

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

So far this season, two weak, highly sheared tropical storms, Arthur and Bertha, have developed over the northern Gulf, with neither producing significant impacts offshore or inland. Looking ahead, long-range forecast guidance indicates a low potential for tropical development through the first one to two weeks of August.

El Nino/La Nina

Sea surface temperatures across the tropical eastern Pacific continue to warm, with the current anomaly reaching +2.04°C, firmly within the strong El Niño range. Forecast guidance indicates anomalies could exceed +2.5°C and potentially approach +2.7°C by September, placing this event among the strongest El Niño episodes on record.

A strong El Niño typically promotes increased atmospheric stability and stronger wind shear across the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic, creating a less favorable environment for tropical cyclone development and intensification. El Niño years can also contribute to an earlier decline in Atlantic tropical activity, often by late October. If current projections hold, the strength of El Niño is expected to be a significant limiting factor for tropical development this season.

Atlantic Water Temperatures

Sea surface temperatures across the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic are currently running slightly below normal, reflecting moderate easterly trade winds across the region. Over the next two months, these trade winds are expected to weaken as the Azores-Bermuda High shifts north and east, allowing tropical Atlantic waters to gradually warm toward near-normal levels.

This evolving pattern may also encourage tropical waves emerging from the west coast of Africa to turn northward before reaching the Caribbean, similar to the pattern observed last season. As a result, tropical cyclone development and tracks are expected to favor areas north of the Caribbean this season, potentially reducing the overall threat to the Caribbean basin.

Wind Shear

Long-range European model guidance continues to indicate the potential for near-record levels of wind shear across the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic during the peak of the season, largely driven by the anticipated strength of El Niño. Elevated wind shear would create a highly unfavorable environment for tropical cyclone development and intensification across these areas.

However, if the strongest shear remains confined to the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic and does not extend northward into the Gulf, conditions there could remain more favorable. This pattern could increase the potential for close-in tropical development within the Gulf, where storms may have less lead time before affecting coastal areas.

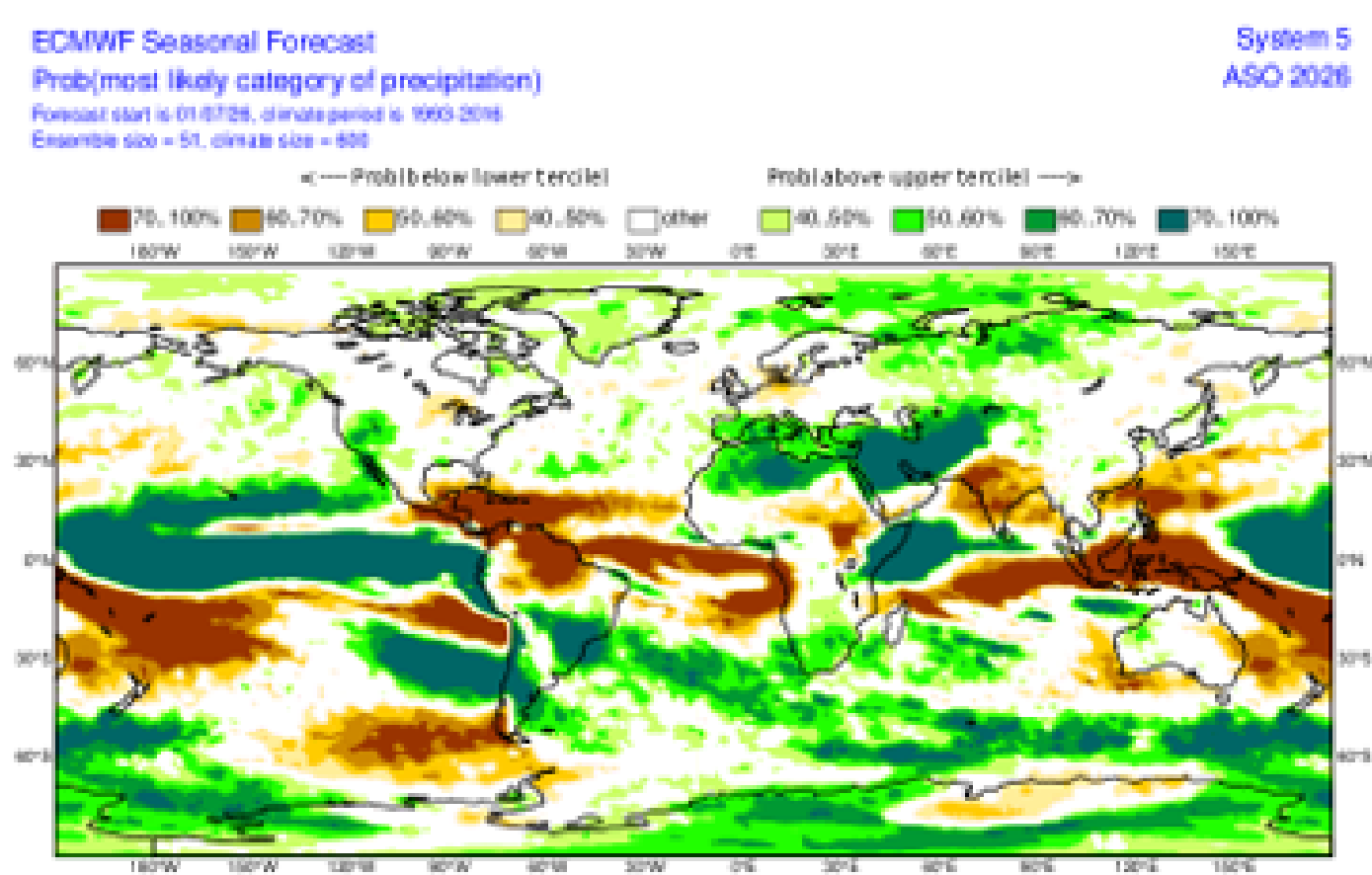
Analog Seasons

An analog season is a season in the past with a similar setup of ocean temperatures and atmospheric flow patterns to what we are seeing at present. The thinking is that if the current state of the tropics closely matches that of a year in the past, then seasonal activity this season could be somewhat similar to the activity in the analog season in terms of numbers and tracks. Analogs predict a below-normal season, numbers wise, with around 10 named storms, 4-5 hurricanes and 2 major or intense hurricanes. The primary analog years featured hurricane development in the northwest Caribbean, which could lead to a Gulf hurricane threat.

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

Because it 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 August Forecast

The very strong El Niño will likely be a significant inhibiting factor for hurricane development this season. There may be little or no hurricane activity across the Caribbean and east to Africa south of 20N latitude. Most storms may form and track north of the Caribbean, possibly affecting Bermuda and north to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. In addition, we have to watch for close-in hurricane development in the southern Gulf, which could result in a landfall across the northern Gulf coast.

For this update, we have not changed the predicted number of named storms and hurricanes. We are predicting 11 named storms (9 additional), with 4 hurricanes, including 2 intense hurricanes. This is below the 30-year climatological average of 14 named storms with 7 hurricanes and 3 intense hurricanes. Given current trends, it is quite possible that our numbers are still a little too high.

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