Have greenhouse gases intensified the contrast between wet and dry regions?


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Publisher: American Geophysical Union

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Geophysical Research Letters

D. Polson, G.C. Hegerl, R.P. Allan, and B. Balan Sarojini

The supplementary material shows results from the main paper for seasons not included there, results for land only and ocean only and illustrates the robustness of the results to the removal of ENSO, the observational dataset, method of defining the wet and dry regions and results for the wet and dry regions separately. It also provides some background technical details on the removal of the influence of ENSO from the observational precipitation data and choice of seasons.

a. Annual cycle of observed precipitation and influence of ENSO

Figure S1(a) shows the monthly tropical precipitation averaged over all years for the GPCP dataset in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. The seasons January, February and March (JFM), April, May June (AMJ), July, August and September (JAS) and October, November and December (OND) where chosen to capture the wettest and driest seasons in each hemisphere. Figure S1(b) shows the HadCRUT4 annual global mean near surface temperature anomalies during the observation period (Morice et al. 2012).

As the record is short, trends will be influenced by ENSO. The influence of ENSO is removed from the observations in each gridbox by regressing the detrended MEI index (Wolter and Timlin 2011) onto detrended precipitation and subtracting the influence of ENSO from the observations in gridboxes where its influence was found to be significant (i.e. p-value
\( \leq 0.05 \) using the Mann-Whitney test \( (\text{Kenyon and Hegerl 2010}) \). Averaging across the simulations should largely remove the influence of ENSO in the multi-model mean as ENSO events occur at random times in the simulations.

Figure S2 shows the timeseries for the Northern and Southern Hemisphere tropical and subtropical dry and wet region precipitation without removing the influence of ENSO, while Figure S3 shows the timeseries with the influence of ENSO removed. To ensure OND is consistent with JFM, the OND data is from the previous year is 1987 to 2009. \( \text{Gu et al. (2007)} \) show that the impact of volcanoes and ENSO on precipitation can be compounded. To distinguish the two, the removal of ENSO was repeated with the years 1991, 1992 and 1993 (defined as volcanic years by \( \text{Gu et al. (2007)} \)) excluded from the regression of ENSO onto the observations. The precipitation changes were not sensitive to treating the volcanic years separately.

b. \textit{Observed and modeled dry and wet regions}

Figures S4 and S5 show the locations of the GPCP dry and wet regions respectively, when defined using method 1. Figures S6 and S7 show the locations of the GPCP dry and wet regions when defined using method 2, which allows the size of the regions to change over time. One change worth noting, is the dry regions tending to occur more often over the NH eastern Pacific in the last 10 years of observations. This is consistent with studies showing an intensification of the Walker circulation in the tropical Pacific in recent decades \( (\text{Merrifield 2011; Sohn et al. 2013}) \).

Figures S8 and S9 show ALL forced simulations dry and wet regions when defined using method 2. The top 4 panels show the percentage of years that each gridbox is defined as a dry region or wet region averaged across all simulations and the bottom 4 panels show the multi-model mean difference between the first 10 years and last 10 years. Figures S10 and S11 shows the same results for RCP4.5 simulations for 2011 to 2035, illustrating that the historical fingerprint results closely resembles a result using a near future fingerprint.
The purpose of examining the wet and dry regions in this way is to determine if they are changing size. Figure S12 shows that in the tropics and subtropics any changes to the size of the dry or wet regions for the GPCP dataset are generally small, (<10%). The ALL forced and RCP4.5 models do not show a consistent change in the size of the dry and wet regions for all simulations while the changes in the multi-model means are small for both (<5%). Changes in the mid-latitudes are somewhat larger for both the observations and the models, however, these are still less than the maximum observed year-to-year variation except in the SH mid-latitudes, particularly in JAS where the expansion of the wet regions and reduction of the dry regions is consistent with increasing precipitation at these latitudes.

c. Observed and modeled changes in precipitation

Figures S13 and S14 show the observed and simulated changes in precipitation in the dry and wet regions for land only and ocean only respectively. Comparison of the figures shows that the pattern of dry gets drier, wet gets wetter in the tropics and subtropics is more consistent over ocean than land.

Long term trends in satellite data are still considered uncertain. To explore data uncertainty to some extent, we compare changes over land with two station-based observational datasets, GPCC and CRU, where both are masked to the wet and dry regions of GPCP (Figure S15). The sign of the changes for GPCC and CRU generally match those of GPCP, with GPCC (which is used to calibrate GPCP), more consistent than CRU.

Figure S16 shows the seasonal precipitation for the GPCP, GPCC and CRU datasets for the Northern Hemisphere high latitudes for the years 1988-2010. The timeseries are similar for all three datasets over land, with no large change in precipitation over this period. While this is unsurprising given that in-situ data are used to cross calibrate satellite data (Adler et al. 2003), it shows that trends are well constrained by stations.
Figure S17 shows the scaling factors for the combined fingerprint of the wet and dry regions in all seasons for ALL, GHG, RCP4.5 and NAT forcing for the precipitation changes shown in Figures 2, S13 and S14. Figure S18 shows the scaling factors when the influence of ENSO is not removed from the observations, the detection results are the same except for ALL forcing for land+ocean. The results for GHG and RCP4.5 are similar to those of ALL forcing while NAT forcing is not detected (i.e. the 90% confidence interval includes zero). Figure S19 shows the scaling factors for the dry and wet regions separately. For the wet only regions, both GHG and NAT only forcing are detected. Combining the GHG and NAT fingerprints in the 2-signal analysis shows that only GHG forcing is detected when the fingerprint contains both the wet and dry regions. The aerosol affects on precipitation are highly uncertain and there were not enough simulations for anthropogenic only or anthropogenic aerosol only to derive fingerprints with suitably a low signal signal-to-noise ratio.

Figure S20 shows the scaling factors for the control simulations. These show that there is no bias introduced by the method of selecting the dry and wet regions that leads to false detection results.

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