

Snowball Earth transitions from Last Glacial Maximum conditions provide an independent upper limit on Earth's climate sensitivity

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Abstract. Geological evidence of a snowball Earth state indicate persistent tropical sea ice cover during the Neoproterozoic (>635 million years ago). Current theory is that a strengthening of the positive surface albedo feedback with cooling temperatures, eventually exceeding the sum of all other feedbacks, leads to a global climate instability. Several recent high sensitivity climate models with strongly positive cloud feedbacks have not been able to simulate the much warmer Last Glacial Maximum (LGM) state, suggestive that they cool excessively in response to a modest decrease in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and therefore enter the snowball instability by this mechanism. Using a coupled Earth system model, MPI-ESM1.2, we show that clouds accelerate the transition to a snowball Earth state and reduce the radiative forcing required to trigger the climate snowball instability. Positive cloud feedbacks over tropical oceans and ahead of the sea-ice edge act to cool down the oceans and promote sea ice formation. Regardless, when approached slowly, the snowball Earth transitions appear transition appears to occur around a global mean temperature of zero degree Celsius, simultaneously with the sea ice edge advancing into the subtropics thereby strengthening the surface albedo feedback. This temperature threshold, if supported by several climate models, could be used as a novel and independent constraint on the upper bound of climate sensitivity. ~~Currently, using the results from MPI-ESM1.2~~ by using the relationship of simulated LGM temperatures and the models' equilibrium climate sensitivity. The constraint depends only on the simple fact that Earth did not enter a snowball instability during the recent ice ages. Using the here estimated transition temperature, we find it is implausible that Earth's climate sensitivity exceeds 5.5 K (4.4–6.2°C (3.9 – 6.68.4, 90 percent confidence). This upper bound estimate of climate sensitivity is only weakly sensitive to uncertainty in the transition temperature, approximately 0.3 degrees per degree.

1 Introduction

During the ~~Neoproterozoic (>635 million years ago)~~history of Earth, geological evidences support the formation of persistent ~~sea-ice-sea ice~~ within the tropical regions, referred to as snowball Earth states (e.g. Hoffman et al., 2017). Because ice is highly reflective, the positive surface albedo feedback strengthens and exceeds the sum of other feedbacks while the Earth cools down. The evolution of the strength of climate feedbacks as a function of temperature is referred ~~as state-dependency~~to as temperature-dependency. Whilst climate models agree that the surface albedo feedback increases in cold climates (e.g. Budyko, 1969), other climate feedbacks such as clouds are less understood in the context of cooling (~~e.g. Braun et al., 2022~~).

~~State-dependency~~ (e.g. Braun et al., 2022). Temperature-dependency in climate feedbacks has often been studied in warming climates (~~e.g. Caballero and Huber, 2013; Jonko et al., 2013; Meraner et al., 2013~~), ~~but rarely in cold climates (e.g. Colman and McAvaney, 2009)~~. (e.g. Caballero and Huber, 2013; Jonko et al., 2013; Meraner et al., 2013), ~~but rarely in cold climates (e.g. Colman and McAvaney, 2009)~~.

Pierrehumbert et al. (2011) proposed the Snowball Earth modelling intercomparison project, or SnowMIP, as a protocol to compare modelling efforts within the field. SnowMIP was made of three atmosphere-ocean models, where two of them are older versions of the models applied in the current study (ECHAM5/MPIOM and CAM). SnowMIP paved the way to identifying the importance of circulation and clouds in snowball Earth initiation across models. Following SnowMIP, the importance of snow-albedo feedbacks and their relation to sea-ice albedo feedback was identified, as well as the interaction of ocean and atmosphere circulations (Voigt and Abbot, 2012). Due to the complexity of running a model into snowball Earth state, and the increasing cost of running higher-end models, there is to this day only a small number of published snowball Earth simulations and even less feedback analyses. To our knowledge, there is also no study that relates the snowball Earth transition and climate sensitivity, which is the main aim of the present study.

The community definition of equilibrium climate sensitivity (ECS) is the long term global mean surface warming in response to a doubling of CO₂ over pre-industrial (PI) levels, excluding temperature changes induced by slow changes in ice sheets (Forster et al., 2021). ECS is among the most important geophysical properties for determining future global warming (Grose et al., 2018; Huusko et al., 2021), and has long been the subject of investigation (Arrhenius, 1896). Currently, multiple lines of evidence are used in combination to constrain ECS, including a process based approach wherein forcing and individual feedbacks are constrained, use of the instrumental temperature record warming, and by interpreting estimates of temperature and forcing in various paleoclimates (Sherwood et al., 2020). The result is a substantially reduced uncertainty relative to earlier assessments (Forster et al., 2021).

In this study, we quantify cloud feedbacks as the Earth ~~transits~~transitions towards a snowball Earth state from ~~pre-industrial~~PI conditions under low ~~CO₂~~CO₂ concentration. In particular, we focus on the contribution of cloud feedbacks over tropical oceans, as well as the interaction between cloud and sea-ice albedo feedbacks. Our motivation to investigate climate feedbacks in the snowball Earth transition stems from the fact that a number of models of the paleoclimate modelling intercomparison project phase 4 (PMIP4) fail to simulate the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM), a cold period with large ice sheets 21 000 years ago (~~e.g. Kageyama et al., 2021~~), (e.g. Kageyama et al., 2021), despite being able to simulate warm paleoclimates (e.g.

Pliocene, 3.2 million years ago (Haywood et al., 2020), (Haywood et al., 2020), Eocene, 50 million years ago (Lunt et al., 2021) (Lunt et al., 2021)). These climate models ~~start transiting to a snowball state at temperatures~~ simulate temperatures for the LGM substantially cooler than indicated by ~~LGM reconstructions (e.g. Zhu et al., 2021a)~~ reconstructions, and show hints of runaway behaviour (e.g. Zhu and Poulsen, 2021b). Since they have strong positive cloud feedbacks they consequently exhibit high climate ~~sensitivities, which is the long-term temperature change after an abrupt doubling of atmospheric CO₂ from pre-industrial concentrations~~ sensitivity. It could ~~therefore~~ be possible to use the models simulating stable LGM states ~~by evaluating the relationship between simulated LGM temperatures and the ECS of those models as~~ to provide an ~~independent~~ upper limit constraint on climate sensitivity ~~by estimating independent from previous estimates by calculating~~ the temperature at which the Earth transits towards an unstable snowball Earth state. ~~The constraint is essentially based on the fact that during the recent glacial cycles we have evidently not entered the snowball state. The upper bound on ECS is either a large value or not provided for the different lines of evidence used in the latest report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), where there was no estimate of an upper bound in the combined assessment. Hence, our estimate may become a valuable addition to the next assessment.~~

To approach this problem with other climate models, we ~~conclude~~ close our study with a short and easy-to-replicate experimental ~~design of protocol of a~~ modern snowball Earth simulations. The results of this experiment are relevant for both climate sensitivity, as shown in this paper, as well as understanding the challenges around setting up the LGM simulation, a notoriously difficult ~~paleoclimate to model~~ climate to simulate.

2 Methods

We use the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology Earth system model version 1.2, MPI-ESM1.2 (Mauritsen et al., 2019) (Mauritsen et al., 2019) to simulate snowball Earth transitions from ~~pre-industrial (PI) PI~~ and LGM initial conditions. ~~The sea-ice and snow-albedo parametrisation in MPI-ESM1.2 is similar to other snowball Earth studies using an older version of this model (Voigt et al., 2011; Voigt and Abbot, 2012), except for the addition of meltponds which are described by Roeckner et al. (2012)~~. We perform abrupt and sustained changes of atmospheric ~~CO₂~~ CO₂ concentrations or solar constant ~~starting~~ from the equilibrium ~~states of PI or LGM~~ Continents, non-CO₂ states. The CO₂ concentrations are chosen as one half of the previous concentration, as CO₂ has a quasi-logarithmic forcing behaviour, and as to facilitate comparisons with other studies which uses doubling and halving, such as the ones of the non-linear modelling intercomparison project (nonlinMIP, Good et al. (2016)). ~~Continents, non-CO₂ greenhouse gases and orbital configurations are kept as in PI or LGM. unchanged. A dynamic vegetation model is used, but vegetation dies-off rapidly due to rapid cooling and low CO₂.~~ PI simulations use the coarse resolution ~~MPI-ESM1~~ MPI-ESM1.2-CR (T31 spectral truncation, 31 atmospheric levels), which is faster and numerically more stable to extreme forcing. LGM boundary conditions are only available in the low resolution MPI-ESM1.2-LR (T63, 47 atmospheric levels). Radiative differences between the two models are small, and the climate sensitivity of MPI-ESM1.2-CR is slightly higher ~~than the LR version~~. While we do not expect ~~state-dependency~~ temperature-dependency to vary much across models,

Table 1. Summary of the runs performed for this study. PI = Pre-industrial, LGM = Last Glacial Maximum. Solar constant is expressed in percentage of ~~pre-industrial-PI~~ solar constant (1361 Wm^{-2}). *The runs started from an equilibrium state and ran for 100 years. **The runs were manually stopped and are expected to reach equilibrium in a cold non-snowball state. If the transition temperature is left empty, the simulation did not transit towards a snowball Earth during the years simulated.

Run	Length (years)	Transition temp. (°C)	Solar constant (%)	CO ₂ (ppm)	Boundaries	Comments
Pre-industrial	*		100	284.32	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
LGM	*		100	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
2xCO2	150		100	568.64	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
abrupt50ppm <u>50ppm</u>	1156**		100	50	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/8xCO2	1142	<u>-14.7</u>	100	35.54	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/16xCO2	639	<u>-19.4</u>	100	17.80	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/32xCO2	442	<u>-20.8</u>	100	8.90	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/64xCO2	338	<u>-19.1</u>	100	4.45	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/128xCO2	280	<u>-23.7</u>	100	2.22	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/256xCO2	245	<u>-19.5</u>	100	1.11	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/512xCO2	219	<u>-22.9</u>	100	0.56	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/1024xCO2	230	<u>-26.5</u>	100	0.28	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/2048xCO2	194	<u>-22.1</u>	100	0.14	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-CR
1/128xCO2-fixalb	1046**		100	2.22	PI	locked albedo feedback
1/128xCO2-fixq	632**		100	2.22	PI	locked water vapor feedback
1/128xCO2-fixcld	946	<u>-15.3</u>	100	2.22	PI	locked cloud feedback
1/512xCO2-fixcld	518	<u>-16.0</u>	100	0.56	PI	locked cloud feedback
1/256xCO2-fixcld	648	<u>-16.4</u>	100	1.11	PI	locked cloud feedback
1/64xCO2-fixcld	1453**		100	4.45	PI	locked cloud feedback
1/32xCO2-fixcld	1312**		100	8.90	PI	locked cloud feedback
lgm-S94	290	<u>-17.2</u>	94	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
lgm-S93	198	<u>-17.2</u>	93	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
lgm-S92	179	<u>-16.0</u>	92	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
lgm-S91	148	<u>-22.9</u>	91	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
lgm-S89	113	<u>-22.3</u>	89	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
lgm-S85	75	<u>-25.0</u>	85	190	LGM	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
S92-LR	179	<u>-13.4</u>	92	284.32	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
S85-LR	166	<u>-21.0</u>	85	284.32	PI	MPI-ESM1.2-LR
CESM1.2	210	<u>-23.3</u>	100	2.22	PI	CESM1.2

individual feedbacks are likely to slightly differ so we also initiate a few simulations from PI with MPI-ESM1.2-LR. Details
85 of all simulations are summarised in ~~Table 1-~~ Table 1.

The growth of thick ~~sea-ice~~ sea ice leads to numerical instabilities in the ~~model~~ (> ocean model component (> 12 meters)). We do not artificially limit sea-ice growth as in other studies (~~Voigt and Marotzke, 2010; Voigt et al., 2011; Voigt and Abbot, 2012~~), ~~as it~~ (Voigt and Marotzke, 2010; Voigt et al., 2011; Voigt and Abbot, 2012), ~~as this method~~ generates latent heat at the base of ~~sea-ice~~ (Marotzke and Botzet, 2007) sea ice (Marotzke and Botzet, 2007) which changes the required ~~CO2~~ CO₂ forcing
90 for snowball Earth initiation (~~Hörner et al., 2022~~ (Hörner et al., 2022)). This results in all our simulations reaching numerical instability at some point when approaching a complete snowball Earth state due to the sea ice being too thick in narrow basins, such as the Baltic Sea. This does not affect our results, as we evaluate the transition in temperatures much higher than at the

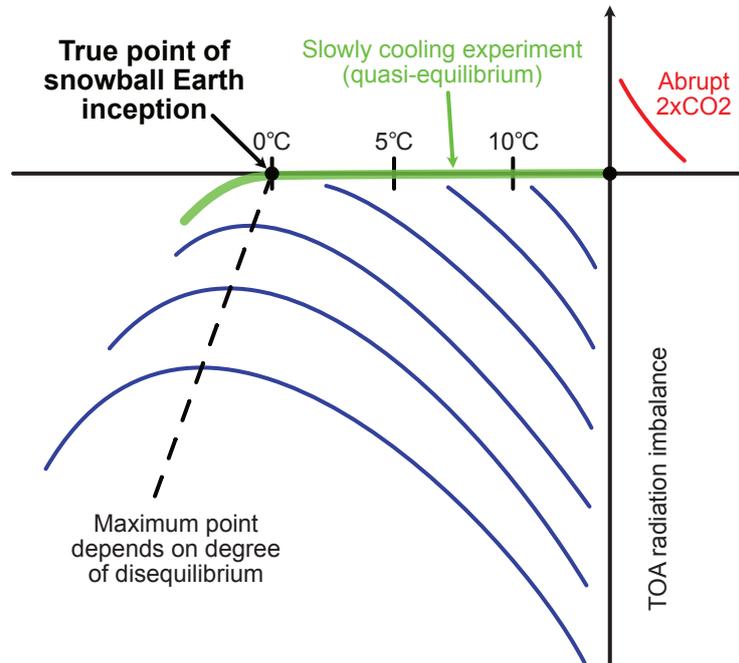


Figure 1. Schematic of top-of-atmosphere (TOA) imbalance versus surface temperature difference to pre-industrial (PI), as developed by Gregory et al. (2004). Here, we compare the behavior of our abrupt forcing simulations, as they cool down, to the behavior of a real world transition wherein CO₂ is slowly and gradually reduced (green line). Note that the dashed line is added for illustration purpose only.

instability. Only the 50ppm simulation was manually stopped as it is expected to reach an equilibrium in a cold non-snowball state (see Table 1 for details on run length).

95 2.1 Temperature and imbalance evolution of the simulations

We analyse the evolution of our simulations by studying how the top-of-atmosphere (TOA) energetic imbalance changes with surface temperature. This approach is shown in Fig. 4 and Fig. 6 and has been first developed by Gregory et al. (2004). Here, each point of data is a one-year global average of the simulation as it responds to an initial and abruptly applied forcing. Because the total feedback is negative near the stable and stationary pre-industrial state, the system will attempt to reduce the TOA imbalance when exposed to positive or negative forcing. Consequently, in the case of an initial negative forcing from reduced CO₂ levels, the climate cools down. Therefore, the beginning of the simulation is where the temperature difference to PI is the closest to zero, and the imbalance is close to the forcing imposed. The end of the simulation is the left-most point, when the temperature anomaly relative to PI conditions is the largest.

In the real climate system, the climate would slowly cool down as the forcing from the Sun or greenhouse gases change only slowly over time. Such transitions and abruptly forced simulations are illustrated in Fig. 1. When a negative forcing is

110 slowly applied, for instance if CO₂ is slowly decreasing over time, the climate system would maintain a quasi-equilibrium and move along the green line to colder temperatures, until the true instability leading to a snowball Earth state is reached. In our simulations, the point the closest to equilibrium, i.e. the least negative TOA imbalance, serves as to estimate the transition value. If a simulation was to be brought to higher CO₂ concentration, it is at this point that the equilibrium would be reached first. Because the simulations miss this equilibrium point, and since any other year is further out of balance than the year at this equilibrium point, they will not reach any other equilibrium until a new climate state, most likely the snowball Earth state, is found. Therefore, we can estimate the model's transition temperature towards snowball Earth as the temperature of the year with the least negative TOA imbalance. By definition it is also the year where the total climate feedback would be strictly zero before turning positive, which is represented by the tangential line in the Gregory et al. (2004) framework.

115 As we shall see, the simulated point slightly differs from the true transition point due to time-dependent effects that are proportional to the degree of disequilibrium. It appears that when the forcing is strongly negative, the transition point in the Gregory analysis shifts to lower temperatures. We speculate that this is a kind of time-dependent feedback effect whereby the positive feedback from formation of sea ice is delayed by the large thermal inertia of the oceans. Therefore, to estimate a model's true snowball Earth transition point it is necessary to carry out multiple abrupt forcing experiments as is done in this study.

2.2 Climate feedback calculations

Climate feedbacks are diagnosed using the partial radiative perturbation (PRP) method (Wetherald and Manabe, 1988; Colman and McAvaney, 1997) (Wetherald and Manabe, 1988; Colman and McAvaney, 1997). Details of its online implementation in MPI-ESM1.2 are in Meraner et al. (2013) Meraner et al. (2013). The PRP method calculates individual contributions of surface 125 albedo, clouds, temperature and water vapor changes to top-of-atmosphere fluxes, by exchanging related variables between a control climate state and the transient state analysed. Because the length of each run varies with the forcing amplitude, we compute climate feedbacks by regressing the top-of-atmosphere radiation balance changes arising from albedo, clouds, temperature, water vapor changes over bins of data points spanning a global temperature ranges of 5°C. We apply the same method in the maps of Fig. 3, whereby the temperature indicated is the middle point of the temperature range.

130 We furthermore perform runs where we separately lock surface albedo, clouds or water vapor in the radiation calculations to the control state, i.e. the corresponding feedbacks do not contribute to the radiation balance. The implementation in MPI-ESM1.2 is described in Mauritsen et al. (2013) Mauritsen et al. (2013). These locked-feedback transient simulations read the pre-industrial-PI control albedo, clouds, temperature and humidity and impose them on the radiation parameterization regardless of the changes the system is experiencing, such as the increasing extent of sea-ice sea ice.

135 2.3 Constraint on Earth's climate sensitivity

The relationship between LGM simulated temperatures and the climate sensitivity of models have been used in an emergent constraint framework to infer the Earth's true climate sensitivity owing to geological reconstructions of LGM tempera-

tures (Hargreaves et al., 2012; Schmidt et al., 2014; Renoult et al., 2020, 2023). The novel constraint on Earth's climate sensitivity developed here uses the same relationship, derived from models participating in the Paleoclimate Modelling Intercomparison Project Phase 4 (PMIP4), where the regression parameters are calculated via ordinary least squares method, but we replace the geological reconstruction of the LGM by the temperature at which the Earth transits to a snowball Earth. This constraint relies on the simple fact that the real LGM was a stable glacial climate, and therefore the highest value of Earth's climate sensitivity before the LGM enters could not have been higher than the point at which the planet would transition into a snowball state, represents the upper limit on climate sensitivity before the LGM. As such, the presented constraint provides a physical upper bound on ECS, not a best estimate.

Recently, Renoult et al. (2023) showed that structural uncertainties and state dependencies in climate feedbacks hinder the relationship between LGM temperature and climate sensitivity, which is computed from warm simulations (4 times pre-industrial CO₂ (Gregory et al., 2004)). We minimize PI CO₂ (Gregory et al., 2004)). The authors minimized the issue by adding to the PMIP4 ensemble an ensemble of CESM models (CESM1.2, CESM1.3 and CESM2.1) in a similar way as described by Renoult et al. (2023). Besides increasing the size of the PMIP4 ensemble, single-model ensembles (or in this case, single-family models) have reduced structural uncertainties, in particular regarding ice sheet forcing, albeit they could add statistical dependency issues within the relationship. Here we assume the three CESM models are sufficiently different to avoid this issue. However, the slope and intercept of the relationship is similar whether CESM2.1 is included or not, which implies that the lower-ECS CESM models are not necessary to preserve the characteristics of the relationship. We decide therefore to not include them, mainly because we only have access to their sea-surface temperature data whereas our analyses are mostly based on surface temperatures including land.

3 Analysis of surface albedo and cloud feedbacks

We perform experiments with abrupt decreases of CO₂ concentrations ranging from 1/8 to 1/2048 of pre-industrial CO₂ concentration using the MPI-ESM1.2-CR model to simulate snowball Earth inception and breakdown transition and breakdown climate feedbacks (Section 2). For clarity, we report temperature anomalies to pre-industrial in units of K, and absolute temperatures in °C. The strengthening surface albedo feedback has often been considered the main driver in the snowball Earth instability, yet positive cloud feedbacks exceed the surface albedo feedback during the initial 10 K of cooling, relative to PI (Fig. 4 2). This strengthening arises from positive tropical cloud feedbacks (Fig. 2 3) due to an increase in shallow cloud coverage over the tropical oceans (Appendix Fig. B1). Below -10 K, cloud feedbacks are increasingly more positive as the initial forcing is increasingly stronger, which amplify tropical cooling. Below -20 K relative to pre-industrial °C relative to PI, cloud feedbacks switch sign and are globally negative and weaker than the surface albedo feedback, although there still exists strong positive cloud feedbacks ahead of the advancing sea-ice edge in both hemispheres (Fig. 2 3). Indeed, because the sea-ice surface is cold, clouds are preferentially over open water which is warmer and a source of moisture (e.g. Wall et al., 2017), (e.g. Wall et al., 2017), where they facilitate further cooling of the ocean. All in all, cloud feedbacks substantially

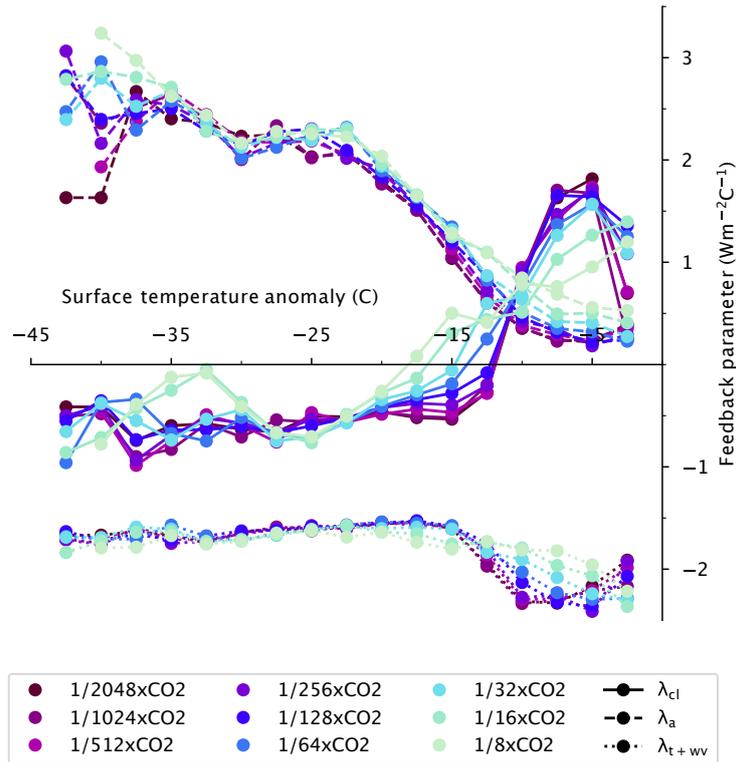


Figure 2. Evolution of the climate feedback parameters of clouds (λ_{cl}), albedo (λ_a) and temperature and water vapor combined (λ_{t+ww}) with global surface temperature anomaly compared to pre-industrial (KPI) ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) under all CO_2 forcing.

contribute to early cooling in response to reduced CO_2 . During the transition, the positive surface albedo feedback starts to exceeds the combined cloud, temperature and water vapor feedbacks at temperatures between -15°C and -20°C below pre-industrial $^{\circ}\text{C}$ below PI (Fig. 3-4). This leads to a global instability and is concomitant with the acceleration of southern the equatorward sea-ice edge into the sub-tropics, resulting in strong global cooling towards the snowball state.

175 The diagnostics presented above is are suggestive that cloud feedback may be an important climate driver towards the snow ball-snowball transition. To demonstrate that this is indeed the case, we isolate the importance of each feedback using the feedback locking technique (Section 2-2) on various simulations, where each feedback mechanism is disabled one after the other (Fig. 3-B 4-B). When the cloud feedback is locked, the instability is reached at a similar global mean temperature as in the non-locked simulations, between -15°C and -20°C relative to PI (Fig. 3-A 4-A). However, cloud feedback locking drastically increases the forcing required to initiate the snowball Earth inception transition, and considerably slow down the transition to snowball Earth. We find that simulations at CO_2 concentration of 1/64 times pre-industrial PI levels and
 180 locking drastically increases the forcing required to initiate the snowball Earth inception transition, and considerably slow down the transition to snowball Earth. We find that simulations at CO_2 concentration of 1/64 times pre-industrial PI levels and lower are required to trigger the transition with locked cloud feedbacks, which is a factor ten less than the concentration required with interactive cloud feedbacks. The surface albedo-locked simulation does not reach a snowball instability as it

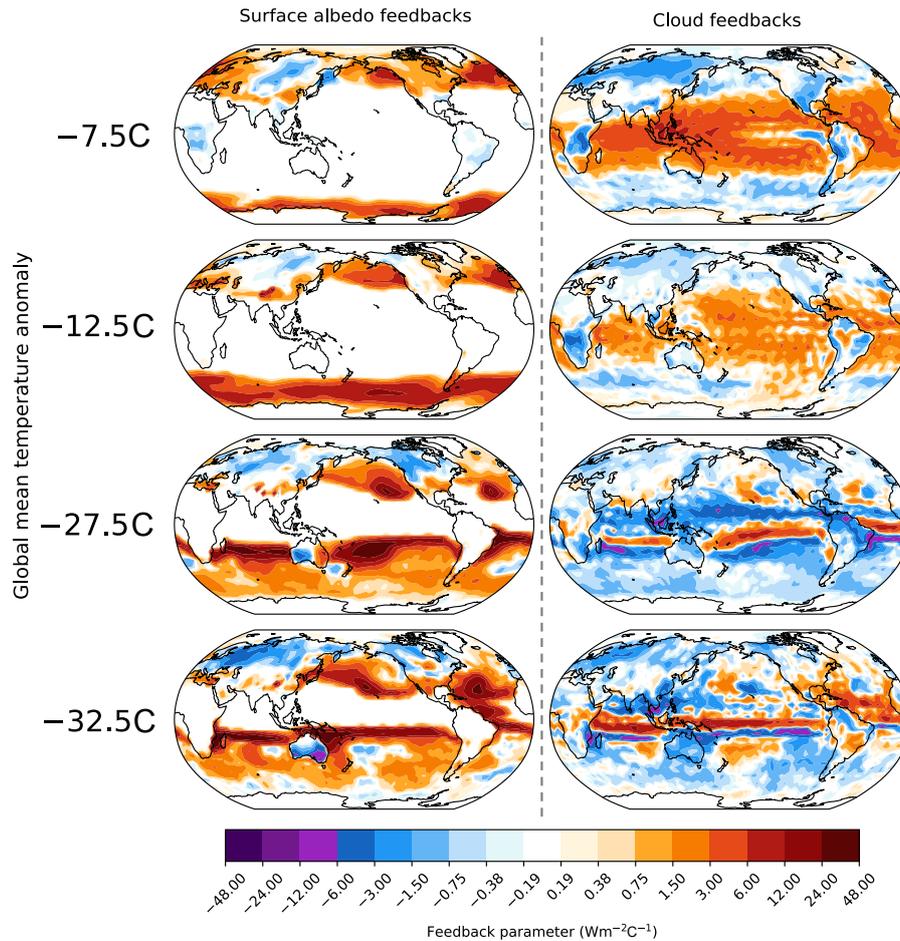


Figure 3. Maps of the surface albedo (left column) and cloud (right column) feedbacks at four average global temperatures in the 1/16xCO₂ simulation. The global mean temperature anomaly indicated is the middle point of the temperature range over which the feedbacks are computed, taking bins of 5 degrees of cooling.

enters quasi-equilibrium below the transition temperature of around $\sim 15\text{K}^\circ\text{C}$ relative to PI. Similarly, the simulation reaches a quasi-equilibrium below $\sim 10\text{K}^\circ\text{C}$ relative to PI when the water vapor feedback is locked (Appendix Fig. B2 B2). The water vapor feedback actually does not strengthen with cooling so is not itself the cause of the snowball instability, however its large positive feedback is important for allowing the surface albedo to trigger the instability.

Thus, the role of cloud feedback is different from that of the surface albedo feedback: 1) positive cloud feedbacks facilitate an early tropical cooling, and this effect is increased with stronger negative forcing, 2) positive cloud feedbacks ahead of the advancing sea-ice edge and its effect on tropical oceans accelerate the transition to snowball Earth and decrease the temperature of instability, as summarized in Fig. 4 5; 3) cloud feedbacks substantially increase the threshold CO₂-CO₂ level required

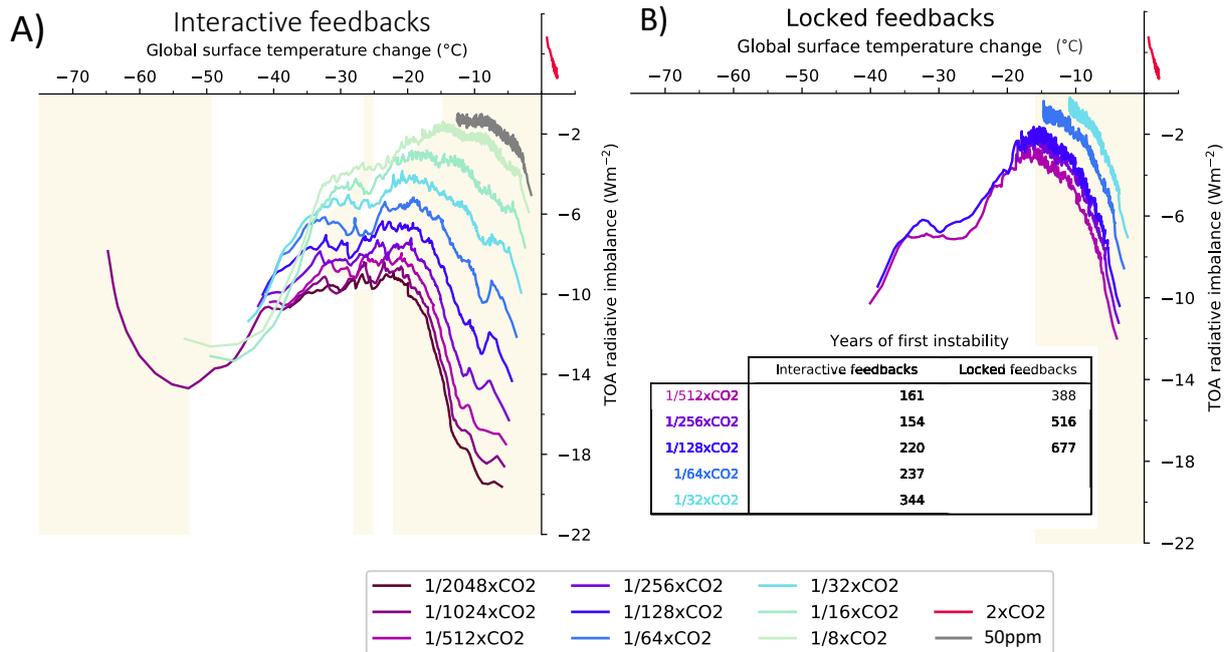


Figure 4. A) Top-of-atmosphere (TOA) radiative imbalance (Wm^{-2}) versus global surface temperature anomaly with relative to pre-industrial (PI) conditions (K°C) under varying CO_2 forcing and B) same but with cloud feedbacks locked to that of the control state. A run with an abrupt doubling of CO_2 ($2\times\text{CO}_2$) is shown for comparison. Colored phases correspond to negative feedback, white phases positive feedback. The years of the first instability between interactive and locked feedbacks are annotated.

for snowball Earth initiation and 4) the entry of sea-ice-sea ice into the southern subtropics results in the surface albedo feedback exceeding the sum of the negative feedbacks. Whereas the surface albedo feedback is responsible for the transition and the main driver to the complete glaciation, our results emphasise an important contribution of cloud feedbacks. And as it happens, cloud-Cloud feedbacks are also the main cause of inter model spread in climate sensitivity (e.g. Zelinka et al., 2020), (e.g. Zelinka et al., 2020), a fact which we shall exploit in Section 5-5.

4 Model evidence for the snowball transition temperature

The temperature at which the climate transits towards a snowball Earth state is broadly similar across the different CO_2 forcing experiments (Fig. 3), as well as 4), when taking into account that it depends systematically on the degree of disequilibrium (Fig. 1). This is independent of whether the experiment is initialized from a PI or an LGM state, as shown in Appendix A A, which demonstrates the importance of background temperature control over the climate feedbacks which drive the transition. In particular, sea-ice formation is primarily temperature-dependent, and the amplitude of the sea-ice albedo

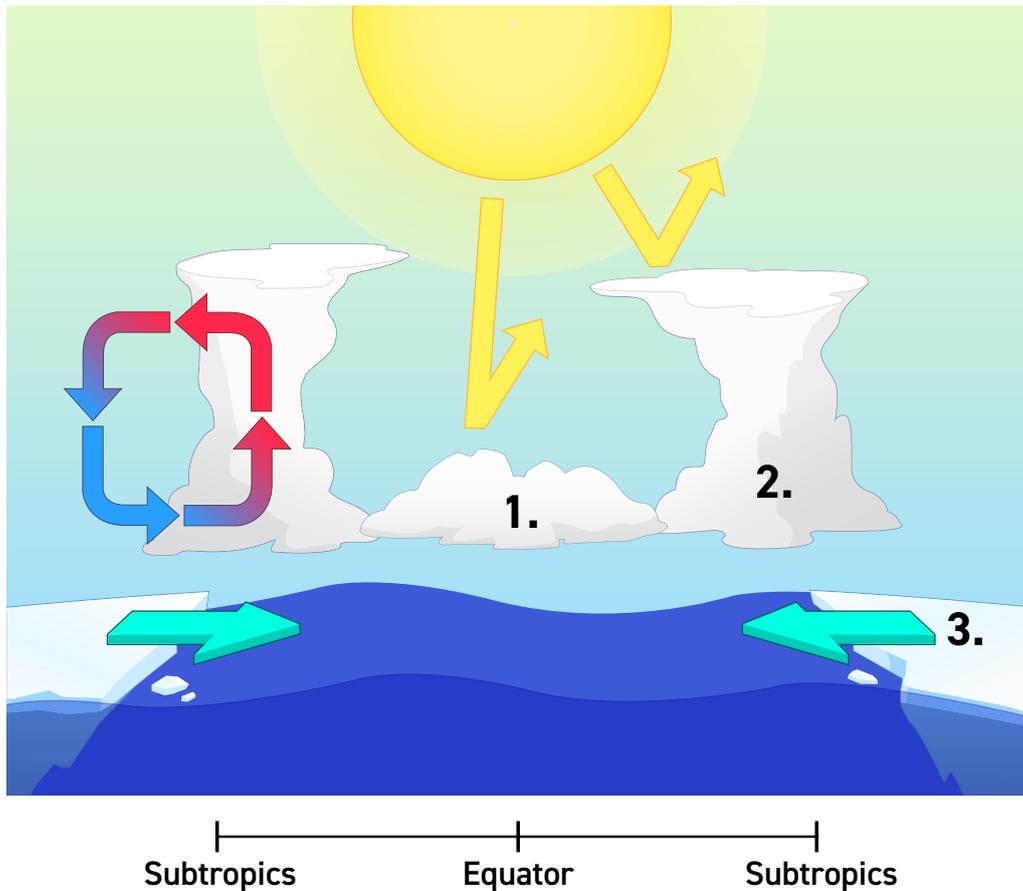


Figure 5. Contribution of cloud feedbacks to ocean cooling and interaction with sea ice. 1. Tropical surface cooling by positive low-level cloud feedback. 2. Sea surface cooling ahead of ice edge. 3. Faster sea-ice advance, facilitated by winds pushing sea ice equatorwards (Appendix Fig. B3).

feedback is practically independent of the strength of the negative forcing (Fig. 2). We can expect such state-dependency temperature-dependency to be similar across climate models, which would contribute to them having a similar temperature of entering the snowball transition. Similarly, the winds pushing sea ice push sea ice equatorwards (Appendix Fig. B3 B3), in connection with temperature contrast between sea-ice sea ice and open ocean, and which are. This is concomitant with positive cloud feedbacks ahead of sea-ice edge are also, which is expected to behave in similar ways similarly across models since they broadly simulate the same represent the same general circulation. A simple geometric argument for a transition temperature close to 0°C is that it happens when the ice edge enters the sub-tropics at about 30 degrees latitude, leaving about half the Earth

210 still ice free and hence above the freezing temperature, and the other half at temperatures below. When abruptly decreasing the $\text{CO}_2\text{-CO}_2$ concentration to 50 ppm (around 1/4 of pre-industrial CO_2 of PI CO_2), we find hints of instability near the global mean temperature of 0°C (~~near -15K relative to pre-industrial $^\circ\text{C}$ relative to PI~~), but the model ~~seems to be is~~ stable for 1848 years until it crashes due to thick ~~sea-ice~~ (Section 2 sea ice (Section 2)). This indicates that it is unlikely that the ~~inception transition~~ temperature happens at a temperature substantially warmer than 0°C .

215 Nevertheless, the transition temperatures of each phase show a slight shift to lower values under stronger negative forcing. 130 Therefore, the climate system deviates from pure ~~state-dependency~~ ~~temperature-dependency~~ behaviour as the strength of the radiative cooling and the speed of transition to snowball Earth increases. These ~~time-dependency~~ ~~time-dependent~~ effects have often been described in the literature following extreme cooling rates (Bendtsen and Bjerrum, 2002; Marotzke and Botzet, 2007), and we believe to be ~~(Bendtsen and Bjerrum, 2002; Marotzke and Botzet, 2007), and we speculate that this is~~

220 due to the large heat capacity of the ocean, as well as differences in ocean mixed layer depths and direct $\text{CO}_2\text{-CO}_2$ forcing across different regions: in certain circumstances, this can result in local temperatures dropping faster than global temperatures (Appendix Fig. B4-A B4-A), and hence out of sync with the sea-ice extent controlling the surface albedo feedback. Ocean convective mixing is also increasingly more efficient at evacuating heat for larger surface cooling, indicated by an increasing peak of the strength of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC) in Appendix Fig. B4-B B4-B. The associated

225 ocean currents on the contrary drag ~~sea-ice~~ sea ice polewards and can slow down the sea-ice edge advance (Voigt and Abbot, 2012) (Voigt and Abbot, 2012). All in all, we suggest slow, low forcing simulations are preferable when analysing snowball Earth transitions, as 1) fast transitions to snowball Earth are hardly realistic, as geological snowball states may form over millions of years (e.g. Schrag et al., 2002) (e.g. Schrag et al., 2002) and 2) fast transitions ~~involves~~ involve temporal effects which would depart from ~~state-dependency~~ ~~temperature-dependency~~. All together, these considerations support the ~~higher~~ transition

230 temperature close to 0°C found in the experiments with weak forcing.

5 ~~Motivation for simulations and potential~~ Potential constraint on climate sensitivity

While we expect the ~~state-dependency~~ ~~temperature-dependency~~ to behave similarly across models, it is currently not known whether the temperature threshold of 0°C that we find in MPI-ESM1.2-CR is indeed universal. The CESM model family has ~~notoriously~~ performed several snowball Earth simulations (Yang et al., 2012b, a; Eisenman and Armour, 2024), and

235 ~~(Yang et al., 2012b, a; Eisenman and Armour, 2024), and~~ while the model CESM2 also transits towards a snowball Earth around 0°C under similar CO_2 forcing (Eisenman and Armour, 2024), CO_2 forcing (Eisenman and Armour, 2024), models such as CCSM3 and CCSM4 can have stable waterbelt states with abrupt but smaller transitions, ~~which anyway are not likely consistent with the evidence for recent LGM states~~. To further test this, we perform an abrupt 1/128x CO_2 simulation with the model CESM1.2. ~~At 1/128x CO_2 , CESM1.2 has been used for several deep-time simulations (Li et al., 2022), but to our~~

240 ~~knowledge never for snowball Earth states. CESM1.2 shows a similar instability than~~ ~~transition temperature at around -24°C , which is similar as MPI-ESM1.2 around a temperature of at the same forcing level (Fig. 6). Due to the time-dependent effects, which we discuss in this study, the transition temperature is displaced under strong forcing. Therefore, under a low forcing, we~~

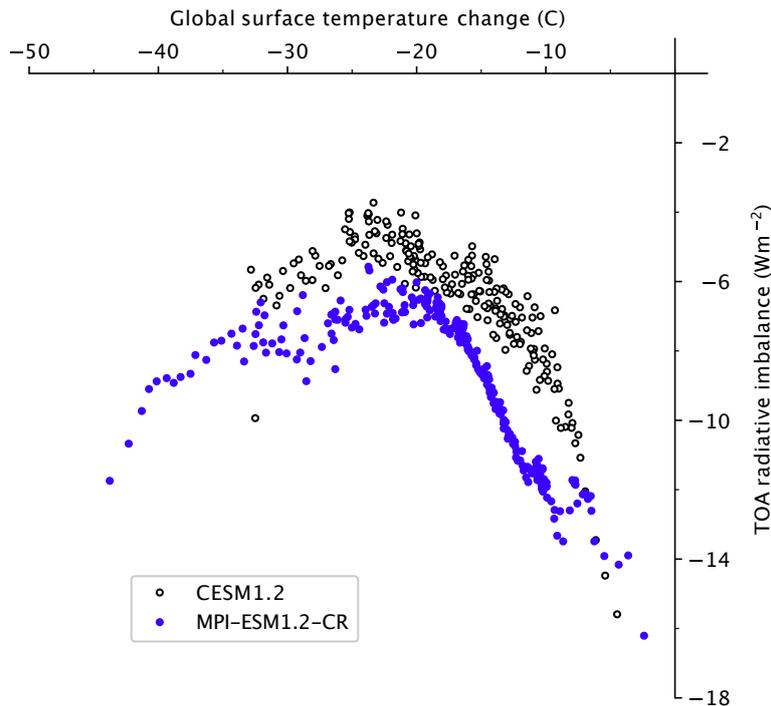


Figure 6. Top-of-atmosphere (TOA) radiative imbalance (Wm^{-2}) versus global surface temperature anomaly with relative to pre-industrial (PI) conditions (K°C) in abrupt $1/128\times\text{CO}_2$ simulations with the models MPI-ESM1.2-CR and CESM1.2.

expect the transition temperature to be close to 0°C , considering the time-dependency effects discussed in this study (Fig. 5).
for CESM1.2, as was the case for MPI-ESM1.2.

245 There is an ongoing discussion on whether climate models with large cloud feedbacks and consequently high climate sensitivity are compatible with the LGM (Zhu et al., 2022; Burls and Sagoo, 2022). (Zhu et al., 2022; Burls and Sagoo, 2022)
 Models with high sensitivity simulate LGM temperatures around the snowball Earth inception-transition temperature of around 0°C and are usually unstable. This in fact is to be expected if the inception-transition temperature is controlled by the temperature-dependent behaviour of the climate feedbacks, where the threshold before transiting to a snowball Earth
 250 would be similar across models. Variations of that threshold could be due to for example different parameterizations of sea ice albedo; tropical shallow clouds. In the case of tropical shallow cloud feedbacks, despite considerably increasing the sensitivity of the climate to enter snowball Earth, these feedbacks they do not seem to modify the inception temperature affect the snowball
Earth transition temperature itself (Fig. 3.4).

It is therefore possible to derive the estimate an upper limit of climate sensitivity from the models with stable LGM states
 255 (Section 2.2), using as snowball temperature threshold a global mean temperature close to 0°C , since both LGM and PI states transit towards a snowball Earth state at similar temperatures (Appendix Fig. A1). In this way, we find that it is implausible

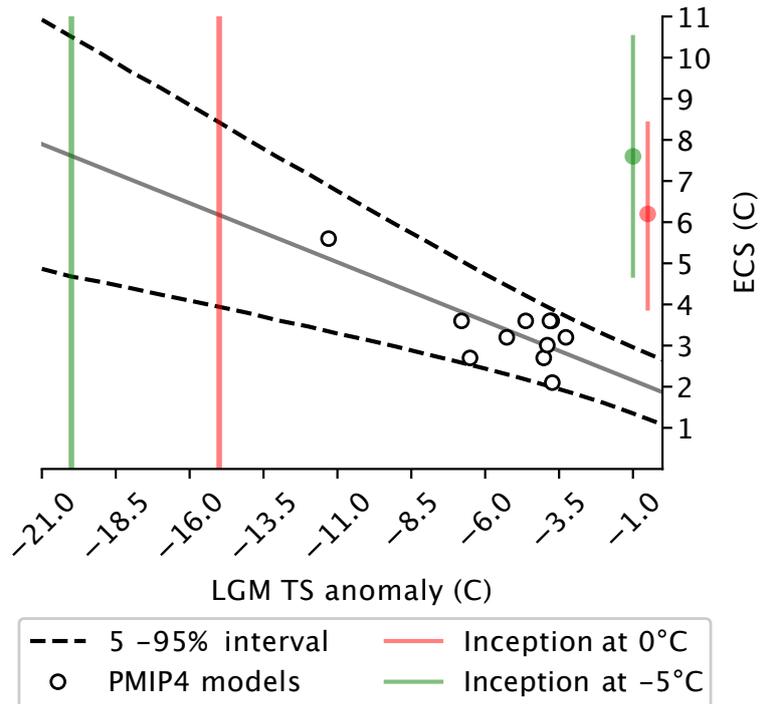


Figure 7. Relationship between modelled LGM surface temperature anomaly relative to pre-industrial (PI) and the climate sensitivity of PMIP4 models. The upper bound on climate sensitivity can be constrained using the temperature at which the climate starts transitioning to snowball Earth, which is around $-15\text{K}^{\circ}\text{C}$ global mean surface temperature anomaly relative to PI (red). As a comparison, we calculate the upper bound if the transition was instead at $-20\text{K}^{\circ}\text{C}$ relative to PI (green).

that climate sensitivity exceeds 5.5K ($4.4-6.6$, 90% confidence interval, Fig. 6 7). This upper limit is close to the sensitivity of CESM2 (5.6°C), which simulates an LGM temperature anomaly of -11.3K (-7.0K in SSTs) (Zhu et al., 2021b), $^{\circ}\text{C}$ (Zhu et al., 2021), just above the global mean temperature of 0°C . Additional support for this limit is obtained from a slightly more sensitive version of the model which is unstable when run with under LGM boundary conditions (Zhu et al., 2022).

On account of the uncertainty on whether the transition temperature would be close to 0°C across models, we test the sensitivity of our constraint by decreasing the transition temperature to -5°C (Fig. 7). In this case, we find that the upper bound on ECS cannot exceed 7.6°C ($4.7-10.5$, 2022).

This approach $5-95\%$ confidence interval). This is a relatively modest change of 1.4°C in the upper bound, considering the large change in transition temperature of -5°C . The uncertainty on the transition therefore has a small influence on our upper bound ECS estimate, and the value obtained here is in agreement with estimates from other lines of evidence, or in many cases a stronger constraint (Forster et al., 2021).

5.1 Motivation for simulations

270 The described approach to provide an upper bound on climate sensitivity could have a great potential, in particular as independent constraints from paleoclimates are ~~increasingly useful (Sherwood et al., 2020).~~ found to be increasingly useful (Sherwood et al., 2020). Nevertheless, to support ~~this constraint requires an effort from several modelling centres to both the constraint, it would be beneficial that modelling centres~~ publish their LGM simulations, even if they fail to stabilise, ~~and as this may be used to narrow~~ down the uncertainty on the instability threshold. It is important to know whether many models have a threshold gravitating
275 around 0°C, similarly to MPI-ESM1.2-CR, MPI-ESM1.2-LR and CESM1.2.

To tackle this problem, we ~~offer suggest~~ the following experimental design, which is short and ~~easy to replicate~~ easy to replicate:

1. Run a ~~pre-industrial-PI~~ PI state, with the ~~CO₂-CO₂~~ concentration set to 1/128 times the PI value, until the model reaches at least the initial instability leading to the snowball Earth state. The chosen ~~CO₂-CO₂~~ concentration should be a fair
280 trade off between a minimal simulation length and the time-dependency effects discussed in this study. If time allows, complement with less strong reductions to investigate the time-dependency.
2. Generate a plot of top-of-atmosphere radiation imbalance versus ~~surfee~~ surface temperature anomaly relative to PI, as in Fig. ~~3.-~~ 4. Report the instability threshold temperature, from surface and sea-surface temperature, as well as the global sea-ice ~~concentration.-~~
- 285 3. ~~For modelling centres simulating the LGM, we strongly suggest to publish runs which led to instabilities.~~ distribution.

The results could support the novel constraint on climate sensitivity presented in this study, but also help understanding ~~instabilities~~ the challenges that some modeling groups experience in LGM simulations, a paleoclimate notoriously difficult to model, ~~in particular for higher climate sensitivity models~~. We advocate that multi-model comparisons of snowball Earth transitions, as well as single-model ensembles with varying climate sensitivity, would better support the relationship between simulated LGM temperatures and the upper bound on ~~model Earth's~~ climate sensitivity. The main strength of this
290 constraint is that it is independent of paleoclimate reconstructions and simply relies on the fact that Earth did not undergo a transition to a snowball state 21 000 years ago, or during any earlier glacial cycles during the Pleistocene, providing a valuable additional line of evidence to those already used in the community (~~Sherwood et al., 2020; Forster et al., 2021).~~ (Sherwood et al., 2020; Forster et al., 2021).

295 *Data availability.* The outputs of the simulations shown in this study can be downloaded from <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8117483>

Author contributions. The idea of the study was conceived by MR. MR performed all simulations, analyses and figures. The paper was written by MR, JH, NS and TM.

Competing interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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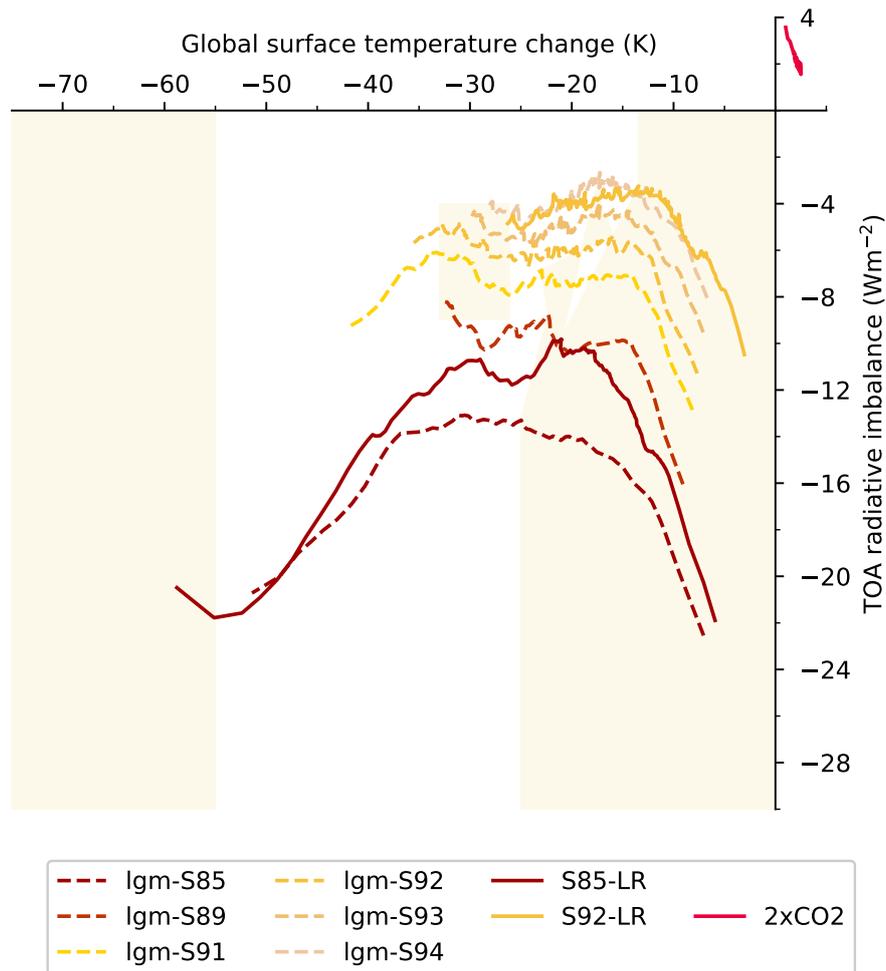


Figure A1. Top-of-atmosphere radiative imbalance (Wm^{-2}) versus global surface temperature anomaly with pre-industrial relative to PI conditions (K°C) under solar forcing from LGM conditions. The similar Colored phases of positive (white) and correspond to negative (colored) climate feedbacks as from PI conditions are shown feedback, white phases positive feedback.

We verify how snowball Earth transitions differ when starting from LGM or PI conditions. MPI-ESM1.2-LR is numerically unstable at low CO_2 concentrations, so we compare solar-forced snowball Earth transitions between LGM and PI instead.

The LGM is characterized by large ice sheets and lower sea-level which can affect cloud feedbacks as well as global circulations (Muglia and Schmittner, 2015; Sherriff-Tadano et al., 2018; Zhu and Poulsen, 2021a; Renoult et al., 2023), thus can influence the transition to a snowball Earth state. Changes in continental distribution and ocean areas are known to affect

~~inception-transition~~ temperatures. For instance, Voigt et al. (2011) indicates a snowball Earth transition at 96% of ~~pre-industrial solar constant~~ PI solar constant and PI CO₂ concentration with Marinoan reconstructed paleogeography (~635 million years ago), which is characterized by agglomerated, bare-soil tropical continents, whereas it would require 94% or lower with PI continents. Tropical land masses reflect more radiations and therefore contribute substantially to snowball Earth transitions.

430 When initializing from LGM conditions (Fig. A1), the same main phases of negative and positive feedbacks are identified than from PI conditions. There are slight differences between both cases, for instance the LGM simulation show a single instability phase, whereas the runs starting from ~~pre-industrial~~ PI still display hints of multiple phases when the solar constant is set at 85% of PI value. However, the ~~inception-transition~~ temperature connected to the main instability leading to the snowball Earth state happens at a broadly similar temperature than from PI conditions, between ~~-15K~~ -15°C and ~~-20K~~ -20°C relative to PI, which demonstrate the role of the feedback dependency on temperature, irrelevant of the
435 differences in boundary conditions.

Memory effects are expected to differ from LGM and PI conditions and likely explain the slight differences in transition temperatures towards the snowball state. Indeed, the LGM ocean is colder than in PI, and the initial thermal state of the ocean is known to affect the speed at which the snowball state is reached (Bendtsen and Bjerrum, 2002). From the LGM, reaching
440 snowball Earth is therefore easier, as tropical oceans are colder and the evacuation of heat via ocean mixing is enhanced. This should add further in rendering the LGM simulations difficult for modern climate models, as they usually initialise their experiments from LGM states of previous generations.

Appendix B: Additional figures

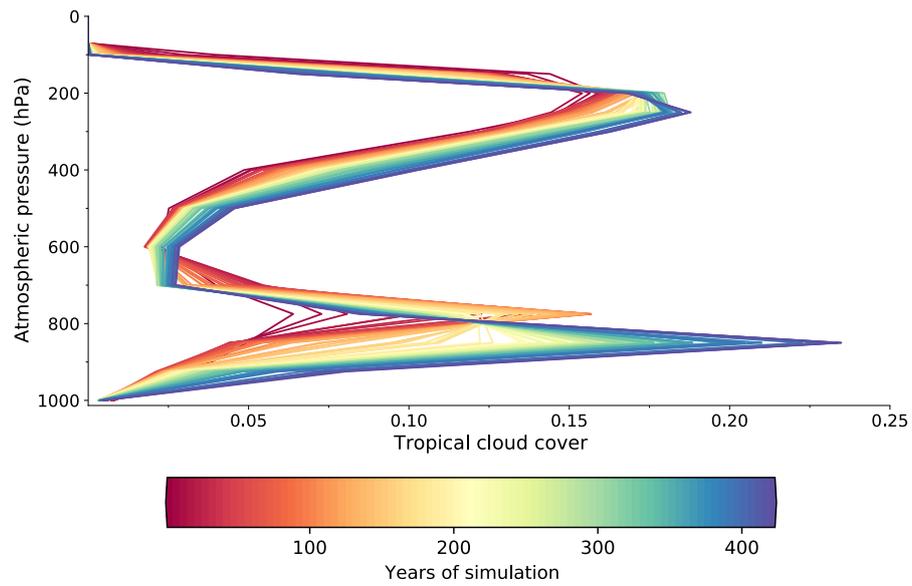


Figure B1. Evolution of tropical (30°S - 30°N) cloud cover within the first $15\text{K}^{\circ}\text{C}$ of cooling (425 years of simulation) in the $1/16x\text{CO}_2$ simulation.

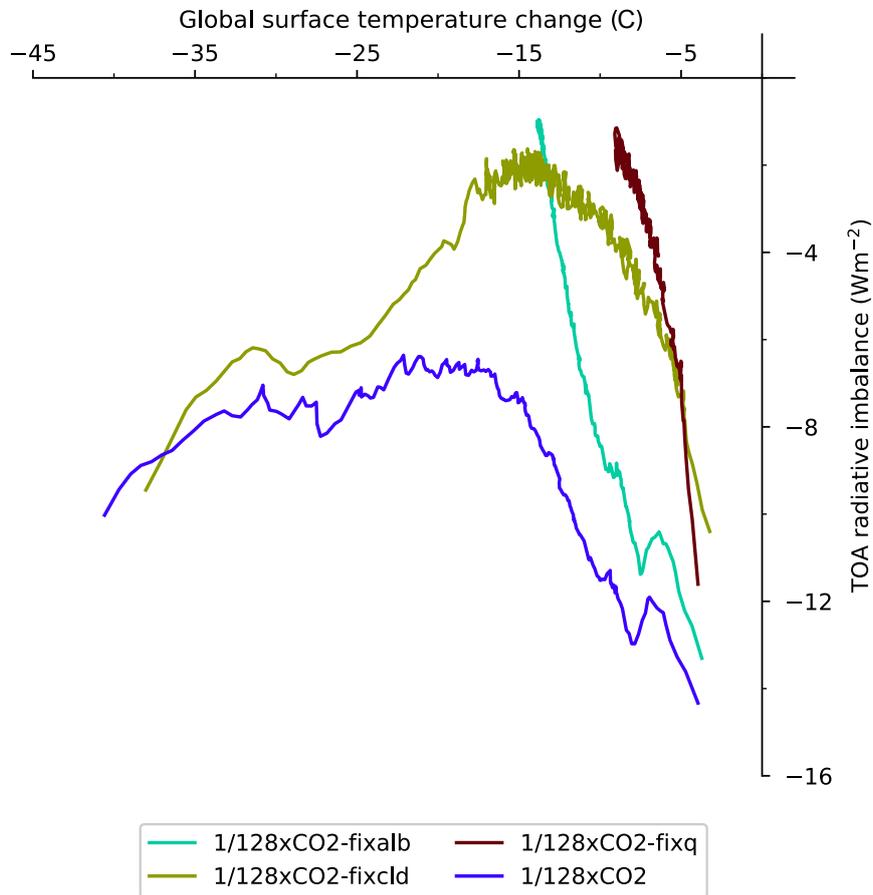


Figure B2. Top-of-atmosphere radiative imbalance (Wm^{-2}) versus global surface temperature anomaly ~~with pre-industrial~~ relative to PI conditions (~~K~~) for the 1/128xCO₂ simulation with either surface albedo (fixalb), water vapor (fixq) or cloud (fixcld) feedbacks locked to that of the control state.

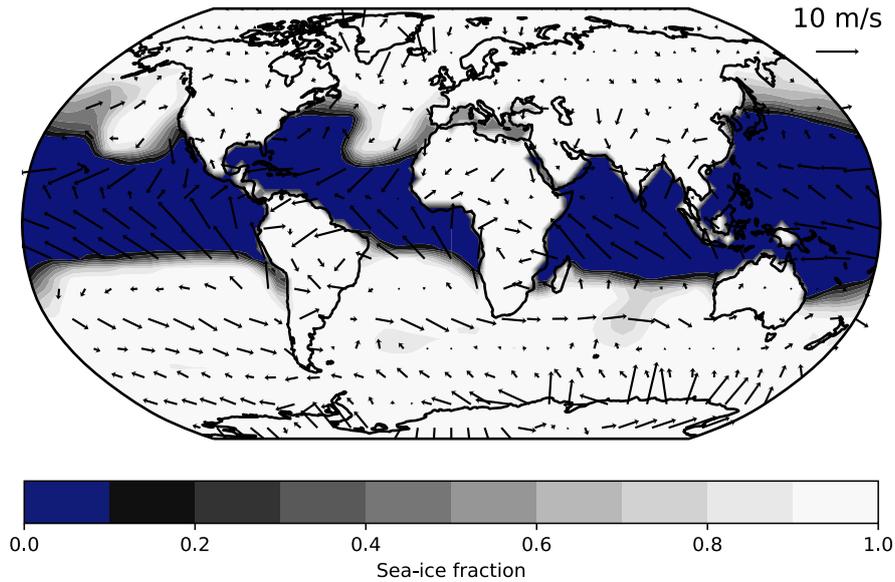


Figure B3. Surface wind field on sea-ice cover during the snowball Earth transition for the 1/16xCO₂ simulation. Strong winds push sea ice equatorwards in the tropical regions.

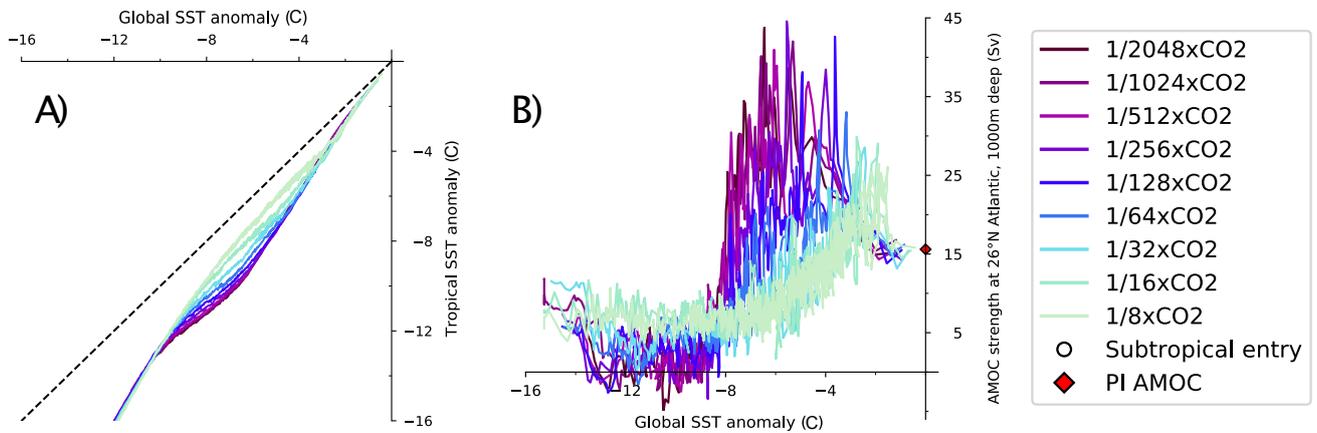


Figure B4. Analysis of tropical and global components affecting the rate of snowball Earth transitions. A) Differences in tropical and global SST cooling under all CO₂ forcing. B) Strength of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC) measured at 26°N, 1000 m deep (Sv) under all CO₂ forcing. The average pre-industrial PI AMOC strength, around 16 Sv, is highlighted.