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The influence of synoptic weather regimes on UK air quality: Analysis of satellite column NO₂

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Abstract

Groupings of Lamb Weather Types (LWTs) are used to assess the influence of synoptic meteorology on UK tropospheric column NO₂. Composite satellite maps using daily 2005-2011 data show significant NO₂ anomalies for each group. Hence, despite large day-to-day variability and significant uncertainty in individual retrievals, the satellite data can be used to determine national-scale column NO₂ variations under different meteorological conditions. Under cyclonic conditions, NO₂ is reduced, while anticyclonic conditions aid its accumulation, especially during winter, consistent with trapping of surface emissions and slower photochemical processing. This composite dataset can be used to test seasonal simulations of air quality models.

Keywords: Lamb Weather Type, OMI NO₂, Air Quality.

1. Introduction

Regional weather exerts a strong influence on local air quality (AQ) through aiding both the accumulation and dispersal of emitted pollutants, and controlling their transport on a regional scale. Models have been developed to predict AQ, but need to be evaluated against observations. Satellite data provide an important source of data for such evaluation, as demonstrated by Huijnen et al., (2010), and greater knowledge of such observations allow for enhanced model development (e.g. detection of an observational seasonal cycle can then

improve model representation of such features). Here we analyse a long data record (2005-2011) of satellite tropospheric column NO₂ over the UK, to determine the influence of specific climatological patterns of meteorology on regional NO₂ distributions.

Lamb Weather Types (LWTs) provide a useful tool to classify synoptic meteorology over the UK (Jones et al., 2013). They are an objective description of the daily midday atmospheric circulation over the UK based on mean sea level pressure reanalysis data. Many studies have investigated the link between surface observations of atmospheric chemistry and synoptic meteorology by using LWTs. For example, Davies et al., (1991) used LWTs with surface station observations of atmospheric/rainwater chemistry data. Lesniok et al., (2010) used the Niedzweidz's Manual Classification, similar to the LWTs, to study the influence of synoptic regimes on surface NO₂ in Upper Silesia, Poland. They found that anticyclonic (cyclonic) conditions enhance (reduce) NO₂ concentrations increasing (reducing) pollution limit exceedances.

O'Hare et al., (1995) and Demuzere et al., (2009) investigated LWTs and rural surface ozone observations in the UK and Netherlands, respectively. Anticyclonic conditions, through primary pollutant accumulation, were found to enhance surface ozone concentrations. However, cyclonic-induced tropospheric folding enhances free troposphere ozone incursion resulting in peak UK surface ozone concentrations.

Other studies have looked at the connection between meteorology and NO₂ tropospheric columns. Beirle et al., (2011) used OMI column NO₂ and wind forecasts (below 500m) to analyse NO₂ transport from the isolated megacity Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, detecting leeward NO₂ plume transport. Hayn et al., (2009) performed a similar analysis of wind direction and column NO₂ over Johannesburg, South Africa. Zhou et al., (2012) found significant impacts of wind speed and precipitation on OMI column NO₂ over western Europe. Savage et al., (2008) investigated the interannual variability (IAV) of satellite NO₂ columns over Europe finding that meteorology influences NO₂ IAV more than emissions.

van der A et al., (2008) used GOME and SCIAMACHY data, 1996-2006, to look at column NO₂ seasonal patterns and trends. Over Europe, the peak industrial column NO₂ occurs during winter. They infer that reduced photolysis (increased NO₂ lifetime), not increased NO_x emissions, are the main cause. The UK is the exception as the meteorological variability leads to peak NO₂ columns in July. However, Zhou et al., (2012) find that days with peak column NO₂ over the UK are in spring.

To our knowledge, LWTs have not previously been used to investigate synoptic patterns in fields of satellite observations of atmospheric chemistry. The aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of UK surface circulation patterns on atmospheric trace gas distributions by using the LWTs to classify distributions of satellite tropospheric NO₂ under these weather regimes.

2. Data

2.1. Lamb Weather Types

Lamb Weather Types were originally derived using a manual method of classifying the atmospheric circulation patterns (mostly using sea level pressure) according to the wind direction and circulation type over the UK (Lamb 1972). Jenkinson and Collison (1977) created an automated classification scheme based on the mean sea level pressure at sixteen points over Western Europe (centred on UK). From the pressure field at these points the direction, strength and vorticity of the mean flow over the UK are calculated. Each day is then assigned both a vorticity type and a wind flow direction. Three vorticity types are used (neutral vorticity, cyclonic and anticyclonic) and eight wind flow directions (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W and NW) unless the flow vorticity is much stronger than the flow strength, when the day is classified solely as cyclonic or anticyclonic. There is also an unclassified LWT. Table 1 summarises the LWT codes. For more details of the classification scheme see Jones et al., (2013).

In this study we use the dataset of Jones et al., (2013) which extends the objective LWT dataset by using daily midday (12.00 UT) grid-point mean sea level pressure data from NCEP/NCAR reanalysis (Kalnay et al., 1996). We obtained the data from the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia (www.cru.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/lwt/).

Table 1. The shaded region shows the 27 basic Lamb Weather Types with their number coding¹. In this work these LWTs are grouped into 3 circulation types and 8 wind directions, indicated in the outer row and column.

This Work	Anticyclonic	Neutral Vorticity	Cyclonic
	0 A		20 C
North-easterly	1 ANE	11 NE	21 CNE
Easterly	2 AE	12 E	22 CE
South-easterly	3 ASE	13 SE	23 CSE
Southerly	4 AS	14 S	24 CS
South-westerly	5 ASW	15 SW	25 CSW
Westerly	6 AW	16 W	26 CW
North-westerly	7 ANW	17 NW	27 CNW
Northerly	8 AN	18 N	28 CN

¹ LWTs also include -1 (unclassified) and -9 (non-existent day).

It would likely prove difficult to find statistically significant associations between the column NO₂ patterns and each individual LWT because their occurrence probability is too low.

Therefore, we merged the LWTs into 11 classes, similar to O'Hare et al., (1994) and Tang et al., (2011), to increase the amount of data in each category (Table 1). There are 3 synoptic classes: neutral vorticity (LWTs 11-18); cyclonic (20-28) and anticyclonic (0-8). There are 8 flow directions: NE, E, SE, NW, W, SW, N and S (e.g. the south-westerly type is a combination of LWTs 5, 15 and 25). It should be noted that there is only one LWT definition per day, but each day is included in two of our weather classes (unless it is unclassified or are

LWTs 0 or 20 as they have no flow direction) e.g. LWT 27 is in the Cyclonic and North-westerly groups.

For the 7-year (2556-day) period 2005-2011, the percentage occurrence was calculated for each of the 11 classes. The relative occurrence of the synoptic conditions was: neutral vorticity 38.9%; cyclonic 26.1% and anticyclonic 33.7%. The most frequent wind flow directions were the W and SW directions at 16.7% and 14.4%, respectively.

2.2 OMI NO₂ Tropospheric Column Data

OMI is mounted on NASA's EOS-Aura satellite and has an approximate London daytime overpass at 13.00 local time. It is a nadir viewing instrument with a pixel size of 312 km². We have taken the DOMINO tropospheric column NO₂ product, version 2.0, from the TEMIS (Tropospheric Emissions Monitoring Internet Service) website, <http://www.temis.nl/airpollution/no2.html> (Boersma et al., 2011). We have binned NO₂ swath data from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2011 onto a daily 13.00 0.25° x 0.25° grid between 43°N - 63°N, 20°W - 20°E. All satellite retrievals have been quality controlled, and retrievals/pixels with cloud cover greater than 20% and poor quality data flags (flag = -1) were removed. The product uses the algorithm of Braak, (2010) to identify OMI pixels affected by row anomalies and sets the data flags to -1. These are filtered out in this study. To obtain better spatial coverage, a time window for the OMI retrievals between 11.00 and 15.00 local time, was applied. Even though the LWTs are based on meteorological reanalyses at 12.00 UT, we consider this temporal difference to be within an acceptable range.

3. Results

Composite maps of OMI tropospheric column NO₂ were derived for each of the 11 synoptic and wind direction classes for both winter (October-March) and summer (April – September). Figure 1 shows these composites for the cyclonic and anticyclonic conditions and Figure 2 shows the anomaly of each composite from the 7-year seasonal average. We focus primarily on the influences of cyclonic and anticyclonic weather patterns, as they have greater occurrence, and are therefore more statistically significant than the wind direction composites.

The summer and winter composites (Figure 1) show that NO₂ tropospheric column concentrations peak in the winter, as discussed by Tang et al., (2011), McGregor et al., (1995), Lesniok et al., (2010) and Demuzere et al., (2009). Winter conditions lead to greater emission of NO_x from heat and electrical generating devices. The lower abundance of OH and slower photochemical processes also decrease the loss rate of NO₂. Over the Netherlands source regions, under cyclonic conditions, the peak NO₂ columns are 13 x 10¹⁵ molecules/cm² in summer and 13-16 x 10¹⁵ molecules/cm² in winter. Over the UK source regions, the peak UK cyclonic column NO₂ is approximately 13 x 10¹⁵ molecules/cm² in summer, while only 10 x 10¹⁵ molecules/cm² in winter. There is a less pronounced seasonality in UK column NO₂ due to the meteorological variability decreasing loss processes (e.g. photolysis), which are

more active over continental Europe in summer. Under anticyclonic conditions, over the UK and Netherlands source regions the summer peak is 16×10^{15} molecules/cm², while in winter the NO₂ concentrations reach 20×10^{15} molecules/cm².

McGregor et al., (1995) and Lesniok et al., (2010) noted that air mass stability (instability) under anticyclonic (cyclonic) conditions leads to reduced (increased) transport of NO₂ from sources. This is seen in Figure 1 where the NO₂ concentrations are higher under anticyclonic conditions. In winter the NO₂ concentrations over South East England and Netherlands range from $10\text{-}16 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm² and $16\text{-}20 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm² in cyclonic and anticyclonic conditions, respectively. The same occurs in summer, but with lower NO₂ concentrations at 13×10^{15} (cyclonic) and 16×10^{15} molecules/cm² (anticyclonic).

To quantify the differences between the synoptic regimes, we subtracted the 7-year seasonal average (of all weather types) from the winter and summer cyclonic and anticyclonic composites (Figure 2). We use the Wilcoxon Rank Test (WRT) to examine the significance of the differences, at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$), in the composite-total period averages. The WRT is the non-parametric counterpart of the Student T-Test and so relaxes the constraint on normality of the underlying distributions (Pirovano et al., 2012). In Figure 2 areas where the anomalies are significant are outlined with black polygons. In the cyclonic case a significant positive-negative dipole exists, with negative anomalies over the southern UK and positive anomalies over the North Sea. The higher winter NO₂ concentrations lead to an intense dipole, with maximum positive anomalies $> 5 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm² and the lowest negative anomalies $< -5 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm². In summer, these anomalies peak at similar values but their spatial extent is much less. Potential reasons why the area of the anomaly is reduced in summer include both the more rapid removal of NO₂ giving less accumulation under stagnant conditions and lighter winds in the summer causing slower transport from source regions. Typically, cyclonic conditions are indicative of westerly and south-westerly flow. Therefore, the anomalies potentially reveal transport of NO₂ off the UK mainland into the North Sea. In the more stable anticyclonic conditions, the inverse of the cyclonic anomaly dipole exists with positive anomalies, $4\text{-}5 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm², over the UK and negative anomalies, -3×10^{15} molecules/cm², over the North Sea. This occurs for both seasons, but with larger spatial patterns in winter. It is probable that the anomaly pattern occurs as less NO₂ is transported out to the North Sea and more remains over the UK.

We averaged all OMI pixels within $6^{\circ}\text{W} - 2^{\circ}\text{E}$ and $59^{\circ}\text{N} - 50^{\circ}\text{N}$ (see Figure 1) to form a UK-average timeseries. Figures 3a and 3b show the mean annual cycles and their anomalies for the three synoptic classes. The anticyclonic column NO₂ seasonal cycle is well pronounced with maximum (minimum) winter (summer) concentrations of approximately 7 (3) $\times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm². The cyclonic column NO₂ cycle is less pronounced with similar concentrations in summer and winter of approximately $3 - 4 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm². The neutral conditions show a seasonal pattern between the cyclonic and anticyclonic conditions. Figures 3c-3e show the correlation of the UK monthly mean columns with their standard deviations. The scattered points all sit above the 1:1 line showing that the monthly mean values are always greater than their temporal variability. Figures 3d and 3e also emphasise the larger range of mean column NO₂ under anticyclonic conditions compared to cyclonic

conditions. Overall, the largest relative differences are in winter, likely due to a combination of more intense winter cyclonic and anticyclonic dynamics and reduced photochemical processes. In winter, increased poleward momentum flux results in larger atmospheric instabilities. Therefore, the more intense cyclones further reduce column NO_2 above source regions in winter. However, winter anticyclones are associated with cold denser air masses enhancing atmospheric blocking and prolonged stable conditions, therefore, accumulating NO_2 more efficiently. Photochemically, under anticyclonic conditions, in summer stronger photolysis converts more NO_2 to NO , but in winter reduced solar intensity and cloudier conditions limit NO_2 to NO conversion. The neutral vorticity conditions typically have similar concentrations to the cyclonic conditions in summer and anticyclonic conditions in winter over the study period.

We also find that the influence of the wind directions on the OMI NO_2 fields can be significant. Note that due to the lower frequency of each of the eight wind directions, these are not seasonal composites but use all seven years of data regardless of season. Two examples of the wind-induced NO_2 transport are shown in Figure 4. Figure 4a shows south-easterly flow off continental Europe, where NO_2 (up to 20×10^{15} molecules/cm²) is transported away from London and Lancashire towards the Midlands and the Irish Sea, respectively. In Figure 4b, the south-westerly flow is transporting NO_2 (up to 13×10^{15} molecules/cm²) away from London and the M62 corridor out into the North Sea. The transport impact from the south-easterly flow is much greater, but since these classes can contain different proportions of each vorticity type, this might account for the greater transport when compared with the south-westerly flow. Figures 4c and 4d show the anomalies in NO_2 for these two flow directions with respect to the 7-year OMI average. The significant positive anomalies suggest south-westerly flow is transporting up to 5×10^{15} molecules/cm² away from the source regions. In Figure 4d, positive (negative) anomalies, over (under) $\pm 5 \times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm² show where the south-westerly flow has transported NO_2 away from the source regions out into the North Sea.

Finally, we have also investigated the link between the winter North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) and column NO_2 data using the NAO Index from CRU (Jones et al., 1997; available from www.cru.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/nao). However, we could not find any significant spatial differences in the NO_2 columns between the positive and negative NAO phases.

4. Conclusions

We have shown that the quality of the OMI NO_2 tropospheric column product is good enough to detect the influences of synoptic meteorology on NO_2 tropospheric columns over the UK. UK column NO_2 peaks in winter (October-March) under anticyclonic conditions. It is likely that increased winter NO_x emissions from energy generation coupled with more stable conditions and reduced photolysis allow for the accumulation of NO_2 above the source regions. The cyclonic conditions have a less defined seasonal pattern, but column NO_2 over the UK source regions is slightly higher in summer (April-September). This is consistent with

more intense winter cyclonic conditions, which reduce column NO₂ concentrations and has more impact than NO₂ loss in summer from enhanced photolysis. The influence of transport of NO₂ by wind flow directions can also be seen in the OMI NO₂ data, with good examples being the south-easterly and south-westerly flow directions. The spatial patterns in the NO₂ fields associated with these transport regimes are significantly different at a 5% confidence level using the Wilcoxon Rank Test.

These statistically significant meteorology-atmospheric chemistry relationships, seen by OMI, can potentially be used as a model validation tool. This dataset will allow progress beyond simply using the satellite data for operational model validation (calculation of means and biases, see Dennis et al., (2010)) and can be used to test the model's ability to reproduce the influence of meteorology on NO₂ (dynamic model evaluation). For chemistry-climate models this can also be used to evaluate the model under each of the synoptic regimes, rather than just using averages over seven or so years. For further work, we plan to test these same relationships in the Met Office Air Quality in the Unified Model (AQUM) (Savage et al., 2012) and further investigate the processes controlling the LWT-NO₂ column relationships. In particular, we will explore the relative importance of transport processes versus difference in photochemistry between the classes.

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Figures

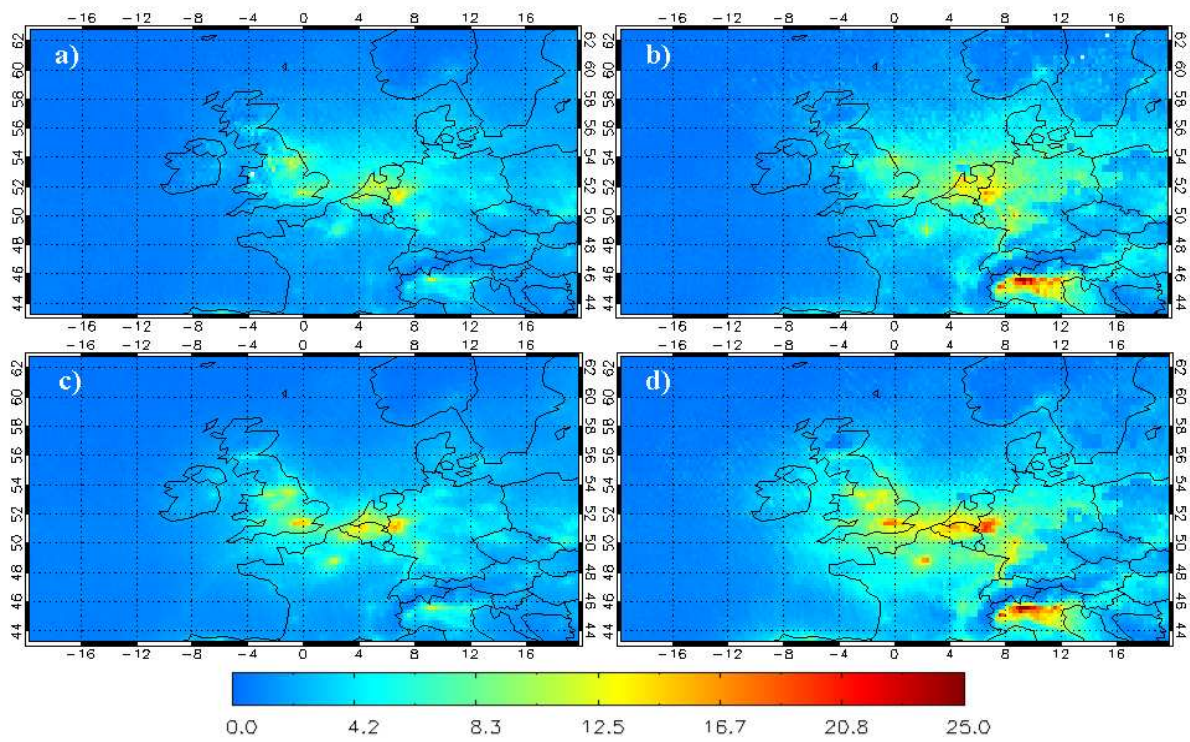


Figure 1. Composites of OMI column NO₂ (x10¹⁵ molecules/cm²) for (a) summer cyclonic, (b) winter cyclonic, (c) summer anticyclonic and (d) winter anticyclonic conditions.

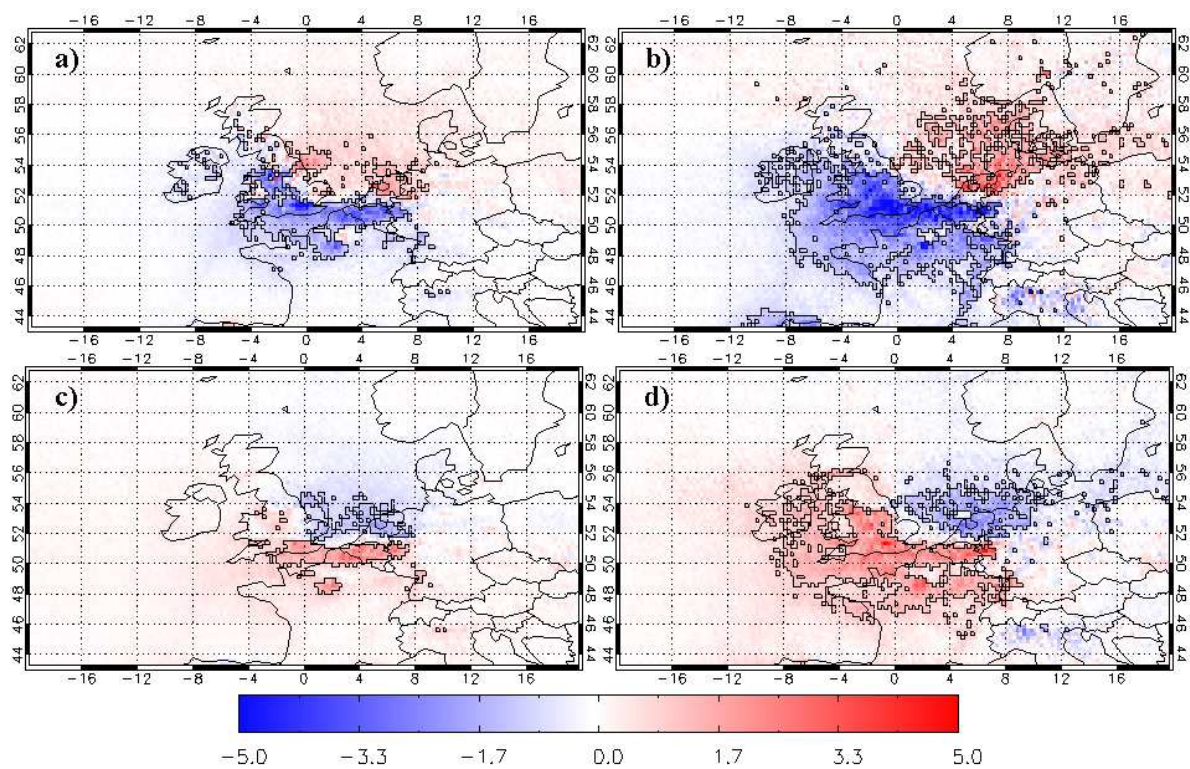


Figure 2. Anomalies of OMI column NO₂ composites compared to seasonal 7-year average (x10¹⁵ molecules/cm²) for (a) summer cyclonic, (b) winter cyclonic, (c) summer anticyclonic and (d) winter anticyclonic conditions. Black boxes indicate where the anomalies are statistically significant at the 5% level.

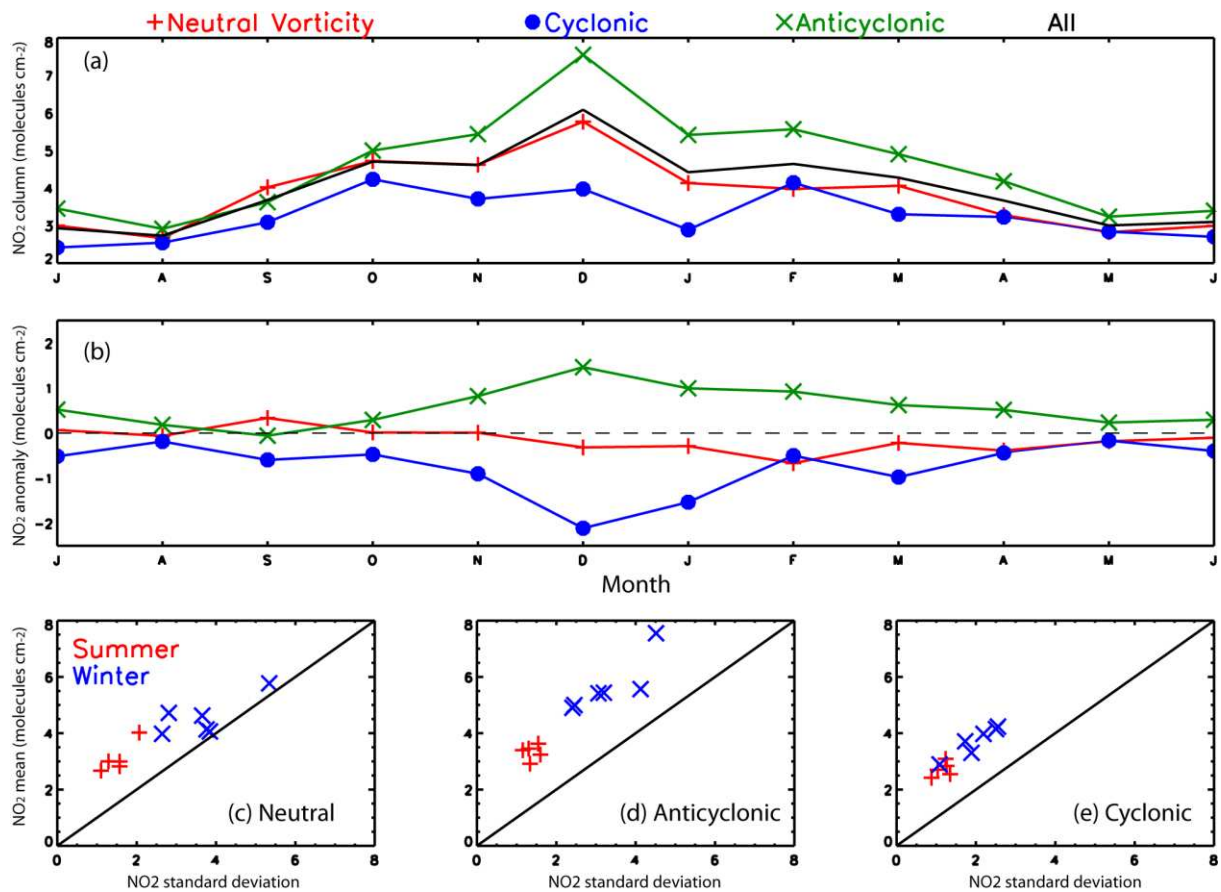


Figure 3. OMI NO₂ columns ($\times 10^{15}$ molecules/cm²) averaged over the UK (see text) under neutral vorticity, cyclonic and anticyclonic conditions for (a) mean annual cycle of monthly means, including black line for all conditions, and (b) anomaly of monthly means with respect to all conditions. Panels (c) – (e) show the correlation of the monthly means with their standard deviations.

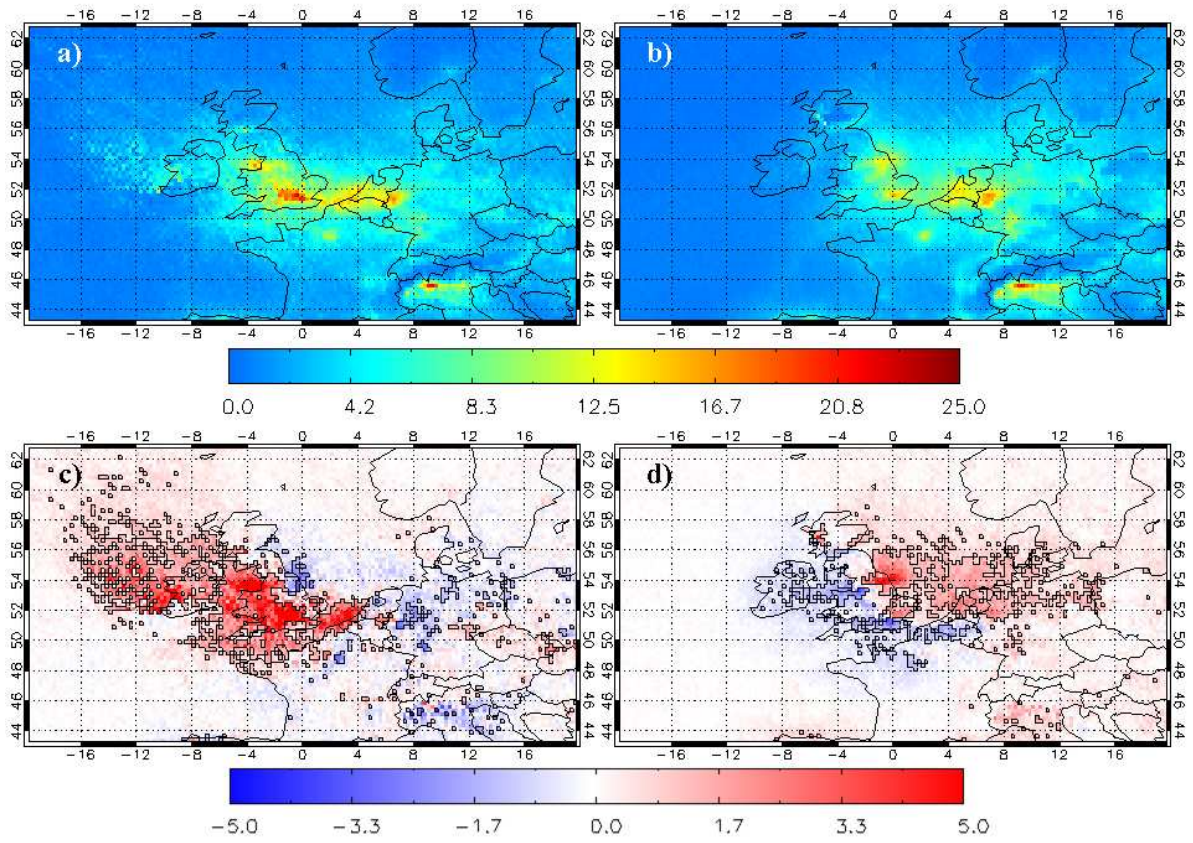


Figure 4. Composites of OMI column NO₂ (x 10¹⁵ molecules/cm²) under different wind flow directions and difference of these with respect to 7-year average. (a) South-easterly flow, (b) south-westerly flow, (c) south-easterly difference and (d) south-westerly difference.