

Stratospheric initial conditions provide seasonal predictability of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oscillations

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The North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), the regional manifestation of the Arctic Oscillation (AO), dominates winter climate variability in Europe and North America. Skilful seasonal forecasting of the winter NAO/AO has been demonstrated recently by dynamical prediction systems. However, the role of initial conditions in this predictability remains unknown. Using a latest generation seasonal forecasting system and reanalysis data, we show that the initial upper stratospheric zonal wind anomaly contributes to winter NAO/AO predictability through downward propagation of initial conditions. An initial polar westerly/easterly anomaly in the upper stratosphere propagates down to the troposphere in early winter, favoring a poleward/equatorward shift of the tropospheric mid-latitude jet. This tropospheric anomaly persists well into the late winter and induces the positive/negative phase of NAO/AO in the troposphere. Our results imply that good representation of stratospheric initial condition and stratosphere-troposphere coupling in models is important for winter climate prediction.

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