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1 **Complementarity of wind and solar power in North Africa: potential for alleviating energy**  
2 **droughts and impacts of the North Atlantic Oscillation**

3 Jakub Jurasz<sup>1,✉</sup>, Mohammed Guezgouz<sup>2</sup>, Pietro E. Campana<sup>2</sup>, Bartosz Kaźmierczak<sup>1</sup>, Alban  
4 Kuriqi<sup>3</sup>, Hannah Bloomfield<sup>4</sup>, Benoit Hingray<sup>5</sup>, Fausto A. Canales<sup>1,6</sup>, Julian Hunt<sup>7</sup>, Sebastian  
5 Sterl<sup>8,9</sup> and Mohamed Elkadeem<sup>10,11</sup>

6  
7 **Highlights**

- 8 ● A negative correlation was detected between NAO and wind power in northern  
9 coastal regions.
- 10 ● Energy droughts dominate coastal regions.
- 11 ● Solar-wind hybridization reduces energy droughts in North Africa.
- 12 ● Seasonal NAO index, in general, does not correlate significantly with energy droughts.

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<sup>1</sup> Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Wrocław, Poland

✉ corresponding author: jakub.jurasz@pwr.edu.pl

<sup>2</sup> School of Business, Society and Engineering, Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden

<sup>3</sup> CERIS, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Av. Rovisco Pais 1, 1049-001, Lisbon, Portugal.

<sup>4</sup> School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, UK

<sup>5</sup> IGE, CNRS, GINP, IRD, Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble

<sup>6</sup> Department of Civil and Environmental, Universidad de la Costa, Barranquilla, Colombia

<sup>7</sup> Energy, Climate, and Environment, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) | Schlossplatz 1 | A-2361 Laxenburg, Austria

<sup>8</sup> World Resources Institute (WRI), Regional Hub for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

<sup>9</sup> Faculty of Engineering, BClimate group, Department HYDR, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>10</sup> Interdisciplinary Research Center of Renewable Energy and Power Systems (IRC-REPS), King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

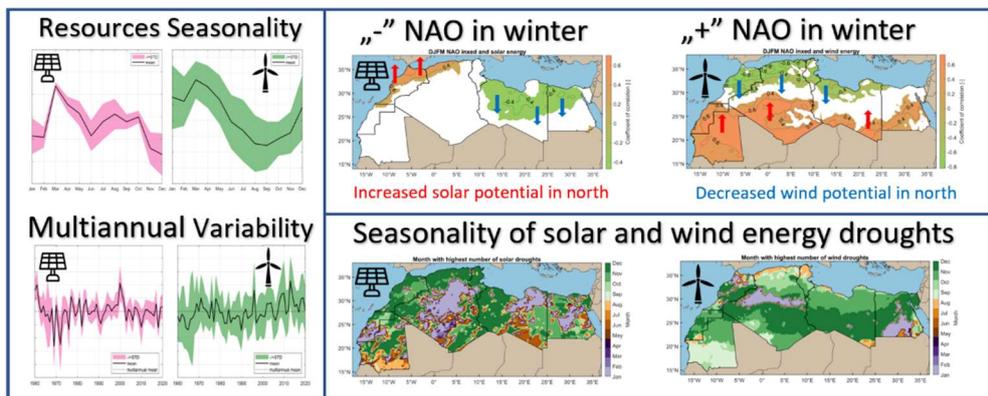
<sup>11</sup> Electrical Power and Machines Engineering Dep., Faculty of Engineering, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt

1 **Abstract**

2 With growing gas and oil prices, electricity generation based on these fossil fuels is becoming  
3 increasingly expensive. Furthermore, the vision of natural gas as a transition fuel is subject to  
4 many constraints and uncertainties. Consequently, renewable energies such as solar and wind  
5 power are expected to reach new records of installed capacity over the upcoming years. In  
6 light of the above, North Africa is one of the regions with the largest renewable resource  
7 potential globally. While extensively studied in the literature, these resources remain  
8 underutilized. Thus, to contribute to their future harnessing, this study presents a spatial and  
9 temporal analysis of the complementary nature of solar and wind resources over North Africa  
10 from the perspective of energy droughts. Both the frequency and maximal duration of energy  
11 droughts are addressed. Both aspects of renewables' variable nature have been evaluated in  
12 the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) context. The analysis considers the period between 1960  
13 and 2020 based on hourly reanalysis data (i.e., near-surface shortwave irradiation, wind  
14 speed, and temperature) and the Hurrell NAO index. The findings show an in-phase  
15 relationship between solar power and winter NAO index, particularly over the coastal regions  
16 in western North Africa and opposite patterns in its eastern part. For wind energy, the  
17 connection with NAO has a more zonal pattern with negative correlations in the north and  
18 positive in the south. Solar energy droughts dominate northern Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco,  
19 while wind energy droughts mainly occur in the Atlas Mountains range. On average, solar  
20 energy droughts tend not to exceed 2-3 consecutive days, with the longest extending for five  
21 days. Wind energy droughts can be as prolonged as 80 days (Atlas Mountains). Hybridizing  
22 solar and wind energy reduces the potential for energy droughts significantly. At the same  
23 time, the correlation between their occurrence and the NAO index remains low. These  
24 findings show the potential for substantial resilience to inter-annual climate variability, which  
25 could benefit power system stability.

26 **Keywords:** Climate resilience; Energy transition; Hurrell NAO index; Hybrid energy system;  
27 Renewable energy.

28 **Graphical abstract**



29  
30  
31

# 1 Nomenclature

Abbreviations	
AC	Alternating current
CF	Capacity factor
DJFM	December, January, February, March
ENSO	El Niño-Southern Oscillation
ERA5	Fifth generation ECMWF atmospheric reanalysis of the global climate
GII	Global inclined irradiation
HVDC	High voltage direct current
NAO	North Atlantic Oscillation
pp	Percentage points
PV	Photovoltaics
RES	Renewable energy sources
Variables, parameters, and constants	
$DI_i$	Deficiency index
$E_i$	Energy generated
$e$	Actual water vapor pressure
$e_s$	Saturation vapor pressure
$K_t$	PV cell temperature coefficient
$NOCT$	Normal operating cell temperature
$P_{PV}$	Hourly power delivered from PV
$P_r$	PV installed capacity
$R_d$	Specific gas constant for dry air
$RH$	Relative air humidity
$S_{ref}$	Solar radiation at standard test conditions
$D_T$	Threshold for energy drought
$T_{amb}$	Ambient air temperature
$T_c$	PV cell temperature
$T_d$	Dew point air temperature
$T_{ref}$	PV cell temperature in standard conditions
$p$	total pressure exerted by the moist air
$S$	Total solar radiation reaching the PV array surface
$v$	Wind speed
$v'$	Air density adjusted wind speed
$\eta$	Overall PV system efficiency
$\rho_{air}$	Air density
$\rho_{ref}$	Reference air density

$\rho$	Spearman coefficient of correlation
--------	-------------------------------------

## 1 1. Introduction

2 Recently, electricity prices have increased unprecedentedly due to higher fossil fuel costs and  
3 elevated market demand following the recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic [1]. North Africa  
4 is one of the largest and richest areas regarding renewable energy sources (RES) such as wind  
5 and solar [2]. However, the potential of renewable energy remains untapped in favor of  
6 conventional power generation because of the intermittent energy production from RES,  
7 storage constraints, and the current dependence on traditional power infrastructure [3].  
8 Theoretically, the Saharan region's solar energy potential could power the world [4]. Several  
9 projects have been proposed, such as the Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) [5] and DESERTEC  
10 [6]. These projects involved the large-scale deployment of RES (i.e., mainly solar and wind) in  
11 Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt in partnership with Europe. For electricity  
12 transmission to Europe, several intercontinental grid connections have been created through  
13 submarine cables and alternating current (AC) and high voltage direct current (HVDC) systems  
14 as part of the MEDGRID project [7]. However, such complex systems require high investment,  
15 rigorous resource assessment, solid infrastructure, and a stable geopolitical situation. More  
16 importantly, North African countries must meet their electricity needs before becoming green  
17 energy exporters. A comparative study of five different scenarios by Brand and Blok [8] found  
18 that large-scale electricity export is only possible if the share of renewable energy meets 60%  
19 of the electricity demand in North Africa. Hawila et al. [9] evaluated the readiness of the target  
20 area to deploy and promote RES in the region. Their assessment framework shows that  
21 Morocco is ahead of its neighboring countries, but the region still exhibits significant  
22 weaknesses and threats that remain a hindrance. Komendantova et al. [10] identified the risks  
23 of developing concentrated solar power plants in North Africa, with the regulatory risks  
24 perceived by the stakeholders as the most significant in terms of probability of occurrence  
25 and the negative impacts associated. However, none of the above studies examined the risks  
26 associated with the multiscale implications of weather and climate variability on the  
27 installation of such projects, which is a critical assessment for renewable energy projects of  
28 any scale.

29 Moreover, one can observe that most of the presented studies focused on concentrated solar  
30 power and its feasibility for transportation to Europe. On the one hand, concentrated solar  
31 power is not as mature or cost-effective as fossil fuel or solar PV-based generators.  
32 Additionally, relying on only one renewable source increases the vulnerability to its  
33 intermittency. On this matter, a potentially critical issue is energy droughts, i.e., sequences of  
34 days where the production from renewable resources is low to very low [11]. Estimating  
35 energy droughts and low resource days is fundamental for designing reliable off-grid  
36 electricity systems. Research relating to this matter for Africa and considering wind and solar  
37 resources includes the works by Plain et al. [12] and Seyedhashemi et al. [13]. Recent studies  
38 suggested combining different RES, notably solar and wind power, to mitigate this problem  
39 and reduce the intensity and duration of energy droughts [3, 14, 15].

40 Only a few studies have shown interest in combining renewable resources in North Africa.  
41 However, none has investigated the role of energy mixes in alleviating energy droughts.  
42 Guezgouz et al. [4] assessed the joint operation of solar and wind power in Algeria. The results

1 showed a favorable complementarity between these vital RES sources. However, the study  
2 was limited to only one country and one year of meteorological data, so it could not rigorously  
3 assess possible interannual and low-frequency variability impacts. Bloomfield et al. recently  
4 drew similar conclusions about favorable complementarity [16] for their multi-decadal ERA5-  
5 based study conducted in Senegal and Kenya. In addition, Jablonski et al. [5] investigated the  
6 potential of combined wind-solar electricity generation in north-western Africa using nearly  
7 four decades of reanalysis data gathered from the ERA5 dataset. Their findings indicate that  
8 wind energy projects in the region are feasible. Still, they alone cannot substantially  
9 contribute to the Mediterranean Solar Plan goal, emphasizing the need to improve the  
10 competitiveness of solar power. Considering the limitations of previous studies, there is a  
11 clear research gap in evaluating solar-wind complementarity for North African countries.  
12 Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by assessing the temporal and spatial patterns of  
13 energy droughts in North Africa and the potential of hybrid systems to reduce the energy  
14 droughts frequency.

15 In addition, even less attention has been paid to intra- and inter-annual weather variability,  
16 which is very important in designing resilient renewable energy systems [17]. Subsequent  
17 studies have shown that this variability is mainly the result of the variability in large-scale  
18 atmospheric circulations such as the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and North Atlantic  
19 Oscillation (NAO) [6, 7].

20 Bloomfield et al. [16] indicate that ENSO is often characterized as the dominant mode of  
21 climate variability affecting precipitation patterns across Africa, and its magnitude and phase  
22 are directly linked to the sea surface temperatures (SSTs) over the tropical eastern Pacific  
23 Ocean. The warm anomalies in SSTs, called El Nino, and the cold anomalies, known as La Nina,  
24 play a crucial role in the world's climate. However, their study reveals that the relationships  
25 between extreme ENSO phases and the potential for wind and solar power in North Africa are  
26 relatively weak, with more significant impacts observed in Southern and East Africa. They  
27 suggest further work is needed to understand the meteorological drivers of wind/solar  
28 variability over Africa.

29 Another atmospheric phenomenon of relevance for the region is the NAO. This mode of  
30 variability is present due to the surface pressure difference between the Azores (high) and  
31 Icelandic (low) regions in the North Atlantic Ocean, where positive and negative phases can  
32 be distinguished [18]. The pressure difference between the two regions is large during positive  
33 NAO phases. The North Atlantic jet stream is diverted to the North, resulting in the path of  
34 the North Atlantic storm track passing the UK and Northern Europe. This region experiences  
35 a warm, windy, wet winter with high cloud cover [19]. At the same time, Southern Europe  
36 experiences a cold, still, and dry winter with relatively sunny weather. The difference between  
37 Iceland and the Azores is conversely weak for the negative NAO phase, as the jet stream has  
38 a more southerly location and more storms move to the south (i.e., South Europe and North  
39 Africa), loaded with clouds and rainy weather conditions. At the same time, the Northern part  
40 of Europe enjoys calm but cold and dry weather conditions. Fluctuations between the NAO's  
41 positive, negative, and neutral phases can happen on several timescales. Passing weather  
42 systems may cause daily changes. However, more slowly varying changes are also present  
43 due to seasonal and inter-annual climate variability. For example, the 1990s experienced a

1 considerable period of positive NAO phases, and negative NAO conditions were observed  
2 between 2009 and 2011 [20].

3 The NAO has become a key feature for meteorological centers to predict European weather  
4 conditions. Many studies have explored the influence of the NAO on RES, variability, and  
5 power systems in several European countries [21]. However, a limited number of studies  
6 address this issue in North Africa. An analysis by Pozo-Vazquez et al. [22] based on 20 years  
7 of reanalysis data showed the particular influence of NAO on the inter-annual variability of  
8 solar and wind resources over the Mediterranean area. Given the proximity of North Africa  
9 to Southern Europe, it is likely that the NAO also influences it. From this perspective, we  
10 explore the relationship between the NAO index and energy droughts in North African  
11 countries.

12 Additionally, due to global warming, most countries of the North African region are witnessing  
13 a rise in average temperature and more natural disasters such as floods, fires, desertification,  
14 and deforestation [23]. Consequently, climate change leads to altered temperature, solar  
15 radiation, wind distribution, and frequency, which directly impact the production of solar and  
16 wind power [24]. Within this context, this article aims to answer the following research  
17 questions:

- 18 ● To what extent do solar and wind resources exhibit complementary natures in North  
19 Africa?
- 20 ● What is the spatial and temporal distribution of energy droughts across North Africa?
- 21 ● Does the North Atlantic Oscillation drive renewable energy droughts over Africa?

## 24 **2. Data and methods**

### 25 *2.1. Study area*

26 There is no uniform definition regarding the region described as North Africa. The list of  
27 countries that form this region varies depending on the consulted source (e.g., United  
28 Nations, African Union, or Encyclopedia Britannica). For our analysis, we have considered the  
29 following: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Western Sahara [25], and Tunisia ([8]  
30 (Table 1).

31

1 **Table 1.** Energy and economic statistics for countries under investigation.

Country	Primary energy demand [TWh] in 2019 [26]	Primary energy in 2019 [26, 27]	Primary energy by source [%]	Population in millions as of 2019 [28]	GDP in billion USD [28]
Algeria	695		65% - gas, 34% - oil, remaining % - coal, hydropower, solar & wind	43	145,164
Egypt	1,073		55% gas, 38% - oil, 3% - hydropower, remaining % - coal, wind & solar	100.4	363,069
Libya	175		65% - oil, 32% - gas, remaining % - biofuel & waste [q]	6.9	25,418
Mauritania	18		65% - oil, remaining % - biofuel & waste	4.5	7,779
Morocco	262		60% - oil, 30% - coal, 4.5% - wind, remaining % - gas, solar & hydropower	36.5	112,871
Tunisia	122		49% - gas, 40% - oil, 10% - biofuels and wastes, remaining % - renewables	11.7	39,236
Western Sahara*	1	-		0.6	908

2 \*Disputed region with most of the territory under the administration of the Kingdom of Morocco. GDP: Gross  
 3 domestic product.

4

5 In 2019, North African countries consumed 1,273 TWh of primary energy, accounting for  
 6 approximately 23% of the continent’s energy consumption, despite representing around 15%  
 7 of Africa’s population [28]. Despite abundant solar and wind resources, most energy supply  
 8 comes from fossil fuels, particularly gas and oil. These two sources cover over 95% of the  
 9 primary energy demand in Algeria and Egypt [29, 30]. At the same time, the rich renewable  
 10 resources of North Africa are believed to have considerable export potential via direct current  
 11 (DC) transmission lines to Europe. Driven by abundant solar and wind resources and mature,  
 12 cost-competitive technologies, renewable electricity generation has increased by 40% in  
 13 North Africa between 2010 and 2020, thanks to 4.5 GW of PV, wind, and solar thermal  
 14 generation added to the power systems [31].

15 *2.2. Input data*

16 This research uses hourly data from 1960 to 2020 from the fifth-  
 17 generation ECMWF atmospheric reanalysis of the global climate, commonly known as ERA5  
 18 [32], provided by the European Centre ERA5 for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF).  
 19 This dataset is used to model the potential power generation from solar and wind energy  
 20 sources within the specified area of interest. Variables considered include hourly: 2 m air

1 temperature, 2 m dew point temperature, air pressure, 100 m v-component of wind, 100 m  
 2 u-component of wind, and surface solar radiation downwards. Regarding spatial coverage,  
 3 the datasets covered areas from 18° W to 37° E and 15° N to 37° N, with a horizontal resolution  
 4 of 0.25° x 0.25°. The North Atlantic Oscillation index covering the period 1960-2020 is from  
 5 the station-based NAO index, which is based on the difference between the normalized sea  
 6 level pressure between Lisbon and Reykjavik [20]. Data were accessed for the extended winter  
 7 season (corresponding to the station-based NAO index: DJFM – December, January, February,  
 8 and March, denominated here as the winter period) and annual resolutions. DJFM is used  
 9 here as the period where the NAO pattern is most pronounced [33, 34].

## 10 2.3. Methods

### 11 2.3.1. Solar power

12 In this study, the hourly generation of solar PV systems is modeled based on  
 13 monocrystalline silicon cell efficiency as a function of global inclined irradiation (GII) and air  
 14 temperature, following Duffie and Beckman [35]. The conversion of ERA5 horizontal irradiation  
 15 to inclined follows the approach proposed by Duffie et al. [36]. An optimal inclination angle  
 16 for each grid point has been identified to ensure the maximal multiannual irradiation sum –  
 17 Fig. A1 presents the mentioned angles.

18 The hourly PV power ( $P_{PV}$ ) is calculated according to the following equations, Eqs. 1 and 2  
 19 [37]:

$$P_{PV} = P_r \times \frac{S}{S_{ref}} \times [1 - K_t (T_c - T_{ref})] \eta \quad (1)$$

20 where the cell temperature ( $T_c$ ) reads:

$$T_c = T_{amb} + S \left( \frac{NOCT - 20}{800} \right) \quad (2)$$

21 where  $P_r$  is the installed capacity (i.e., assumed to be 1 kW in this research),  $S$  and  $S_{ref}$  refer to  
 22 the total solar radiation reaching the PV array surface and its value at standard test conditions  
 23 [1 kW/m<sup>2</sup>]. Based on values available at [38],  $K_t$  [%/°C] is the temperature coefficient of  
 24 power, which indicates the dependence of the PV output power on the cell temperature (here  
 25 set to  $-3.7 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ),  $T_{amb}$  denotes the ambient temperature,  $T_{ref}$  is the standard ambient  
 26 temperature set at 25 °C,  $NOCT$  is the normal operating cell temperature given by the  
 27 manufacturer (here assumed to be 50 °C), and  $\eta$  is the overall system efficiency (de-rating  
 28 factor) set to 0.85.

### 29 2.3.2. Wind power

30 The wind turbine power output has been modeled based on the power curve (Fig. A2) of  
 31 a commercially available 3 MW Vestas V90/3000 wind turbine with a 100 m hub height. This  
 32 turbine was selected based on current trends that show that these units are slowly replacing  
 33 2 MW on-shore wind turbines because of their greater nameplate capacity [39, 40]. In  
 34 addition, wind data at 100 m are directly available from ERA5 reanalysis.

1 Air density might significantly impact the performance of wind turbines [41], but this  
 2 variable is not directly available in the ERA5 database. This study employs the approach  
 3 proposed by Ulazia et al. [42] to correct the wind power output from the Vestas wind turbine  
 4 for air density. In their method, the wind speed ( $v$ ) at a given time (denoted by subscript  $t$ ) is  
 5 corrected for the change in air density, as follows:

$$v'_t = v_t \left( \frac{\rho_{air_t}}{\rho_{ref}} \right)^{1/3} \quad (3)$$

6 where  $v'$  is the wind speed adjusted for air density [m/s],  $\rho_{ref}$  is the reference air density  
 7 ( $\text{kg/m}^3$ ) here equal to 1.225 [ $\text{kg/m}^3$ ].

8 A relative air humidity ( $RH$ ) parameter is needed to estimate the hourly air density; and  
 9 even if this is not available from ERA5, it is possible to estimate it from temperature and  
 10 pressure variables available in this reanalysis dataset. Hence it has been calculated based on  
 11 the procedure described in the literature [43, 44] :

$$e = 611 \times \exp\left(\frac{17.27 \times T_d}{237.3 + T_d}\right) \quad (4)$$

12

$$e_s = 611 \times \exp\left(\frac{17.27 \times T_a}{237.3 + T_a}\right) \quad (5)$$

13

$$RH = \frac{e}{e_s} \quad (6)$$

14

15 where  $e$  is the actual water vapor pressure [Pa],  $e_s$  is the saturation vapor pressure [Pa],  $T_d$   
 16 is the dew point temperature [ $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ], and  $T_a$  the air temperature [ $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ].

17 Having the relative humidity estimated, it is now possible to calculate the air density based  
 18 on the following equations [43, 44]:

$$e = e_s * RH \quad (7)$$

19

$$p_d = p - e \quad (8)$$

20

$$\rho_{air} = \frac{p_d}{R_d T_a} + \frac{e}{R_v T_a} \quad (9)$$

21

22 where  $p_d$  is the partial pressure of dry air [Pa],  $p$  is the total pressure exerted by the moist  
 23 air,  $T_a$  the air temperature [K],  $R_d$  the specific gas constant for dry air (287.058 J/  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{K}$ ),  $R_v$   
 24 the specific gas constant for water vapor (461.495 J/ $\text{kg}\cdot\text{K}$ ), and  $\rho$  is the air density [ $\text{kg/m}^3$ ].

### 2.3.3. Complementarity – energy droughts

The energy droughts were investigated using the approach by Raynaud et al. [11]. A low generation below a defined threshold characterizes the energy drought. In other words, energy droughts can be defined as periods of prolonged low availability of renewable energy or significant mismatch between demand and supply. Following the procedure described by Raynaud et al., analyzing energy drought events involves the calculation of the deficiency index (DI). In summary, the procedure requires converting the generation time series into a binary time series whose values are equal to 0 when the generation is greater than a set threshold ( $D_T$ ) or to 1 when lower (Eq. 10). In the calculation process, the total number of days with  $DI = 1$  per year and per winter (i.e., as in the NAO index definition) were used for further evaluation. The threshold ( $T$ ) is usually set as a certain percentage of the multiannual mean generation. As in Raynaud et al. [11], we assumed it to be 0.2. In Eq. 10, the available energy during the day can be associated with, for example, an average daily capacity factor. Then, for example, if  $E_i = 0.3$  (or 30%), then considering threshold  $T = 0.2$  (or 20%), such a day was not considered an energy drought day. Alternatively, an approach can be used when the actual generation (ex., MWh) or generation per unit of installed capacity (MWh/MW) can be used instead of capacity factors.

$$DI_i = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } E_i \geq D_T \\ 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (10)$$

where  $E_i$  is the available energy during the day ‘i’, and  $D_T$  is the set threshold. Energy droughts can be assessed from a local or regional resources availability perspective [45]. The energy drought event was considered a day meeting the criteria defined for an energy drought regardless of the characteristics of the previous or the following day. In other words, we have calculated for each grid point the total number of days falling under the definition of the energy drought. For each region, the longest energy drought was also identified, assuming that the energy drought event is an interrupted time series of “1”. For example, [0 1 1 1 0] is an energy drought event lasting three days.

### 2.3.4. Complementarity – optimal capacity of generators

Investigating the impact of hybrid system structure on the frequency of energy drought events provides helpful insight from a planning perspective. By the hybrid system structure, one should understand the capacity ratio of solar and wind generators – naturally, other variable renewable energy sources can also be investigated. The following steps summarize the procedure employed for this purpose:

- First, the frequency of energy drought events is calculated for individual solar and wind generators.
- The next step involves energy droughts analysis conducted for a hybrid solar-wind power plant with equal nameplate capacities [11, 46].
- The last step aims at finding an optimal capacity sharing between solar and wind energy in a solar-wind hybrid system. For this purpose, we started with a solar-only system. We converted it to a solar-wind system by changing the solar-wind ratio. The analysis considered increments of 1 percentage point (pp). For example, we can envision a 100 MW solar park hybridized into a solar-

1 wind park. The procedure above implies that the following hybrid system  
2 structure is 99 MW installed in solar PV and 1 MW in wind power. This  
3 procedure is continued until reaching a 100 MW wind park only. The hybrid  
4 system with the lowest frequency of energy droughts over the 1960-2020  
5 period was considered and was identified for each site. Its capacity ratio was  
6 archived under the constraint that the hybrid generator's capacity factor (CF)  
7 was not less than  $k$  percentage points compared to the generator with the  
8 most power (i.e., either PV solar or wind) at a given site. The  $k = 0.5$  pp was an  
9 arbitrary value considered here.

#### 10 2.3.5. NAO index

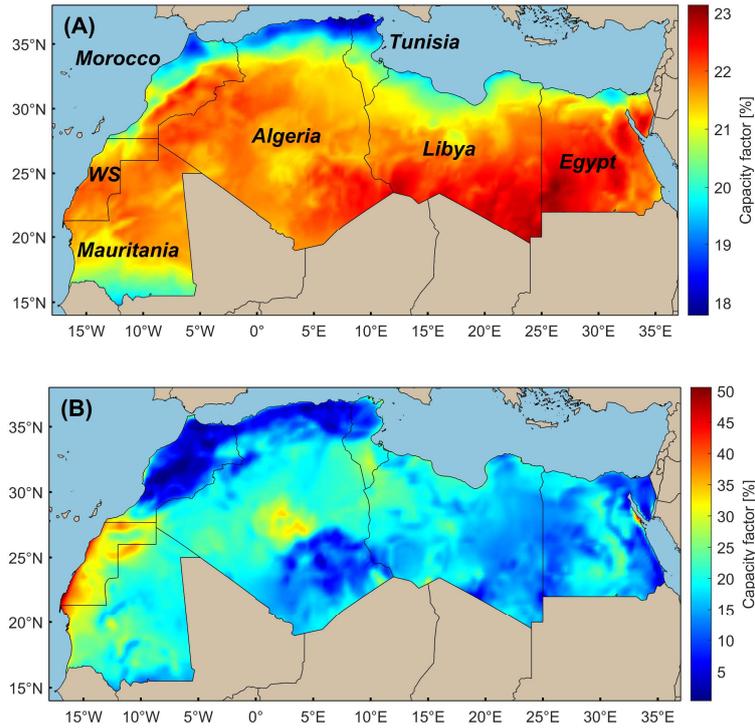
11 The statistical relationship between the NAO index and the analyzed parameters of solar  
12 and wind energy in North Africa is based on the Spearman coefficient of correlation, assuming  
13 statistical significance of correlations at  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ .

### 14 3. Results and Discussion

15 After collecting and processing the relevant meteorological data from the ERA5 database,  
16 the corresponding CF of each RES was calculated. Next, solar-wind potential,  
17 complementarity, energy droughts, and their relationship with the NAO index are explored  
18 and presented in the form of maps in the following sections.

#### 19 3.1. Solar and wind resources

20 Consistent with previous research findings [4, 47-49], solar and wind resources in North  
21 Africa exhibit significant spatial (Fig. 1) and temporal (Fig. A3 and Fig. A4 in the appendix)  
22 variability. The highest potential for solar power (CF) is observed in the northwestern part of  
23 the Sahara Desert. In contrast, regions with favorable wind conditions are unevenly  
24 distributed: the western coast of Morocco/Western Sahara [47, 50] and the Gulf of Suez. For  
25 the whole region presented in Figure 1, the average CF for solar and wind power based on  
26 1960-2020 data are 21.59% and 16.93%, respectively - with the latter characterized by a much  
27 higher spatial variability (Standard Deviation = 6.44 pp) compared to solar (Standard  
28 Deviation = 0.78 pp). Considering the above, the resources exhibit significant spatial and  
29 temporal variability.



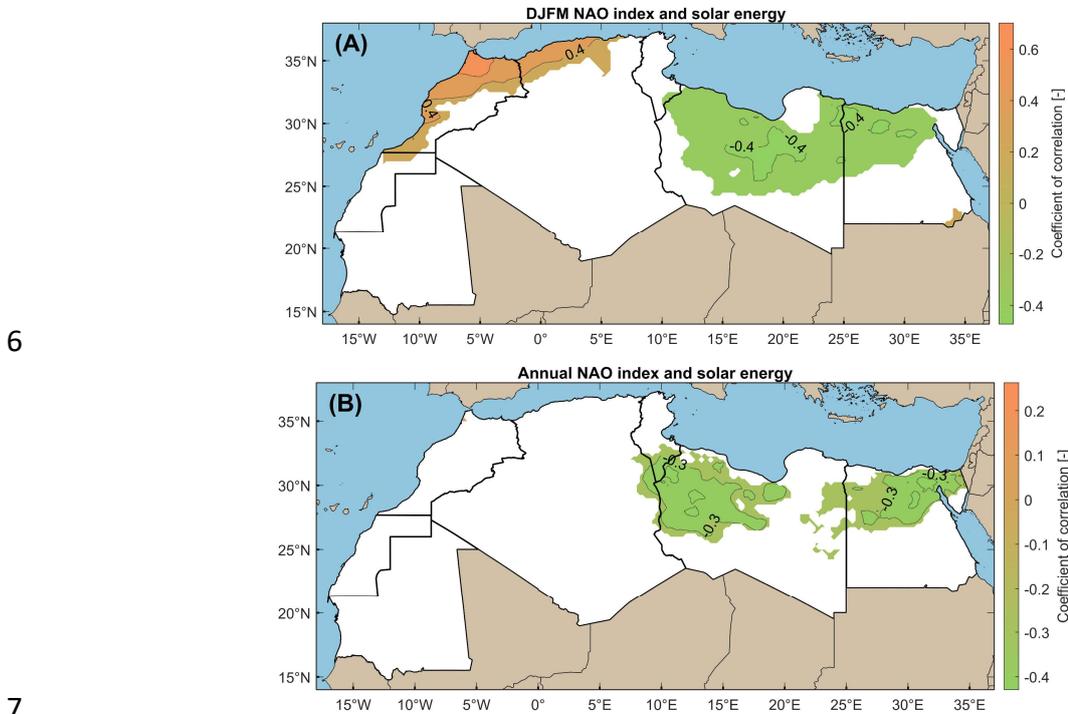
**Fig. 1.** Mean capacity factors over 1960-2020 based on the ERA5 dataset for (A) Solar PV and (B) wind generation. WS – stands for Western Sahara\*.

The availability of RES changes over time. The diurnal, seasonal, and multiyear variations are one of the major challenges in establishing power systems dominated by renewable energy [22]. Such changes in availability from RES often require additional flexibility measures in the form of enabling the rapid adjustment of power output from conventional generators, flexible loads, or energy storage, which is often considered the ultimate solution associated with successful power sector transformation and has therefore drawn the attention of the research community in recent years to exploring conventional [51] and unconventional storage options [52]. Thus, this raises the question of the potential of low-cost solutions (i.e., optimal capacity allocation) to reduce the need for energy storage, the occurrence of energy droughts, or the impact of global weather patterns on renewable energy generation.

According to previous studies, the North Atlantic Oscillation might drive inter-annual changes in renewables availability [21, 22]. Figures 2 and 3 present the correlation between the NAO (annual and seasonal) index [20] and the potential of the two RES under consideration, covering years from 1960 to 2020. It is observed that a moderate, statistically significant, positive correlation (values ranging from 0.4 to 0.6) for solar resources exists in the northern part of the analyzed region, particularly for north Morocco and Algeria. In contrast, negative correlations were found in northern Egypt and north-western Libya (Fig. 2).

\* The Authors stay neutral regarding jurisdictional claims in published maps and simply reported as it was shown on Google Maps.

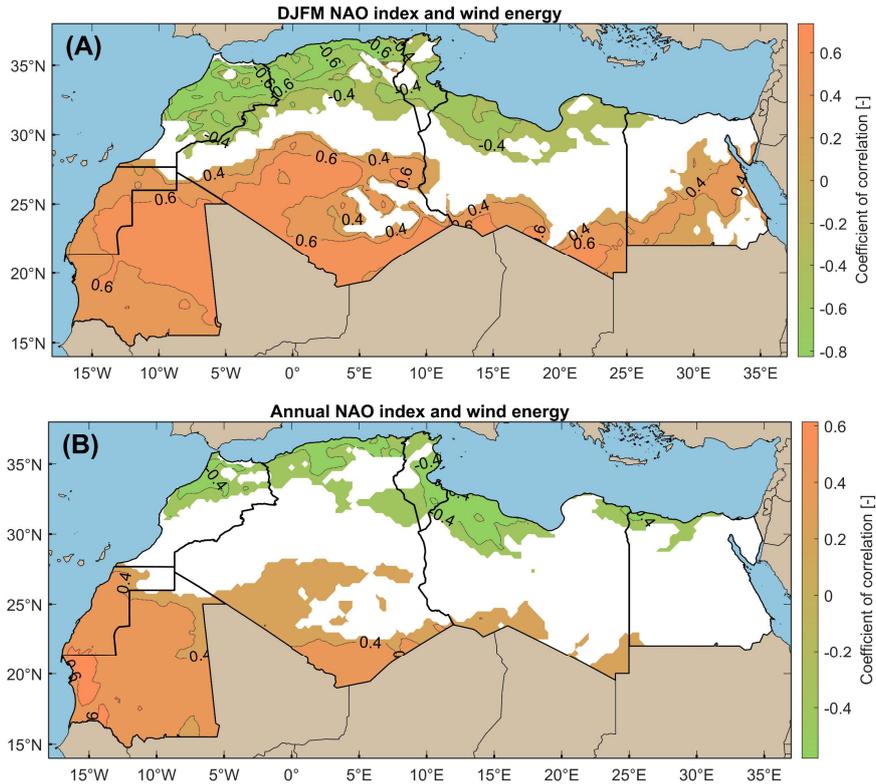
1 In other words, for the positive values of the winter NAO index, the western part of North  
 2 Africa faces a relatively cool and dry climate associated with higher potential energy yield  
 3 from PV systems. Additionally, we can observe that the correlation coefficient values  
 4 decrease further to the south for solar energy, indicating less connection between  
 5 renewables and large-scale weather phenomena over the North Atlantic Ocean.



8 **Fig. 2.** Spearman correlation between NAO index and Solar resources in the North Africa  
 9 region. Please note the different scales on the color bar. Only significant correlations ( $p$   
 10  $< 0.05$ ) are shown.

11 The situation is considerably different in the context of wind energy and its relationship  
 12 with the NAO index. We observe stronger correlations, often surpassing  $\rho = |0.6|$ , with  
 13 opposite signs compared to those of solar resources. In the northern part of the region under  
 14 consideration (i.e., the coastal area of North Africa), we note a negative correlation between  
 15 the NAO index and wind resources. Conversely, in its southern part, the correlations are  
 16 positive, as depicted in Fig. 3. Negative NAO index values are likely to coincide with reduced  
 17 wind potential in the northern coastal regions of North Africa and with higher wind potential  
 18 in the western coast. However, the uneven spatial distribution of wind resources suggests  
 19 limited advantages from spatially distributed generation from this RES. The correlations for  
 20 the annual NAO index are also lower than for the seasonal one – similar to solar energy.

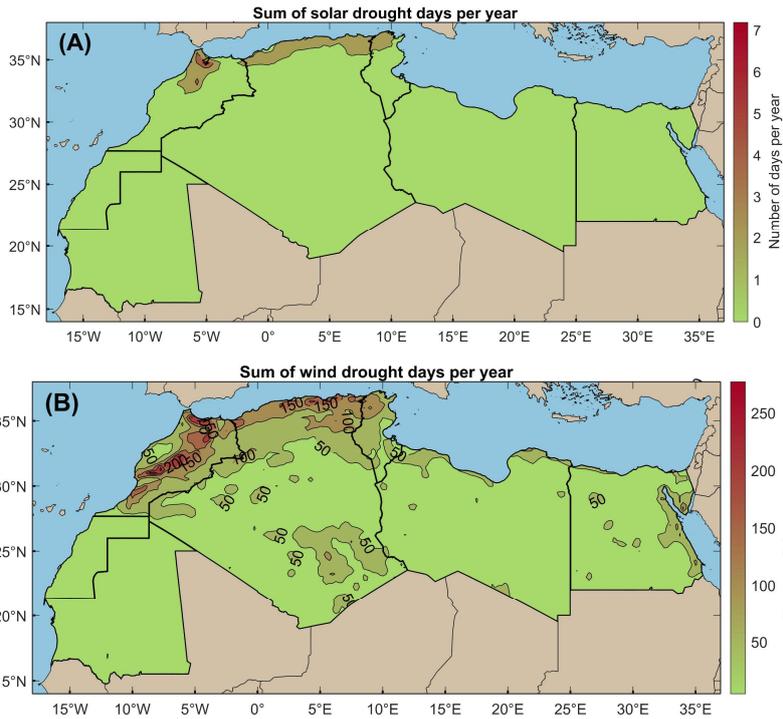
21 Nevertheless, the reversed correlations are a positive sign from the perspective of the  
 22 potential multiannual complementarity of these two resources - meaning years with lower  
 23 solar potential might be compensated by higher wind potential and vice versa. This issue will  
 24 be discussed in section 3.4.



**Fig. 3.** Spearman correlation between NAO index and wind resources in the North Africa region. Please note the different scales on the color bar. Only significant correlations ( $p < 0.05$ ) are shown.

### 3.2. Energy drought for single RES

The occurrence of energy droughts is a relevant phenomenon, enabling a more in-depth analysis of the complementary nature of solar and wind resources. Figure 4 displays the energy droughts from the perspective of individual RES. As observed, energy droughts are extremely limited due to the low variability of solar resources over the Sahara Desert. Energy droughts are as rare as one event per year in the region, indicated by the green color. A higher number of solar energy droughts is observed for northern parts of Morocco and Algeria, potentially exceeding five and up to 7 events per year. Compared to solar, wind energy droughts are more frequent, and, on a regional level, they tend to exceed at least ten events per year, with the highest concentration in northwest Morocco and northern Algeria, where they can exceed 200 days per year. This behavior indicates a very high variability of wind resources in this region.



1

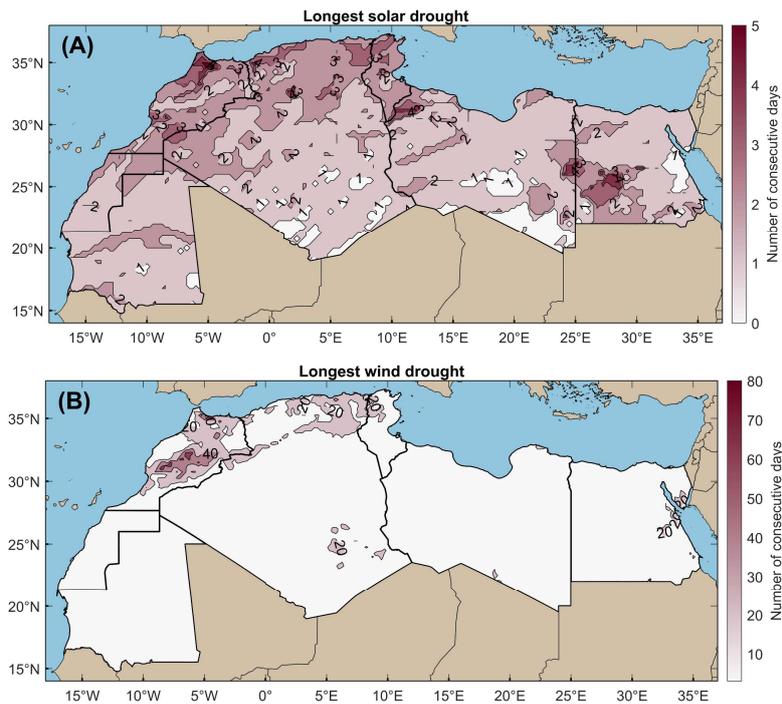
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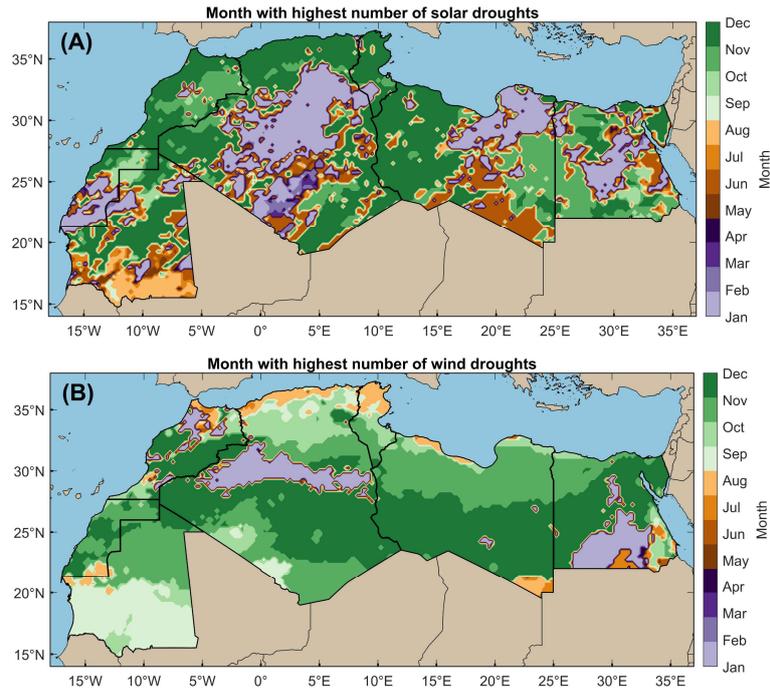
**Fig. 4.** The average number of energy droughts per year, based on daily time series from 1960 to 2020.

5 Individual energy droughts can vary in length. Figure 5 presents the most prolonged events  
 6 recorded between 1960 and 2020. For solar energy, the droughts, on average, do not exceed  
 7 two consecutive days, with the longest ones observed in northern Algeria, Morocco, and  
 8 southern Egypt, with lengths exceeding four days. The situation is more extreme for wind  
 9 energy due to the high variability of resources in the Atlas Mountains, where the energy  
 10 droughts lasted as long as 80 consecutive days; in other words, the generation from wind  
 11 turbines was below 20% of the multiannual average during an 80-days period. This behavior  
 12 aligns with the area's low CF, as shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 5.** Severe energy droughts recorded during the period 1960-2020. The color bar indicates the maximum number of consecutive days classified as energy drought days at each location.

The probability and occurrence of energy droughts vary throughout the year, mainly because of the RES seasonality, and are further influenced by interannual variability. This pattern becomes evident when establishing the energy drought threshold based on multiannual resource potential averages (threshold parameter equal to 0.2) without considering seasonal variations. For that purpose, in Figure 6, we have visualized the months where the highest number of energy droughts can be observed. For instance, in Algeria, solar energy droughts occur mainly from December to February, as also observed in the findings by Guezgouz et al. [4]. In contrast, energy droughts from May to August prevail in southern Mauretania and southern Libya. The situation is different for wind energy, with distinctive horizontal zones and most energy droughts occurring from September to December, and the northern coast of Algeria facing most of the energy droughts in August.



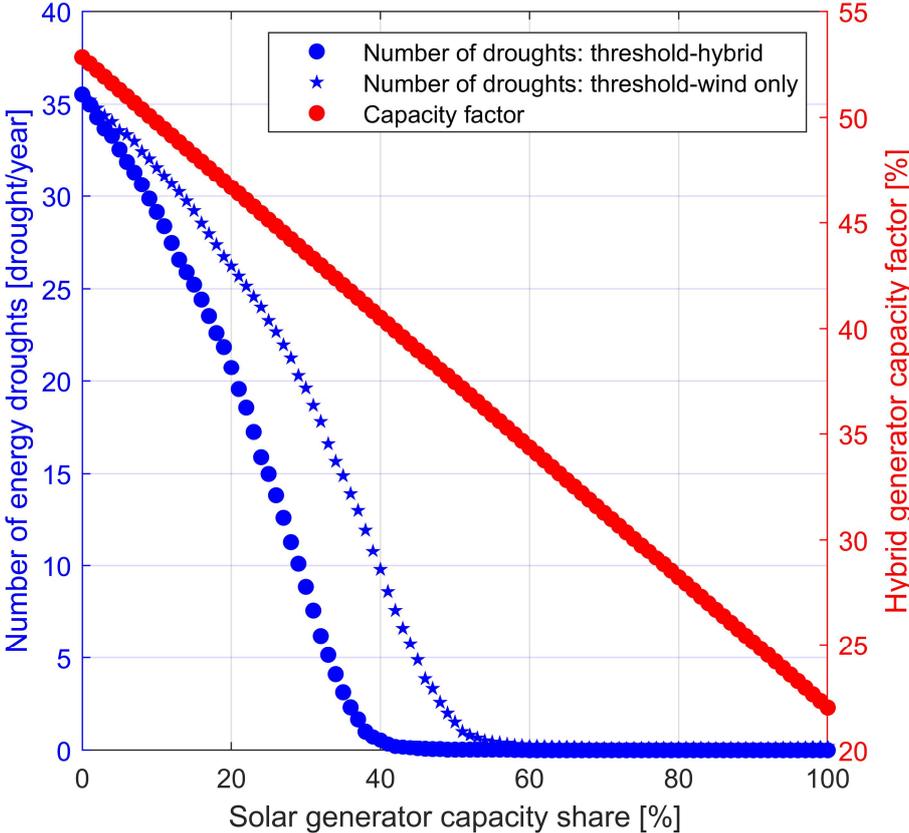
**Fig. 6.** Spatio-temporal distribution of severe energy droughts from 1960-2020.

### 3.3. Energy drought – sources of hybridization

Considering the previous results, it is relevant to explore further the characteristics of energy droughts in power generation from a hybrid generator. To address this, a random location was first modeled within the research area to highlight a relevant aspect of hybridization. The selected region has a relatively high solar PV capacity factor of 22% and a very high capacity factor of wind generation of 52.3%. However, the analysis of the energy droughts for the latter indicates a potential occurrence of 2167 such events for 61 years (i.e., 35 energy drought days on average per year). In the case of the solar generator, such events were not identified – confirming the region’s considerably higher stability of solar resources. Suppose one combines those two energy sources as a hybrid generator, assuming the installed joint capacity will not exceed 1 kW (or any other constant number). In that case, the observed CF of the hybrid generator will start to decrease, as shown in Fig. 7. Adding an energy source with a lower CF (here solar PV) drops the hybrid system CF; however, it simultaneously reduces the frequency of the energy droughts, as shown on the left axis of Fig. 7. Please note that for each configuration of the hybrid system capacity structure, the energy drought’s threshold was set in two ways:

- The threshold value is calculated based on the mean value of hybrid system generation (i.e., blue dots in Fig. 7 “threshold-hybrid”).
- The threshold for each hybrid system configuration is taken from the generator characterized by the highest CF here, the wind one (blue stars of Fig. 7 “threshold-wind”).

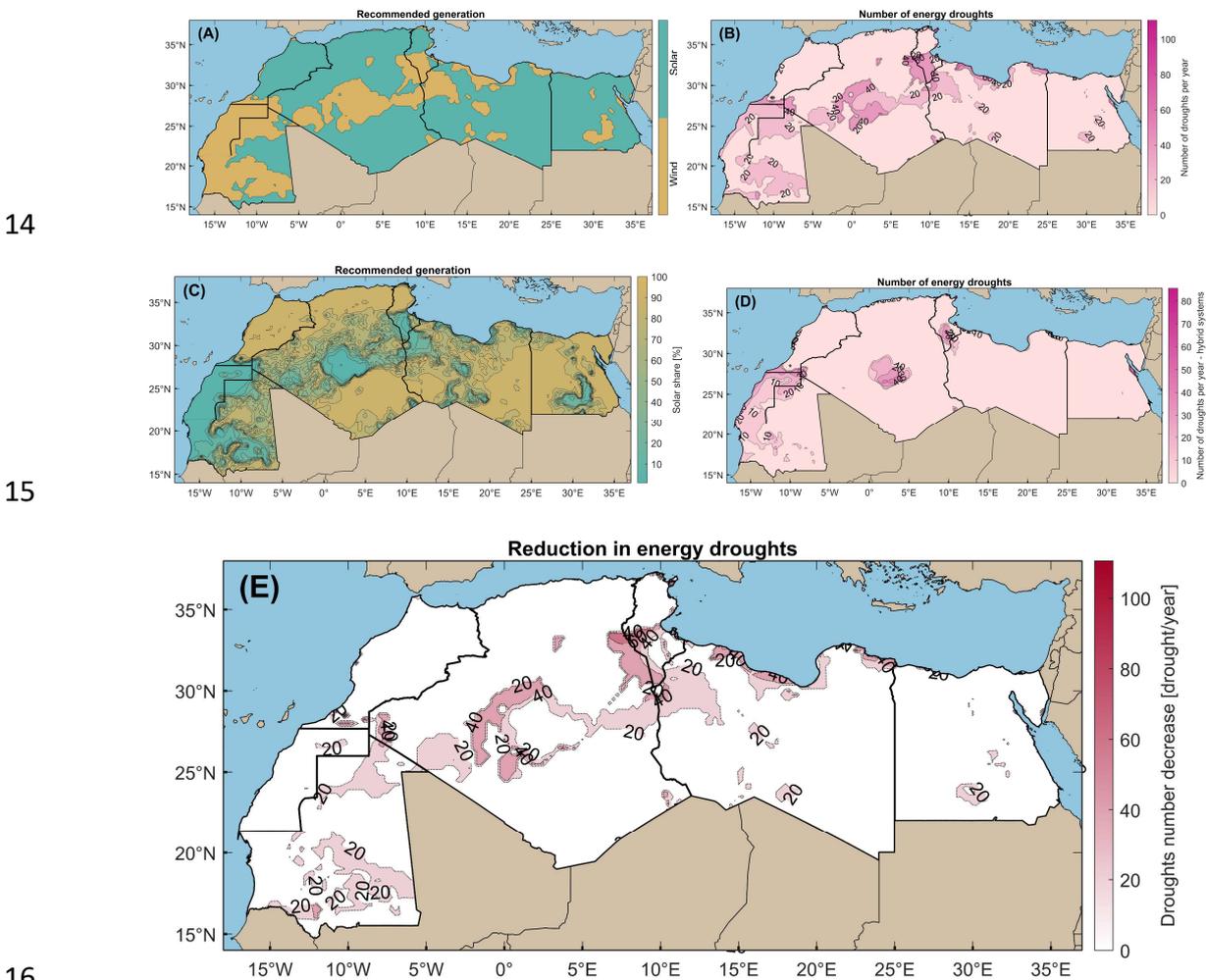
1 The interpretation of Fig. 7 is as follows: systems on the left are dominated by wind power,  
 2 while those on the right are dominated by solar power. As stated earlier, adding solar power  
 3 decreases the system's CF; however, it simultaneously and significantly reduces the system  
 4 energy droughts. When the solar capacity exceeds 40% of the generator installed capacity,  
 5 the energy droughts are: 1) as rare as one event per two years (i.e., if the threshold is based  
 6 on hybrid generator performance), and 2) as frequent as almost ten events per year from the  
 7 perspective of the wind generator only based threshold. The above results raise questions  
 8 regarding the acceptable decline in CF, which usually drives the final cost of electricity  
 9 delivered [53]. The earlier research on the sizing of the hybrid system indicates that the  
 10 optimal capacity of generators depends on the objective function formulation, and the  
 11 generation profile matches the load and investment costs of generators [54]. Since such  
 12 analysis is outside the scope of this study, we have arbitrarily assumed that the acceptable  
 13 decline in CF should not exceed 0.5 pp ( $k = 0.5$ , as indicated in section 2.3.5). Furthermore, to  
 14 observe the benefits of hybridization, we assumed that the threshold for energy droughts  
 15 would be set based on the mean generation time series of the generator with the highest CF  
 16 in each location.



17  
 18 **Fig. 7.** Number of energy droughts per year (blue) and capacity factor (red) as a function of  
 19 hybrid generator capacity structure (wind generator capacity = 100-solar generator  
 20 capacity).  
 21

22 Fig. 8 displays the results of the above-presented procedure when applied across North Africa.  
 23 Solar generation should be prioritized over wind power in most North African regions (top

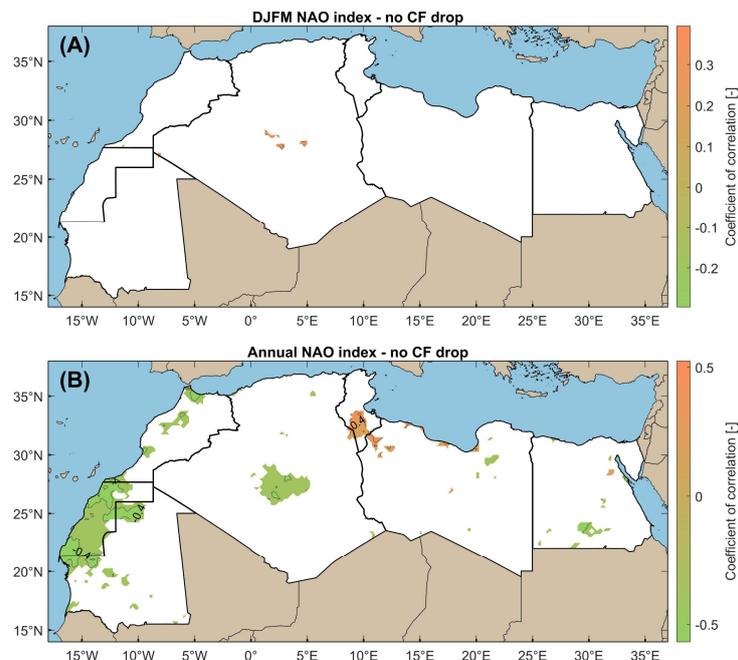
1 row left panel). However, wind energy should be the primary option in certain areas (i.e.,  
 2 mostly Western Sahara and western Mauretania) because of its higher CF in those regions. It  
 3 is worth mentioning that areas where wind energy has higher CF also exhibit the highest  
 4 frequency of energy droughts. When hybridization is considered (Fig. 8 middle row), one can  
 5 observe a significant decrease in energy droughts (Fig. 8 middle row, right panel, and Fig. 8  
 6 bottom row). The region most prone to energy droughts remains the western part of North  
 7 Africa, central Algeria, and southern Tunisia. Although the optimal option for many regions  
 8 (Fig. 8 middle row, left panel) is a system purely solar or wind (no benefits from hybridization  
 9 within the range of allowed decrease in CF), hybridization occurs mainly at the border  
 10 between solar and wind-dominated regions. The detailed regional analysis revealed that  
 11 hybridization makes it possible to reduce the number of energy droughts by 100% (for  
 12 example, at the Algerian-Tunisian border) while losing only 0.5 pp of CF, thus indicating the  
 13 complementary nature of solar and wind energy sources in certain regions.



17 **Fig. 8.** Top row – recommended energy source considering local availability of resources; in  
 18 each grid cell, the generator with the highest CF is regarded as a reference. Middle row –  
 19 hybrid systems with changing solar-wind capacity ratio considering allowed 0.5 pp drop in  
 20 capacity factor due to hybridization. Bottom row – reduction in many energy droughts  
 21 comparing top and bottom rows results.

### 3.4. Relationship between hybrid system's energy droughts and NAO

The last part of the results section is dedicated to the potential relationship between the North Atlantic Oscillation and the occurrence of energy droughts in the case of the hybrid system. Fig. 9 presents the statistically significant correlation between the energy droughts for the hybrid system and seasonal (DJFM) and annual values of the NAO index. The analysis was performed for a hybrid system with solar-wind ratios as presented earlier in Fig. 8, top row left – namely the system structure ensuring minimal energy drought events while maintaining CF equal to the best-performing energy source. The only statistically significant correlations for the seasonal NAO were found for central Algeria, with a mean value of 0.28 and the highest not exceeding 0.39. In general, more significant correlations on the spatial scale were found for the annual NAO index, where positive NAO mode implies lower energy drought frequency in the Western Sahara and central Algeria (i.e., correlations as low as -0.56) and increased energy drought frequency in southern Tunisia (i.e., correlations up to 0.52). A similar exercise was conducted for hybrid systems with an optimized solar-wind ratio (Fig. 8 middle row, left panel). We note that the signs of these correlations are strongly impacted by whether the system is wind- or solar-dominated (see Figures 2 and 3).



**Fig. 9.** Relationship between seasonal (DJFM) and annual values of NAO index for solar-wind hybrid system-related energy droughts. The solar-wind capacity ratio was adjusted to minimize the number of energy droughts while maintaining the system capacity factor of no less than the best-performing energy source in each location, as shown in Fig. 8, top left panel. Only significant correlations ( $p < 0.05$ ) are shown.

The results revealed neither an existence of a significant change in the correlations in the spatial domain (i.e., there was no change regarding the region where significant correlations exist) nor concerning the observed values, which remained almost the same. The analysis proves a relatively weak correlation between the North Atlantic Oscillation and the frequency

1 of energy droughts in North Africa. Regarding spatial distribution and intensity, the  
2 correlations are more evident for the annual NAO index than the seasonal one. System  
3 hybridization has no significant benefits regarding the correlation between NAO and their  
4 occurrence, even though hybridization enables a substantial reduction in energy drought  
5 events in individual regions, as shown in Fig. 9 (bottom row).

#### 6 **4. Conclusions**

7 This study examines the temporal and spatial variability of solar and wind resources in North  
8 Africa from the perspective of energy droughts and their connection with variations in the  
9 NAO index. This section will concisely answer the research questions based on the analysis  
10 and literature review results.

11 One of the purposes for assessing complementarity is to evaluate the ability of hybrid systems  
12 to reduce the number of energy droughts. In that case, such a situation has been observed in  
13 some areas of North Africa, particularly in central Algeria, Southern Tunisia, and the eastern  
14 border of Western Sahara. Despite our conservative assumption that a hybrid system should  
15 be characterized by a loss in CF of no more than 0.5pp compared to a single source, the best-  
16 performing generator in each region revealed that the occurrence of energy droughts could  
17 be limited by as much as 100% (case of the southern Algerian-Tunisian border).

18 Solar energy droughts are most frequent in the northern parts of Algeria, Tunisia, and  
19 Morocco. In contrast, wind energy droughts are most frequent in the Atlas Mountains,  
20 southern Algeria, and eastern Egypt. Thanks to the stability (low temporal variability) of solar  
21 resources below 30 °N, the energy droughts are limited to none or a single event per year in  
22 many regions. Regarding energy drought length, solar energy droughts tend not to exceed  
23 five days (northern parts of Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and southwest Egypt). In contrast, wind  
24 energy droughts can be as prolonged as 80 days in regions with low resource potential (in the  
25 Moroccan part of the Atlas Mountains).

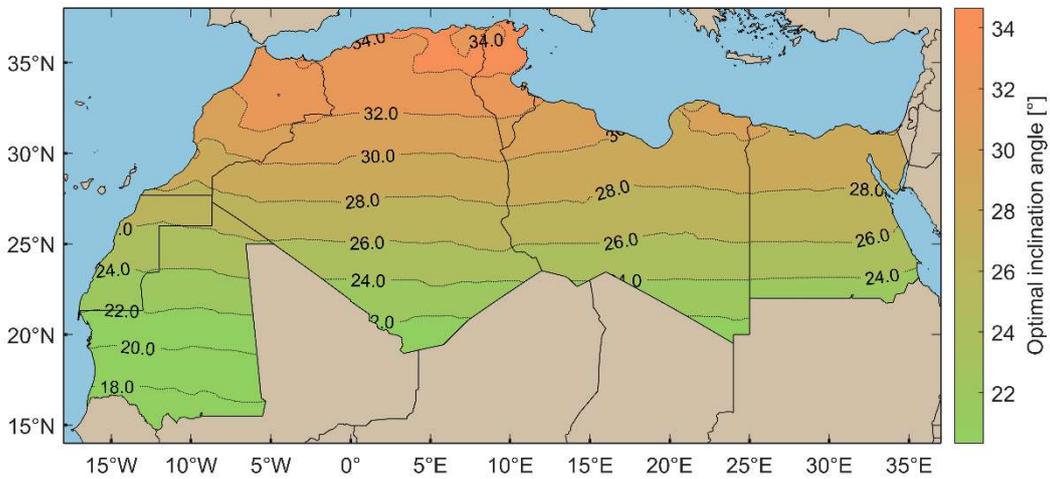
26 Although evident and moderately strong correlations have been identified between mean  
27 solar/wind energy resources availability and the NAO index, further analysis has revealed a  
28 lack of significant correlations between the NAO index and energy droughts apart from small  
29 parts of Western Sahara, central Algeria, and southern Tunisia (in the case of annual NAO  
30 index). The same observations were found for the hybrid solar-wind system, implying that the  
31 hybridization of these two variable sources not only has the potential to reduce the number  
32 of energy droughts but also makes the connection of global teleconnection (in this case, NAO)  
33 and the performance of renewable generators weaker and the energy system based on  
34 renewables have the potential to be more robust.

35 To summarize, this work attempted to quantify the spatial and temporal variability of solar  
36 and wind resources in North Africa from the perspective of energy droughts and global  
37 teleconnection in the form of the North Atlantic Oscillation. Although valid only for North  
38 Africa, the results come from a universal method that can be used for any other region. Future  
39 research should address the following limitations of the current work:

- 1 • The availability of renewable energy should be juxtaposed with the energy demand  
2 on the local, national, and North African levels. The two later consider the  
3 transmission system limitations and suggested development.
- 4 • Instead of analyzing only the past/historical data, the research should also look at  
5 future climate change projections, particularly those considering solar and wind  
6 resource availability from the different plausible CO<sub>2</sub> concentration pathways.
- 7 • The economic value of energy drought avoidance through hybrid systems should be  
8 assessed from the perspective of alternative solutions like long-term energy storage.

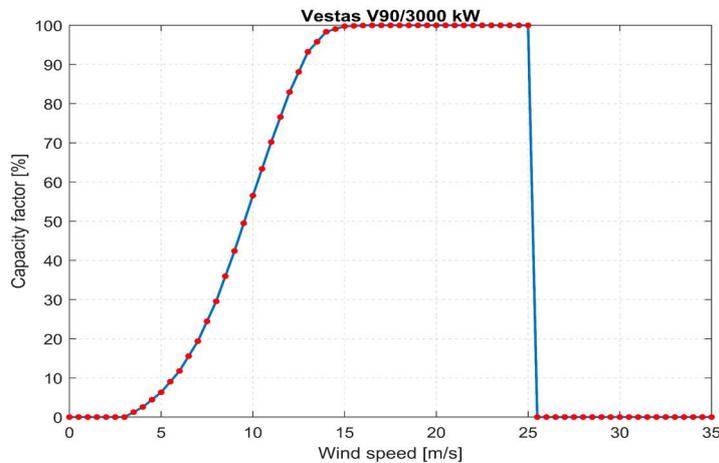
9 **5. Appendix**

10 **5.1. Wind and solar generation**



11  
12 **Fig. A1.** Optimal PV modules inclination angle that maximizes the annual energy yield from  
13 the PV systems.

14



15  
16 **Fig. A2.** Vestas V90/3000 kW power curve [55]. Dots represent data provided by the  
17 manufacturer; the line is a polynomial approximation, particularly for the cut-in-cut-off wind  
18 speeds.

## 5.2. Multiannual and seasonal variability

Averaged over the whole region, temporal and spatial solar (left) and wind (right) variability of generation regarding multiannual (1960-2020) mean value is shown in Figure A2. Spatial variability is introduced by shaded area marking  $\pm$  standard deviation from the mean. Regions' generation potential (local CF) is treated equally – meaning equal weight was assigned to each one of the individual grid nodes falling within the investigated region.

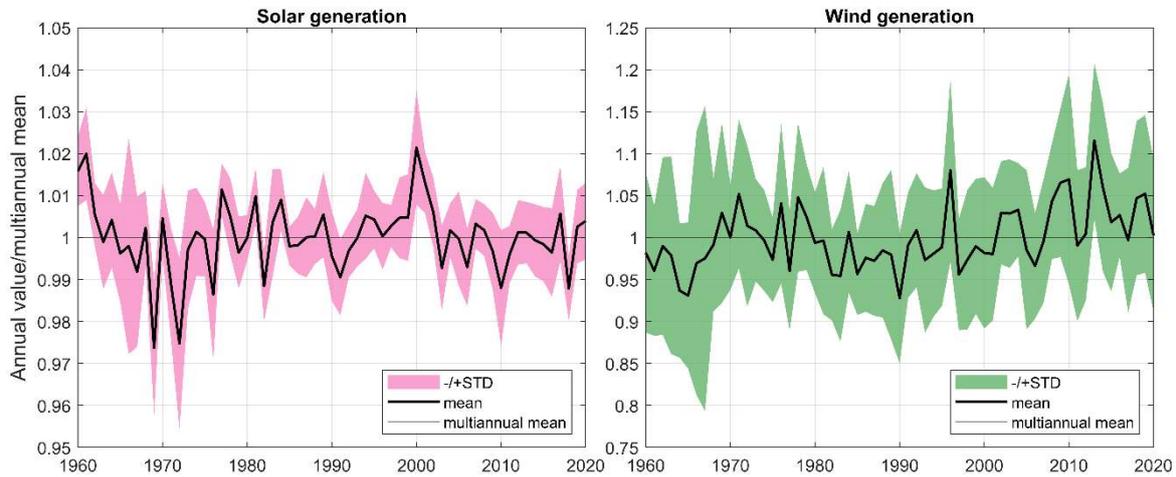


Fig. A3. Solar and wind resources multi-annual variability in the region.

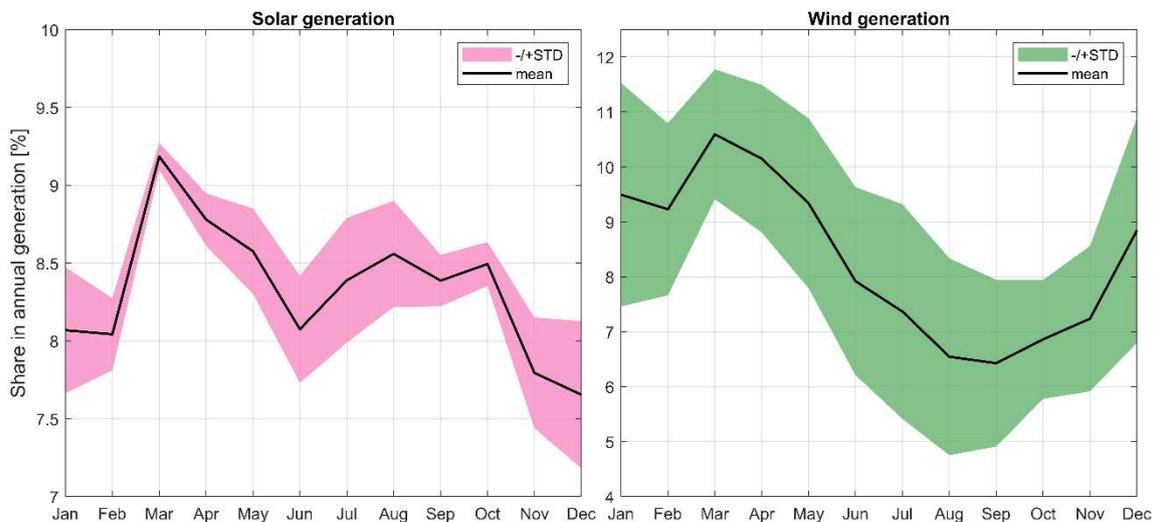


Fig. A4. Solar and wind resources seasonal variability in the region.

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