Burnt Area from 2001 to 2022 of southern Africa

Percentage of the Burns per Year in 2022 against the Average Annual Burns per Year (2001 to 2021)

Number of Years Burn (2001 to 2021)
Fire plays a determining role in the creation of the southern African landscape. The duration of the annual dry season and the availability of fuel contribute to the spatial variation and extent of burning, and relies on the prior rainfall season(s).

The comparison of the number of burns per year for 2022 to the average annual burns per year from 2001 to 2021 on page 1 suggests that areas burned in Angola, Botswana and Zambia burned at an average frequency or more often than in the prior 22 years.

The map further highlights the huge areas in Angola, north-eastern Namibia and Zambia, that have burned almost every year, counting between 15 and 21 years, between 2001 and 2021. While wild fires have been shown to be an integral periodical part of the southern African landscape and play an important role in certain plant regeneration, numerous studies have also suggested detrimental effects of regular annual burns on the landscape biodiversity and these drive landcover changes.
The fire season predominantly occurs before the rainy season, during the dry winter months of the year. The graphs, on page 3, of the average number of years burn, for a given month, reinforces that the majority of burns occur during the drier winter months from May to October. Burns during this period can be generally associated with the common slash-and-burn practice of subsistence farming.

The burnt area data for the past 22 years suggest that the areas burned for Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe in 2022 are below average, while the areas burned for Botswana are above average for 2022.

Data Source: MODIS MCD64A1 version 6.1 burnt area fire data from 2001 to 2022

References: