

2026 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook

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2026 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook: A Return of El Niño

Key factors influencing the tropical Atlantic Basin:

- ✓ A strong El Niño
- ✓ Potentially high wind shear
- ✓ Primary analog seasons featuring hurricane development in the northwest Caribbean.



2026 Risk Areas

Season Outlook

The 2026 hurricane season has begun on a relatively quiet note. While a few weak disturbances have developed across the Caribbean and Gulf regions, none have posed a significant threat for tropical development.

In this outlook, we will examine several key atmospheric and oceanic indicators that help provide insight into the potential activity and overall character of the season ahead. An updated outlook will be issued in mid-July.

El Niño/La Niña

Sea surface temperatures across the tropical eastern Pacific continue to warm steadily. As of today, temperature anomalies are running at approximately +1.3°C, placing current conditions firmly within the strong El Niño category. Forecast guidance indicates that these anomalies could exceed +2.0°C and potentially approach +2.7°C by September, which would rank this event among the strongest El Niños on record.

Historically, strong El Niño patterns promote widespread sinking air and drier atmospheric conditions across the tropical Atlantic basin, extending from the Caribbean Sea to the coast of Africa. In addition, stronger-than-normal upper-level winds typically increase wind shear across the region, creating a less favorable environment for tropical cyclone development in the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic. Strong El Niño seasons also have a tendency to shorten the active portion of the hurricane season, with activity often decreasing by late October.

Overall, the forecast strength of this year's El Niño is expected to be a significant suppressing factor for Atlantic hurricane activity.

Atlantic Water Temperatures

Sea surface temperatures east of the Caribbean remain slightly below normal, largely due to stronger easterly trade winds during the winter months. In contrast, temperatures across the Caribbean are running above normal, while the Gulf of Mexico and the subtropical Atlantic continue to experience well above-normal warmth.

The placement of these warmer and cooler ocean regions can provide important clues about the large-scale atmospheric patterns likely to develop during the hurricane season. Current forecasts suggest that the Azores-Bermuda high pressure system will shift farther northeast, closer to the Azores. This pattern would favor tropical waves moving off Africa turning northward earlier in their track, potentially before reaching the Caribbean — a setup similar to what was observed last season.

As a result, the majority of tropical systems this season are expected to develop and/or track north of the Caribbean.

Wind Shear

The long-range European model indicates that wind shear may be unusually elevated across the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic during the upcoming season. This outlook is likely influenced, in part, by projections of a relatively strong El Niño developing during the peak months. Increased wind shear in the Caribbean and areas east of it would act to suppress hurricane development in those regions. However, if these stronger shear conditions do not extend northward into the Gulf of Mexico, the environment there could remain more favorable, potentially supporting nearshore tropical development during the season.

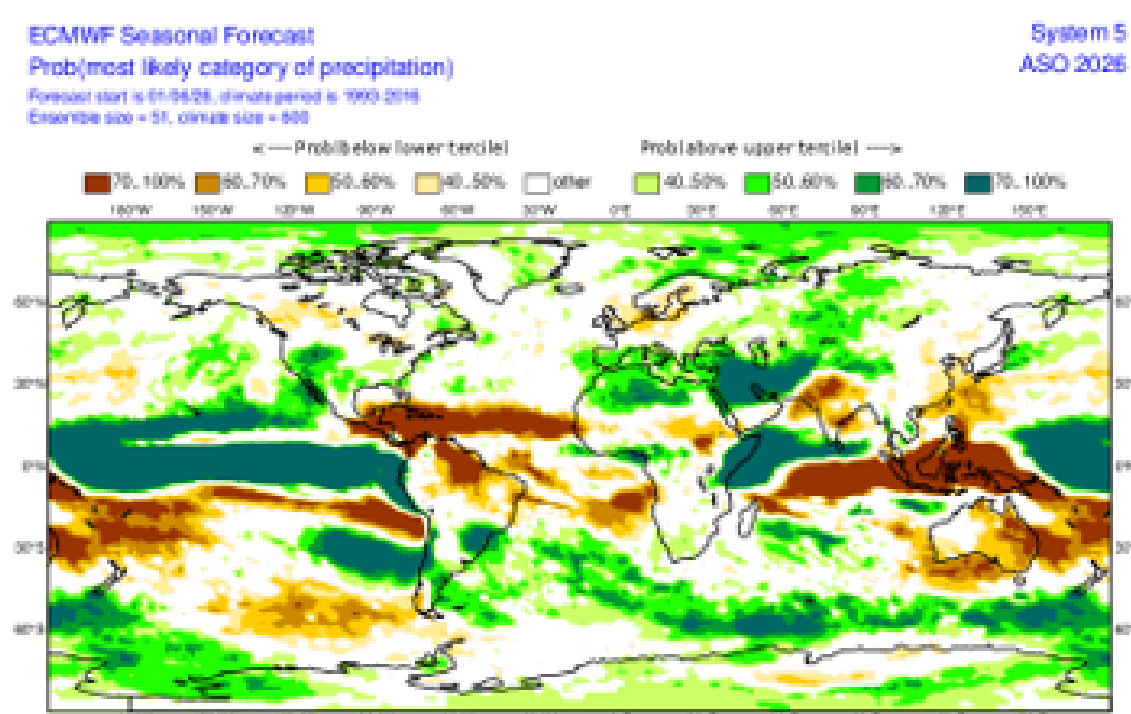
Analog Seasons

An analog season refers to a past year with ocean temperature patterns and atmospheric conditions similar to those currently observed. The premise is that when present-day tropical conditions closely resemble those of a historical season, overall activity may follow a comparable pattern in terms of storm frequency and track behavior. For the 2026 season, identified analog years are categorized as primary and secondary to guide expectations. The primary analogs suggest slightly below-normal activity, with approximately 10 named storms, 4–5 hurricanes, and 2 major or intense hurricanes. Notably, these primary analog years also featured development in the northwestern Caribbean, indicating a potential for elevated hurricane risk in the Gulf of Mexico.

Year	Named Storms (normal = 14)	Hurricanes (normal = 7)	Intense Hurricanes (normal = 3)
1963	10	7	3
2002	12	4	2
2006	10	5	2
2009	9	3	2
2015	11	4	2
Avg.	10.4	4.6	2.2

European Model Forecast

The ECMWF is predicting a very strong El Niño, the European model is predicting well below-normal rainfall (brown area) from the western Caribbean to the coast of Africa. This is resulting from the dry, sinking air that often occurs during a strong El Niño. This region would be quite unfavorable for tropical development in 2026.



Our June Forecast

The forecast development of a very strong El Niño is expected to serve as a major inhibiting factor for hurricane activity this season. Tropical development across the Caribbean and the tropical Atlantic eastward toward Africa — particularly south of 20°N latitude — may remain limited, with some areas potentially experiencing little to no hurricane activity.

Instead, the majority of tropical systems are expected to form and track north of the Caribbean, with potential impacts extending from Bermuda northward toward Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. At the same time, the potential for close-in tropical development in the southern Gulf of Mexico will require monitoring, as this type of pattern can occasionally lead to landfalls along the southern Gulf Coast.

For this June update, we have reduced our seasonal forecast to 11 named storms, including 4 hurricanes and 2 major hurricanes. This projection remains below the 30-year climatological average of 14 named storms, 7 hurricanes, and 3 major hurricanes. Based on current trends, it remains possible that even these revised numbers may still be slightly too high.

Our next forecast update is scheduled for early July.

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