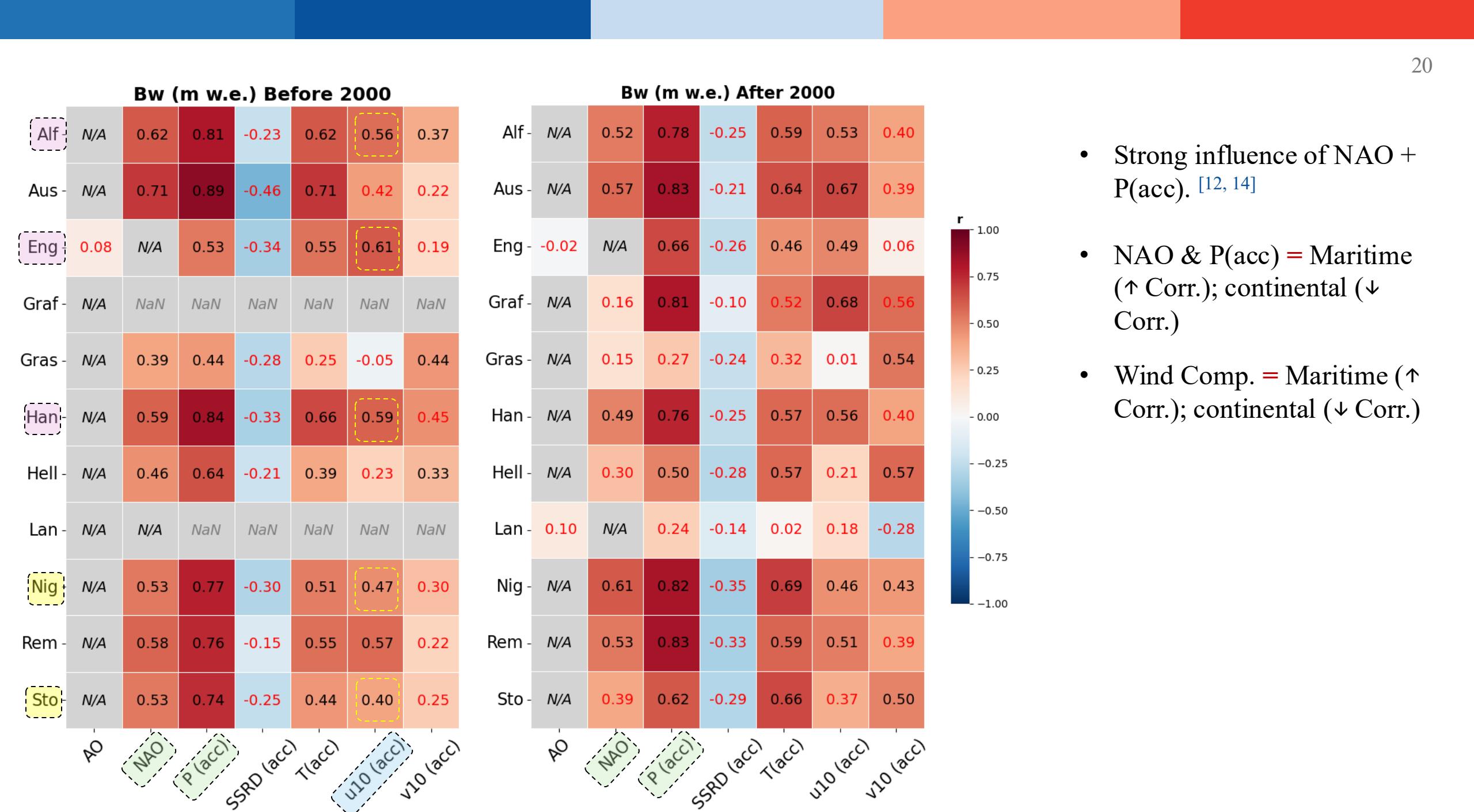


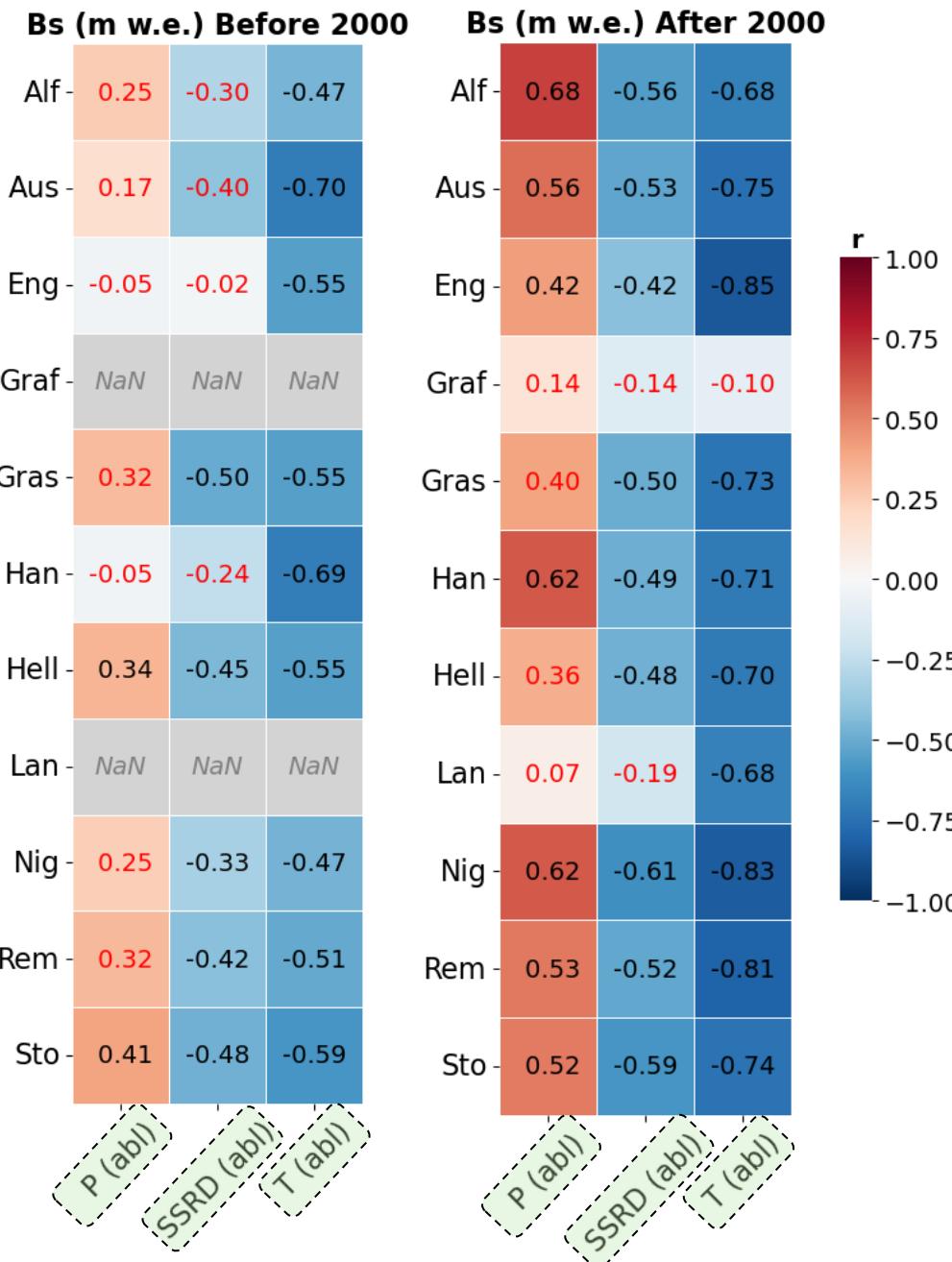
03

Results & Discussion

A. Glacier–Climate Correlation Analysis

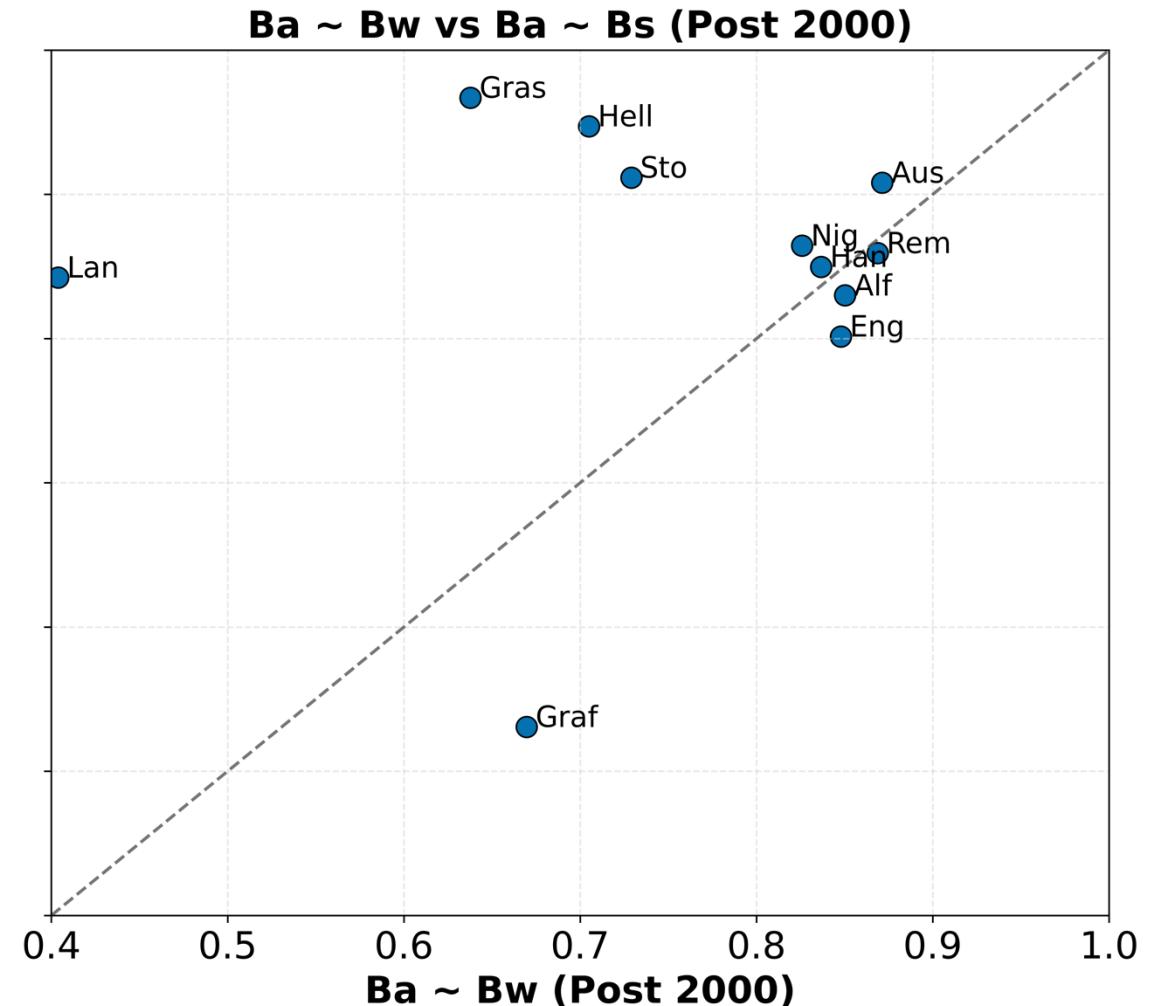
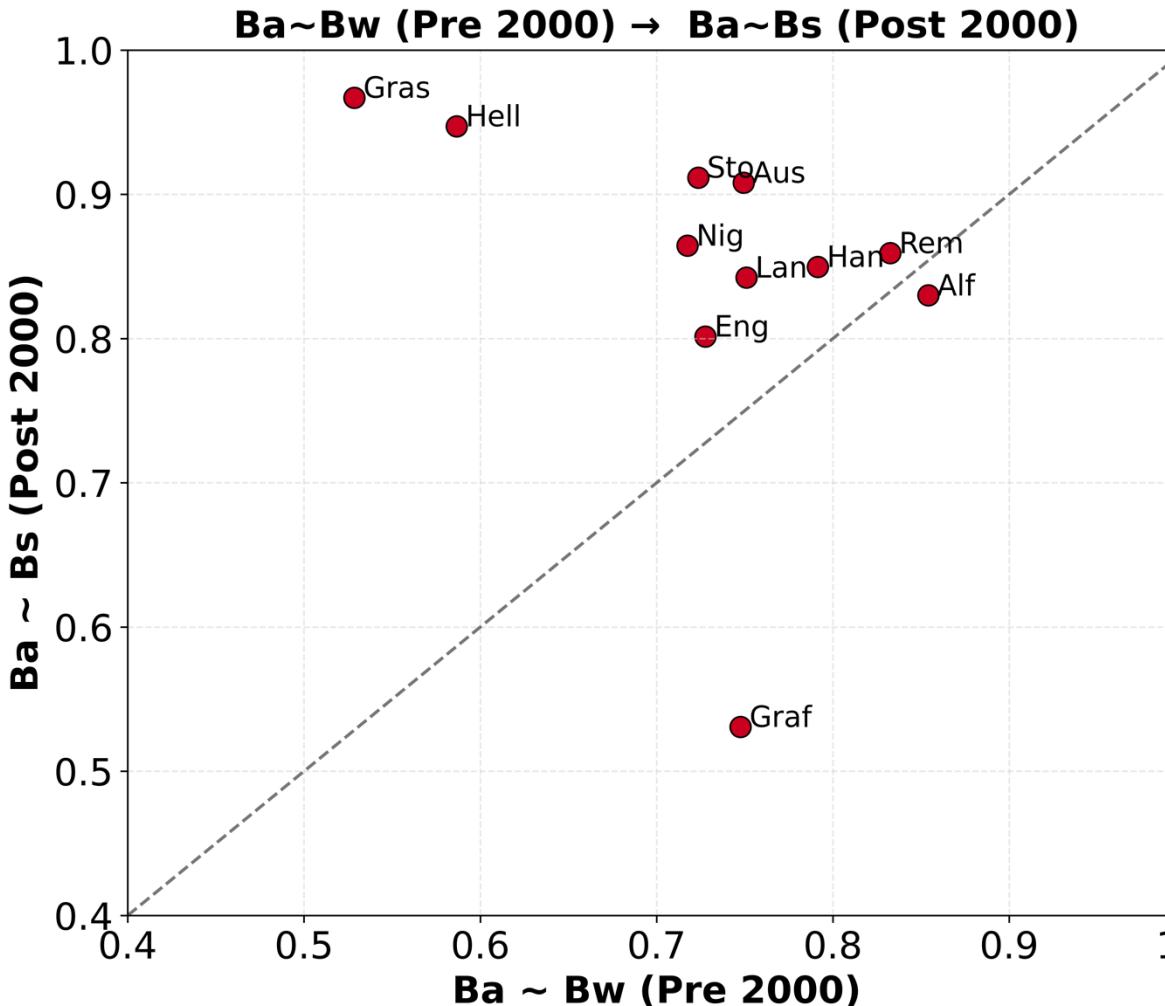






- Post-2000 = T(abl) (\uparrow Corr.)
- Post-2000 = P(abl) (\uparrow Corr.) \rightarrow Precipitation \neq Snowfall [3]
- Post-2000 = Surface Solar Radiation Downwelling (\uparrow Corr.)

Shift in Glacier–Climate Control





03

Results & Discussion

B. Model Metrics

Model Metrics

- **Prediction Errors (RMSE) Ranking:** $bw < ba < bs$
- **Predictive Skill (R^2) Ranking:** $ba > bw > bs$
- **Spatial gradient:** maritime glaciers (\downarrow RMSE) & continental glaciers (\uparrow RMSE). [8, 12]
- **Model Performance:** Linear (\uparrow median R^2) \geq non-linear models (\downarrow median R^2)
- **Dataset Size:** Longer records (>15 years) \rightarrow lower RMSE values \rightarrow better predictive skill. [16]
- **This study (Norway):** ba models (mean): $R^2 \approx 0.55$; RMSE ≈ 0.64 m w.e., comparable to reported values. (e.g., $ba R^2$ from 0.82 at Ålf to 0.30 at Grås). [17]
- **Other regions:** Similar values in Austria and the Andes (Mean $R^2 \approx 0.5$; RMSE ≈ 0.6 m w.e.). [18, 19]
- **Model type:** Physical \geq statistical models. (e.g., Andes: $R^2 = 0.91$, RMSE = 0.47 m w.e.). [20]

04 Conclusion

Summary (Part A)

“A Post-2000 Regime Shift in the Controls on Norwegian Glaciers.”

- **Post-2000 shift in regime:** from winter (bw) → summer (bs) dominated control.
- **Change in control:** from NAO driven P(acc) → an energy dominated regime (T(abl)).
- **$ba \sim T(abl)$ correlation:** strong negative correlation for all 11 glaciers post-2000.
- **Spatial gradient:** maritime glaciers (\uparrow precipitation sensitive) & continental glaciers (\uparrow temperature sensitive). [8, 12]

Weaker NAO (\downarrow P(acc)) + higher T(abl) → ***MOST NEGATIVE BALANCE ON RECORD POST-2000!*** [3]

Summary (Part B)

27

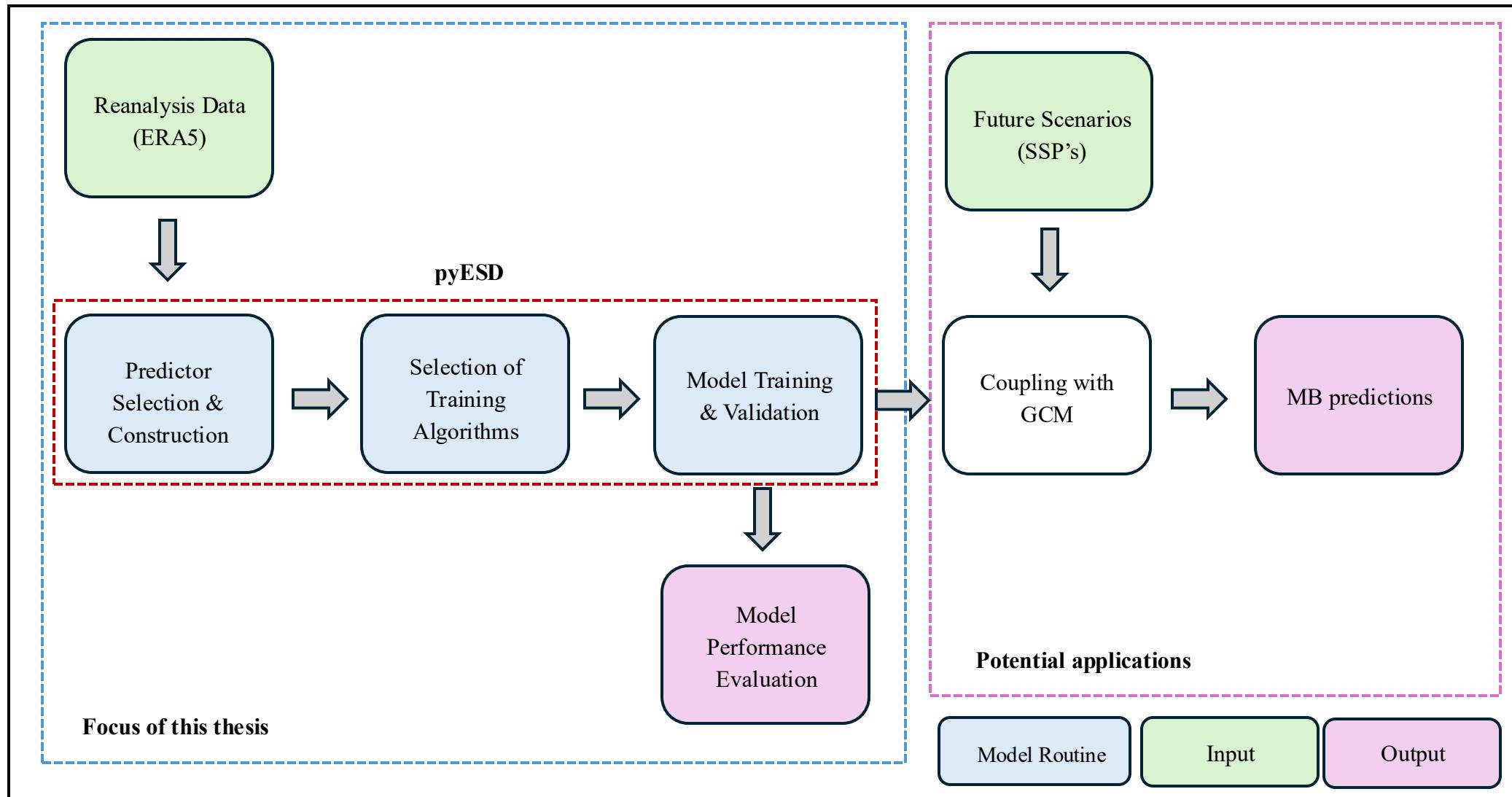
“A Post-2000 Regime Shift in the Controls on Norwegian Glaciers.”

- **Model type:** Linear (ARD, RidgeCV, BYR) \geq non-linear models (Bag, RF, XGBoost).
- **Dataset size:** More complete records pre-2000 \rightarrow better predictive skill.
- **Spatial gradient:** maritime glaciers (\uparrow performance) & continental glaciers (\downarrow performance).

Incorporate proxy data + robust dataset \rightarrow *Improved model performance*

The background of the slide is a high-angle aerial photograph of a vast mountain range. The mountains are covered in patches of white snow and rocky terrain. In the foreground, there's a large, dark, rocky mountain face with some snow. Behind it, the range continues with more snow-covered peaks under a clear blue sky.

05 Future Applications





THE BEST THESIS DEFENSE IS A GOOD THESIS OFFENSE.

Thank you for your attention!

References

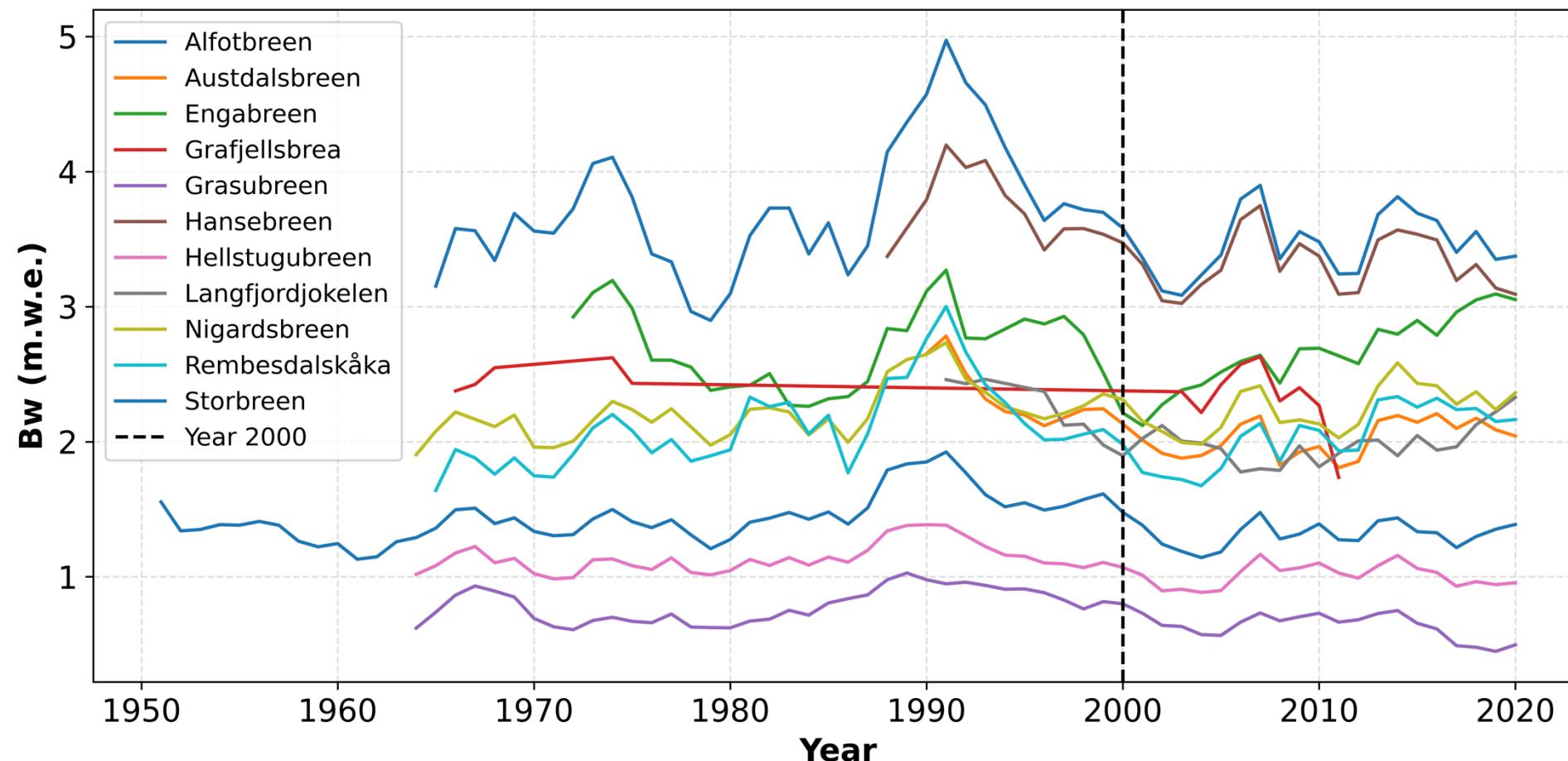
1. Beniston, M., Farinotti, D., Stoffel, M., Andreassen, L. M., Coppola, E., Eckert, N., Fantini, A., Giacoma, F., Hauck, C., Huss, M., Huwald, H., Lehning, M., López-Moreno, J.-I., Magnusson, J., Marty, C., Morán-Tejeda, E., Morin, S., Naaim, M., Provenzale, A., ... Vincent, C. (2018). The European mountain cryosphere: A review of its current state, trends, and future challenges. *The Cryosphere*, 12(2), 759–794. <https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-12-759-2018>
2. Andreassen, L. M., & Winsvold, S. H. (2012). *Inventory of Norwegian Glaciers*.
3. Andreassen, L. M., Elvehøy, H., Kjøllmoen, B., & Belart, J. M. C. (2020). Glacier change in Norway since the 1960s – an overview of mass balance, area, length and surface elevation changes. *Journal of Glaciology*, 66(256), 313–328. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jog.2020.10>
4. Østrem, G., & Haakensen, N. (1973). *GLACIERS OF NORWAY Meddelelse nr 82 fra Hydrologisk avdelingg 1993 CONTENTS*.
5. Winsvold, S. H., Andreassen, L. M., & Kienholz, C. (2014). Glacier area and length changes in Norway from repeat inventories. *Cryosphere*, 8(5), 1885–1903. <https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-8-1885-2014>
6. SSB (2012) Electricity, annual figures, 2025. <https://www.ssb.no/en/energi-og-industri/energi/statistikk/elektrisitet>
7. Zemp, M., Huss, M., Thibert, E., Eckert, N., McNabb, R., Huber, J., Barandun, M., Machguth, H., Nussbaumer, S. U., Gärtner-Roer, I., Thomson, L., Paul, F., Maussion, F., Kutuzov, S., & Cogley, J. G. (2019). Global glacier mass changes and their contributions to sea-level rise from 1961 to 2016. *Nature*, 568(7752), 382–386. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1071-0>
8. Nesje, A., & Bakke, J. (2007). *Norwegian mountain glaciers in the past, present and future*.
9. Daly, G. L., & Wania, F. (2005, January). Organic contaminants in mountains. In *Environmental Science and Technology* (Vol. 39, Issue 2, pp. 385–398). <https://doi.org/10.1021/es048859u>
10. Gabrielli, P., Cozzi, G., Torello, S., Cescon, P., & Barbante, C. (2008). Trace elements in winter snow of the Dolomites (Italy): A statistical study of natural and anthropogenic contributions. *Chemosphere*, 72(10), 1504–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2008.04.076>
11. Hodson, A. J. (2014). Understanding the dynamics of black carbon and associated contaminants in glacial systems. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water*, 1(2), 141–149. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1016>
12. Andreassen, L. M., Elvehøy, H., Kjøllmoen, B., Engeset, R. V., & Haakensen, N. (2005a). *Glacier mass-balance and length variation in Norway*. <http://www.ipcc.ch>
13. Nesje, A. (2023). Future state of Norwegian glaciers: Estimating glacier mass balance and equilibrium line responses to projected 21st century climate change. *The Holocene*, 33(10), 1257–1271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09596836231183069>
14. Andreassen, L. M., Elvehøy, H., Kjøllmoen, B., Engeset, R. V., & Haakensen, N. (2005b). Glacier mass-balance and length variation in Norway. *Annals of Glaciology*, 42, 317–325. <https://doi.org/10.3189/172756405781812826>
15. Dyurgerov, M. (2003). Mountain and subpolar glaciers show an increase in sensitivity to climate warming and intensification of the water cycle. *Journal of Hydrology*, 282(1–4), 164–176. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1694\(03\)00254-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1694(03)00254-3)
16. Anilkumar, R., Bharti, R., Chutia, D., & Aggarwal, S. P. (2023). Modelling point mass balance for the glaciers of the Central European Alps using machine learning techniques. *The Cryosphere*, 17(7), 2811–2828. <https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-17-2811-2023>
17. Mutz, S., Paeth, H., & Winkler, S. (2016). Modelling of future mass balance changes of Norwegian glaciers by application of a dynamical–statistical model. *Climate Dynamics*, 46(5–6), 1581–1597. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-015-2663-5>
18. Schöner, W., & Böhm, R. (2007). A statistical mass-balance model for reconstruction of LIA ice mass for glaciers in the European Alps. *Annals of Glaciology*, 46, 161–169.
19. Mutz, S., & Aschauer, J. (2022). *Empirical glacier mass-balance models for South America | Journal of Glaciology | Cambridge Core*. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-glaciology/article/empirical-glacier-massbalance-models-for-south-america/5858720EDDF9D02938D728114E408764>
20. Buttstädt, M., Möller, M., Iturraspe, R., & Schneider, C. (2009). Mass balance evolution of Martial Este Glacier, Tierra del Fuego (Argentina) for the period 1960–2099. *Advances in Geosciences*, 22, 117–124..

A dramatic, high-angle photograph of snow-capped mountain peaks under a clear blue sky. The mountains are rugged, with deep blue shadows and bright white snow. In the foreground, a rocky ridge is partially visible. The overall scene is vast and majestic.

06 Appendix

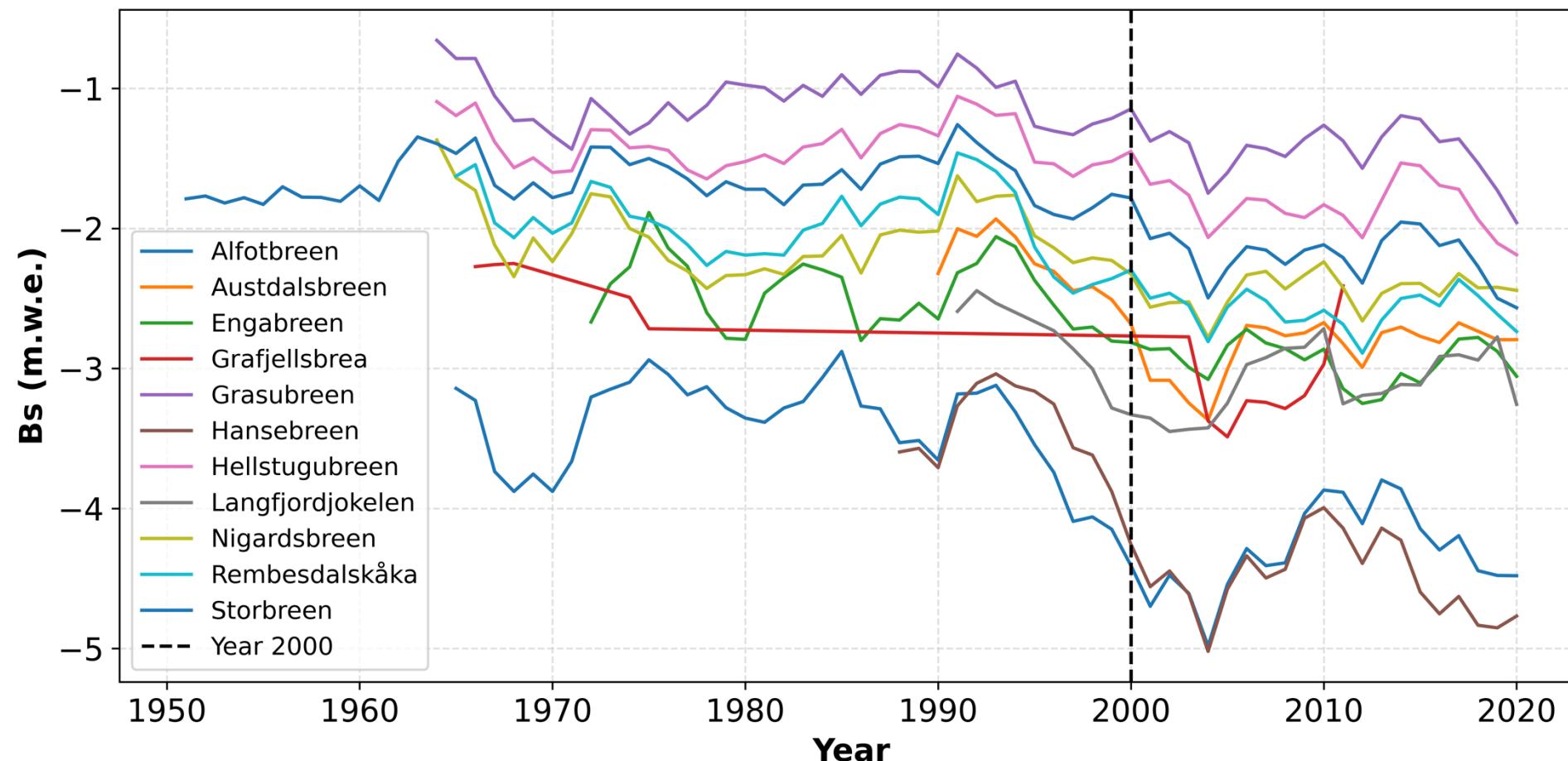
Hypothesis

A Regime Shift in the Climatic Controls on Norwegian Glaciers in 2000...?



Hypothesis

A Regime Shift in the Climatic Controls on Norwegian Glaciers in 2000...?



Hypothesis

A Regime Shift in the Climatic Controls on Norwegian Glaciers in 2000...?

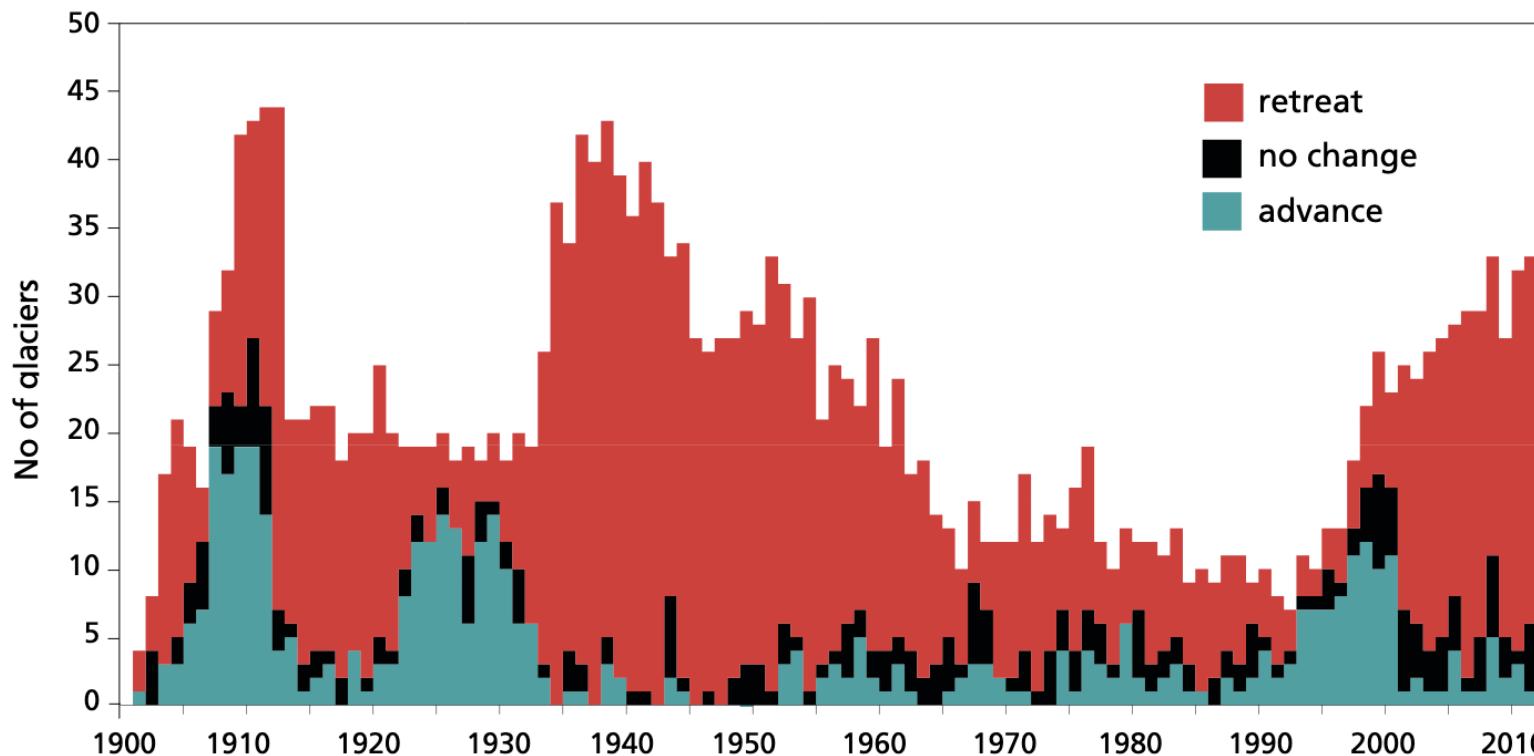
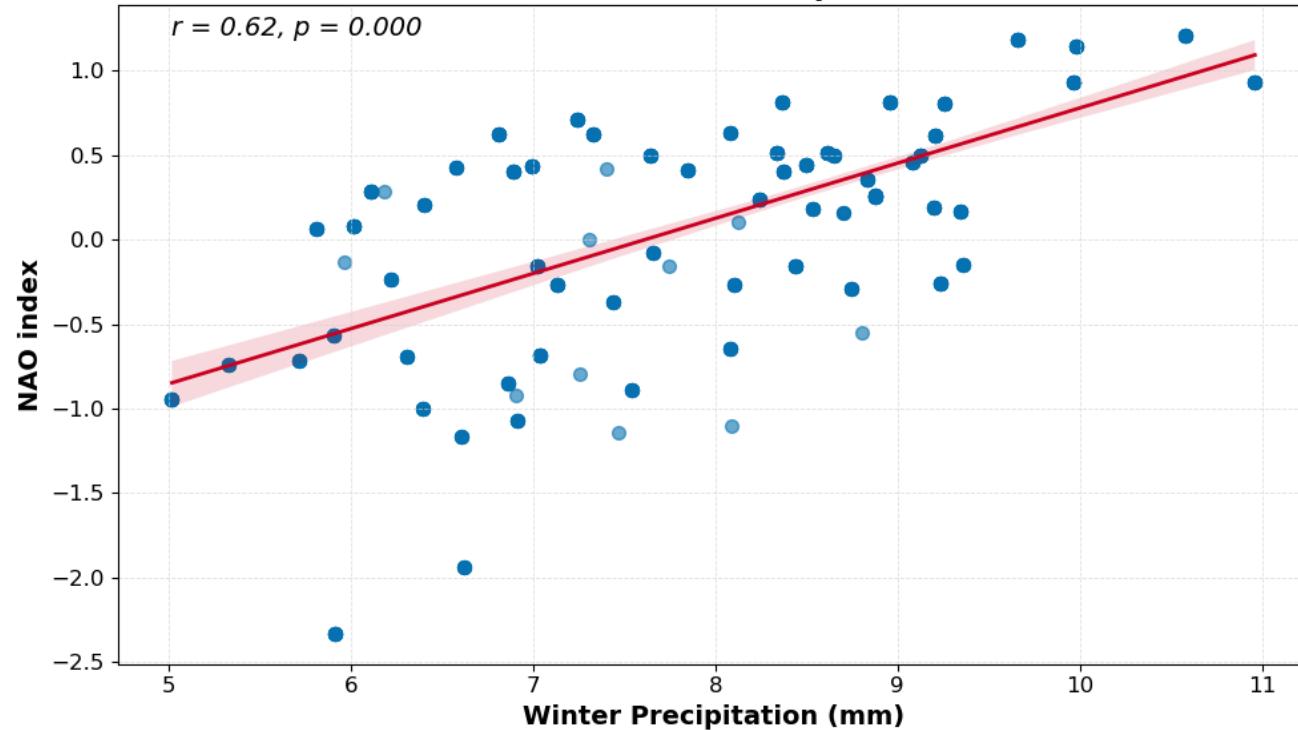


Figure from Andreassen & Winsvold (2012):

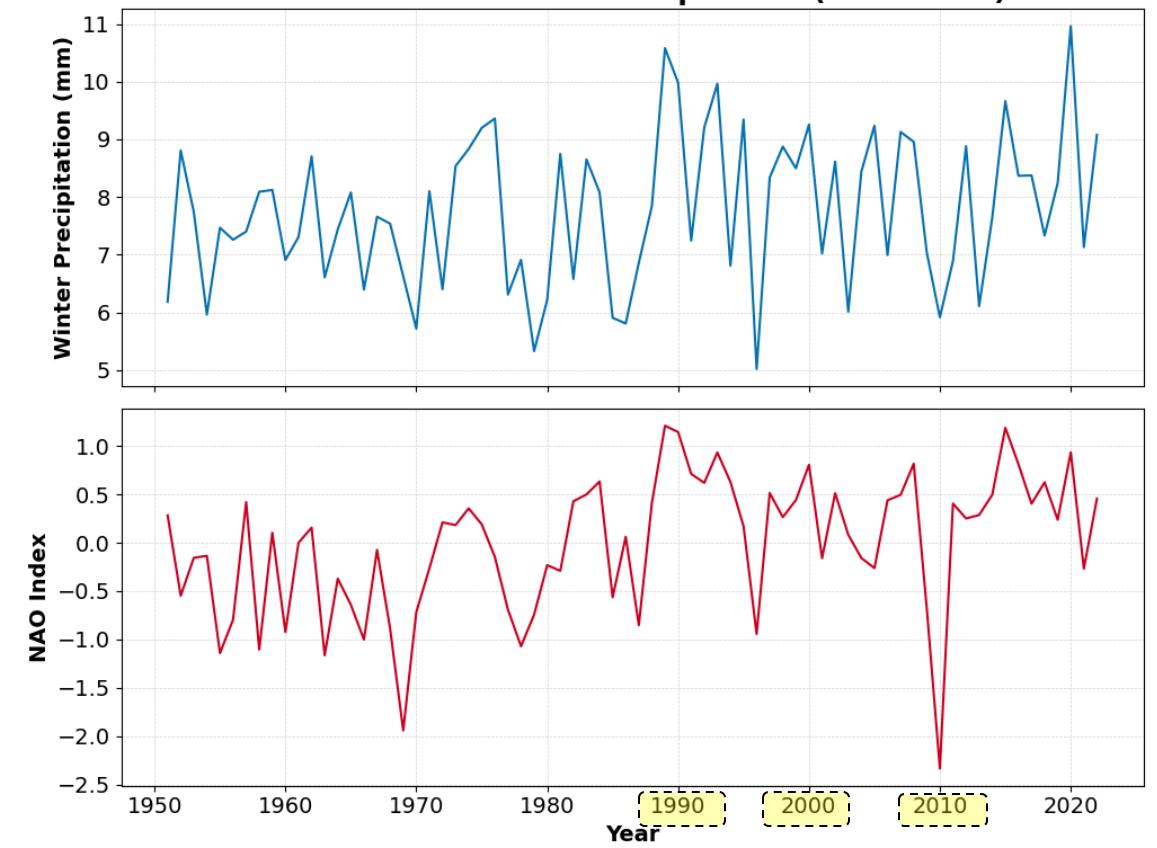
- Stacked histogram showing the number of Norwegian glaciers measured every year between 1900 and 2004.
- Red indicates part of total that retreated (more than 2 m), black indicates no change (+/- 2m), and green part of total that advanced (more than 2 m).
- Major advances occurred around 1910, 1930 and in the 1990s.

Correlation: NAO vs Winter Precipitation (1950-2023)

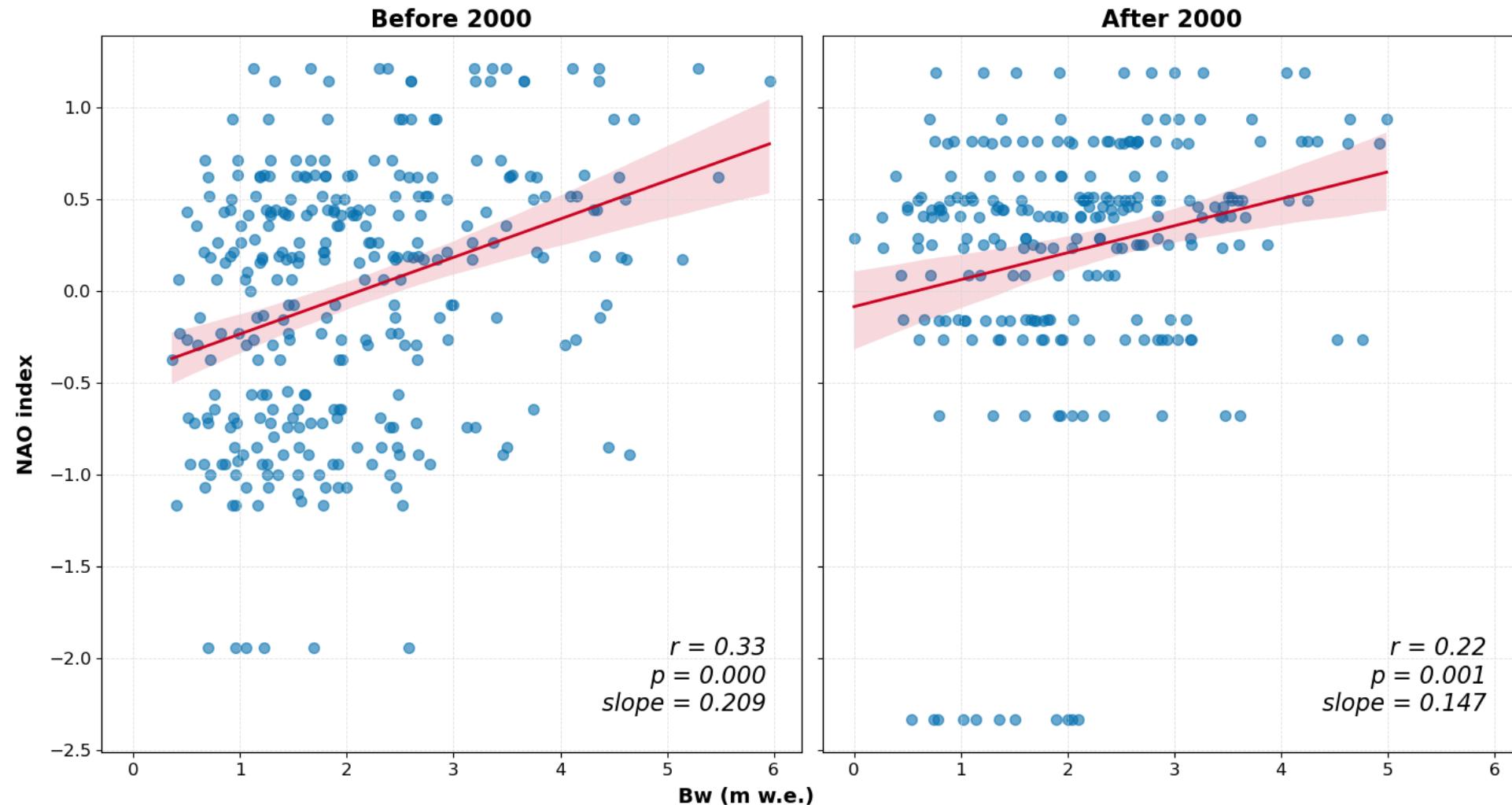


Scatterplot of correlation between P(acc) & NAO

NAO Index vs Winter Precipitation (1950-2023)



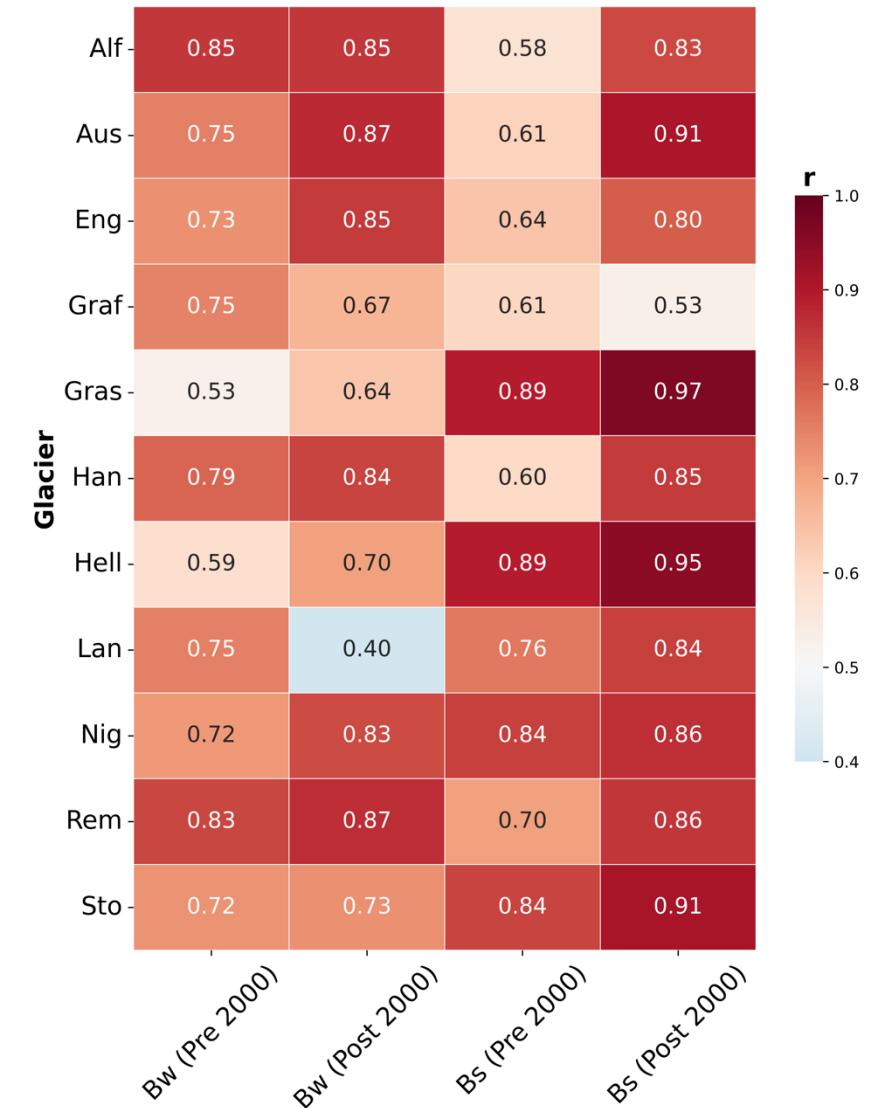
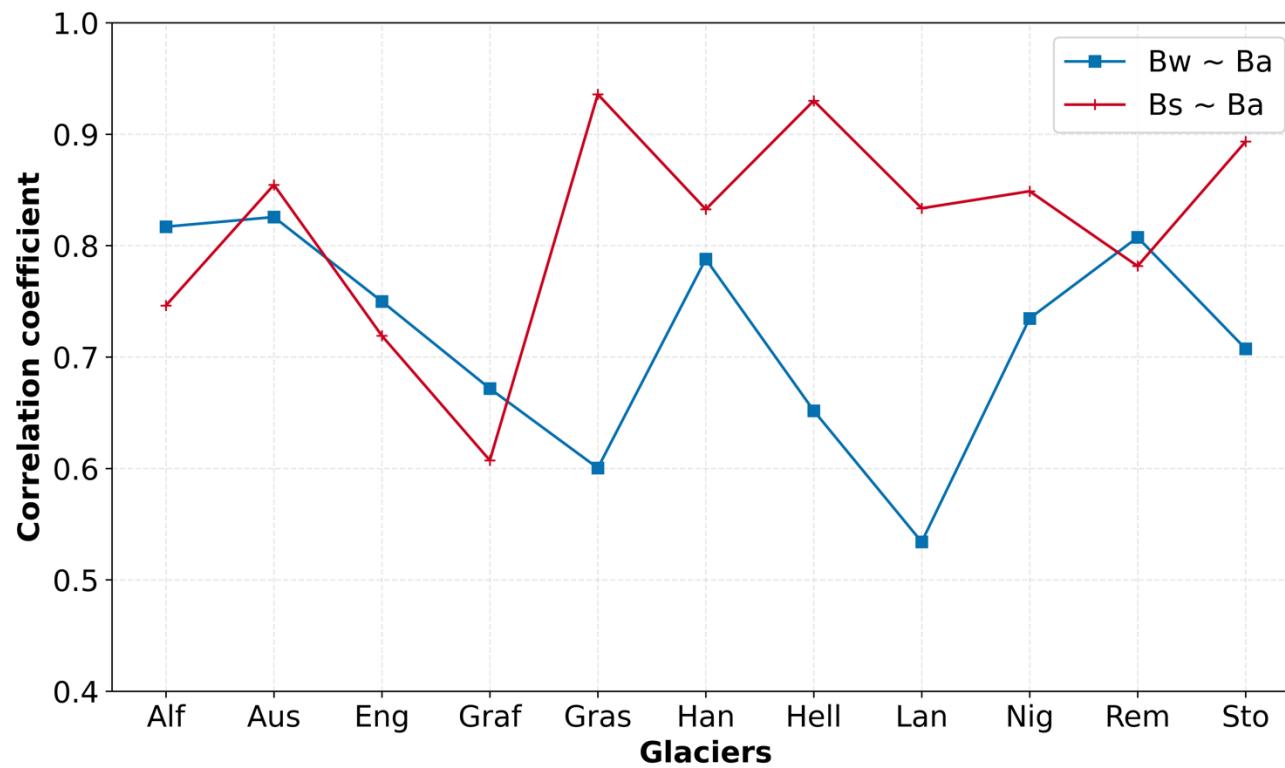
Inter-annual variability of P(acc) (*top*) & NAO (*bottom*)



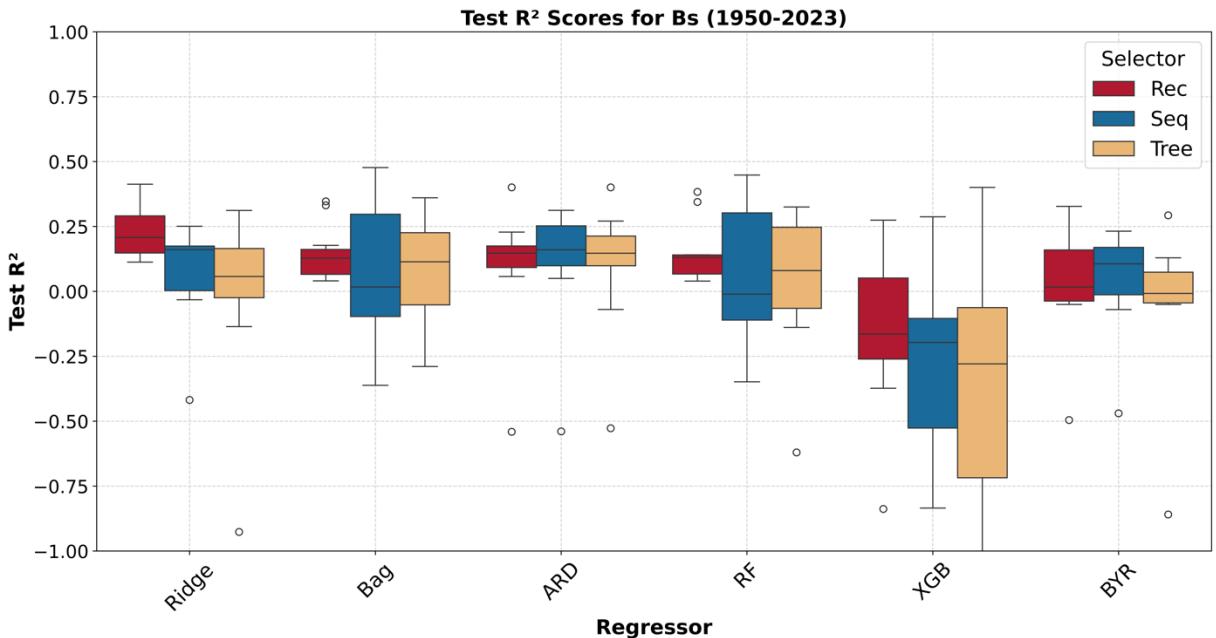
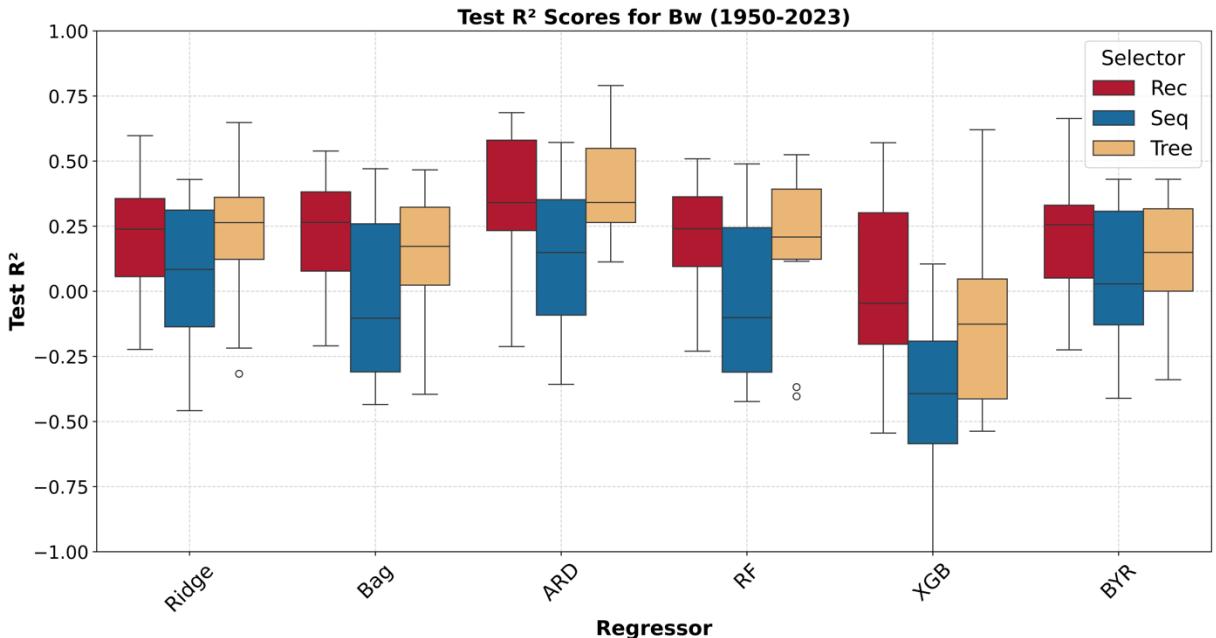
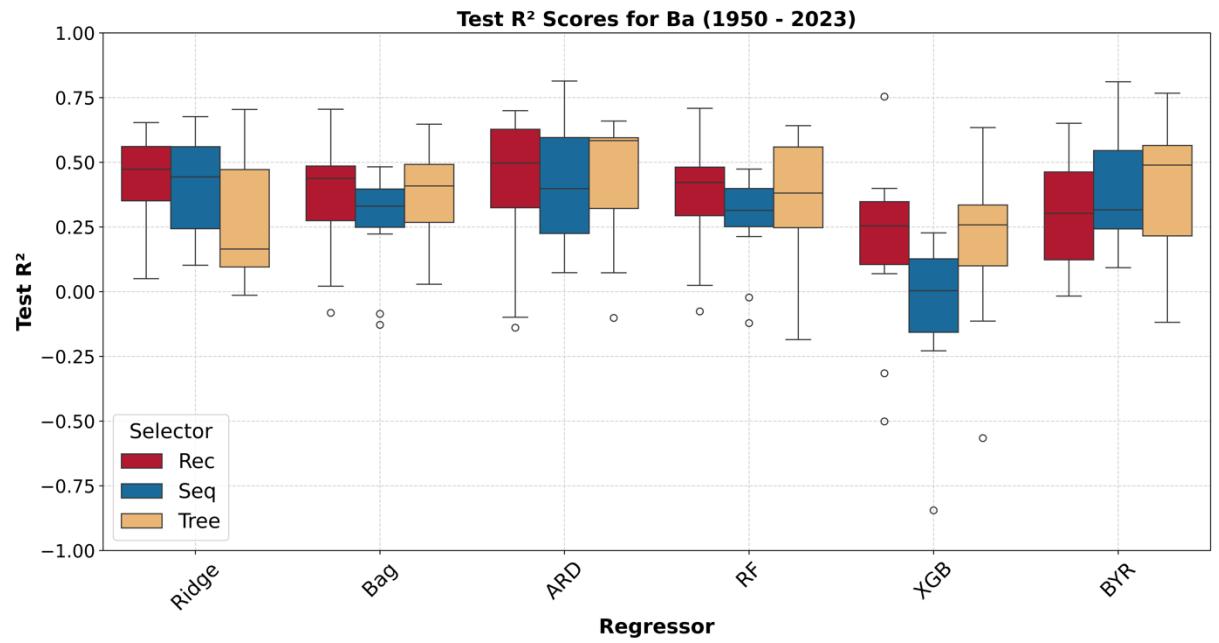
Slope change (After - Before): -0.062

Relationship weakened by 29.6%

Shift in Glacier–Climate Control

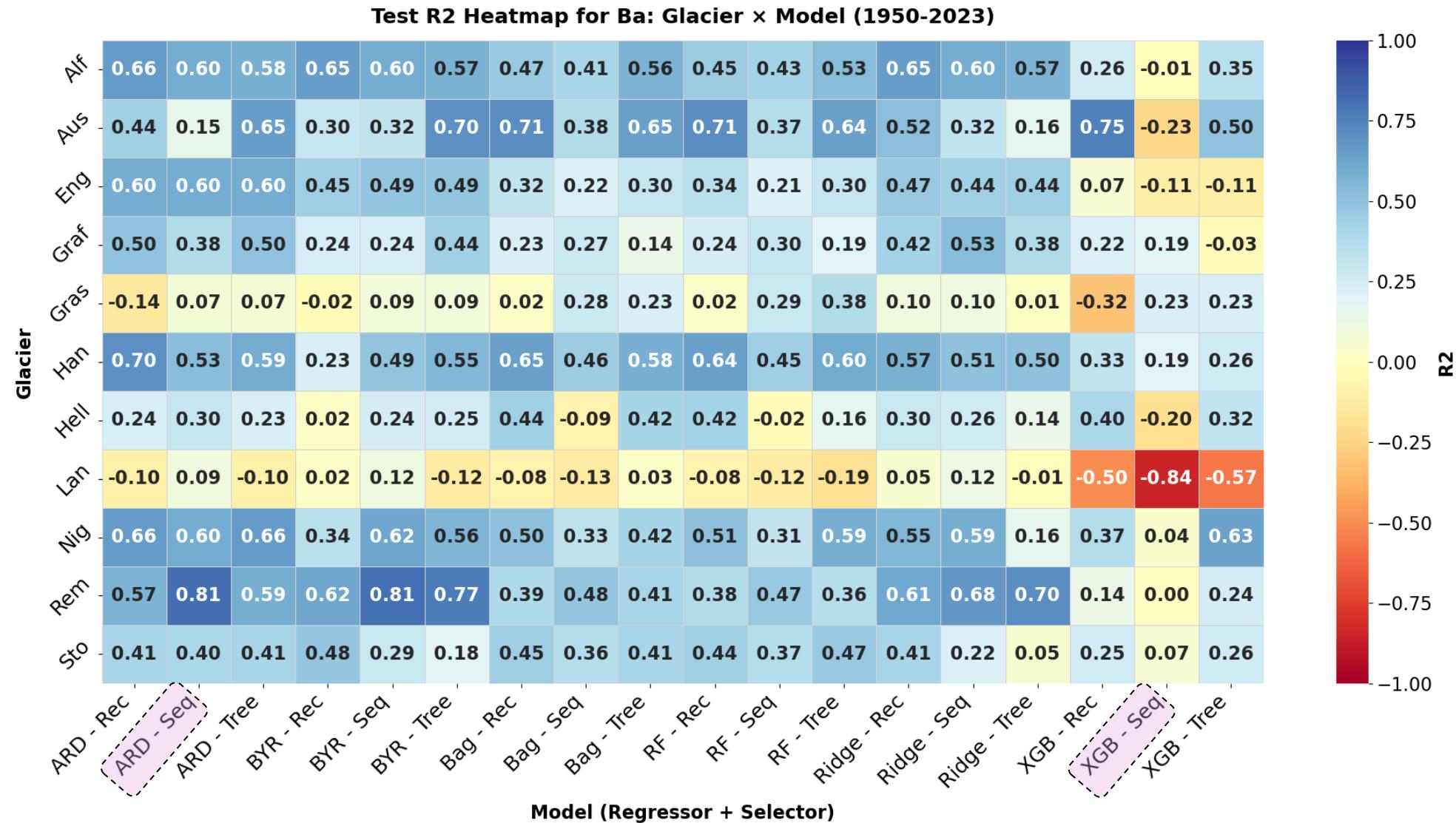


Test R²



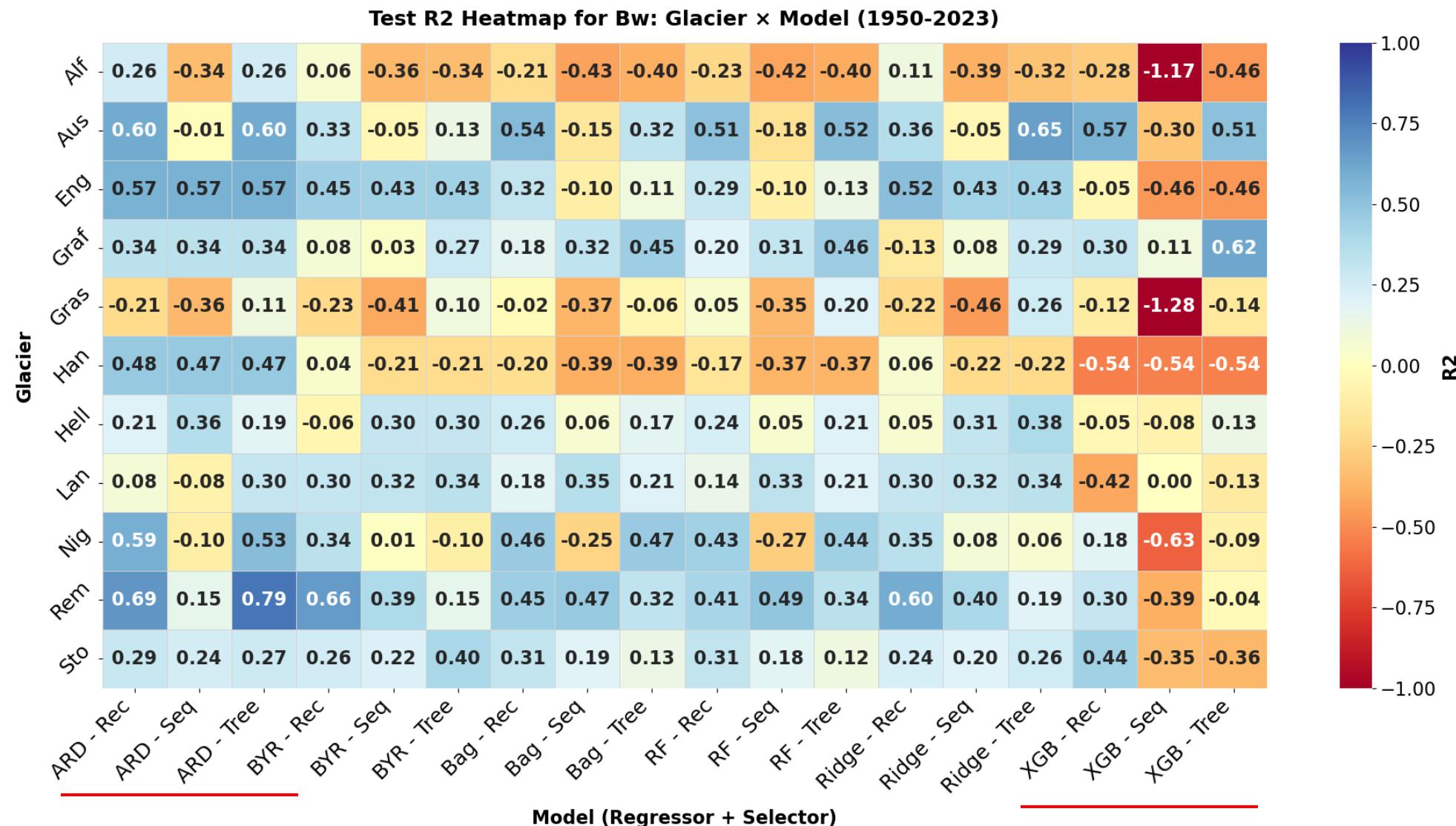
Test R²

40



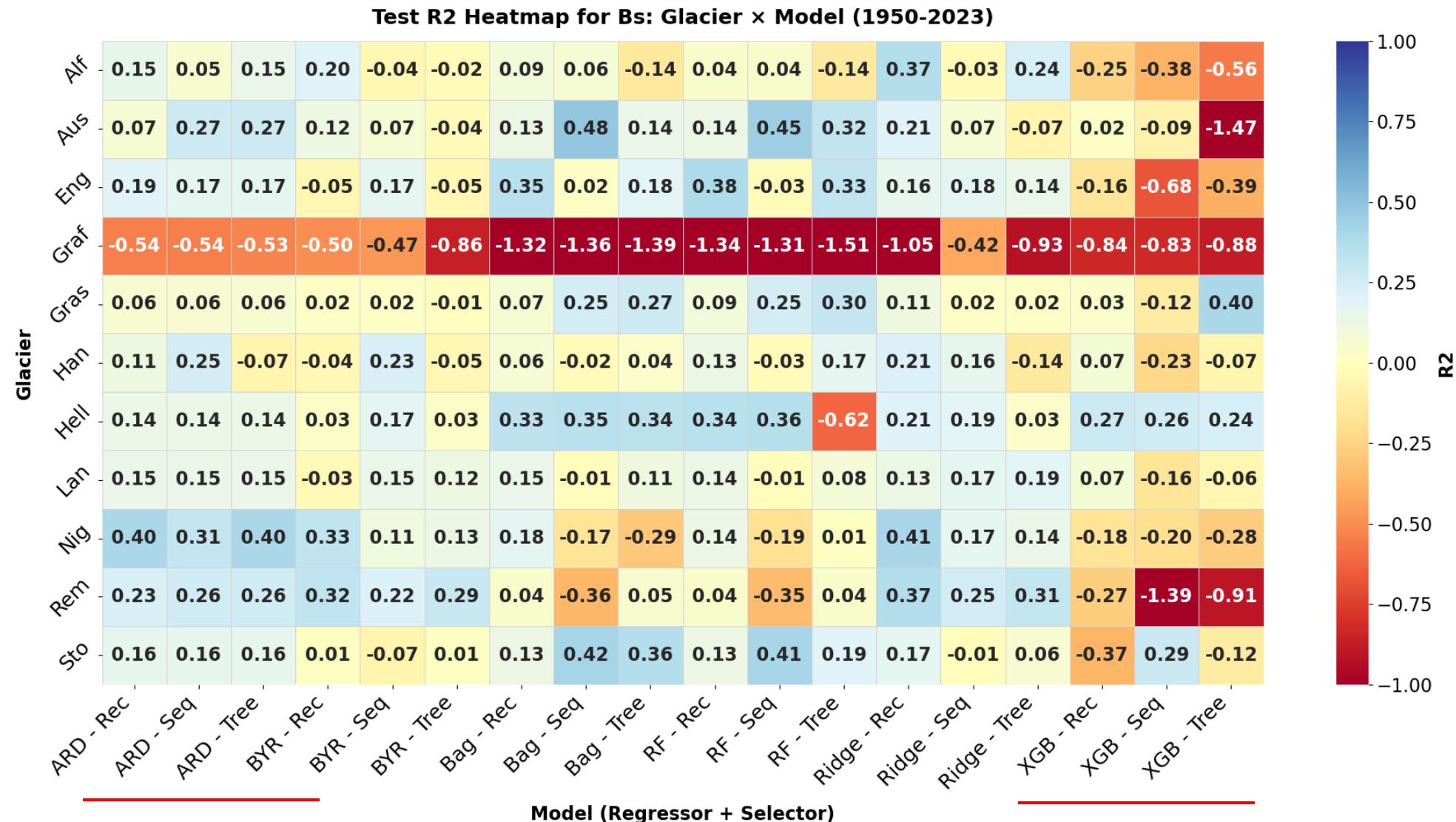
Test R²

41

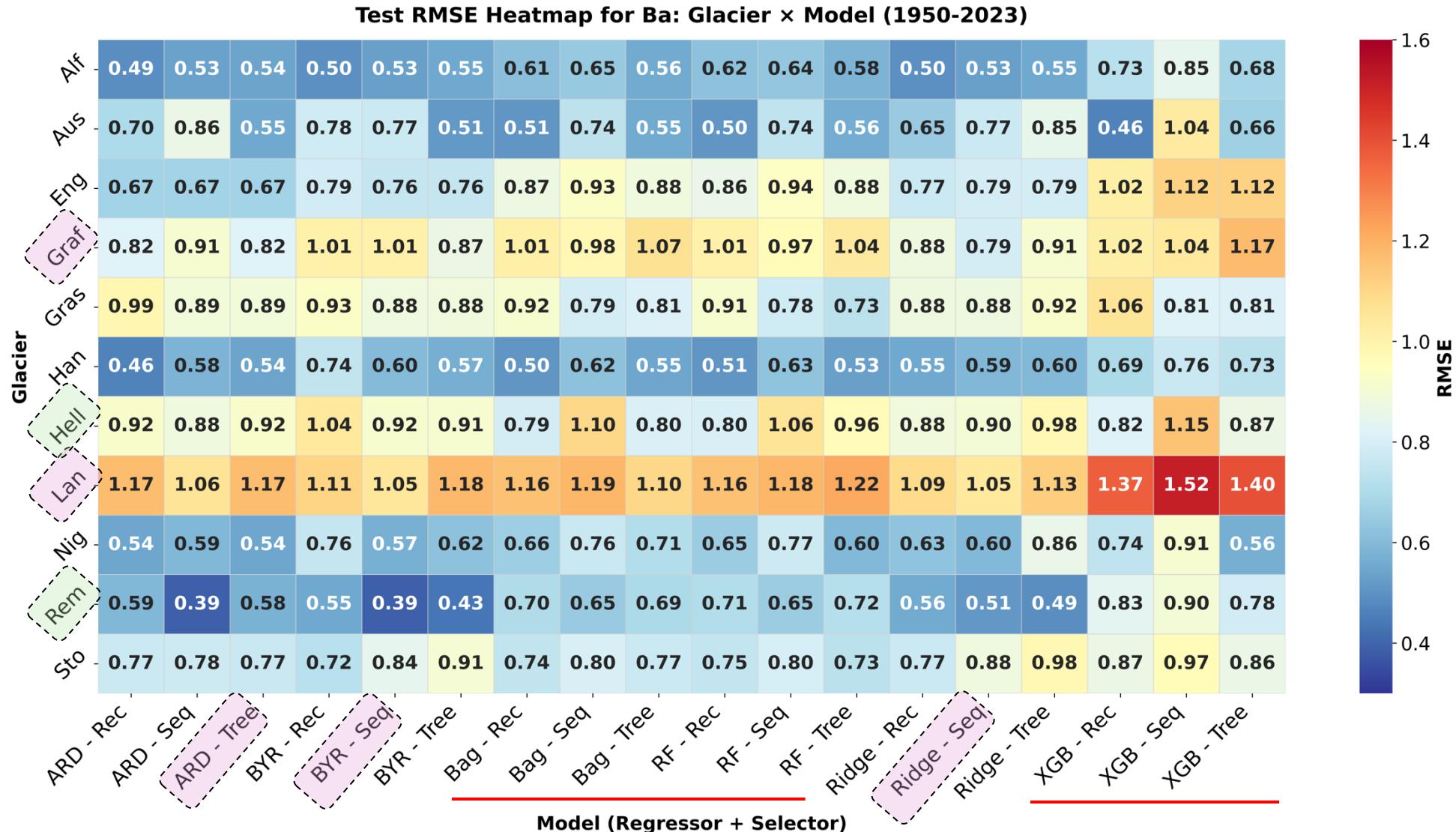


Test R²

42

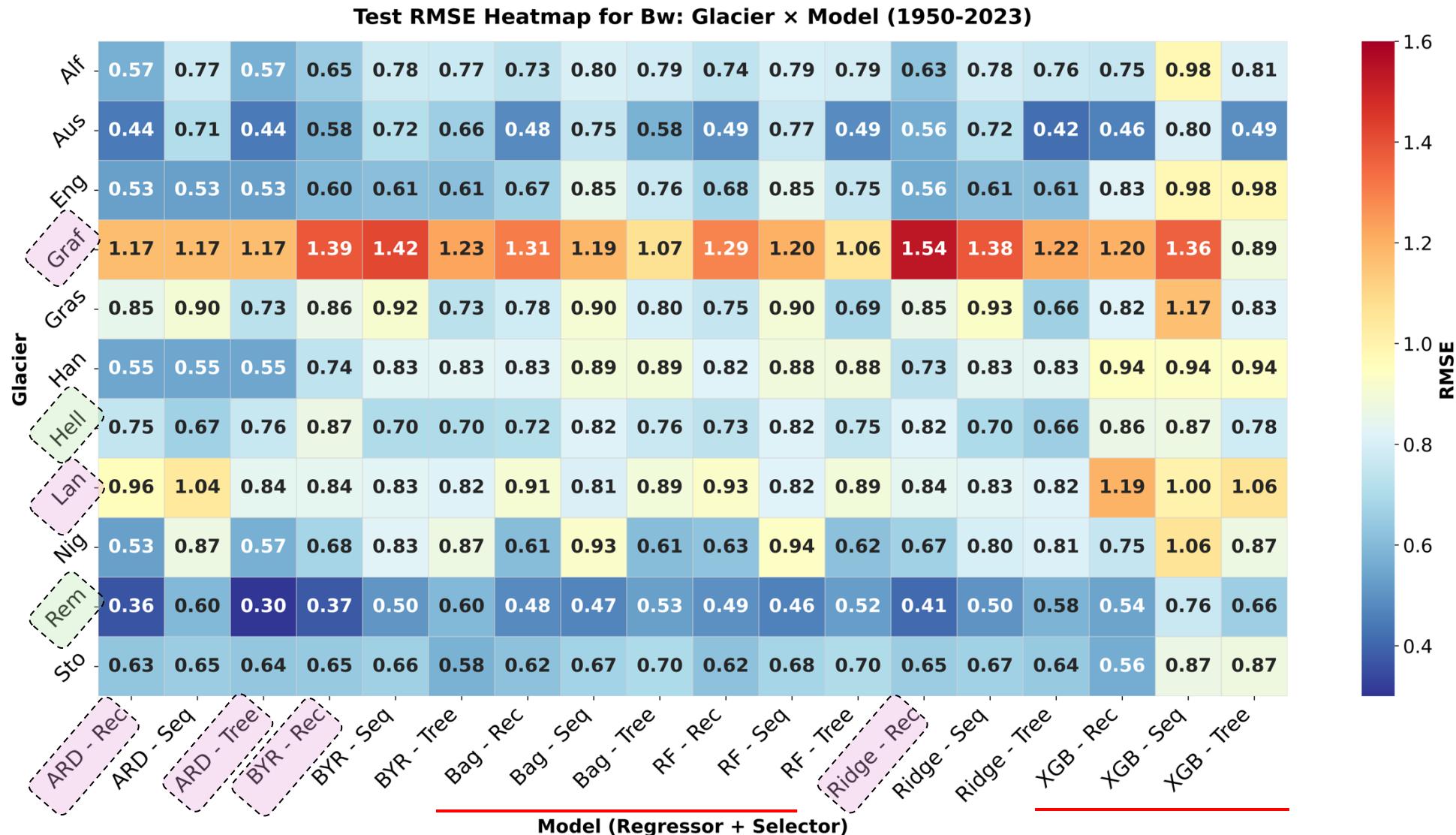


Test RMSE



Test RMSE

44



Test RMSE

