

# STATE OF THE CLIMATE IN 2023

## GLOBAL CLIMATE

R. J. H. Dunn, J. Blannin, N. Gobron, J. B. Miller, and K. M. Willett, Eds.



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Aerial photo of smoke from wildfires in Alberta, Canada, on 5 May 2023. (Photo credit: Alberta Forestry and Parks)

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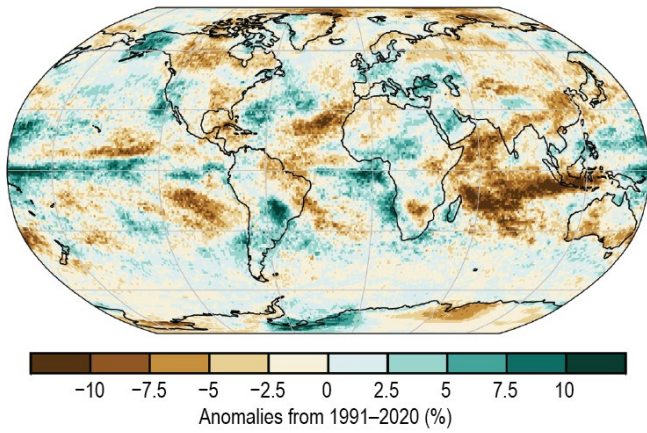
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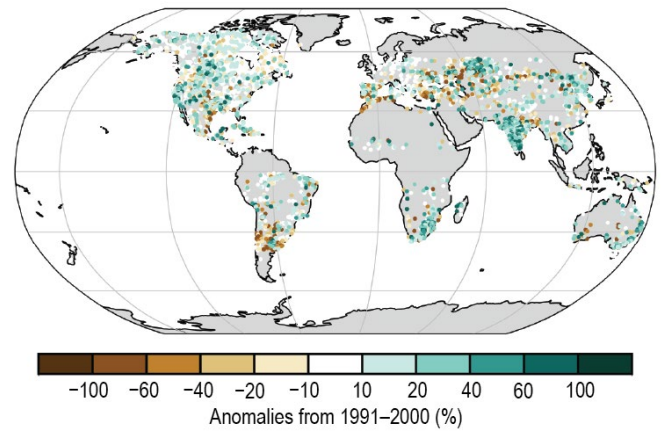
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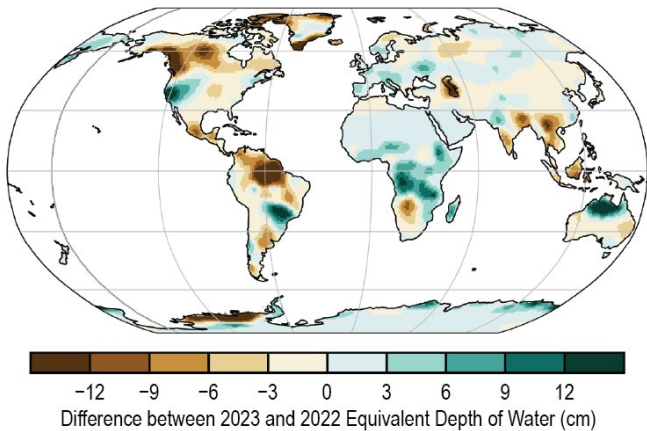
(o) Cloudiness



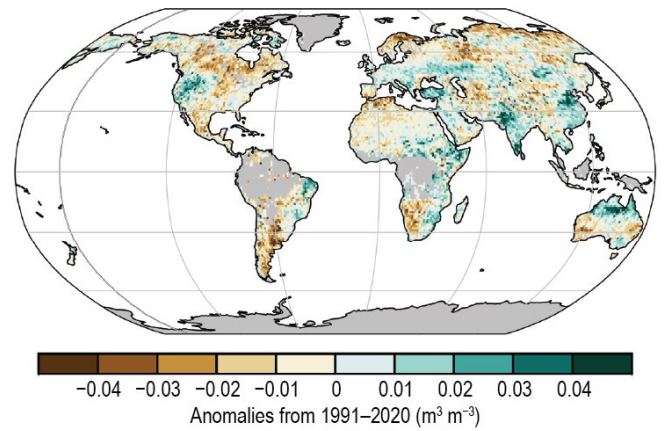
(p) Lake Water Level



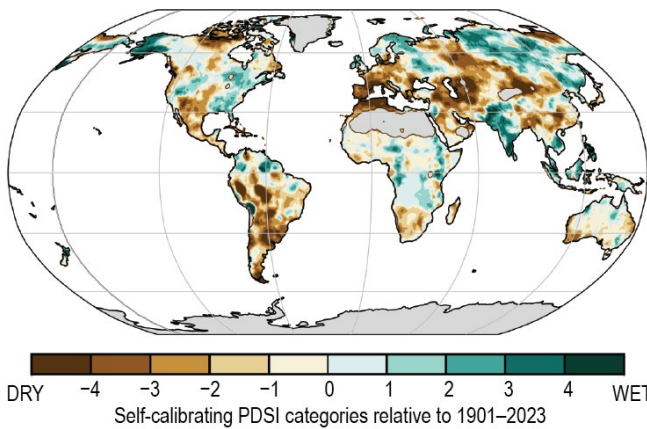
(q) Terrestrial Water Storage



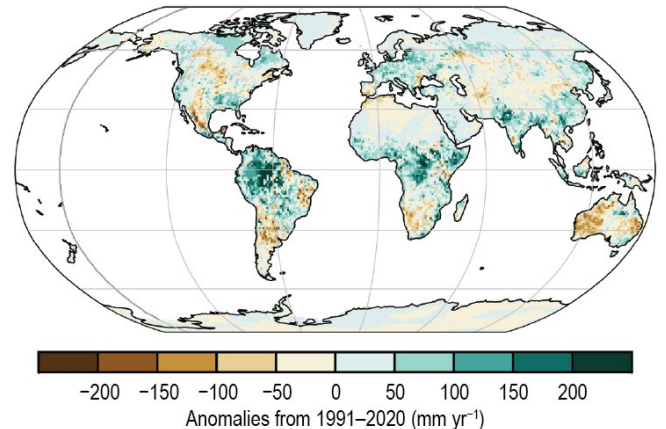
(r) Soil Moisture



(s) Drought



(t) Land Evaporation



(u) Sea Level Pressure

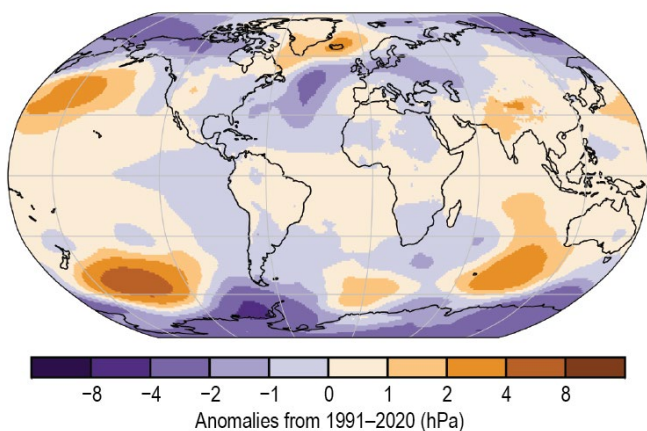


Plate 2.1 (cont.) (o) PATMOS-x 6.0 cloud fraction annual anomalies (%); (p) GloLakes lake water storage anomalies (%); (q) GRACE-FO difference in annual-mean terrestrial water storage between 2022 and 2023 (cm); (r) Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) average surface soil moisture anomalies ( $\text{m}^3 \text{m}^{-3}$ ). Data are masked where no retrieval is possible or where the quality is not assured and flagged, for example due to dense vegetation, frozen soil, or radio frequency interference; (s) Mean self-calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index (scPDSI) for 2021. Droughts are indicated by negative values (brown), wet episodes by positive values (green). No calculation is made where a drought index is meaningless (gray areas: ice sheets or deserts with approximately zero mean precipitation); (t) GLEAM land evaporation anomalies ( $\text{mm yr}^{-1}$ ); (u) ERA5 mean sea level pressure anomalies (hPa);

started the year with strong wet anomalies that persisted for most of the year, while in the central and southeast part of the country, severe below-normal conditions started to emerge at the end of 2023 (e.g., Clarke et al. 2024; see section 7d2).

In contrast to these regionally confined wet soil moisture anomalies of 2023, dry conditions were observed in numerous regions (Plate 2.1r). The most pronounced dry anomaly was observed in southern South America, especially in the River Plate basin and Patagonia (below 50% of normal soil moisture in some areas). This region has been suffering from a multi-year drought since 2019 (Naumann 2021). Pronounced dry conditions also persisted in the Canadian Prairies for the third consecutive year (see section 7b1; van der Schalie et al. 2022; Stradiotti et al. 2023). Although soil moisture remained below normal, drought conditions in the Great Plains of central North America weakened in 2023 compared to 2022. Mexico experienced drier-than-normal conditions during June–September (Appendix Fig. A2.6). Similarly, below-normal soil moisture was observed in southwestern Africa (including South Africa and Namibia), with the most pronounced dry anomalies recorded from February to May. Many of the regions around the Mediterranean Sea (including Spain, northern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) also experienced moderately dry conditions in 2023. In addition, widespread mild-to-moderate negative soil moisture anomalies were observed over much of inland China, southern Central Asia, northern Asia, and in the higher latitudes in general. In southeast Australia, the strong positive soil moisture anomalies of 2022 (Stradiotti et al. 2023) turned into widespread dry anomalies covering most of the southern part of the continent (except for parts of Victoria), but with intermittent periods of wetter-than-normal conditions in January, April, June, and July.

Soil moisture was observed by microwave satellite remote sensing of the surface soil layer down to approximately 5-cm depth, as provided by the COMBINED product of the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) version 202212 (Dorigo et al. 2023). C3S combines multi-sensor data in the 1978–2023 period through statistical merging (Dorigo et al. 2017; Gruber et al. 2017, 2019). Wet and dry anomalies here refer to the deviation from the 1991–2020 climatological average. Note that changes in spatiotemporal coverage (also between product versions, e.g., resulting from the inclusion of additional sensors) can introduce uncertainties in the domain-averaged soil moisture time series (e.g., Bessenbacher et al. 2023).

## 11. MONITORING GLOBAL DROUGHT USING THE SELF-CALIBRATING PALMER DROUGHT SEVERITY INDEX

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The self-calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index (scPDSI; Wells et al. 2004; van der Schrier et al. 2013) over the period 1950–2023 shows that the increasing trend in severity and extent of global drought, which has been ongoing since mid-2019 (Barichivich et al. 2020, 2021, 2022), reached a new historical peak during the second half of 2023 (Fig. 2.43). During June–September, extreme drought conditions (scPDSI  $\leq -4$ ) surpassed 7% of the global land area for the first time in the record, peaking at a new historical maximum of 7.9% in July. Similarly, the extent of severe plus extreme drought conditions (scPDSI  $\leq -3$ ) in 2023 exceeded 16% of the global land area for the first time during the same period, reaching a historical maximum of 16.8% in July. Moderate or worse drought conditions (scPDSI  $\leq -2$ ) peaked in September at a historical maximum of 29.7% of the global land area.

The global pattern of regional droughts seen in 2022 largely persisted through 2023, with the most extensive severe-to-extreme

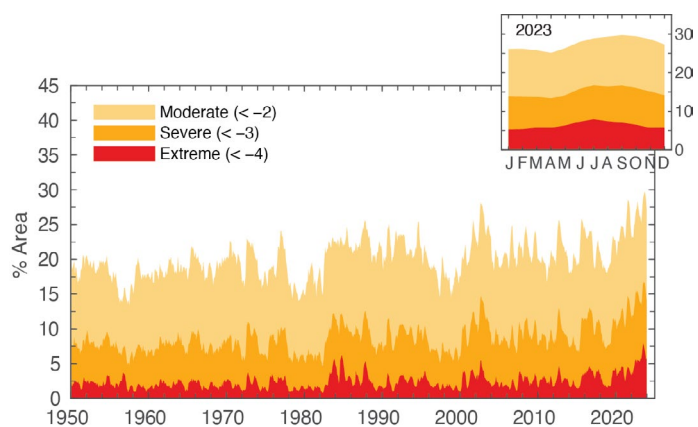


Fig. 2.43. Percentage of global land area (excluding ice sheets and deserts) with self-calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index (scPDSI) indicating moderate ( $\leq -2$ ), severe ( $\leq -3$ ), and extreme ( $\leq -4$ ) drought for each month during the period 1950–2023. Inset: each month of 2023.

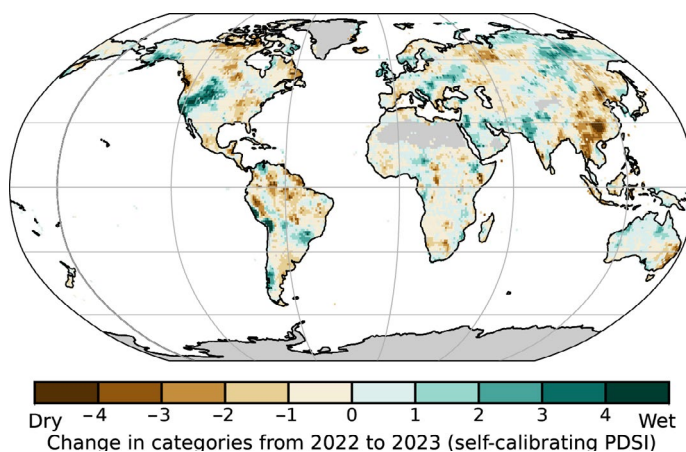
drought conditions occurring over South America, parts of North America, the Mediterranean, and the midlatitudes of Asia (Plate 2.1s). Drought severity eased through western North America and parts of northern and eastern Europe but worsened in tropical South America and the midlatitudes of Asia (Fig. 2.44). In western North America, California experienced a shift from dry to wet conditions, but the overall west–east moisture contrast observed across the United States since 2017 continued as Arizona and New Mexico were under moderate drought (Plate 2.1s). Moderate drought conditions also affected Mexico and Central America. In South America, El Niño conditions during the latter half of 2023 led to extremely wet conditions in coastal areas of Peru and extreme drought through the Amazon basin to the La Plata basin and central Chile. By the end of October, the Rio Negro at Manaus, a major tributary of the Amazon River (Barichivich et al. 2018), fell to its lowest water level since records began in 1902. The megadrought of central Chile reached its 14th consecutive year in 2023, but an increase in winter rainfall broke the drought in the south-central part of the country (section 2d5).

Although precipitation was above normal in parts of northern, central, and eastern Europe in 2023 (section 2b5), most of the southern part of the continent, particularly countries around the Mediterranean, continued under severe-to-extreme drought (Plate 2.1s). In northern Africa, previous extreme drought conditions along the Mediterranean coast from Morocco to Tunisia continued through 2023 (Plate 2.1s). Most of the Middle East from eastern Türkiye to Pakistan also saw a continuation of severe-to-extreme drought conditions.

Although uncertain due to sparse in situ data, moisture patterns in Africa did not change much in 2023 (Plate 2.1s). Tropical Africa saw a continuation of moderate wet conditions that were observed since 2019. Southern Africa saw a continuation of drought conditions that began in 2018, and its severity remained mostly as moderate. In Australia, drought eased in many northern regions, was sustained in the southwest, and worsened in the easternmost parts during 2023; some parts of the country continued under moderate drought (Plate 2.1s). Wet conditions seen through most of India and southeast Asia in 2022 continued during 2023.

In contrast, severe-to-extreme drought conditions extended farther through China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan. Previous severe-to-extreme drought continued through part of northeastern Siberia (Plate 2.1s).

Hydrological drought results from a period of abnormally low precipitation, sometimes exacerbated by a concurrent increase in evapotranspiration (ET). Its occurrence can be apparent in reduced river discharge, soil moisture, and/or groundwater storage, depending on the season and duration of the event. Here, the scPDSI is calculated, using gridded global precipitation and Penman-Monteith Potential ET from an early update of the CRU TS 4.08 dataset (Harris et al. 2020). A simple water balance at the core of the scPDSI estimates actual evapotranspiration, soil moisture content, and runoff based on the input precipitation and potential loss of moisture to the atmosphere. Estimated soil moisture categories are calibrated over the complete 1901–2023 period to ensure that “extreme” droughts and pluvials (wet periods) relate to events that do not occur more frequently than in approximately 2% of the months. This calibration affects direct comparison with other hydrological cycle variables in Plate 2.1s that use a different baseline period.



**Fig. 2.44.** Change in drought categories from 2022 to 2023 (mean self-calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index [scPDSI] for 2023 minus mean scPDSI for 2022). Increases in drought severity are indicated by negative values (brown) and decreases by positive values (green). No calculation is made where a drought index is meaningless (gray areas: ice sheets or deserts with approximately zero mean precipitation).



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#### **d7 Cloudiness**

Clouds and Earth's Radiant Energy Systems Energy Balanced and Filled (CERES EBAF) data were obtained from the NASA Langley Research Center CERES ordering tool at <https://ceres.larc.nasa.gov/data/>.

#### **d8 Lake water storage**

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#### **d9 Groundwater and terrestrial water storage**

Work on the Groundwater and Terrestrial Water Storage section was funded by NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-On (GRACE-FO) Science Team.

#### **d10 Soil moisture**

This study uses satellite soil moisture observations from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) Climate Data Store (CDS) (2018): Soil moisture gridded data from 1978 to present. C3S CDS. (Accessed on 16 01 2024), 10.24381/cds.d7782f18.

#### **d11 Monitoring drought using the Self Calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index**

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#### **d12 Land evaporation**

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#### **e2 Surface winds**

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#### **e4 Lightning**

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Sub-section	General Variable or Phenomenon	Specific dataset or variable	Source
2d11	Drought	Climatic Research Unit gridded Time Series (CRU TS) 4.07	<a href="https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/hrg/cru_ts_4.07/">https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/hrg/cru_ts_4.07/</a>
2d12	Land Evaporation	Climatic Research Unit gridded Time Series (CRU TS) 4.07	<a href="https://www.gleam.eu/">https://www.gleam.eu/</a>
2d1	Modes of Variability	Southern Oscillation Index	<a href="https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/soi/">https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/soi/</a>

### Section 2e Atmospheric circulation

Sub-section	General Variable or Phenomenon	Specific dataset or variable	Source
2e1	Modes of Variability	Antarctic Oscillation (AAO)/Southern Annular Mode (SAM)	<a href="https://ftp.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/cwlinks/norm.daily.aao.index.b790101.current.ascii">https://ftp.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/cwlinks/norm.daily.aao.index.b790101.current.ascii</a>
2e1	Pressure, Sea Level or Near-Surface	ERA5	<a href="https://www.ecmwf.int/en/forecasts/dataset/ecmwf-reanalysis-v5">https://www.ecmwf.int/en/forecasts/dataset/ecmwf-reanalysis-v5</a>
2e2	Modes of Variability	Antarctic Oscillation (AAO)/Southern Annular Mode (SAM)	<a href="https://ftp.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/cwlinks/norm.daily.aao.index.b790101.current.ascii">https://ftp.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/cwlinks/norm.daily.aao.index.b790101.current.ascii</a>
2e2	Wind, [Near] Surface	ERA5	<a href="https://www.ecmwf.int/en/forecasts/dataset/ecmwf-reanalysis-v5">https://www.ecmwf.int/en/forecasts/dataset/ecmwf-reanalysis-v5</a>
2e2	Wind, [Near] Surface	HadISD v3.3.0.2022f	<a href="https://hadleyserver.metoffice.gov.uk/hadisd/v330_2022f/index.html">https://hadleyserver.metoffice.gov.uk/hadisd/v330_2022f/index.html</a>
2e2	Wind, [Near] Surface	Modern-Era Retrospective Analysis for Research and Applications version 2 (MERRA-2)	<a href="http://gmao.gsfc.nasa.gov/reanalysis/MERRA-2/">http://gmao.gsfc.nasa.gov/reanalysis/MERRA-2/</a>
2e2	Wind [Near Surface]	Remote Sensing System (RSS) Merged 1-deg monthly radiometer winds	<a href="https://www.remss.com/measurements/wind/">https://www.remss.com/measurements/wind/</a>
2e2	Wind [Near Surface]	Remote Sensing System (RSS) Advanced Scatterometer (ASCAT)	<a href="https://www.remss.com/missions/ascat/">https://www.remss.com/missions/ascat/</a>
2e2	Wind [Near Surface]	Remote Sensing System (RSS) QuickScat4	<a href="https://www.remss.com/missions/qscat/">https://www.remss.com/missions/qscat/</a>
2e3	Wind [Upper Atmosphere]	Quasi biennial Oscillation (QBO)	<a href="https://www.atmohub.kit.edu/data/singapore2023.dat">https://www.atmohub.kit.edu/data/singapore2023.dat</a>
2e3	Modes of Variability	Antarctic Oscillation (AAO), Southern Annular Mode (SAM)	<a href="https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/daily_ao_index/aao/aao.shtml">https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/daily_ao_index/aao/aao.shtml</a> , <a href="http://www.nerc-bas.ac.uk/icd/gjma/sam.html">http://www.nerc-bas.ac.uk/icd/gjma/sam.html</a>

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