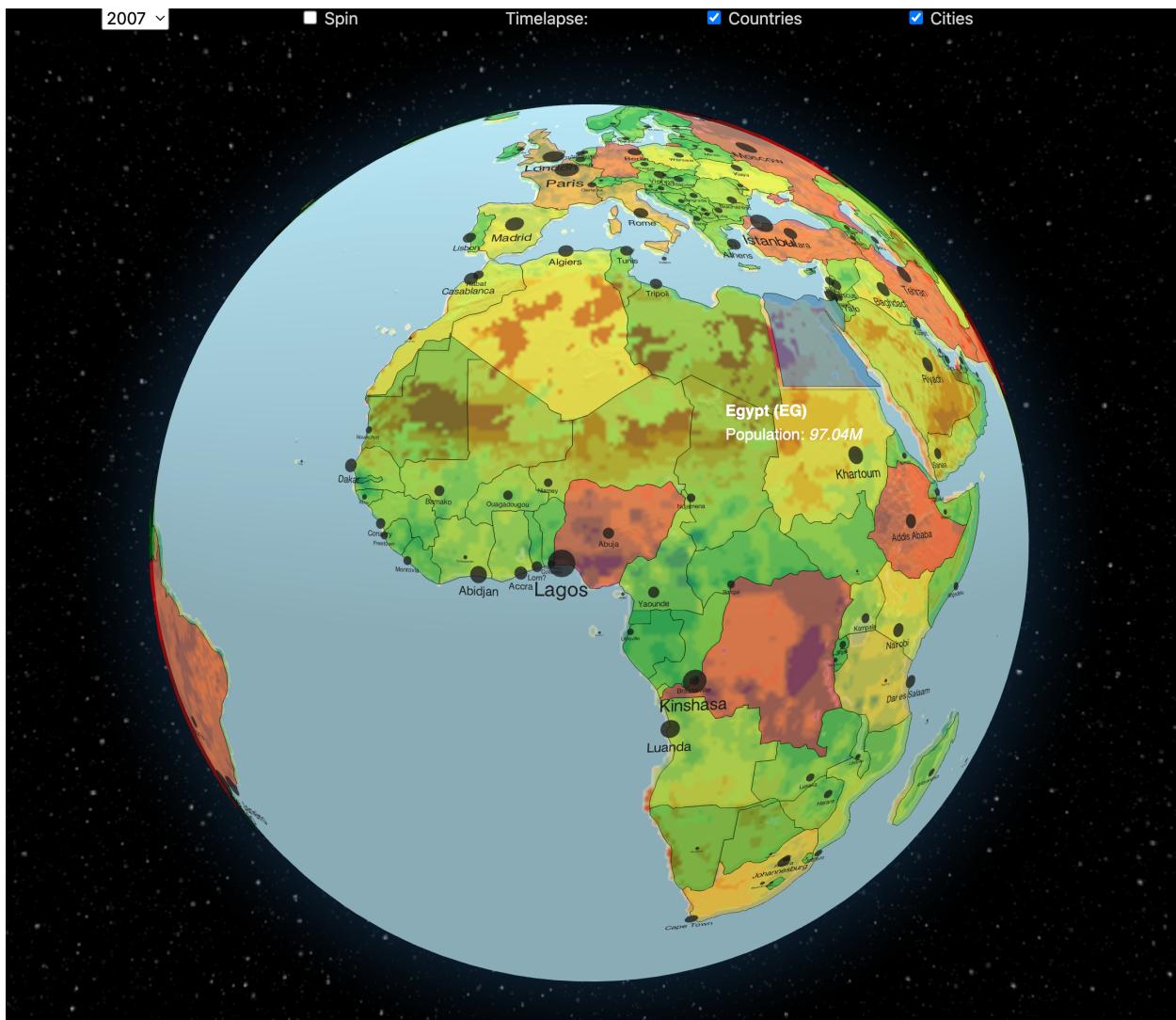




Pale Blue Dot Visualization Challenge Detailed Report



Introduction: Addressing the SDGs.

How does your visual inform a decision or action that furthers one or more of the key competition SDGs
([zero hunger](#), [clean water and sanitation](#), [climate action](#))?

All three SDGs of this competition have one core component in their foundation: WATER. Without access to water we can't fight hunger since water access is required for the crops irrigation, drinking for both humans and livestock and even for the modern food farms to grow their produce.

We obviously need water to provide access to clean water and sanitation

And this access to water is heavily dependant on the climate action, as we can clearly see on examples like access to the Colorado River in the Western states of the US.

For this reason, I decided to focus this visualization on access to the main supply of water: terrestrial water and how this access overlays with the most populated areas on earth, both in terms of the largest cities and most populated counties.

With the help of this visualization, it would be possible to visually analyze such aspects of water consumption as

- How much water is drawn by the most populated cities of the world
- What large cities in the world are in potential danger of running out of water (take a look at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia or Los Angeles, USA)
- Do most populated countries of the world have adequate access to the terrestrial water supply
- What are the global trends to the terrestrial water availability

Technology: How This Visualization Was Created

How did you create your submission? Include the tools you used (e.g., Python, Excel, specific python packages), how you processed the data, and (if applicable) how you managed your codebase. If you have a public repository with code, you can share a link here.

For this visualization I decided to use Globe.GL, a 3D visualization library that allows mapping data on the globe. The main reason for this decision (vs the map, for example) is that it provides a lot more accurate representation of the countries and continents sizes than the existing 2D maps projections. One example, would be a massive misrepresentation of the size of Africa on most maps published in the United States and Europe. Misrepresenting the size of Greenland, a key ground water resource would be another example.

The data on this visualization is GLDAS_CLSM025_DA1_D: GLDAS Catchment Land Surface Model L4 daily 0.25 x 0.25 degree GRACE-DA1 V2.2 from GES DISC. I chose this dataset because it accurately represents a large range of dates from 2003 to 2023 covering the entire world and illustrating a very important parameter of global water supply: Terrestrial Water Storage. This is a perfect dataset for illustrating the changes in the terrestrial water in the last two decades, known for accelerated climate change.

The data was rendered using NASA Earth Data Giovanni visualization tool into a set of images. I had to adjust the parameters to make the images fit my vision of this visualization:

- Remove all titles, subtitles, legend and other non-informational parts of the image
- Adjust the scale to 100-5000, which seemed to be a good fit for the data from the last 20 years

- Change scaling to logarithmic, to make it more visually appealing (the linear scaling painted everything into red-yellow shades)
- Generate the images for the same date: February 1st, for consistency

Even though the resulting images are in the same equidistant cylindrical projection used by Three.js, they appeared to be not compatible with the Globe.GL. After some research into this problem, I came up with an algorithm that converts Giovanni output into something that could be used by Three.js:

- Crop the image width to 1024 pixels, cutting 13 pixels from the left and the entire right side. It seems like there is a bug in Giovanni image render which renders the legend even when the Decorations group is turned off.
- Stretch the image to 2048x854
- Pad at the bottom of the image with $1024 - 854 = 170$ pixels to make the overall image fit the 2048x1024 size required by Three.js
- Replace white with appropriate color (I chose lightblue, to show the oceans as a source of water, matching the palette in Giovanni images)

All these operations would take too much time to perform manually on the images, so I used ImageMagic command-line tool:

```
convert test.png -crop 1024x854+13+0 -resize 2048x854 -gravity north -extent 2048x1024 -fuzz 5% -fill lightblue -opaque white test2.png
```

All Giovanni files for this data visualization could be converted with a simple script:

```
#!/bin/bash
# This script converts all images in this directory from Giovanni
format into images suitable for Three.js

for i in *.png
do
    echo "Converting $i"
    convert "$i" -crop 1024x854+13+0 -resize 2048x854 -gravity north -
extent 2048x1024 -fuzz 5% -fill lightblue -opaque white "../$i"
done
```

Finally, I added a menu at the top of the data visualizations to allow the user to adjust different layers of the visualization.

All code necessary to reproduce this visualization is available at <https://github.com/rtfms/pale-blue-dot-nasa-challenge> under MIT license.

The visualization itself is also available at <https://andrey.mikhachuk.com/pale-blue-dot-nasa-challenge>, if you want to try it in action.

Licenses

- The images are coming from NASA Giovanni project, its content is available under the GNU Free Documentation license
- The countries and the cities data are from Natural Earth Project:
<https://github.com/nvkelso/natural-earth-vector/> (an MIT-like license)
- D3.js license is BSD
- Globe.GL license is MIT
- Three.js license is MIT
- The project code is also licensed under MIT

Motivation

What motivated you to choose this topic?

I work in Data processing and visualization, it's not just my business, but also a hobby and a passion (I'm very lucky that all three converged in dataviz). For business I develop and use a lot more flexible and powerful tools, but for this challenge I had to stick exclusively to open data and opensource software, so I wrote this code from scratch.

Being a big fan of NASA work I just couldn't resist participating in one of NASA challenges, and, after reviewing the rules for all challenges I decided to work on this one since it's closest to what I like to do: dataviz.

As for the data selection, I'm very concerned about what's happening with the planet and all the anthropogenic changes humans caused to nature. Making raw numbers more visual, dynamic and interactive will help us to understand the full impact of mankind actions, and, hopefully, convince sceptics that we need to do something about our reckless treatment on natural resources.

Finally, I decided to focus on water for reasons listed above (because water is the common core of all 3 SDGs of this competition). After all, humans can only survive for 3 days without water, so having access to it is crucial for the survival of the mankind.

Learning the broader context

How did you learn about the broader context of your chosen issue (e.g., historical, social, political)? This could include drawing on the lived experiences of team members, reading articles and literature, conducting interviews with community members, etc. Did what you learned change your approach?

I can't say that I ever lived in an area with a limited access to water. But I vividly remember a lot of documentaries and movies showing the struggle of getting this precious resource in places

that have limited supply of ground water: Saudi Arabia, Most of Australia, large parts of China and Mongolia, and, above all, Northern Africa. All these movies made me think “what if...”. What if we will continue misusing water like we currently do and there will be none left for all the people on Earth. Postapocalyptic Sci-Fi movies draw a pretty grim picture of this world. For this reason, we need to start monitoring access to this precious resource and spread the information about the state of things among all people. We can't continue on the current path of destruction of our precious water supplies.

Ethics and Equity

What are the ethics and/or equity issues you considered? What are some possible strategies or approaches for addressing them?

This visualization makes it obvious that the most prosperous countries of the world have the best access to the terrestrial water. In the US, Europe, most populated parts of Australia and other rich regions we do have access to water. But a lot of people in Africa don't have this access and don't have alternative means for fulfilling the basic need of water access.

This, obviously raises the question of what can we do about this. I don't have the answer. At the moment, nobody does. But a few things we must try are

- Keep monitoring all parameters of the water supply. This includes
 - o Monitoring the freshwater pollution
 - o Monitoring precipitation in different regions
 - o Evaluating the changes of patterns caused by the climate change
 - o Predict (to a degree possible) upcoming problems with the water supply
 - o Use this information to correlate with the population density to minimize the impact of water shortage starting with the most populated areas (but not limiting to these)
- Explore new technologies expanding access to water:
 - o Desalination
 - o Better water treatment
- Establish international programs ensuring access to water and technologies for producing fresh and drinkable water to all people. Access to water is not a privilege, it's a right

Links

Would your team like to share the URL of an interactive visualization?

Absolutely! Here is the link: <https://andrey.mikhailchuk.com/pale-blue-dot-nasa-challenge>.

I have much better data visualizations related to Earth Science, including some work in 3D, AR and VR involving a lot more data. Unfortunately the format of this work doesn't quite fit this challenge, but please feel free to contact me at palebluedot@rtfms.com for more information.

And here are some additional screenshots for the reference:

