

# Rebuttal Letters sent to Journals to challenge the exclusive focus on the zoonosis hypothesis

(none were accepted)

## Context

In the scientific community the debate around the origin of SARS-CoV-2 was quickly framed by the publication of two articles:

- The first one ([Calisher et al. 2020](#)) in February 2020 in the prestigious journal The Lancet, signed by 27 scientists, which underlines the efforts of Chinese scientists and, without providing arguments supporting the natural origin, "strongly condemns the conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin". This article was followed by a [petition](#) signed by more than 20,000 persons.
- The second article ([Andersen et al. 2020](#)) was published in March 2020 in Nature Medicine and provided a series of scientific arguments in favor of a natural origin.

Several researchers sent letters to various journals to alert that the origin of the coronavirus was not definitively proven to be zoonotic and that a laboratory accident was a plausible hypothesis that should be investigated. Some of these letters are listed below. None of them was published, either because they were explicitly rejected, or because they were not considered for publication.

Date of submission	Journal	Target publication	Authors (* corresponding)	Title	Date of rejection	Link to the rebuttal letter
10 Jan 2021	Science	<a href="#">Zhou and Shi, 2021</a>	Milton Leitenberg		14 Jan 2021	<a href="#">link</a>
May 2020	Nature	<a href="#">Zhou et al. 2020</a>	Monali Rahalkar			
6 Jan 2021	The Lancet	<a href="#">Calisher et al. 2020</a> and <a href="#">Andersen et al. 2020</a>	Jacques van Helden*, Colin D Butler, Bruno Canard, Guillaume Achaz, François Graner, Rossana Segreto, Yuri Deigin, Fabien Colombo, Serge Morand, Didier Casane, Dan Sirotkin, Karl Sirotkin, Etienne Decroly*, José Halloy*	An appeal for an open scientific debate about the proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2	11 Jan 2021 + 14 Jan 2021 (after discussion)	<a href="#">Research Gate</a>
2020	Nature Medicine	<a href="#">Andersen et al. 2020</a>	Michael Antoniou	Was the COVID-19 virus genetically engineered?		<a href="#">GMWatch</a>
13 May 2020	Nature	<a href="#">Zhou et al. 2020</a>	Günter Theißen	Discussion on the origin of the new coronavirus lacks scientific rigor		<a href="#">Research Gate</a>
27 Feb 2021	Nature	<a href="#">Zhou et al. 2020</a>	Günter Theißen	Hypotheses about a lab origin of SARS-CoV-2 should be tested rather than ignored		<a href="#">Research Gate</a>
24 Aug 2020	Nature	<a href="#">Zhou et al. 2020</a>	Steven Quay	The seminal paper from the Wuhan Institute of Virology claiming SARS-CoV-2 probably originated in bats appears to contain contrived data	27 Aug 2020	
12 May 2020	BioRxiv		Nikolai Petrovsky	In silico comparison of spike protein-ACE2 binding affinities across species; significance for the possible origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus	13 May 2020	Dear Nikolai Petrovsky;  We regret to inform you that your manuscript is inappropriate for <a href="#">bioRxiv</a> . As part of a two-step screening process, every

						<p>submitted manuscript is examined by affiliate scientists to determine its suitability for posting. During the screening process it was determined that this manuscript would be more appropriately distributed after peer review rather than through bioRxiv.</p> <p>Best regards, The bioRxiv team</p>
16 July 2020	The Lancet		Nikolai Petrovsky	In silico comparison of spike protein-ACE2 binding affinities across species; significance for the possible origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus	18 July 2020	<p>Thank you for your recent submission to <i>The Lancet</i>. We have now had time to consider your manuscript and unfortunately, on this occasion, because we are receiving unprecedented numbers of COVID-19 related submissions we are unable to prioritise it for publication in <i>The Lancet</i> or in any other <i>Lancet</i> journal.</p>
31 July 202	PNAS		Nikolai Petrovsky	In silico comparison of SARS-CoV-2 spike protein-ACE2 binding across species; significance for animal susceptibility and viral origin	10 August 2020	<p>Thank you for submitting your manuscript, titled <b>In silico comparison of SARS-CoV-2 spike protein-ACE2 binding across species; significance for animal susceptibility and viral origin</b>, to PNAS. Our assessment has led us to decline your paper for publication at this time.</p>