

Bayesian Inference and Global Sensitivity Analysis for Ambient Solar Wind Prediction¹

Opal Issan^{1,2} Pete Riley³ Enrico Camporeale^{4,5} Boris Kramer¹

September 23rd, 2025

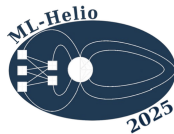
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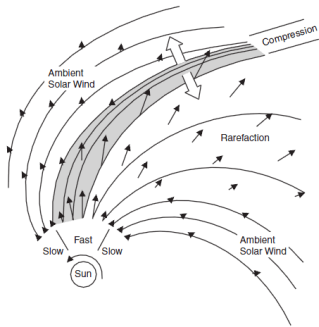
⁵University of Colorado, Boulder, USA



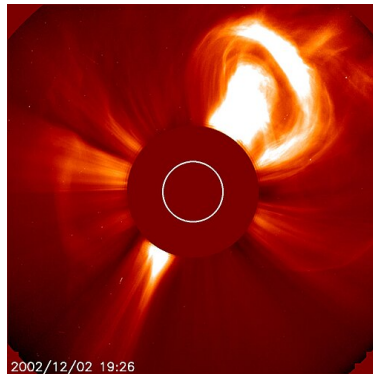
¹This research was partially supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Award 2028125.

What is the ambient solar wind?

- The **ambient solar wind** is the long-lived, large-scale structure in the solar wind.
- **Corotating interaction regions** (CIR), regions between fast and slow solar wind, are the main driver of geomagnetic activity during **solar minimum**.
- **Coronal mass ejections** (CME) are modeled as perturbations to the ambient solar wind and are the main driver of geomagnetic activity during **solar maximum**.



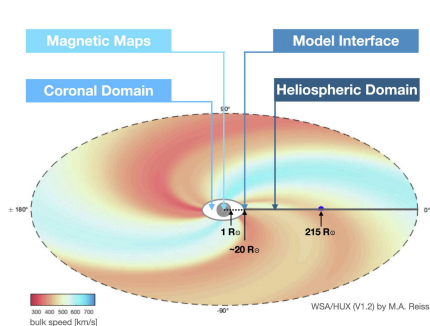
Schematic illustration of CIRs. Credit: [Pizzo, 1978]



CME in white-light coronagraph imagery. Credit: [Webb and Howard, 2012]

State-of-the-art ambient solar wind models

State-of-the-art models for forecasting the ambient solar wind near Earth couple **coronal** and **heliospheric** models. NASA's CCMC available models²:



Magnetic Maps	Coronal Domain	Model Interface*	Heliospheric Domain
GONG	CESE-HLLD Li et al., 2018, 2020	DCHB Model Riley et al., 2015	CESE-HLLD Li et al., 2018, 2020
MDI	MAS Linker et al., 1999	WS Model Wang and Sheeley, 1990	Enlil Odstrcil et al., 2003
MWO	MULTI-VP Pinto and Rouillard, 2017	WSA Model Arge et al., 2003	EUHFORIA Pomoell and Poedts, 2018
NSO SOLIS	PFSS Altschuler and Newkirk, 1969	Adaptive-WSA Model Reiss et al., 2020	HelioMAS Linker et al., 1999
	AWSoM Van der Holst et al., 2014	* Note that an empirical model at the interface is not always needed.	LFM-helio Merkin et al., 2016
	WindPredict-AW Reville et al., 2020		HUX, THUX Riley and Lionello, 2011
			HUXt Owens et al., 2020
			SWMF Tóth et al., 2005

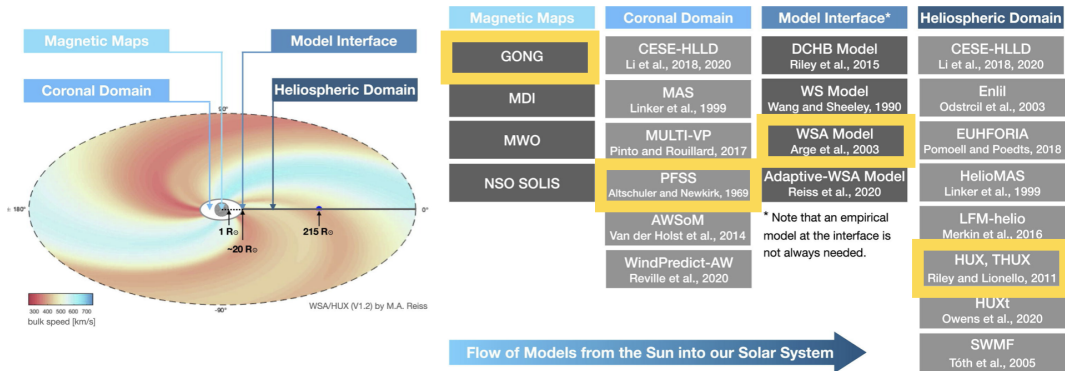
Flow of Models from the Sun into our Solar System

Credit: [Reiss et al., 2022]

²<https://ccmc.gsfc.nasa.gov>

State-of-the-art ambient solar wind models

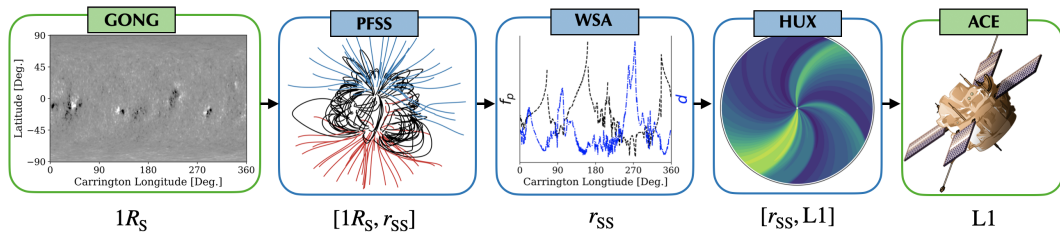
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Highly efficient ambient solar wind model chain



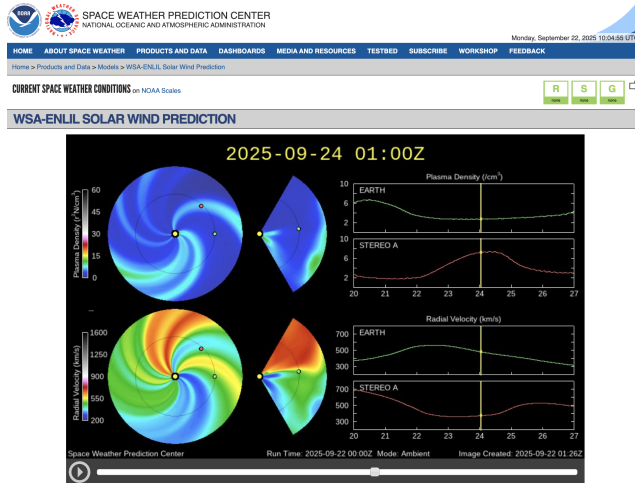
Reduced-physics and semi-empirical models

- Potential Field Source Surface (**PFSS**) [Altschuler and Newkirk, 1969]
 $\Rightarrow \nabla^2 \Psi = 0$
- Wang-Sheeley-Argge (**WSA**) [Arge et al., 2004] $\Rightarrow$
$$v_{wsa}(f_p, d) = v_0 + \frac{v_1 - v_0}{(1 + f_p)^\alpha} \left(\beta - \gamma \exp \left(- \left(\frac{d}{w} \right)^\delta \right) \right)^\psi$$
- Heliospheric Upwind eXtrapolation (**HUX**) [Riley and Lionello, 2011] $\Rightarrow$
$$-\Omega_{\text{rot}} \frac{\partial v(r, \phi)}{\partial \phi} + v(r, \phi) \frac{\partial v(r, \phi)}{\partial r} = 0$$

Observational data

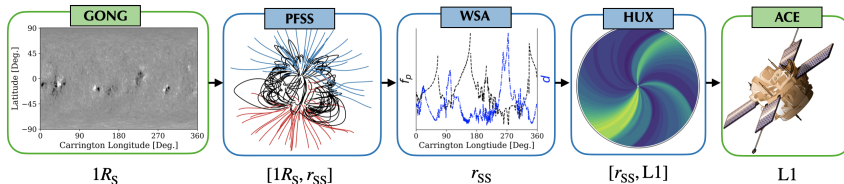
- Global Oscillations Network Group (**GONG**) synoptic magnetograms
- Advanced Composition Explorer (**ACE**) in-situ measurements at $L1$

WSA model is used at NOAA and UK Met Office today



A snapshot taken from NOAA-SWPC website www.swpc.noaa.gov on Sept. 11th, 2025.

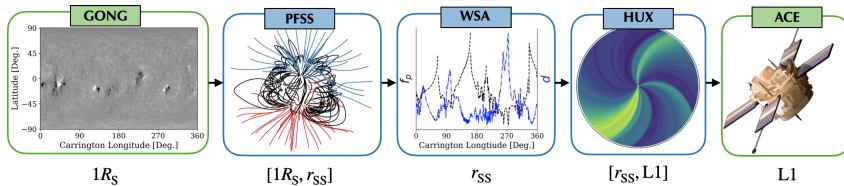
What are sources of forecast uncertainties?



■ Boundary conditions

⇒ Different observatories produce different photospheric maps, far-side and polar regions are unobserved, and synoptic magnetograms assume the photosphere is static over 27 days.

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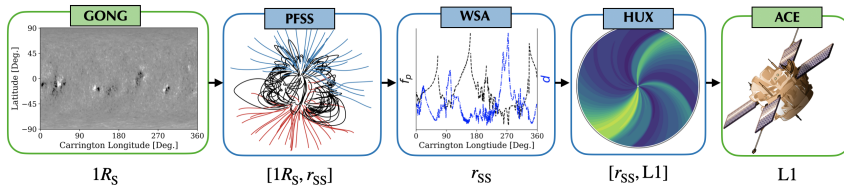
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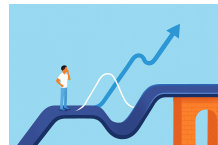
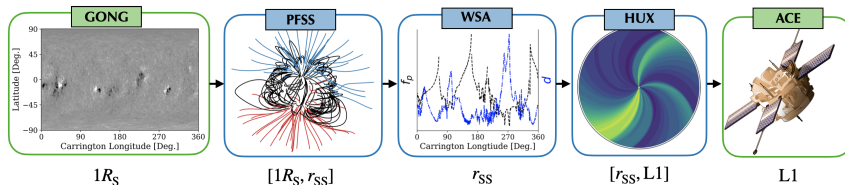
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⇒ Not resolving kinetic processes which can influence solar wind heating/acceleration.

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■ **Input parameters** ⇒ focus of today's talk!

⇒ Empirical coefficients and scalars from reduced-physics approximations.

Model chain parametric uncertainty

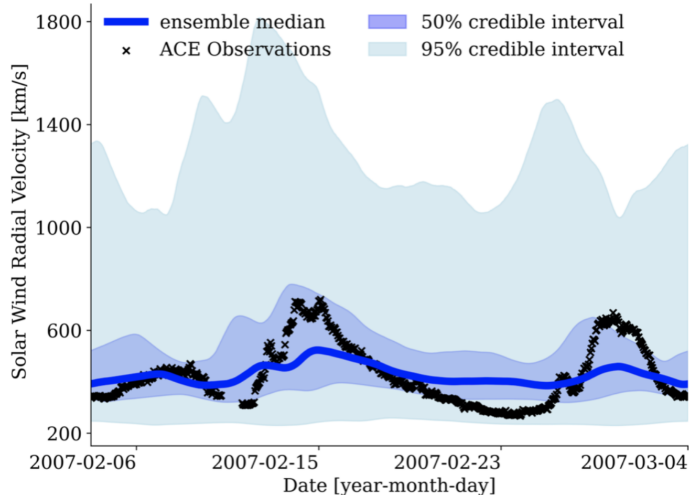
- The model chain has **11 uncertain input parameters** due to reduced physics assumptions and empirical relations.
- Operational forecasts adopt fixed nominal values, which limit **accuracy**.

	Parameter	Model	Description	Prior Range
1.	$r_{SS} [R_S]$	PFSS	source surface height	[1.5, 4]
2.	$v_0 [\frac{km}{s}]$	WSA	minimum velocity	[200, 400]
3.	$v_1 [\frac{km}{s}]$	WSA	maximum velocity	[550, 950]
4.	α	WSA	fitting parameter	[0.05, 0.5]
5.	β	WSA	fitting parameter	[1, 1.75]
6.	$w [rad]$	WSA	fitting parameter	[0.01, 0.4]
7.	γ	WSA	fitting parameter	[0.06, 0.9]
8.	δ	WSA	fitting parameter	[1, 5]
9.	ψ	WSA	fitting parameter	[3, 4]
10.	α_{acc}	HUX	acceleration factor	[0, 0.5]
11.	$r_h [R_S]$	HUX	radius acceleration ends	[30, 60]

[Lee et al., 2011, Arden et al., 2014, Meadors et al., 2020, Kumar and Srivastava, 2022, Riley et al., 2015]

Parametric uncertainty leads to large forecast uncertainties

Ensembles generated from the prior uniform distributions result in **large credible intervals** and an **inaccurate** ensemble median.



Phase 1. Global sensitivity analysis via Sobol' indices

⇒ Identify the most influential parameters based on their contribution to output variance.

Sobol' sensitivity indices [Sobol', 2001]

$$T_i := \frac{\mathbb{E}_{X \sim i} [\text{Var}_{X_i}(f(X) | X_{\sim i})]}{\text{Var}[f(X)]} = \text{output variance contributed only by } X_i$$

$X := [r_{SS}, v_0, v_1, \alpha, \beta, w, \gamma, \delta, \psi, \alpha_{acc}, r_h]$ uncertain input parameters

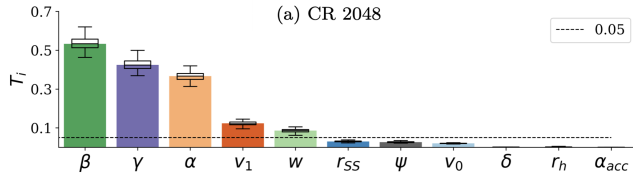
$X_i := i$ th input parameter

$X_{\sim i} :=$ all input parameters excluding the i th parameter

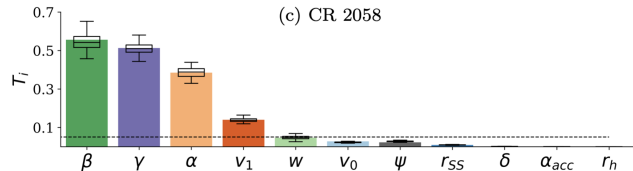
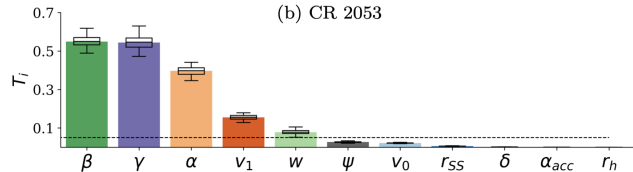
$f :=$ RMSE between the model radial velocity
predictions and ACE observations

- **Intuition.** If $T_i \approx 0$, then $\mathbb{E}_{X \sim i} [\text{Var}_{X_i}(f(X) | X_{\sim i})] \approx 0$, which, by the non-negativity of the variance operator, implies that $\text{Var}_{X_i}(f(X) | X_{\sim i}) \approx 0$.
- **Estimation.** We estimate T_i via Monte Carlo estimators, e.g. the Janon and Monod estimator [Janon et al., 2014, Monod et al., 2006].

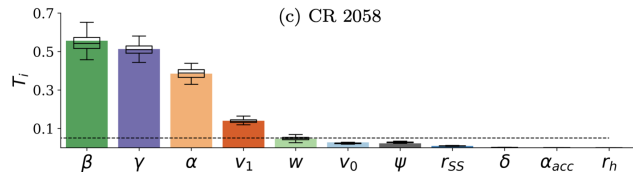
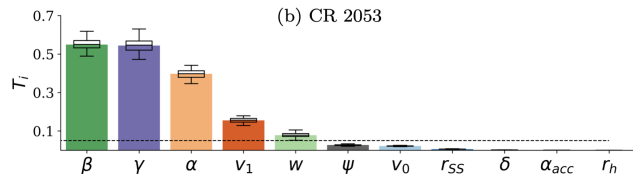
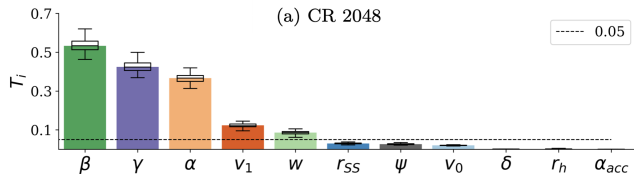
Phase 1. Global sensitivity analysis numerical results



■ The **five most influential** parameters are all from **WSA**.



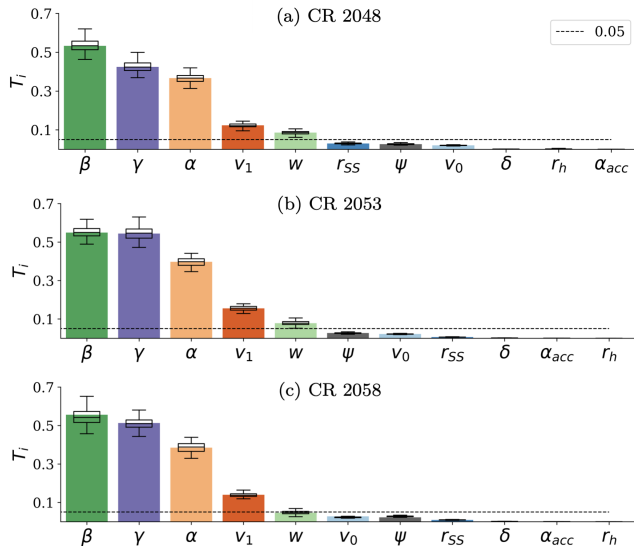
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■ Meadors et al. (2020) and Majumdar et al. (2025) found that adjusting the **source surface height** r_{SS} improves the solar wind predictions.

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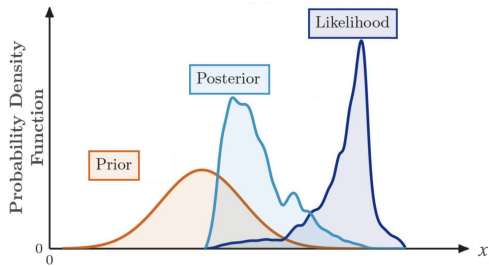
- Meadors et al. (2020) and Majumdar et al. (2025) found that adjusting the **source surface height** r_{SS} improves the solar wind predictions.

- We found that **in comparison** to all other parameters, it is deemed **non-influential**.

Phase 2. Bayesian inference

We seek to estimate the **posterior** $\pi(x|z)$, which is the probability of the influential parameters x given ACE measurements at 1-hr cadence $z = \{z_1, z_2, \dots, z_n\}$, via **Bayes' rule**:

$$\underbrace{\pi(x|z)}_{\text{Posterior}} \propto \underbrace{\pi(z|x)}_{\text{Likelihood}} \underbrace{\pi(x)}_{\text{Prior}}$$



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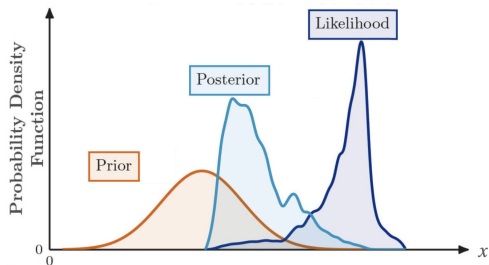
We assume that the model and measurements are related by

$$Z_i = g(X; t_i) + \epsilon_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

$$\epsilon_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma), \quad \sigma = 80 \frac{\text{km}}{\text{s}}$$

resulting in the following likelihood

$$\pi(z|x) \propto \exp \left(-\frac{1}{2\sigma^2} \sum_{i=1}^n [z_i - g(x; t_i)]^2 \right)$$

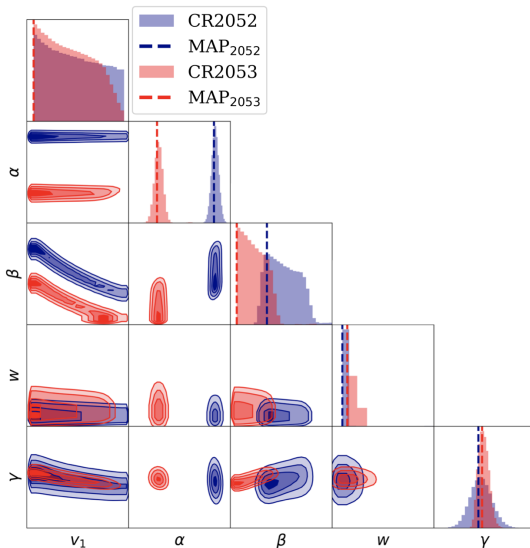


Phase 2. Bayesian inference numerical results

We use the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (**MCMC**) Affine Invariant Ensemble Sampler (**AIES**) [Goodman and Weare, 2010] to generate samples from the posterior density.

AIES main advantages are

1. Affine invariant $\Rightarrow$ suitable for anisotropic posteriors

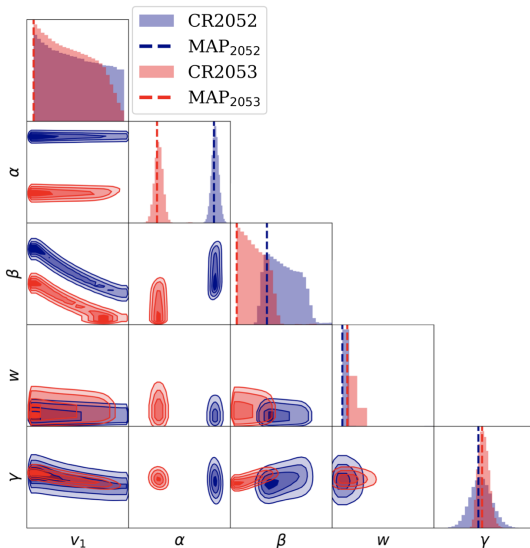


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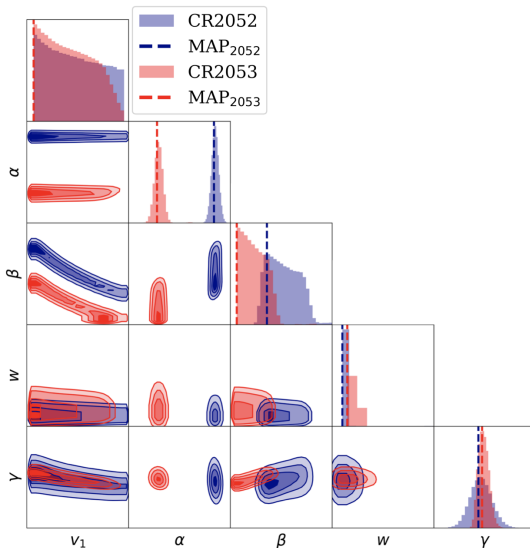


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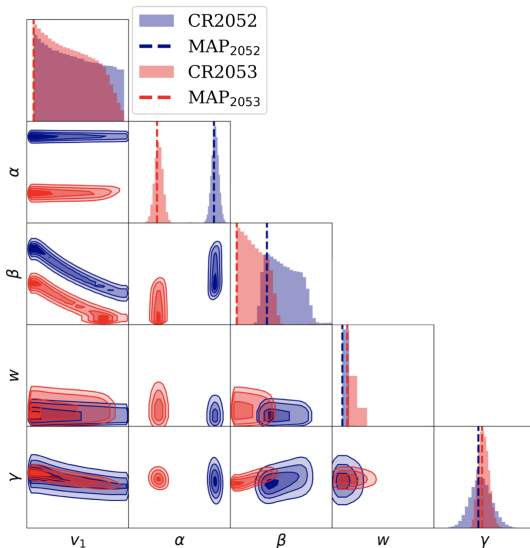


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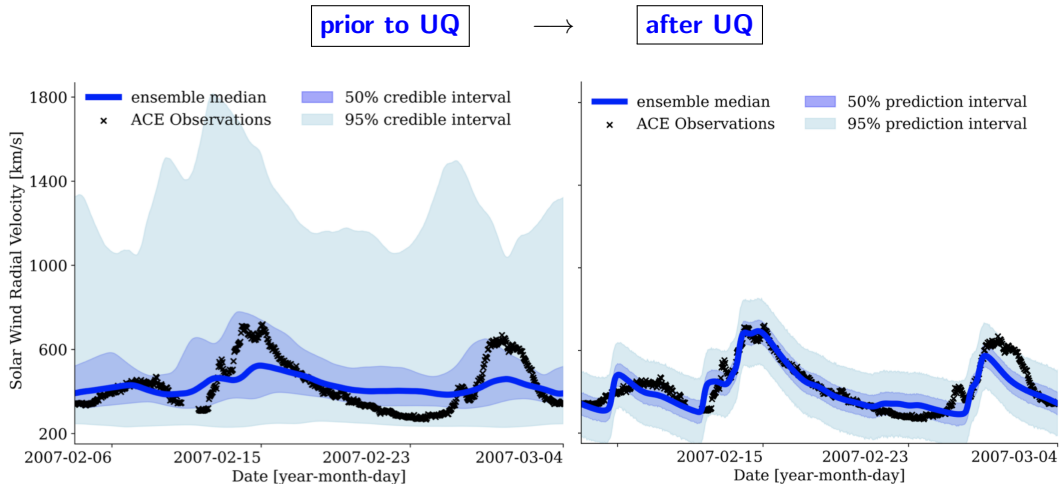
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4. Only two hyperparameters vs. d^2 for standard Metropolis Hastings



Phase 3. Posterior ensemble predictions

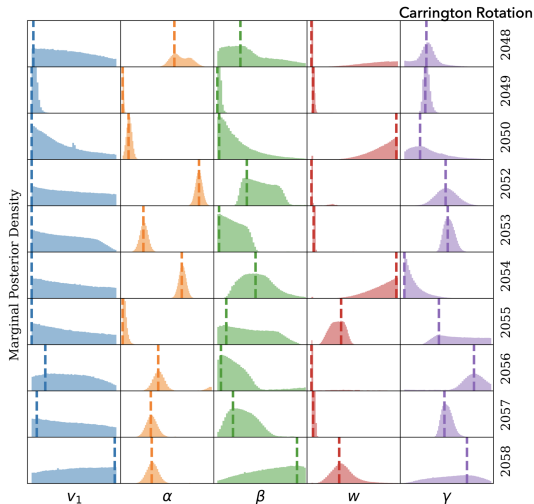


Can we apply the UQ framework for real-time forecasting?

Ideally, we could use the posteriors from one CR to generate an ensemble for the next.

However, the posterior densities **vary greatly from one CR to the next**.

1. The non-physical parameters are trying to overcompensate the intrinsic and “**hard-wired**” limitations of each of the models. $\Rightarrow$ Model chain specific...



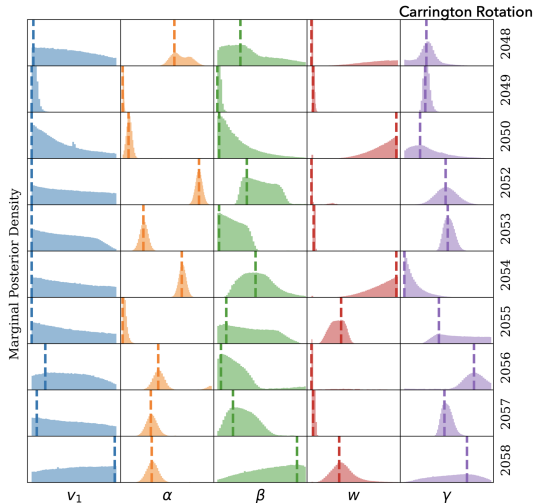
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2. The WSA model is **overparameterized** $\Rightarrow$ could be **reformulated**

$$v_{\text{wsa}}(f_p, d) = v_0 + \frac{v_1 - v_0}{(1 + f_p)^\alpha} \left(\beta - \gamma \exp \left(- \left(\frac{d}{w} \right)^\delta \right) \right)^\psi$$



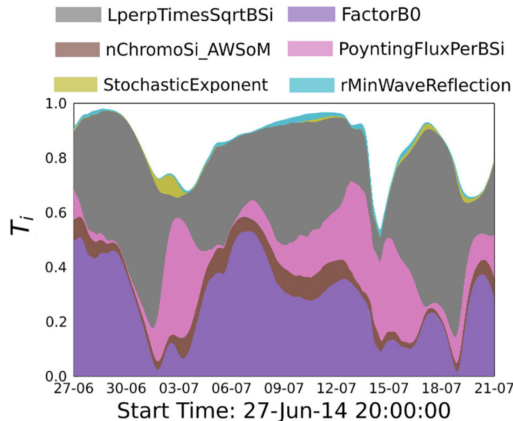
Computational limitations and alternative methods

The UQ framework requires a large number of model evaluations to reach MC convergence $1/\sqrt{N}$.

- $N \approx 10^5$ for the sensitivity analysis (*offline*)
- $N \approx 10^7$ for MCMC (*online*)

Alternative methods for more **computationally expensive model chains** (e.g., WSA-ENLIL):

- Multifidelity unbiased estimators which leverage surrogate models for speeding up MC convergence [Peherstorfer et al., 2018]



Sobol' indices via PCE surrogates for **expensive models** like **AWSOM** [Jivani et al., 2023]

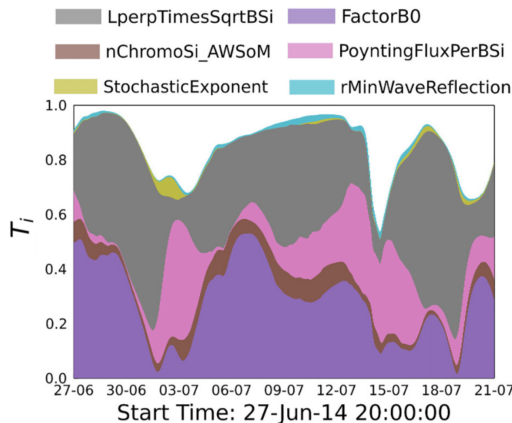
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- Surrogates include
 1. neural networks
 2. projection-based model reduction via SVD
 3. interpolatory-based, e.g., polynomial chaos expansions (PCEs)



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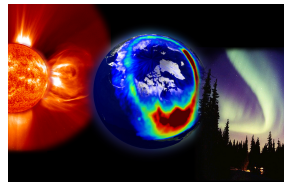
UQ study conclusions

- The proposed UQ framework can significantly **reduce** the forecast **uncertainty** and improve median **accuracy**.

Code Accessibility

The code used to generate these results is available at https://github.com/opaliss/Parameter_Estimation_Solar_Wind.

Space Weather paper link



Credit: STEREO

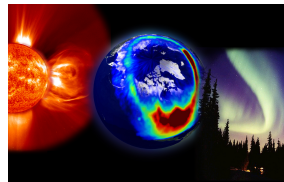
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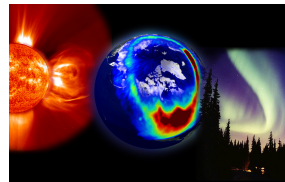
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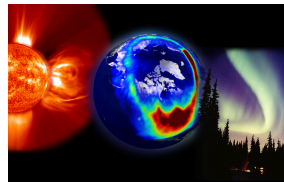
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- The posterior distributions of the WSA model change greatly over time $\Rightarrow$ might need reformulation.
- New efforts: WSA+ [Mayank et al., 2025] achieves 40% error reduction using transformers, but there is still room for further progress toward **parsimonious symbolically simplified** WSA.

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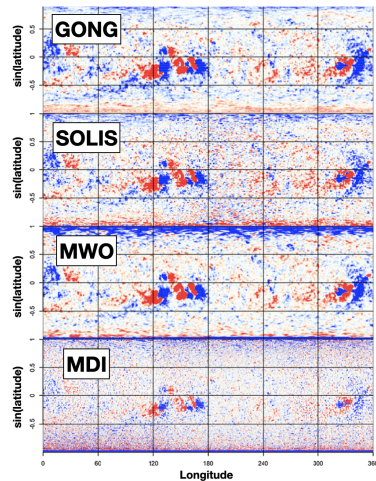
Space Weather paper link



Credit: STEREO

Future directions and outlook

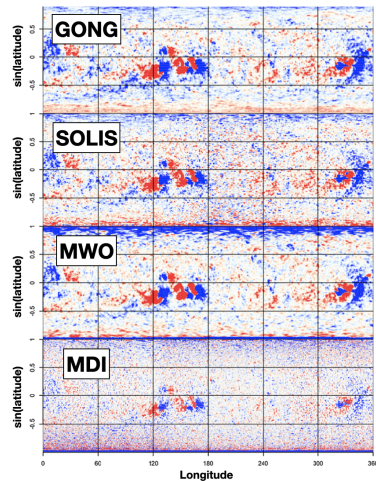
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 1. Considerable differences between magnetograms from **different observatories** [Riley et al., 2014].



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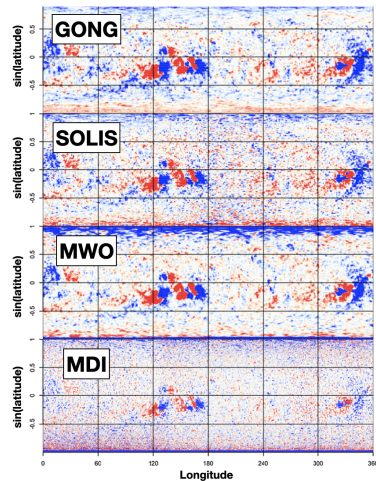
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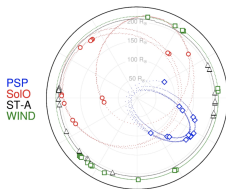
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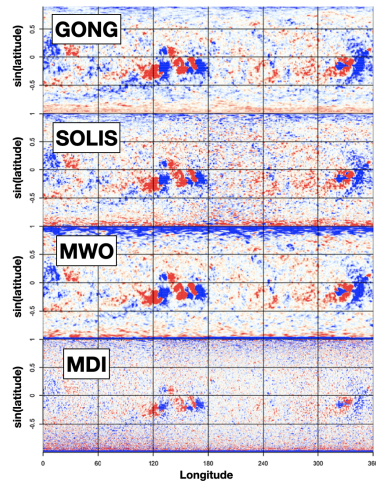
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- We can leverage **more data sources** to reduce the forecast uncertainties, e.g., *in-situ* **PSP** [Samara et al., 2024] and **EUV images** [Majumdar et al., 2025].



Credit: [Clarkson et al., 2025]



Credit: [Riley et al., 2014]

Thank you! Questions?



Solar wind prediction: part physics, part surrealism.



Space Weather paper link

- Altschuler, M. D. and Newkirk, G. (1969).
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