

pyTCR: A tropical cyclone rainfall model for python

16 March 2025

Summary

pyTCR is a climatology software package developed in the Python programming language. It integrates the capabilities of several legacy physical models into a reduced-complexity framework, enabling rapid estimation of tropical cyclone (TC) rainfall consistent with the large-scale environment. Specifically, pyTCR implements a horizontally distributed and vertically integrated model (Zhu, Quiring, and Emanuel 2013) for simulating rainfall driven by TCs. Along storm tracks, rainfall is estimated by computing the cross-boundary-layer, upward water vapor transport caused by different mechanisms including frictional convergence, vortex stretching, large-scale baroclinic effect (i.e., wind shear), topographic forcing, and radiative cooling (Lu et al. 2018). The package provides essential functionalities for modeling and interpreting spatio-temporal TC rainfall data. pyTCR requires a limited number of model input parameters, making it a convenient and useful tool for analyzing rainfall mechanisms driven by TCs.

To sample rare (most intense) rainfall events that are often of great societal interest, pyTCR adapts and leverages outputs from a statistical-dynamical TC downscaling model (Lin et al. 2023) capable of rapidly generating a large number of synthetic TCs given a certain climate. As a result, pyTCR provides a computationally efficient approach for capturing extreme TC rainfall events at the tail of the distributions from limited datasets. Furthermore, the TC downscaling model is forced entirely by large-scale environmental conditions from reanalysis data or coupled General Circulation Models (GCMs), simplifying the projection of TC-induced rainfall and wind speed under future climate using pyTCR. Finally, pyTCR can be coupled with hydrological and wind models to assess risks associated with independent and compound events (e.g., storm surges and freshwater flooding).

Statement of need

Tropical cyclones (TCs) – that is, hurricanes and tropical storms – are among the most destructive weather events, causing massive economic and human losses worldwide each year (Krichene et al. 2023). In the United States, hurricanes can trigger a surge of deaths long after the storms through complex chains of lasting impacts (Young and Hsiang 2024). Much of the damage caused by TCs is done by water – particularly by torrential rainfall and subsequent flooding (Shi et al. 2024; Zhang et al. 2018). Accurately capturing TC rainfall characteristics at high spatial (e.g., <10 km) and temporal (e.g, hourly) resolution is therefore of critical importance. Moreover, a growing body of evidence suggests that TC rainfall is becoming more intense under a warming climate due to the Clapeyron–Clausius scaling of water vapor in the atmosphere (Held and Soden 2006), increasing the likelihood of extreme rainfall and flooding (Zhu, Emanuel, and Quiring 2021). Given the societal consequences of TCs, it is crucial to understand not only TC rainfall risk in the current climate, but also how the risk might evolve with warming. Advancing tools and models to accurately and efficiently quantify these risks is of great significance.

The ability of GCMs to simulate climate extremes has been substantially improved over the past few decades. These climate models have become one of the main tools used to explore the effect of global warming on precipitation and climate variability (Emanuel 2021; Le et al. 2021, 2023). While high-resolution GCMs have improved the representation of TCs (Haarsma et al. 2016; Li and Srivastava 2018), they remain too computationally expensive for risk analysis, which requires robust sampling of extreme rainfall events. `pyTCR` responds to this need for an easy to use and efficient tool that facilitates TC-driven rainfall analysis across scales. It takes the advantage of a synthetic downscaling approach that can generate large ensembles of synthetic TCs at the basin (ocean) scale based on comprehensive climate conditions from observations and reanalysis data and a large number of GCM simulations (Emanuel, Sundararajan, and Williams 2008; Lin et al. 2023). `pyTCR` provides a fast and highly efficient tool for risk analysis related to TC rainfall.

Mathematical Approach

`PyTCR` implements a TC rainfall model described in Lu et al. (2018) that simulates along-track convective rainfall by relating the precipitation rate to the total upward velocity within the TC vortex. Let P_{TC} be the precipitation rate driven by TCs, calculated as:

$$P_{TC} = \epsilon_p \frac{\rho_{air}}{\rho_{liquid}} q_s \max(w, 0) \quad (1)$$

where ϵ_p is precipitation efficiency, ρ_{air} and ρ_{liquid} are the density of water vapor and liquid water, respectively, q_s is the saturation specific humidity, and w is

the upward-positive vertical wind velocity that brings surface moisture into the upper atmosphere. The key assumption here is that time-evolving TC rainfall is organized around the storm track and proportional to w . The core function of pyTCR includes estimating w as a linear combination of five major components:

$$w = w_f + w_h + w_t + w_s + w_r \quad (2)$$

where w_f represents the velocity induced by surface frictional convergence, w_h is the velocity driven by topographic forcing, w_t denotes the velocity component arising from time dependence of the storm's vorticity, w_s denotes the baroclinic/shear component velocity, and w_r represents the velocity related to radiative cooling. We refer to Lu et al. (2018) for detailed formulations of these components.

Examples

To help users learn key concepts and functions of pyTCR, we provide different Jupyter notebooks designed for training purposes. For example, Figure 1 compares the tracks and mean power dissipation index (PDI) of TCs downscaled from the outputs of the E3SM-1-0 model and ERA5 reanalysis data using the TC downscaling model (Lin et al. 2023) with those obtained from the IBTrACS observations in the North Atlantic Ocean during the historical period (1964-2014). Along each TC track, pyTCR can generate time series and spatial patterns of rainfall events. Figure 2 illustrates the spatial distribution of total rainfall along a TC track.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Biological and Environmental Research program and is a product of the Southeast Texas (SETx) Urban Integrated Field Laboratory (UIFL) project.

References

- Emanuel, Kerry. 2021. “Response of Global Tropical Cyclone Activity to Increasing CO₂: Results from Downscaling CMIP6 Models.” *Journal of Climate* 34 (1): 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-20-0367.1>.
- Emanuel, Kerry, Ragoth Sundararajan, and John Williams. 2008. “Hurricanes and Global Warming: Results from Downscaling IPCC AR4 Simulations.” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 89 (3): 347–68. <https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-89-3-347>.
- Haarsma, R. J., M. J. Roberts, P. L. Vidale, C. A. Senior, A. Bellucci, Q. Bao, P. Chang, et al. 2016. “High Resolution Model Intercomparison Project

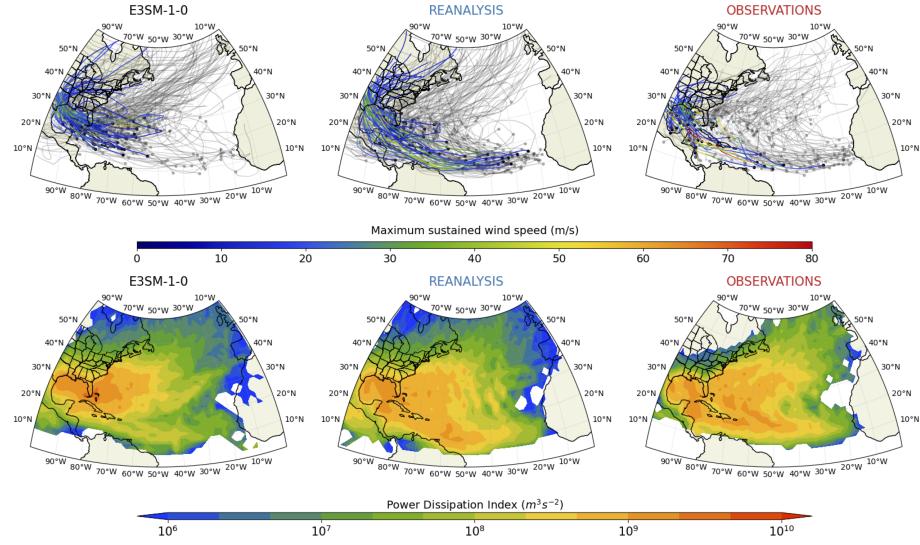


Figure 1: (Top) Tracks of 200 example TCs in the North Atlantic. Color lines indicates wind speed and TC tracks that landfall in Texas.(Bottom) Mean power dissipation index (PDI) per $2^\circ \times 2^\circ$ box per year. Plot was generated using the notebook `ex1_tropical_cyclone_tracks.ipynb` in the repository.

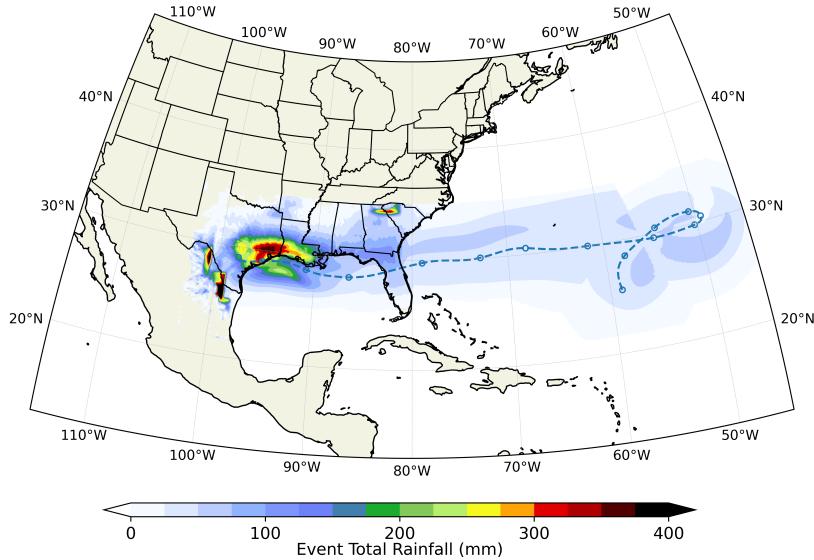


Figure 2: Spatial distribution of total rainfall generated for a particular TC track that makes landfall on Texas, USA. Plot was generated using the notebook `ex2_rainfall_generation.ipynb` in the repository

- (HighResMIP V1.0) for CMIP6.” *Geoscientific Model Development* 9 (11): 4185–4208. <https://doi.org/10.5194/gmd-9-4185-2016>.
- Held, Isaac M., and Brian J. Soden. 2006. “Robust Responses of the Hydrological Cycle to Global Warming.” *Journal of Climate* 19 (21): 5686–99. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI3990.1>.
- Krichene, Hazem, Thomas Vogt, Franziska Piontek, Tobias Geiger, Christof Schötz, and Christian Otto. 2023. “The social costs of tropical cyclones.” *Nature Communications* 14 (1): 7294. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-43114-4>.
- Le, Phong V. V., Clément Guilloteau, Antonios Mamalakis, and Efi Foufoula-Georgiou. 2021. “Underestimated MJO Variability in CMIP6 Models.” *Geophysical Research Letters* 48 (12): e2020GL092244. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2020GL092244>.
- Le, Phong V. V., James T. Randerson, Rebecca Willett, Stephen Wright, Padhraic Smyth, Clément Guilloteau, Antonios Mamalakis, and Efi Foufoula-Georgiou. 2023. “Climate-Driven Changes in the Predictability of Seasonal Precipitation.” *Nature Communications* 14 (1): 3822. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-39463-9>.
- Li, Hui, and Ryan L. Sriver. 2018. “Tropical Cyclone Activity in the High-Resolution Community Earth System Model and the Impact of Ocean Coupling.” *Journal of Advances in Modeling Earth Systems* 10 (1): 165–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2017MS001199>.
- Lin, Jonathan, Raphael Rousseau-Rizzi, Chia-Ying Lee, and Adam Sobel. 2023. “An Open-Source, Physics-Based, Tropical Cyclone Downscaling Model With Intensity-Dependent Steering.” *Journal of Advances in Modeling Earth Systems* 15 (11): e2023MS003686. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023MS003686>.
- Lu, Ping, Ning Lin, Kerry Emanuel, Daniel Chavas, and James Smith. 2018. “Assessing Hurricane Rainfall Mechanisms Using a Physics-Based Model: Hurricanes Isabel (2003) and Irene (2011).” *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences* 75 (7): 2337–58. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JAS-D-17-0264.1>.
- Shi, Xiaoming, Yang Liu, Jianan Chen, Haoming Chen, Yueya Wang, Zhongming Lu, Ruo-Qian Wang, Jimmy C.-H. Fung, and Charles W. W. Ng. 2024. “Escalating tropical cyclone precipitation extremes and landslide hazards in South China under global warming.” *Npj Climate and Atmospheric Science* 7 (1): 107. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41612-024-00654-w>.
- Young, Rachel, and Solomon Hsiang. 2024. “Mortality caused by tropical cyclones in the United States.” *Nature* 635 (8037): 121–28. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07945-5>.
- Zhang, Wei, Gabriele Villarini, Gabriel A. Vecchi, and James A. Smith. 2018. “Urbanization exacerbated the rainfall and flooding caused by hurricane Harvey in Houston.” *Nature* 563 (7731): 384–88. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0676-z>.
- Zhu, Laiyin, Kerry Emanuel, and Steven M Quiring. 2021. “Elevated Risk of Tropical Cyclone Precipitation and Pluvial Flood in Houston Under Global Warming.” *Environmental Research Letters* 16 (9): 094030. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac1e3d>.

Zhu, Laiyin, Steven M. Quiring, and Kerry A. Emanuel. 2013. "Estimating tropical cyclone precipitation risk in Texas." *Geophysical Research Letters* 40 (23): 6225–30. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2013GL058284>.