

Major comments

This manuscript presents an inverse modeling study of NO_x and VOC emissions over Europe in the spring of 2019 and 2020, based on TROPOMI NO₂ and HCHO data. The focus is on the differences between the two years and on the detection of Covid-related effects. In agreement with previous studies, large NO_x emission decreases are derived over most European countries in April 2020. In March and May, however, the picture is less clear, with some regions (e.g. large parts of UK and Germany in March) showing large emission increases in 2020 (Figure 4). Those changes are unrealistic and are contradicted by comparisons with surface NO₂ measurements (Figure 7). The authors present the disparity between regions as a consequence of the different timing of Covid-lockdown measures over different regions of Europe, but the discussion is poor and does not present concrete arguments for the inferred patterns. Those patterns are probably related to the inability of the model to match the observed NO₂ column distribution, in particular (but not only) over N-W Europe (see Figure S3). The prior model strongly overestimates NO₂ over northern Germany and strongly underestimates NO₂ in southern Germany and in many other regions. It would be most enlightening to examine the top-down emission increments for each year and month (and not just the differences between the two years). I suspect there will be huge disparities within several countries, especially Germany. It is highly unlikely that bottom-up emission inventory could perform so badly in terms of spatial

We agree with the last sentence saying that the *location* of NO_x emissions inventories are relatively well known, but not necessarily that the *magnitudes* of NO_x emissions provided by crude bottom-up estimates with infrequent updates are true. We need both to be right to get the simulation correct. Therefore, using a top-down estimate is useful here. The differences between NO₂ concentrations (i.e., lockdown vs baseline) simulated by the model would have been minimal, if we had not leveraged the inverse modeling. When we set up the model, the CEDS emission inventory had not projected emissions beyond the year of 2014.

The reviewer directly pointed at the large discrepancy between the modeled NO₂ using the *a priori* and TROPOMI NO₂ (Figure S11, former Figure S3) which goes to the show that the prior emissions needed a serious adjustment. The results in the manuscript are based on the *a posteriori* (the constrained model), not the *a priori*.

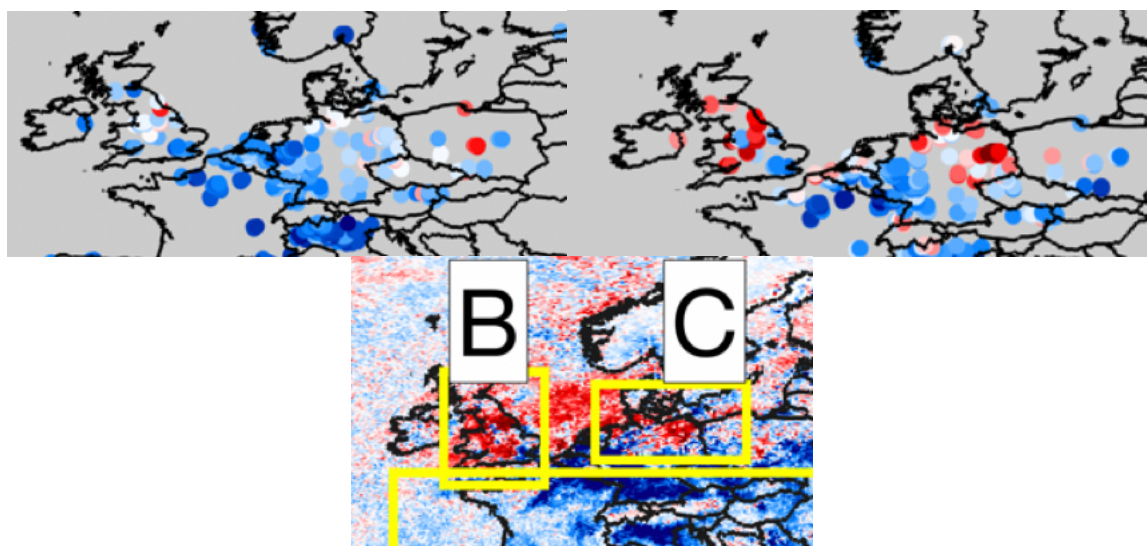
Because several points were raised by this reviewer, we broke down their arguments:

“the picture is less clear, with some regions (e.g. large parts of UK and Germany in March) showing large emission increases in 2020 (Figure 4). Those changes are unrealistic and are contradicted by comparisons with surface NO₂ measurements (Figure 7).”

The model by itself is incapable of reproducing those changes in NO₂ (because the same anthropogenic emissions are used for both years); we do see them because of the use of the satellite observations (mainly TROPOMI NO₂ here). We need to put the motivation of this study explicitly stated in the introduction into the context: “How representative are satellite observations at capturing surface air quality through an inversion context?” **In many places explicitly stated in the discussion, the changes suggested by the constrained model (along**

with TROPOMI NO₂), such as UK and northeastern Germany in March, and eastern Europe in May, are not fully supported by in-situ measurements. It is because of this reason that we had limited the ozone analysis (the main focus of the present study) with the month of April.

There are some similarities between surface NO₂ and the constrained model in March over northeastern Germany and UK. The surface measurements show little changes or higher values in 2020 compared to 2019. But these changes are obviously exaggerated by TROPOMI NO₂ (and the constrained model). A screenshot of the TROPOMI NO₂ anomaly map in March (bottom), the constrained model (top, right), and the surface measurements (top, left) for reminder:



To decipher this discrepancy we ideally would require additional data including aircraft spirals and surface spectrometers. Available data are too limited to make a sense out of the disagreement. The reviewer's concern had already been addressed in the manuscript: "Given the reasonable performance of our model at reproducing the changes observed over the surface in April, *a result of abundant samples from TROPOMI*, we only focus on this month for the subsequent analysis." **This statement is strongly in line with the concern we raised in the introduction: If the satellite observations are too uncertain (*flagged by two stringent tests, filtering out averaging kernels < 0.5, explaining the partition of the information gained from the observations with respect to the prior knowledge of emissions, and comparisons to the surface observations*), we will have to drop them; so did we for the months of March and May. It is important to recognize that illustrating satellite observations can sometimes depreciate model values in some places is quite useful for the retrieval community and validation studies.**

The authors present the disparity between regions as a consequence of the different timing of Covid-lockdown measures over different regions of Europe, but the discussion is poor and does not present concrete arguments for the inferred patterns.

Thanks, there are two instances in which we attribute the NO_x emission differences to the different timelines of the covid-19 lockdown measures:

- 1) **Moscow, Russia.** We are confident in transitioning of NO₂ from positive in March (2020 minus 2019) to negative in April. This is due to Russian governments' late action on imposing restrictions. The transition strongly coincided with a credible report [<https://tass.com/society/1144123>].
- 2) **UK and Poland.** Based on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_the_United_Kingdom#Spring_2020:_First_wave; Figure S1 in <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.579181/full>, and <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51981653>], the total shutdown was enforced on 18-20th March 2020; in response, we observed larger reductions in TROPOMI NO₂, the top-down NO_x emissions, and surface measurements in the month of April compared to March.

We agree that a more rigorous approach should be taken in general to fully connect the differences to the pandemic activities. Such approach should rely strictly on bottom-up information (such as synergistically combining data from cell-phone locations, traffic patterns from cameras, and mass flux measurements from industrial sectors). Satellite-based NO₂ data are too crude to perform a source apportionment analysis. So we removed the discussion about the northeastern Germany.

To account for the reviewer's concern, we removed this part from the abstract: "The large variability of changes in NO_x emissions is indicative of different dates and the degree of restrictions enacted to prevent the spread of the virus." We changed this part in the abstract: "However, NO_x emissions remain at somewhat similar values or even higher in Poland, UK, and Moscow in March 2020 compared to the baseline possibly due to the timeline of restrictions." We removed the spatial part from the conclusion: "Second, a large spatial and temporal variability associated with the reduction in NO_x was evident, as each country might possibly have different timeline of restrictions."; we smoothed this part in discussion and added more references: "In general, the level of NO_x reduction is somewhat higher in April relative to months of March and May possibly due to spatiotemporal variabilities associated with the restrictions; for example, UK and Poland governments enforced the restrictions starting in the last week of March to the middle of April (see Figure S1 in Łukasz et al. [2020]; <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51981653>, accessed on April 2020)" We removed this part in discussion: "For instance, northeastern Germany is associated with less populated areas, and as a result, we would expect a weaker signal in the reduction of NO₂."

"Those patterns are probably related to the inability of the model to match the observed NO₂ column distribution, in particular (but not only) over N-W Europe (see Figure S3). The prior model strongly overestimates NO₂ over northern Germany and strongly underestimates NO₂ in southern Germany and in many other regions. It would be most enlightening to examine the top-down emission increments for each year and month (and not just the differences between the two years)."

We have not used the a priori for any of the analysis. As we mentioned above, those discrepancies are induced by TROPOMI. The model simply is adjusting to the satellite-based observations (roughly weighted by the covariances matrix of observation (S_o) relative to the prior emission errors projected onto the observational space ($K^T S_e K$), please see the definition of the Kalman gain in the manuscript). *The overestimation of the emission in northeastern Germany and the underestimation in other areas are strongly constrained by TROPOMI NO₂.*

To consider the reviewer's comment, 1) we included the prior vs posterior emissions of NO_x in the new SI; our inverse modeling adjusted the emissions in six individual months of March, April, and May in 2019 and 2020.

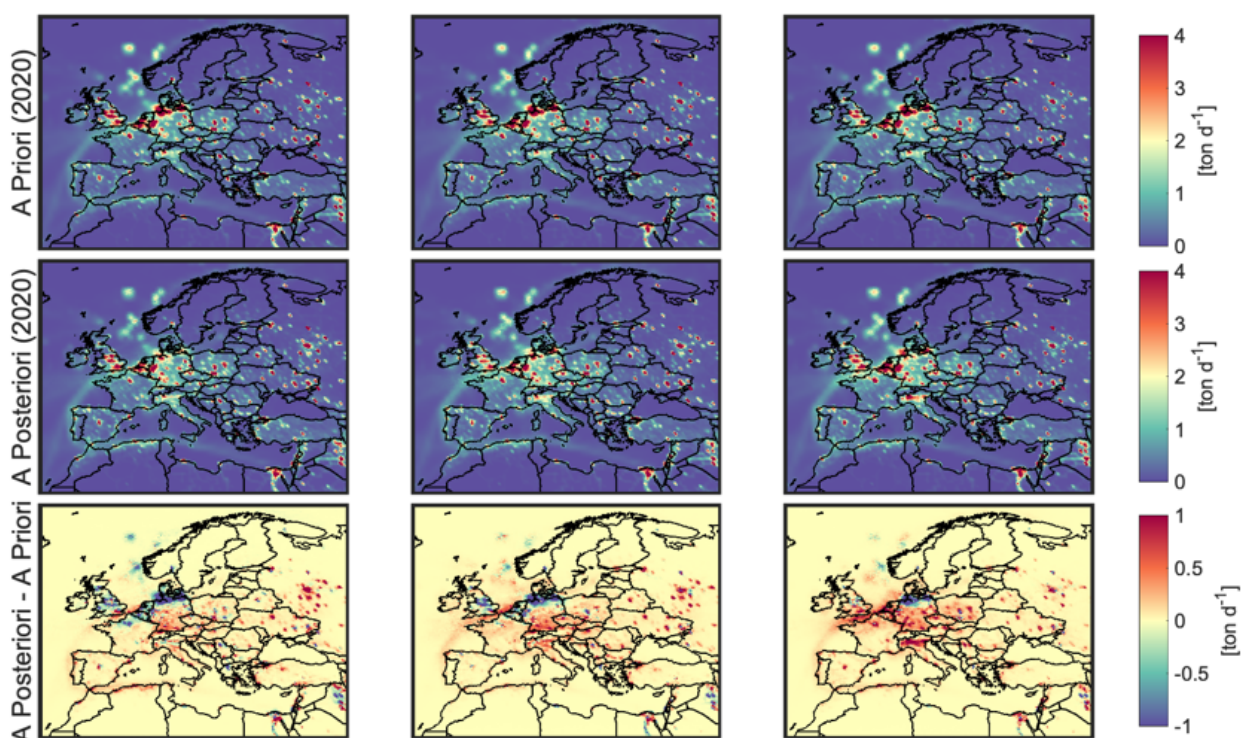


Figure S3. The a priori and the a postteriori of the total NO_x emissions for the months of March (first column), April (second column), and May (last column) in 2020.

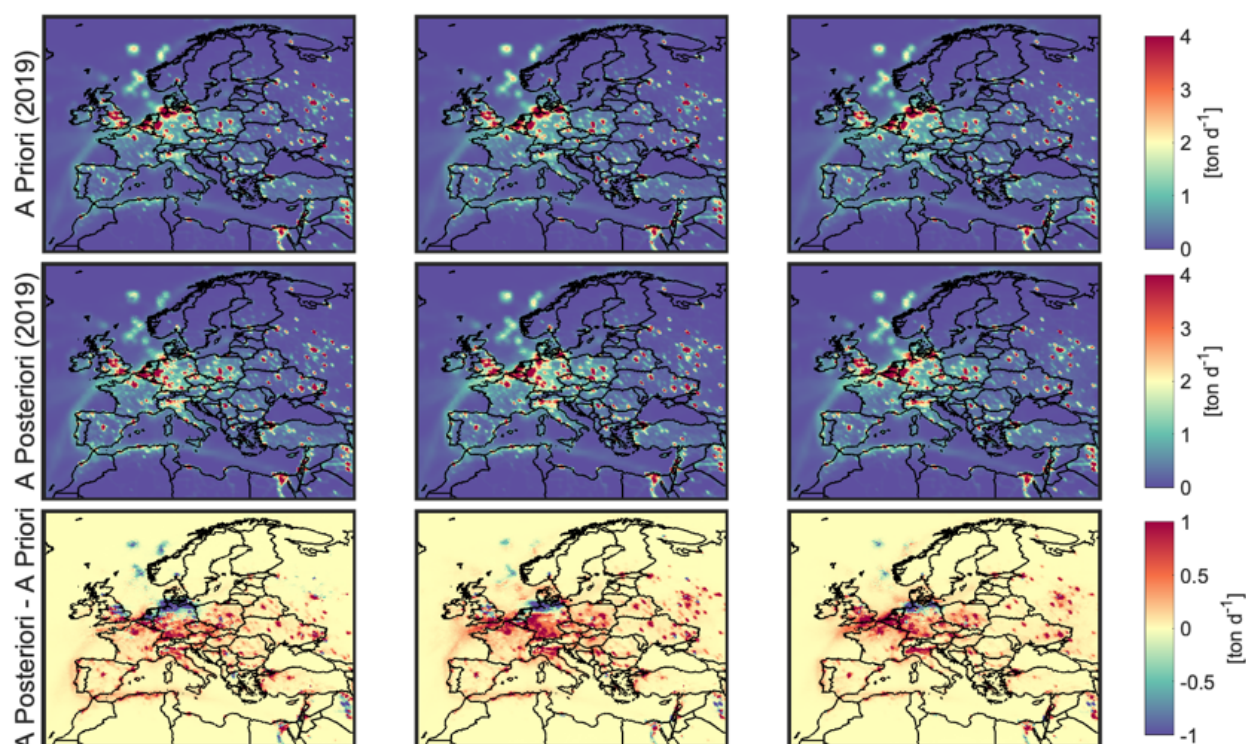


Figure S4. The a priori and the a posteriori of the total NO_x emissions for the months of March (first column), April (second column), and May (last column) in 2019.

2) Surface observations (as an independent assessment) are included in the new SI, please note that the underestimation of the CEDS emissions is evident (especially in 2019), which was effectively mitigated. The northeastern Germany is an exception where TROPOMI observations exacerbated the bias. It is worth noting that remote sensing data provide limited information for optimizing emissions (e.g., Sourì et al., 2016:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1352231016301315>, Sourì et al., 2017:

<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2016JD025663>, Sourì et al., 2018:

<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2017JD028009>, Sourì et al.,

2020a,d: <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1029/2019JD031941>,

<https://acp.copernicus.org/articles/20/9837/2020/>), so we should not expect the deviation between model and measurements to completely vanish. We expanded the discussion by adding:

“We observe a large **improvement** (31-45%) in the bias associated with simulated surface NO₂ using the posterior emissions compared to the surface measurements in **many places around Europe with an exception to northeastern Germany where TROPOMI NO₂ observations deviates the model from the measurements** (Figs S7, S8, S9 and S10). The improvements in correlation are minimal indicating that the prior location of emissions are well known.”

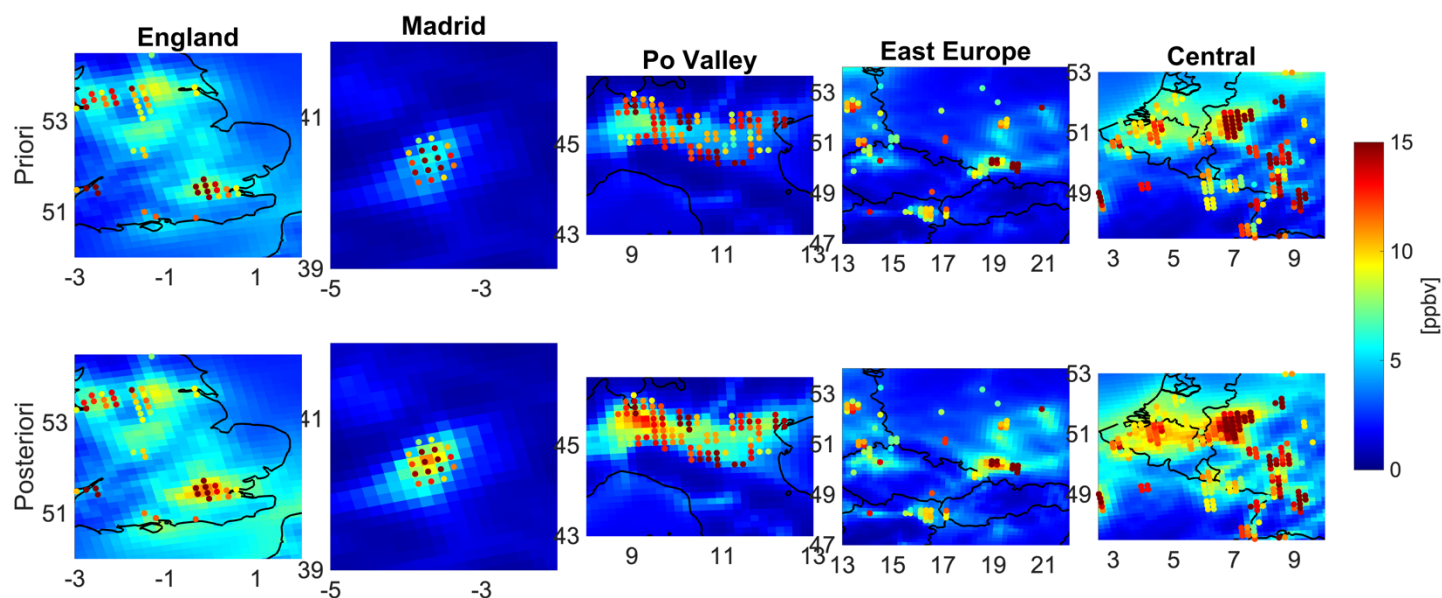


Figure S7. Comparison of daily-averaged surface NO₂ observations (circles) against the simulated model in different regions around Europe in March-May 2019 (baseline). The first row uses the prior emissions whereas the second is based on the top-down emissions constrained by the satellite observations through an analytical non-linear inversion. All available observations are averaged within 15 km radius for each model grid.

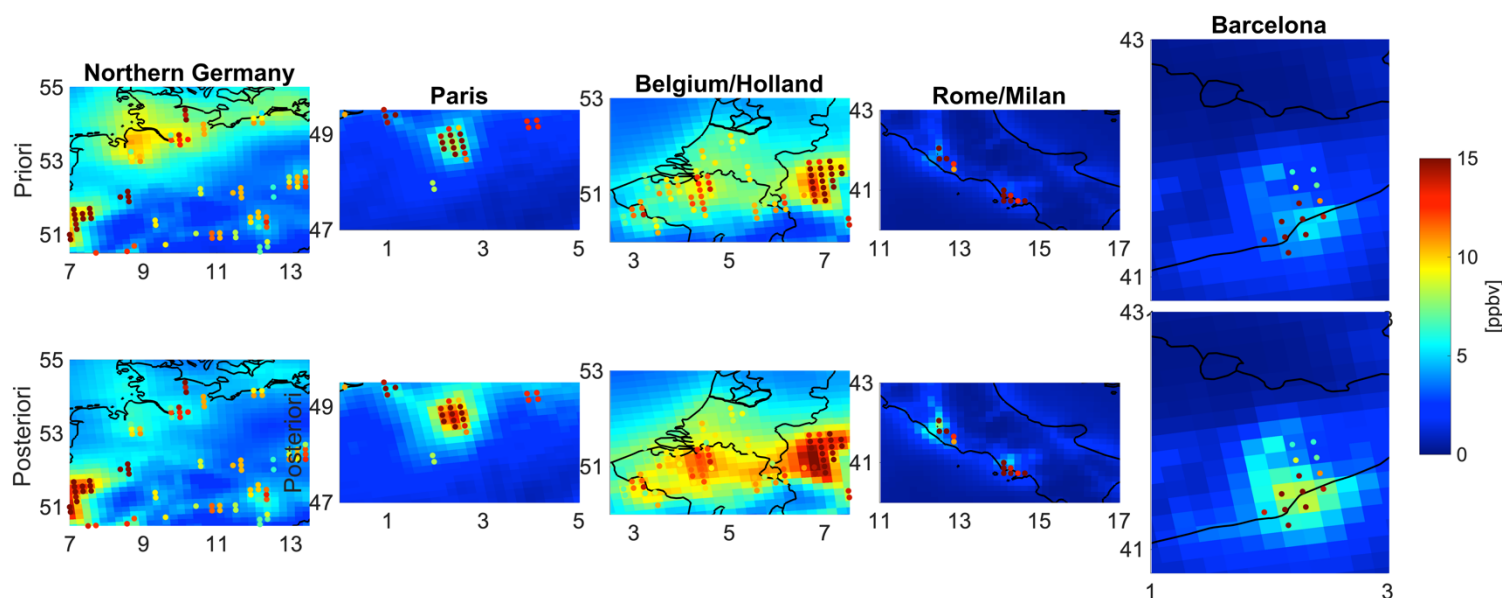


Figure S8. Similar to Figure S7 but in different areas.

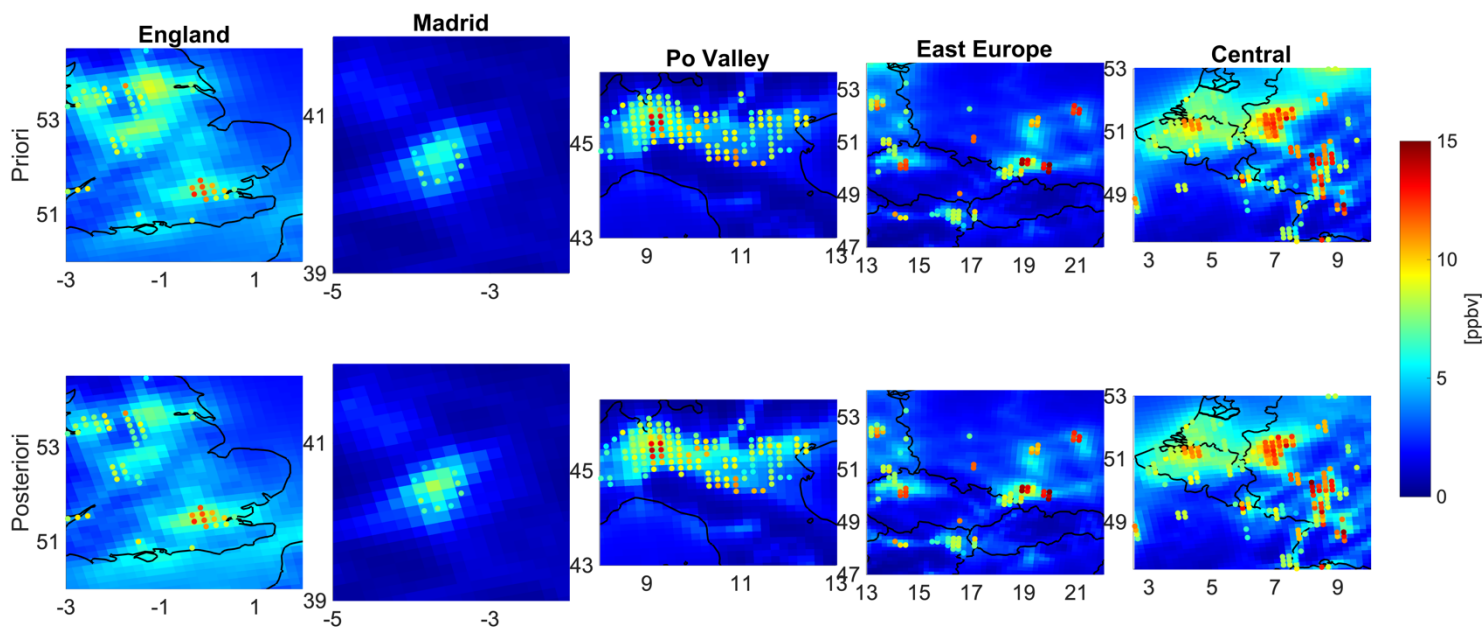


Figure S9. Comparison of daily-averaged surface NO₂ observations (circles) against the simulated model in different regions around Europe in March-May 2020 (baseline). The first row uses the prior emissions whereas the second one is based on the top-down emissions constrained by the satellite observations through an analytical non-linear inversion.

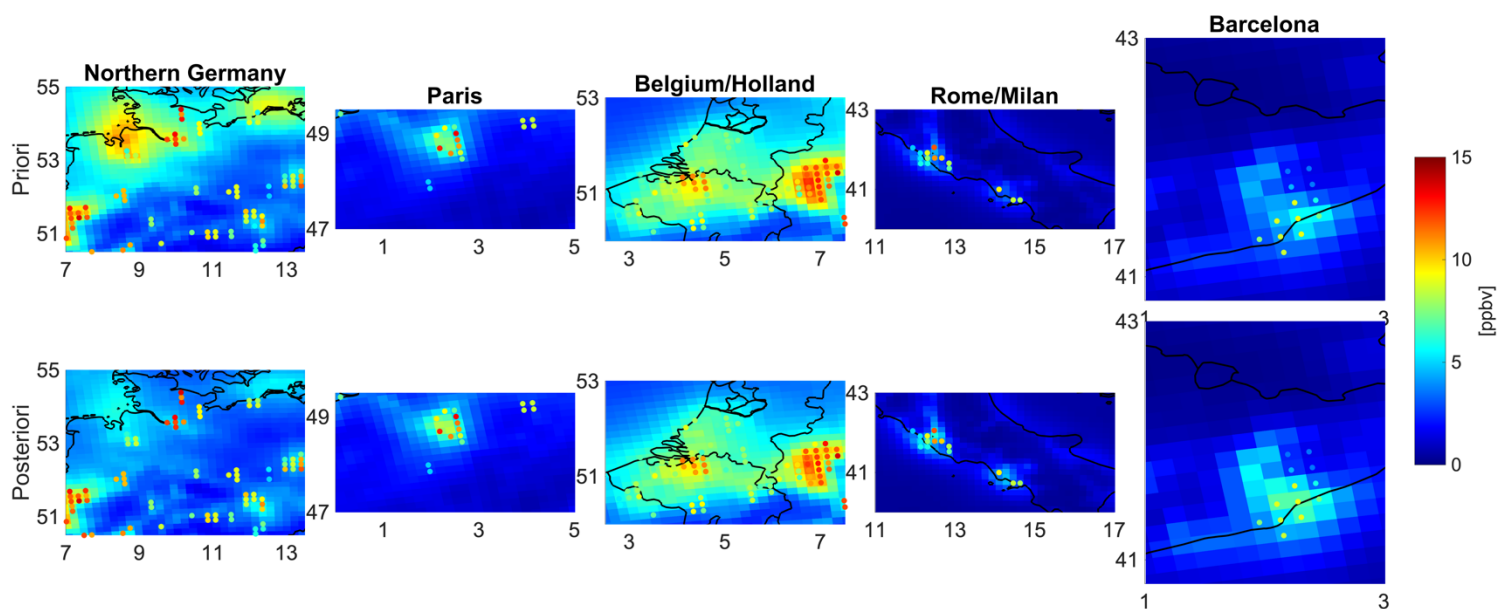


Figure S10. Similar to Figure S9 but for different areas.

- 3) The absolute amount of CEDS is too low in many places. We should not confuse the spatial distribution with the magnitude of emissions. The reason why TROPOMI NO₂ is low over northeastern Germany compared to surface measurements is unclear.
- 3) This paper is trying to quantify the contributions of emissions changes on surface ozone based on the top-down emissions. We just need some prior values to build the a posteriori based upon. The inversion is an intermediate platform to translate the information from satellites (considering their random + systematic errors) to a model realization. We do not understand why this reviewer is concerned about the prior emissions. This paper is not about validating CEDS emission inventory. We could have used EDGAR emissions and reached to similar results (maybe with different iterations). In theory, you can even use constant emission rates throughout Europe and induce the emission changes by TROPOMI after many iterations.

The model compares also very poorly against TROPOMI HCHO, although this is partly due to issues with the observations. As detailed further below, the high HCHO values in April (also May) in Scandinavia and Russia might be artefacts as evidenced by comparisons of TROPOMI with FTIR data (Vigouroux et al. 2020). The authors apply a crude "bias correction" to the data (decrease by 25% the values below 2.5E15 cm⁻², increase by 30% the values above 7.5E15 cm⁻²) but it is inappropriate as it probably increases values which are already too high (e.g. in April over parts of Russia and Scandinavia) and it leads to different corrections being applied in 2019 and 2020, thereby creating artificial patterns in the differences between the two years. Given the magnitude of the biases between the model and the satellite, the inferred top-down emission differences (Figure 5) have no credibility at all. Top-down anthropogenic VOC emissions in April appear to be much higher than in March, without justification. In the abstract and conclusions, much case is made of the small VOC emission decrease in March 2020, compared to March 2019, as if it could be related to Covid. This is highly misleading since the averaging kernel (AK, Figure 5) is lowest (close to zero) in March, i.e. the decrease is not well constrained by the data. The authors emphasize very much the importance of the NO_x inversion on the results for VOCs in March, but their arguments (that VOC emissions in Spain and Italy are decreased only to compensate for the stronger VOC oxidation above cities due to NO_x decreases) do not stand scrutiny. As shown by Figure S5, the inversion does increase HCHO columns over Spain and Italy in 2019, bringing the model (a little bit) closer to the data. For some unknown reason, this HCHO increase does not happen in 2020 despite similarly high TROPOMI columns. This explains the March patterns of Figure 5. There is an influence of the NO_x optimization on the VOC results, but probably not the one described by the paper.

Having an expectation for the constrained model to 100% match to the observations is incorrect because observations consist of errors. Mathematically, if $AK=0$, then $0 = (I - S^{\wedge}/S)$ meaning $S^{\wedge} = S$ meaning $I = I - GK$ and because K is not zero, then Kalman gain (G) is equal to 0 meaning $S_o \gg S_e$, and x_{post} will largely be dominated by x_{prior} . Therefore AK explains how far the emissions can be adjusted according to the observations ($x_{post} \sim x_{prior} + G(\text{observation} - \text{model})$, G and AK are linked together)

The same analogy applies to the optimal estimation of trace gases from satellite radiance. For instance, if the information of radiance on CO profile is extremely limited ($AK=0$), the posterior profile will be similar to the prior values.

We added in the methodology:

“Not only does this method considers non-linear chemical feedback among NO_2 -HCHO- NO_x -VOC by simultaneously incorporating the HCHO and NO_2 in the inversion framework, it also permits quantification of **A** that explicitly explains the amount of information obtained from the observation. **Low A indicates low G making the a posteriori to be rather independent of the observational constraint.**”

In low AK areas, we shall not expect simulations to line up with observations used for the optimization. Low AK values do not suggest that the model performance is excellent, it simply means that the information from satellites was insufficient to guide the model. So the constrained model is pretty much similar to an unconstrained model (the prior) in low AK areas. The publicly available HCHO observations are scarce in our case study. To account for this we added: “As to VOC emissions, we observe improvements in the magnitude and spatial distribution of simulated HCHO columns after the inversion with respect to TROPOMI data over areas with reasonable amount of information (e.g., $AK>0.2$) (Figure S5 and S6).”

Due to a larger number of arguments, we need to fragment this paragraph:

“The model compares also very poorly against TROPOMI HCHO, although this is partly due to issues with the observations. As detailed further below, the high HCHO values in April (also May) in Scandinavia and Russia might be artefacts as evidenced by comparisons of TROPOMI with FTIR data (Vigouroux et al. 2020). The authors apply a crude “bias correction” to the data (decrease by 25% the values below $2.5E15\text{ cm}^{-2}$, increase by 30% the values above $7.5E15\text{ cm}^{-2}$) but it is inappropriate as it probably increases values which are already too high (e.g. in April over parts of Russia and Scandinavia) and it leads to different corrections being applied in 2019 and 2020, thereby creating artificial patterns in the differences between the two years.”

We will address this point in different aspects:

- 1) The crude bias correction is based on the compilation of several FTIR measurements averaged over several months (see Figure 3 in Vigouroux et al. 2020). The paper explicitly concluded in page 3760: “The negative bias over high-HCHO-level sites (biomass burning or megacities) could be due to aerosol effects.” Negative here means TROPOMI HCHO is too low. Each individual location has a significant variability related to the bias which is not formulated in Vigouroux et al. 2020. This is the biggest obstacle in using the numbers reported in the validation studies. A concrete way of correcting satellite biases is to establish a relationship between the prognostics used in the retrievals and the bias. Those relationships (say a multi-linear regression involving surface albedo, cloud fraction, cloud albedo, aerosol**

optical properties, SZA, and etc. with quantified errors) can be further used and adjusted dynamically in the inverse modeling framework, which is commonly known as “variational bias correction” in the field of meteorology. To better inform this, we included in the paper: “Directly incorporating these numbers into an inversion model is challenging, mainly because of spatiotemporal variability in the satellite errors. Ideally, the relationship between errors and retrieval inputs (e.g., albedo, scene radiance, profiles, etc.) would be used as an additional cost function in the inversion, commonly known as variational bias correction [e.g., Auligné et al., 2007]. In the absence of such relationships, we use the biases reported in the validation studies.”

- 2) If one provides a certain bias over a certain point that is x% impacted by biomass burning activities, how can an inverse modeler quantitatively use that number to scale the observations? In other words, how representative a one-point comparison is at fully characterizing errors all over the scene, which may or may not be impacted by biomass burning?
- 3) Satellite errors are significantly larger in higher latitudes due to larger scattering weights (i.e., any random error will be amplified). Those errors (provided with the data) are considered in the inversion in addition to the 4% magnitude-dependent error. This is the main reason that we observed very low AK over the biomass burning activities in Russia in spite of the strong signal. This result suggests that our inversion is aware of the fact that those pixels are uncertain.
- 4) Despite some enhancements of VOC emissions over this area, the constrained model still significantly underestimated the biomass burning signal compared to Figure 5 in *Vigouroux et al. 2020*. This supports that the difference map is not an artifact but shows the right direction towards mitigating the large underestimation of the model; so the direction of the map is credible. VOC emissions in April 2019 *are and should be larger* than April 2020 over those areas. The inversion did not *overly* correct the emissions. We added a sentence to point out this caveat: “The inversion partly corrects for the large underrepresentation of biomass burning emissions in high latitudes occurring in April 2019 but due to large uncertainties of the retrieval over this area, averaging kernels are low. *Vigouroux et al. [2020] showed FTIR HCHO columns to be around $4\text{--}6 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm² in Saint Peterburgh (59.9°N), Kiruna (67.8°N), and Sodankylä (67.4°N) in April 2019. Despite some improvements over the biomass burning areas in April 2019, the model still greatly underestimates HCHO columns suggesting more well-characterized observations are needed to adjust the emissions.*”

A relevant criticism to this large underestimation of model is if this would degrade the ozone analysis. April 2019 exhibited a particular synoptic condition. The predominantly high pressure system over Russia and Scandinavia effectively holds on to biomass burning contributions and prevent them from being transported to the central Europe. Moreover, the upper winds are westerly. The main findings of this study are concentrated on central Europe (box L). So we do not think those complications will impact the major conclusion of this manuscript. To account for this, we added the following figure to SI and wrote:

“The predominately high pressure system formed over these areas (Figure S15) in April 2019 impedes the transport of the biomass burning pollution to central Europe.”

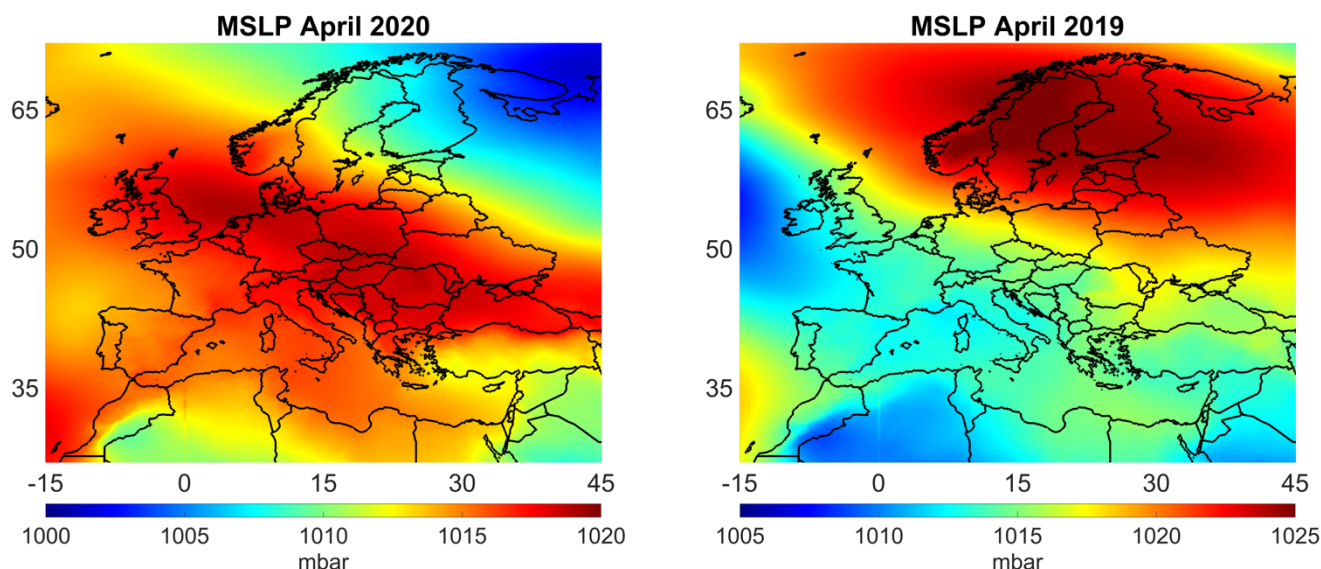


Figure S15. The WRF-simulated mean sea level pressures in April 2020 (left) and 2019 (right).

VOC emissions in April appear to be much higher than in March, without justification.

Thanks for raising this good point. We mentioned in the ozone analysis discussion that April 2020 is exceptionally warmer than the average with clear sky over central Europe. This tendency is thoroughly studied in Ordóñez et al. [2020], and shown in former Figure 6. As a result, HCHO levels are larger in April 2020 in central Europe compared to April 2019. From this month (i.e., April and May), biogenic emissions also kick in. TROPOMI HCHO provides good information to improve the relevant emissions, evident in AK close to 0.4. We shall not treat averaging kernels as binary values. To address this comment, we first added the averaged biogenic fraction, the a priori vs the a posteriori in SI, and added:

“The inversion suggests larger VOC emission rates in April 2020 compared to April 2019 over central Europe. Ordóñez et al. [2020] reported ambient temperature along with solar radiation to be higher than the norm. This is primarily due to a well-developed high-pressure system over the region [Figure S] resulting in elevated HCHO columns. The top-down estimate is indicative of too low prior VOC emission rates over this area. Given the significant role of VOCs in the formation of ozone in urban settings, this correction with reasonable AK (~ 0.4) is crucial for precisely modeling the surface ozone anomalies (shown later)“.

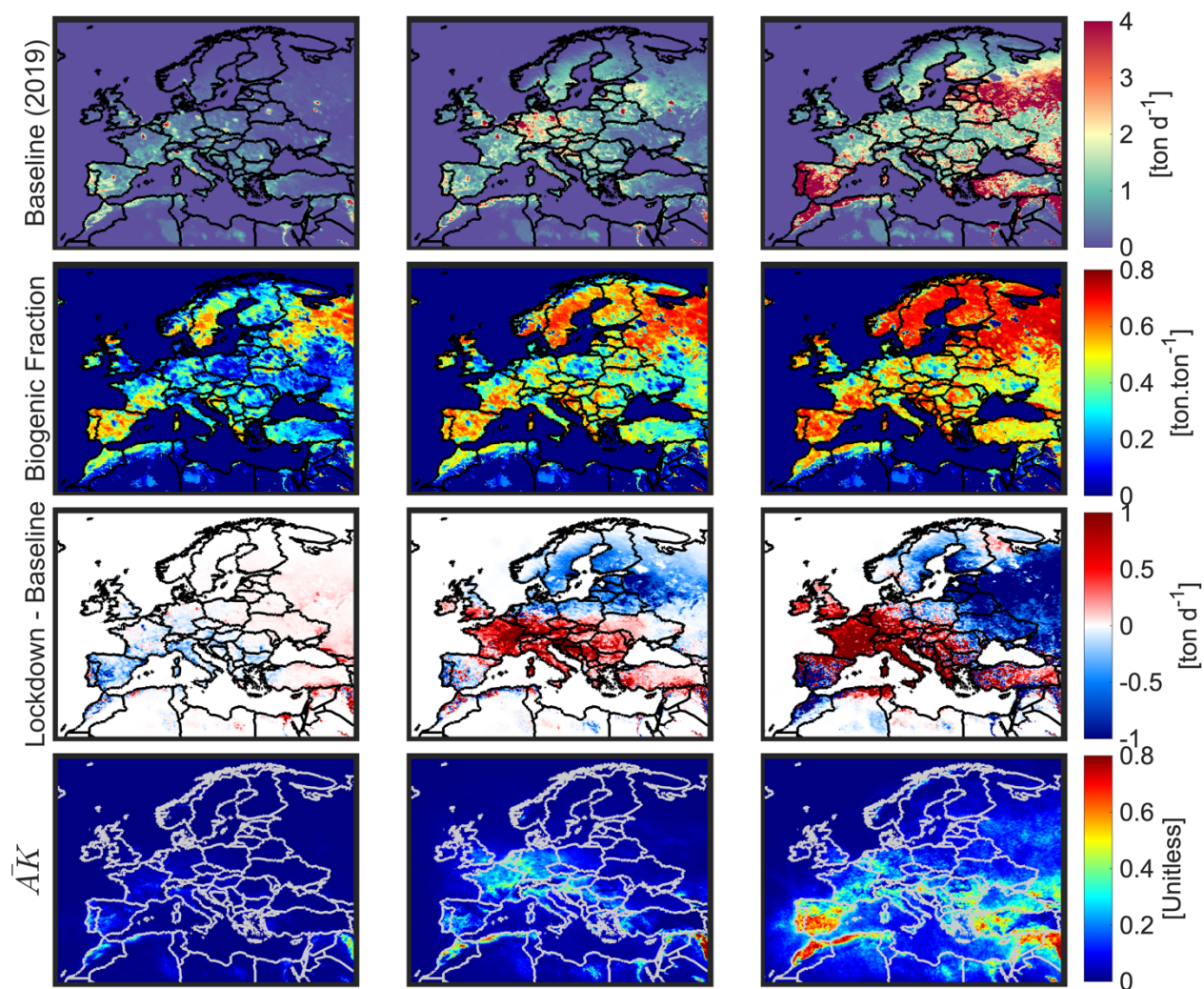


Figure 5. Same as Figure 4 but for the total VOC emissions. Biogenic fractions are based on the average values in both 2019 and 2020.

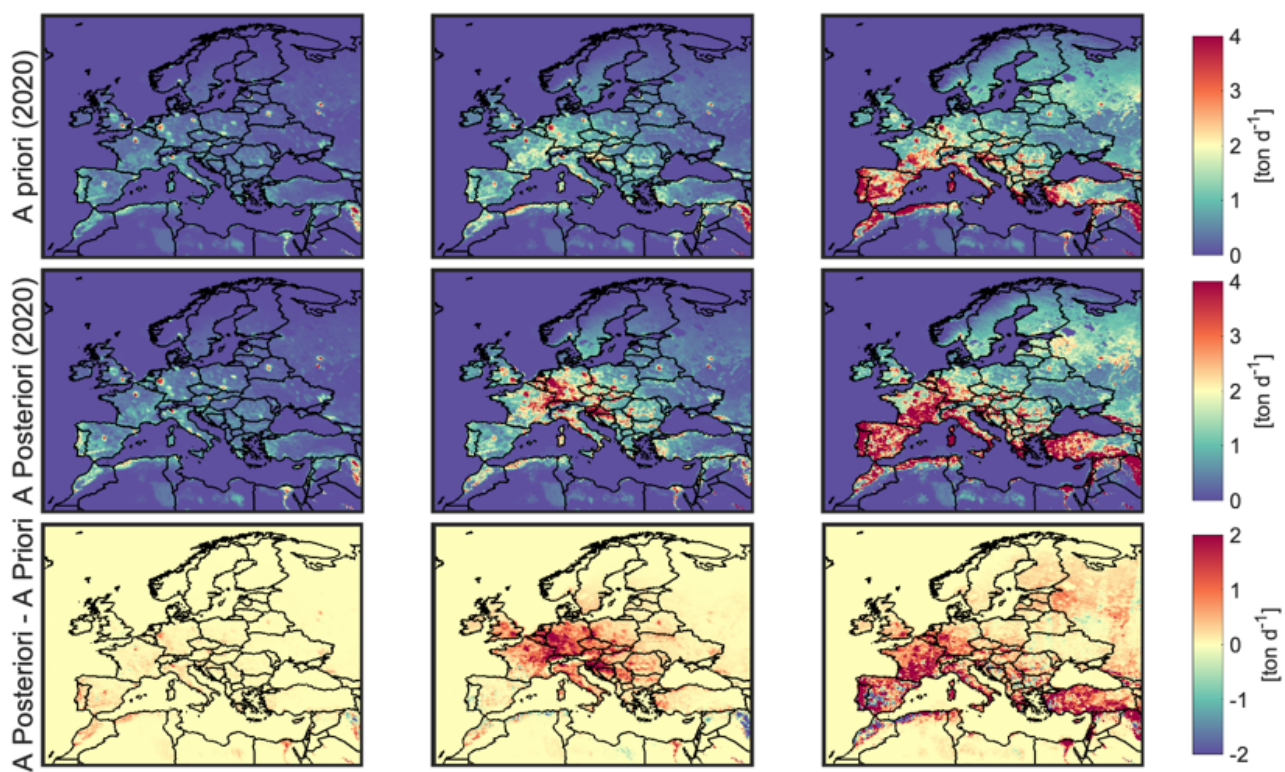


Figure S5. The a priori and the a posteriori of the total VOC emissions for the months of March (first column), April (second column), and May (last column) in 2020.

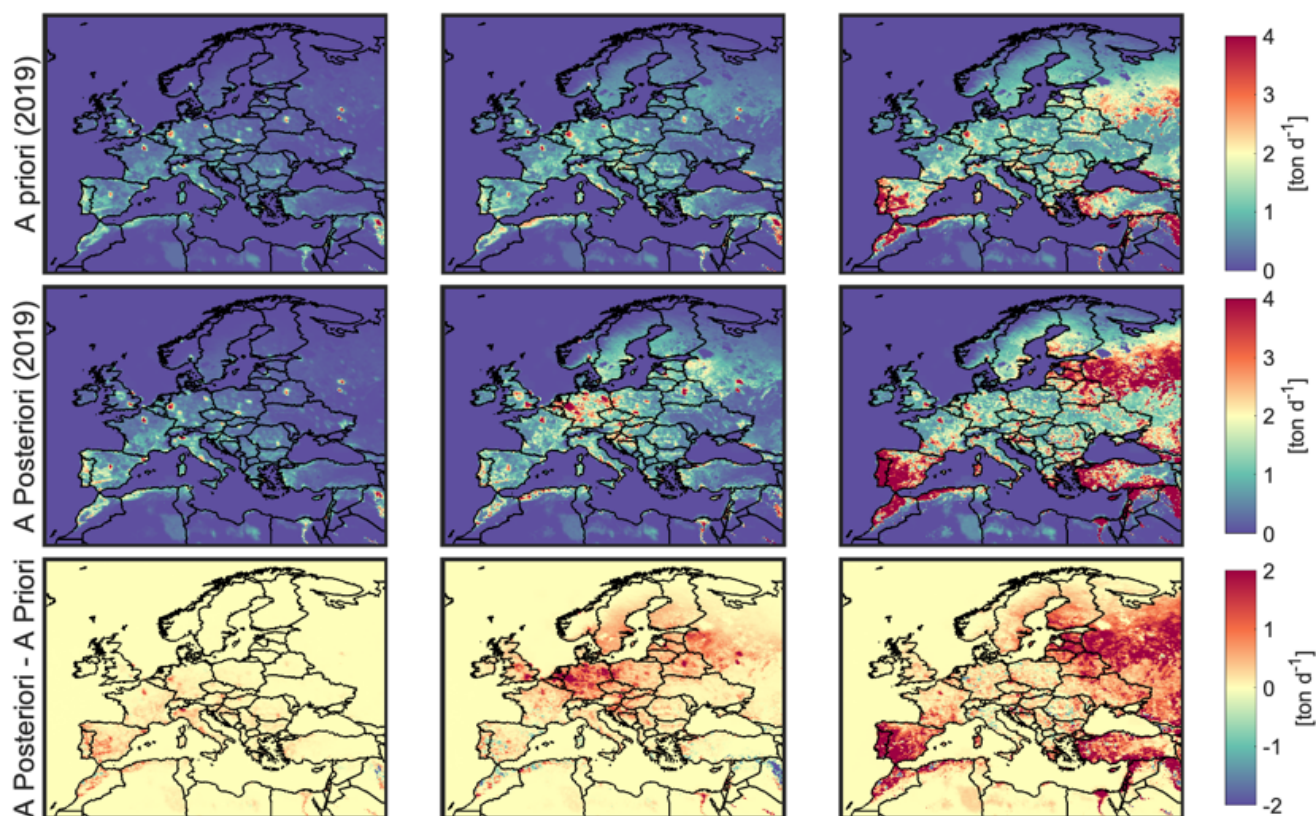


Figure S6. The a priori and the a postteriori of the total VOC emissions for the months of March (first column), April (second column), and May (last column) in 2019.

In the abstract and conclusions, much case is made of the small VOC emission decrease in March 2020, compared to March 2019, as if it could be related to Covid. This is highly misleading since the averaging kernel (AK, Figure 5) is lowest (close to zero) in March, i.e. the decrease is not well constrained by the data. The authors emphasize very much the importance of the NO_x inversion on the results for VOCs in March, but their arguments (that VOC emissions in Spain and Italy are decreased only to compensate for the stronger VOC oxidation above cities due to NO_x decreases) do not stand scrutiny. As shown by Figure S5, the inversion does increase HCHO columns over Spain and Italy in 2019, bringing the model (a little bit) closer to the data. For some unknown reason, this HCHO increase does not happen in 2020 despite similarly high TROPOMI columns. This explains the March patterns of Figure 5. There is an influence of the NO_x optimization on the VOC results, but probably not the oneddescribed by the paper.

Inferring emissions only from satellite columns is tricky. This is especially the case for HCHO columns whose errors can be large and comparable to the absolute value of the columns in relatively colder months, and there is a substantial chemical feedback from NO_x levels on HCHO formation.

Due to large errors of HCHO retrievals in March relative to their columns, the model is barely constrained by the HCHO columns. The large changes in VOC emissions are caused by NO_x. This reviewer provided a very good point later that we can prove this feedback by running the inversion with constant HCHO levels; our inversion in this month is very close to this experiment (extremely low AKs (no Kalman gain) means no observational constraint).

We need to consider the errors associated with observations, the a priori, and Jacobians. We can reproduce the same amount of HCHO with varying VOCs if we change Jacobians (which are changing due to chemistry, photolysis rates, meteorology, and etc.). Likewise, the same amount of VOCs can yield different HCHO levels under different atmospheric environments. All of these complexities are considered in our inversion. The impact of NO_x on the formation of HCHO is comprehensively studied in papers cited in the manuscript including Sourì et al. [2020b], please take a look at Figure 10 and Figure S10 in <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1352231020300820>). We copy Figure S10 here because the SI is open access:

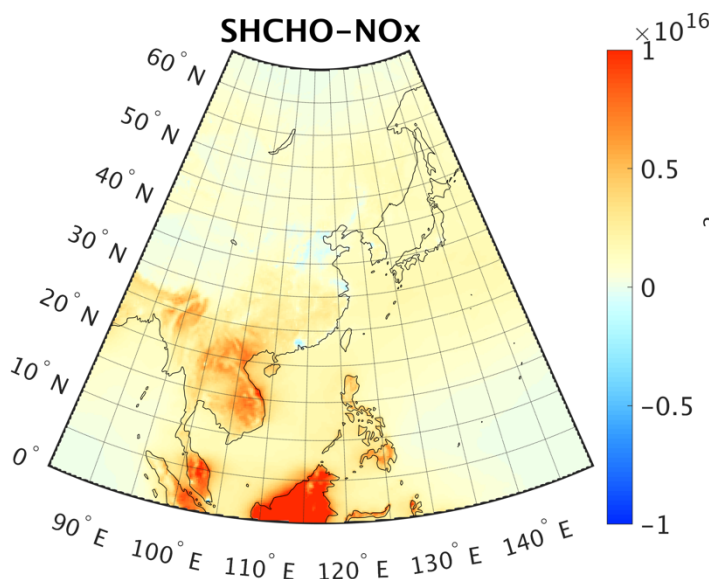


Figure S10. The sensitivity of HCHO columns to one mole/s of NO_x emissions calculated by the CMAQ-DDM. The time period is May-June 2016 at 1:30 LST. The unit is molec.cm⁻²

This figure is generated by changing one mole/s of NO_x emissions uniformly over East Asia. 1 mole/s is roughly equivalent to 2.7 ton/day (assuming 90% NO and 10% NO₂). The formation of HCHO is strongly dampened by increasing NO₂ (due to OH suppression and formation of organic nitrates) in NO_x-saturated areas. Values are around 1-3x10¹⁵ molec.cm⁻² for 2.7 ton/day. While this derivative can vary under different atmospheric conditions, we observed the same tendency over Europe. Jacobians of HCHO to VOC increase after the first iteration in March 2020. Our model is not coupled, so there is no feedback from chemistry on meteorology. The reason we do see the differences in Jacobians of HCHO with respect to VOC (occurring right after the first iteration) is solely because of the chemical feedback. HCHO observations are rather useless here (although

they provide an upper bound for the HCHO changes, meaning HCHO columns weighted by their errors are not too different between two years, so the HCHO constraint on VOCs is minimal). Nonetheless, there is, unfortunately, a drawback in our implicit joint inversion of NO_x and VOC approach, which is not including the cross relationships between NO_x-HCHO and VOC-NO₂, shown in color fonts (from our AGU's poster):

$$\begin{bmatrix} NO_2^1 \\ NO_2^2 \\ \vdots \\ HCHO^1 \\ HCHO^2 \\ \vdots \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{S_{NO_2}^{NO_2^1}}{NO_x} & \frac{S_{VOC}^{NO_2^1}}{VOC} \\ \frac{S_{NO_2}^{NO_2^2}}{NO_x} & \frac{S_{VOC}^{NO_2^2}}{VOC} \\ \vdots & \vdots \\ \frac{S_{NO_x}^{HCHO^1}}{NO_x} & \frac{S_{VOC}^{HCHO^1}}{VOC} \\ \frac{S_{NO_x}^{HCHO^2}}{NO_x} & \frac{S_{VOC}^{HCHO^2}}{VOC} \\ \vdots & \vdots \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} NO_x \\ VOC \end{bmatrix}$$

Based on experiments we did in Souri et al. [2020a], we came into conclusion that constructing those cross-relationships in the Jacobians were not necessary. Especially if multi-sensors are used (we used both OMI/OMPS in that study); trying to co-register cross-relationships degraded the quality of the inversion if one sensor had too many gaps; moreover it is quite expensive to calculate those derivatives.

Although the non-linear feedback between NO_x-VOC are implicitly considered by incrementally updating Jacobians, the lack of those cross-relationships means that we cannot explicitly quantify the amount of information gained from TROPOMI NO₂ on VOC emissions (and HCHO on NO_x emissions). AKs in the paper only explain the amount of information we gained from HCHO on the VOC estimate (and NO₂ on NO_x). Since we do not have this important piece of information right now, we decided to drop the discussion about the VOC reduction in March (abstract, conclusion, table, and discussion).

The paper is too long and, at many instances, not clearly written. I have provided a number of suggestions for improvement, but I encourage the authors to make a general effort towards more clarity. Many sentences and entire paragraphs are given which do not add much to the discussion. For example, Figure 6 is very long to describe, but I am not sure whether it really helps to interpret the results. If it does, please make it more clear and remove unnecessary parts. On the other hand, much information about the model and methodology is incomplete or clearly wrong (e.g. the adopted errors for TROPOMI HCHO).

Thanks for you feedback. We omit Figure 6 and the associated discussions. We also removed the discussion about the NO_x impact on VOC emissions in March due to not being able to estimate cross-AK at this point. We also did our best to shorten some parts and improved the clarity.

In conclusion, I do not recommend the paper for publication (in its present form) since its conclusions are not well supported by analysis of the data. I recommend to scale down the ambition of the paper. The HCHO (and AOD) data do not seem to help constraining the emissions. The NOx part could be interesting if presented honestly with its caveats. Sensitivity inversions would help to appreciate the uncertainties and robustness of the conclusions.

Minor comments

Abstract: very long, should be shortened

We removed some sentences in the abstract.

l 122-124 "Since vertical column densities (...° depend on assumed gas profile shape (...), we recalculate those shape factors using profiles from our (...) model": the air mass factors being a complex function of profile shapes, cloudiness, albedo, etc., more details are needed to describe how the profile shapes are taken into account.

AMF is defined as (taken from Sourì et al., 2018):

$$AMF = AMF_G \int_{\sigma_0}^1 \overbrace{\frac{1}{AMF_G} \frac{\alpha(\sigma)}{\alpha_e} \frac{\partial \ln I_B}{\partial \tau}}^{w(\sigma)} \times \overbrace{\frac{\Omega_a}{\Omega_v} \eta(\sigma)}^{S(\sigma)} d\sigma,$$

We only re-estimated the S(sigma) based on the profiles. These profiles are iteratively updated based on the new emission estimate.

We added : “Shape factors are re-estimated by calculating the ratio of the vertical column of total air to the simulated vertical column of NO₂ multiplied by the mixing ratios of NO₂ profile from the regional model [Martin et al., 2002].”

l 156 Why the RMSE? Do you mean the assumed uncertainty on the NO2 columns from TROPOMI?

We improved this part for clarity:

We assume the errors of observations originate from two main sources: i) the precision error provided with the data ($e_{\text{precision}}$) and ii) a fixed error estimated from comparisons to in-situ measurements (e_{const}). Mathematically, the final error is:

$$e_o^2 = e_{\text{const}}^2 + \frac{1}{n^2} \sum_{i=1}^n e_{\text{precision},i}^2 \quad (1)$$

where n is the number of samples for a given grid and e_{const} equals to 1.1×10^{15} molec/cm² ($< 6 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm²) in clean regions and 3.5×10^{15} molec/cm² ($\geq 6 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm²) in moderately to highly polluted regions. These regions are defined based on the wide ranges reported in Verhoelst et al. [2021] ($3\text{--}14 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm² for polluted areas).

l 156 The values of 1.1E15 and 3.5E15 molec cm-2 seem arbitrary. Please provide better explanation of how those were derived (as they play an important role in the emission inversion)

The relevant paper provided these errors within a wide range (3 to 14 Pmolec cm^{−2} for labeling moderate-polluted areas), we found a reasonable result by choosing these numbers, please see the comparison of surface/model, and the difference maps in April against in-situ measurements. Analytical inversion is extremely time and space consuming, we cannot redo the inversion with different numbers. Again the problem with directly using the reported errors is more fundamental (mentioned earlier). The errors used in the inversion are within the reported values from the validation studies listed in Table 1.

l 176-178 "Vigouroux et al (...) majorly located over pristine areas and 9 MAX-DOAS stations..." : wrong. The paper concerns FTIR stations, not MAX-DOAS. Furthermore, many of the FTIR sites are in cities (e.g. Paris, Bremen, Mexico city, etc.). Please check the references you cite.

Thanks for your comment. We fixed the discussion: “Vigouroux et al. [2020] expanded the validation suite by including more than 25 FTIR stations located over both pristine and polluted sites. Results from the comparison with FTIR measurements (over clean areas) also indicate a high bias, whereas those compared in polluted areas show a low bias. By compiling numbers quoted in Lambert et al. [2020] and Vigouroux et al. [2020], we correct the existing biases in TROPOMI HCHO by scaling 25% ($< 2.5 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm²) down columns in clean areas and 30% ($\geq 8 \times 10^{15}$ molec/cm²) up in polluted areas. We assume the constant term of errors (e_{const}) to be equal to 4% of HCHO total columns based on Vigouroux et al. [2020].”

l 181-183 "The agreement between MAX-DOAS...": again, this paper concerns FTIR data only. Please provide the correct references to your statements.

Thanks, addressed above.

l 184-186 Please provide the precise procedure used for deriving those numbers.

The numbers are reported in those studies (we found a typo in the upper bound). Please see the abstract of Vigouroux et al. “an overestimation ($+26 \pm 5$ %) of TROPOMI is observed for very low HCHO levels ($< 2.5 \times 10^{15}$ molec. cm^{−2}), while an underestimation ($-30.8\% \pm 1.4$ %) is found for high HCHO levels ($> 8.0 \times 10^{15}$ molec. cm^{−2}).”

l 186-187 A value of 4% seems extremely low and unlikely given the large biases and scatter of the FTIR-TROPOMI comparisons.

We added the equation regarding how we formulated the errors in the inversion (see above). 4% is indeed low, but it is based on the reported deviation of the bias in Vigouroux et. The bias varies between 1-5% on average (see the above abstract). The dominant error in TROPOMI HCHO originates from the precision errors which are provided with the data (see the new equation number 1; we also had mentioned this in the manuscript: “The instrument covariance matrices are populated with squared-sum of the aforementioned errors based on the compilation of the validation studies and precision errors provided with the data.”). The RMSE associated with spectrum fitting of HCHO is large due to relatively weak absorption of HCHO molecules in the UV-range.

l 188-201 The motivation for using MODIS AOD is not made clear. Clarify. If it does not bring anything, why this complication?

We were not satisfied with the performance of the model in terms of aerosol in the beginning, so we improved it using MODIS AOD. The photolysis rates are impacted by aerosols in CMAQ.

l 209-210 The assumption that the interferences are similar in 2019 and 2020 due to low photochemistry is crude. In Lamsal et al 2008, the correction factors in spring over the U.S. range typically between 0.4 and 0.7. Since CMAQ calculates the interfering species (PAN etc.), why don't you apply the correction proposed by Lamsal et al.? It is a rough correction but it would be better than no correction at all.

Thanks, we used to correct this complication in our former studies (Souri et al., 2016; 2017; 2018), but after realizing how poorly models can perform in terms of NO_y in colder months (see Figure 7 in Travis et al., 2020 based on the ATom campaign), we started having doubts on whether this correction can be beneficial. Ideally we would need to constrain or at least validate NO_z in the model before applying the correction. NO_z observations are lacking during the case study.

To clarify, we have added: “Additionally, the correction needs a careful evaluation of the model with regards to the NO_z family whose measurements are not available in this case study”

l 228 Do you use gridded maps of the emission factors or PFT distributions in conjunction with the emission factors from Table 2 in Guenther et al 2012?

PFTs are the fraction of land/use land covers based on the Community Land Model (CLM). They also are used for scaling LAI because MEGAN uses LAI_v (scaled by the fraction of vegetation). The emission factors are estimated by the new information of PFT and the PFT-specific values in. Guenther et al., 2012.

To clarify, we added: “The biogenic emission factors are estimated based on the PFT-specific information provided in Guenther et al. [2012].”

l 230 Does the model include soil and lightning NO emissions? The use of fertilizers could be a significant source in spring.

MEGAN v2.1 also estimates the soil NO_x emissions based on J.J. Yienger and H. Levy II, Journal of Geophysical Research, vol 100,11447-11464,1995 (see soilnox.F subroutine in the model). We added: “Soil NO_x emissions are estimated by Yienger and Levy, [1999].”.

In terms of lightning NO_x, we turned on the inline calculations which uses the convective precipitation rates and cloud bottom/top layers. Flash counts were not available during the project. We added. “Lightning NO_x emissions are based on in-line calculations involving convective precipitation rates and cloud vertical distributions. Lightning NO_x emissions are not constrained in the model.”

For constraining the lightning NO_x emissions, we will definitely need the profile information.

l 230 Is the diurnal cycle of anthropogenic emissions taken into account? Regarding the biogenic emissions from MEGAN, are diurnal and day-to-day variations included? What VOC species are emitted (besides isoprene)?

Unfortunately, CEDS does not provide the diurnal scales. While we adopted some US EPA-based diurnal correction for mobile sources in Souri et al., 2020a over East Asia, we realized that those crude approximations might not always be true. Furthermore, TROPOMI cannot constrain diurnal information. The NO₂ comparisons and analysis are all daily-averaged.

On the other hand, we do consider hourly-basis biogenic VOC and biogenic NO_x emissions in the model based on MEGAN.

We added:” Anthropogenic emissions are based on the Community Emissions Data System (CEDS) inventory in 2014 [Hoesly et al., 2018]. Diurnal scales are not considered.”

“Hourly-basis biogenic emissions are processed by the offline standalone”

MEGAN produces many different VOCs including isoprene, monoterpenes, xylene, ethanol, methanol, CH₄, acetaldehyde, ethene, ethane, toluene, paraffin, and direct formaldehyde. MEGAN has a processor to convert those emission reported in Guenther 2012 paper to CB05 mechanism. We added : “The biogenic VOCs include a wide range of compounds including isoprene, monoterpenes, aromatic VOCs, and methanol.”

l 247 Is y a collection of monthly NO₂ columns or daily NO₂ columns? Is the model sampled at the satellite overpass time? Specify the temporal tolerance window.

Monthly-basis. Not only the model is sampled at the same but also the Jacobians and emissions (state vectors) are sampled at the same time and over “qualified pixels”. TROPOMI provides a time variable for each row used for co-registration. Everything is

synched. We do not need a temporal tolerance; each pixel has a definitive time. We added: “The model outputs along with Jacobians and emissions are spatiotemporally co-registered with the observations.” and “where y is bias-corrected monthly-averaged TROPOMI NO₂ and HCHO observations,”

l 257 Why three times? How do know whether this is sufficient?

This number is based on two factors: first, we used the same number in our previous study [Souri et al., 2020] over East Asia for which we found satisfactory results against satellite/observations indicating a reasonable convergence. Non-linear chemistry was a problem in that region due to large oxidation capacity and extremely large emission rates. Second, we defined certain time and computational resources for this project. The analytical inversion is extremely time (and space) consuming at a continental regional-scale.

l 263-267 The rationale for this assimilation of MODIS AOD is not clear.

We addressed this before.

l 275 The faster vertical mixing should generally lead to higher NO₂ columns due to the higher sensitivity of TROPOMI to NO₂ at higher altitudes. Stronger advection does not change much when averaged over a sufficiently large area. Clearly, the increased photochemical activity is by far the main reason for lower NO₂ columns in later months.

First, If the receptor is at the location A and winds are stronger vertically, the receptor at A will experience lower concentrations of NO₂ columns. We cannot change the location of the receptor at the same time. To be more specific: “faster vertical mixing due to larger sensible fluxes (more diluted columns for a given receptor due having a greater chance of experiencing stronger winds in higher altitudes),”

Second, the larger sensitivity of TROPOMI NO₂ to upper levels is only relevant for SCD. The primarily reason of using AMF is to scale the column based on the sensitivity. VCD is defined as SCD/AMF. Scattering weights increase by altitude, so even a small amount of NO₂ in the free troposphere largely increases AMF scaling down total columns. In this part of paper we are pointing at fundamentals, not what can go wrong with the profile.

l 282 "we see negligible reductions..." : there is no reduction at all. There is a significant increase in these regions (boxes B, C and D). Rephrase.

Thanks, we changed it to increase.

l 289 "northern Germany is associated with less populated areas": quite an extraordinary statement. Please look at population density maps. Please focus on relevant information, e.g. the timing of the lockdown, besides meteorological variability. When did lockdown measures take effect in Germany, France, Italy, etc.?

We removed the discussion about the northeastern Germany.

l 308 A detection limit of $7E15\text{ cm}^{-2}$ is not "very low", since it is higher than the TROPOMI columns at most locations in March-May (Figure S5)

Detection limit can be significantly lowered down by coadding pixels over time/space. So we should not directly compare this value to the monthly-averaged data. This detection limit is magnificent compared to former sensors for such a single small pixel.

l 315 The reference Karlsson et al. 2013 does not inform on the occurrence of biomass burning in 2019

We also added a NASA link (https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/global-maps/MOD14A1_M_FIRE).

l 315 Over St Petersburg, the FTIR HCHO column in April 2019 is about $4.2E15\text{ cm}^{-2}$ (Vigouroux et al. 2020), a factor of 1.6 below the TROPOMI column. A similar overestimation is found at Kiruna. In May, the discrepancy is even higher at Scandinavian sites. Clearly, TROPOMI data over Northern Europe and Russia in spring need to be considered with extreme caution. The "dipole anomaly" (line 319) might very well be an artefact (at least quantitatively)

We discussed this before. Our model is largely underestimated there and TROPOMI HCHO provided little information due to large precision errors associated with high latitudes. We did not overcorrect the emissions.

As for the month of May, biomass burning contributions subsided (please see https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/global-maps/MOD14A1_M_FIRE). The anomaly is strongly related to surface temperature (biogenic). We added: “We revisit the pronounced dipole anomaly of dominantly biogenic VOC emissions in May. In this month, the biogenic VOCs dominate. Our model suggests that ambient surface temperature differences between Russian and central Europe are more than 7°C , possibly inducing a strong dipole anomaly in biogenic emissions.”

l 317 "the fact that isoprene reactivity significantly increases by rising temperature": the OH-rate constant actually decreases at higher temperatures. The chemical lifetime of isoprene is always short enough that it is oxidized close to the emission area. Nevertheless, there is a longer delay in winter/spring before oxidation products like MACR and MVK get oxidized and form HCHO. But this should not play a significant role compared with the temperature-dependence of biogenic emissions. Note furthermore that over Russia and Scandinavia, where coniferous trees are dominant, monoterpenes (not isoprene) might be the main biogenic precursors of HCHO. Are those emissions (and their subsequent chemical oxidation) considered in the model? If not, what could be the consequence of their omission?

We changed it to “but also stems from faster isoprene oxidation through higher levels of OH [Pusede et al. 2015].”

Monoterpene is generated by MEGAN (added in the model description) and is included in Cb05:

		0.967*C2O3		
R149	TERP+O	0.150*ALDX + 5.12*PAR	3.60E-11	20
R150	TERP+OH	0.750*HO2 + 1.250*XO2 + 0.250*XO2N + 0.280*FORM + 1.66*PAR + 0.470*ALDX	1.5E-11 @ -449	20
R151	TERP+O3	0.570*OH + 0.070*HO2 + 0.760*XO2 + 0.180*XO2N + 0.240*FORM + 0.001*CO + 7.000*PAR + 0.210*ALDX + 0.390*CXO3	1.2E-15 @ 821	20
R152	TERP+NO3	0.470*NO2 + 0.280*HO2 + 1.030*XO2 + 0.250*XO2N + 0.470*ALDX + 0.530*NTR	3.7E-12 @ -175	20

Section 3.2 Before discussing the top-down emissions, the paper should discuss the performance of the a priori model against satellite data. I find striking that the model fails at reproducing many prominent features of NO2 column distributions. Why is CMAQ NO2 so high along the coasts of Germany and Holland whereas it is notably too low e.g. over southern Germany? Over Ukraine and other regions, the model is too low by a very large factor (>4). The paper should show not just the top-down emissions but also the emission increments and discuss whether those increments have any plausibility. I have serious doubts on that matter. The a priori emission distribution (from CEDS) might have some uncertainty but cannot be completely wrong.

We have comprehensively addressed this in the major comment.

l 328 "elsewhere": elsewhere in the paper or in a further study? I would guess that these aerosol changes have only limited impacts on NO2 and HCHO. If so, the impact of AOD assimilation should be either briefly mentioned or dropped entirely from the paper. If not, it would be interesting to discuss more in detail.

We needed to improve the quality of aerosol mass in our model. The photolysis rates are impacted by aerosol optical thickness which directly/indirectly impacts NO2, HCHO, and ozone. Unfortunately, we had not saved photolysis rates with/without AOD adjustment analysis for the whole time period (with the inversion) to show the differences of the impacts. As a modeler, we have to provide all necessary adjustments made to the model.

l 335-336 "large reduction (...) in the bias associated with simulated surface NO2": why not show this, e.g. in the Supplement?

Thanks, we added in the major comment.

l 338-339 "the discrepancies between the simulated tropospheric NO2 columns versus TROPOMI are largely mitigated by the inversion": only in region with highest emissions, not at all elsewhere.

Yes, this exactly points out the definition of AKs. Low AKs means xposteriori is roughly similar to xpriori.

l 342 "because of the consideration of observational errors": but the choice of NO₂ column errors was pretty arbitrary (as far as I understand). It could be useful to show inversion results adopting alternative choices of those errors and other setup parameters.

We addressed this earlier. Those numbers are within the reported values.

l 343 During summer and even in spring (at least in southern Europe), the feedback would be: if NO_x increase, then OH increase, then the NO_x lifetime decreases, implying a larger NO_x emission increase is needed to match the NO₂ enhancement. Therefore, it does not seem obvious that chemical feedbacks would decrease the magnitude of the anomalies. Please clarify, or drop the mention of chemical feedback.

That's a very good point, We did some experiments in (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1352231020300820>), Figure 10. We changed NO_x and VOC in a very actively photochemical area in summer over Seoul where abundant VOC emissions were present (very similar to the southern Europe), OH as you mentioned increased by NO_x in VOC-rich environment. But OH leveled off after certain points. So this chemical feedback is very subject to initial values of NO_x and VOC (to be more specific reactivity of VOCs). Because we have discussed the feedback in more detail in our previous papers. We decided to remove this sentence.

l 344 "some doubt the practicality of direct mass balance methods": at least, such methods provide a direct answer independent on assumptions regarding uncertainties.

We do not wish to treat the satellite observations error free and totally ignore the chemical feedback. The mass balance methods are more appropriate for precise in-situ measurements relative to emission errors, and relatively inert species like CO₂ or CH₄.

Table 2: The absolute differences of top-down NO_x emissions are not really useful and could be dropped.

Regulatory agencies are often more interested in the absolute changes compared to the percentage, so we wish to provide this information.

l 358 As for NO_x, a discussion of the model performance is needed for HCHO, before discussing the inversion. In addition, the a priori VOC emissions should be shown for the 3 months. Generally speaking, there is a huge underestimation of the model against TROPOMI HCHO (Fig S5). That might be partly due to biases in the data (see above regarding FTIR vs TROPOMI comparisons) but should clearly be mentioned. My guess is that the model would underestimate the FTIR HCHO columns at sites like Paris and Bremen. In any case, the large uncertainties in TROPOMI HCHO make the inversion results unreliable (except maybe at low latitudes in May). The differences "Lockdown-Baseline" (Figure 5) are even more uncertain. I think they should not be shown at all as they might mislead the reader.

We need to account AKs when we compare the data to the constrained model. We addressed this earlier. We added the prior VOC emissions, the biogenic fraction and more

discussion about the potential errors associated with model. Again, we should not treat AKs as binary, we do see decent information in April in central Europe. Readers should consider AKs. That is the main advantage of an analytical inversion over a numerical way.

l 366-367 "This tendency, which is striking, mainly stems from the indirect impacts of the reduced NO_x emissions on HCHO": the reasoning is overly simplistic. E.g. over Spain, the largest change is not seen over Madrid but in an area to the west of the city. Over Italy as well, the changes are spread over wide areas. Furthermore, in April the VOC emissions are found to increase quite a lot over cities like Paris, Rome, Milano, etc. Obviously the patterns are primarily dictated by the large differences between TROPOMI HCHO and the model, despite the large HCHO uncertainty adopted in the inversion.

We addressed this in the major comment.

An additional worry concerns the seasonality of top-down emissions in 2019. According to Fig 5, VOC emissions in April are considerably higher than in March over most countries. The retrieved emission patterns indicate primarily anthropogenic emissions. How can this be justified?

We addressed it in the major comment. Biogenic emissions have an hourly temporal scale. CEDS has a monthly scale. We believe most of this signal is biogenic due to very favorable atmospheric conditions in April 2020. For the same reason, we observed 48% of MDA8 ozone enhancements were due to biogenic+meteorology (natural variability, see the middle panel in Figure11). Additionally, the reactions of RO₂+NO linked to VOCs are large (Figure 13). The relatively large AK (~0.4) suggests there are fruitful information in this area from TROPOMI HCHO.

Section 3.3.1 could be shortened. Get to the point!

We removed the discussion about the former Figure 6.

l 440 In March, surface NO₂ is higher in 2020 than in 2019 according to the model (not the data), consistent with the column changes (Fig 4). This confirms the suspicion that the NO_x emission changes in these regions are unreliable due to large model errors.

TROPOMI NO₂ suggested those tendencies. The model by itself does not have the knowledge to make those changes. This can be an observation problem. We addressed this in the major comment.

Figure 8: is this given for 2019 or 2020? I suggest providing both years, but in the Supplement instead of the main article

It's the averaged. We added : "Figure 8 depicts the average number of days that TROPOMI was able to sample on in both years."

We added both years in the SI. Please note how clear the sky is in April 2020 (the reason of elevated HCHO and 48% of ozone based on our model).

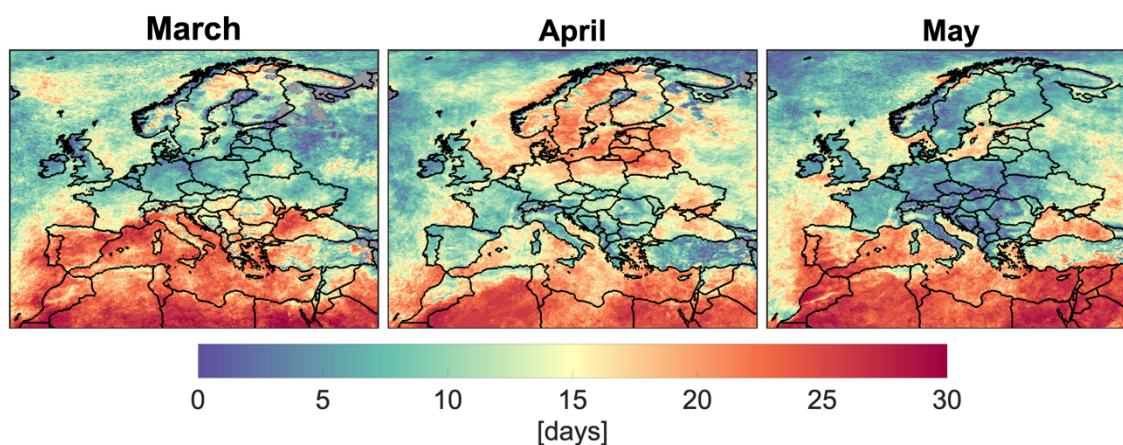


Figure12. The number of good quality ($qa_flag > 0.75$) TROPOMI tropospheric NO_2 days observed at $15 \times 15 \text{ km}^2$ in 2019. These numbers are heavily affected by cloudiness.

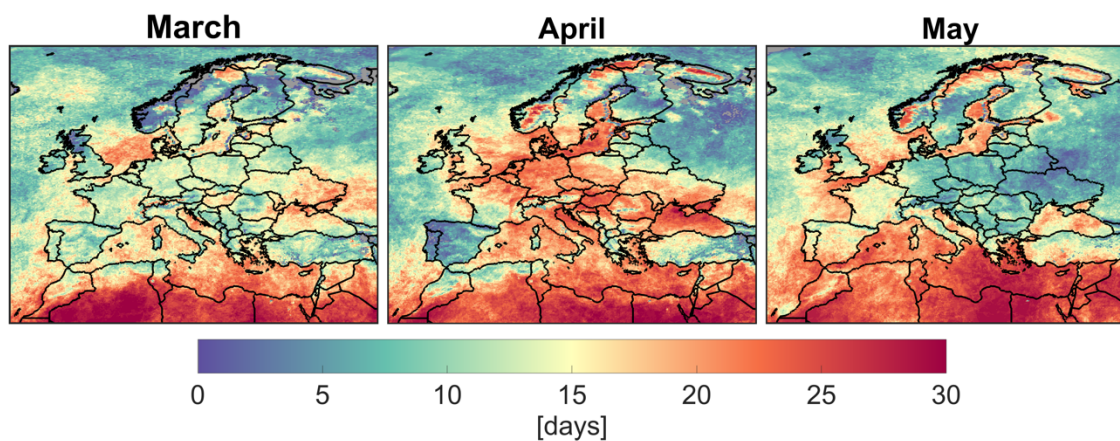


Figure13. The number of good quality ($qa_flag > 0.75$) TROPOMI tropospheric NO_2 days observed at $15 \times 15 \text{ km}^2$ in 2020. These numbers are heavily affected by cloudiness.

l 566-568 "large spatial and temporal variability associated with the reduction in NO_x was evident as each country might have different level and timeline of restrictions": however, the discussion of this aspect is poor in the paper. "emissions decreased in April rather than March in some portions of UK, northern Germany...": do you really mean that the UK and Germany both showed significant regional differences in the lockdown measures? I doubt very much that it was the case, but if it is, it should be discussed and better justified.

We addressed this earlier.

l 569-571 "we showed that anthropogenic VOC emissions over Paris (...) decreased in March (...) achievable through jointly using NO₂ and HCHO observations" as noted above, this is very doubtful. You have not made your case that the VOC emission changes are due to NO_x emission changes. For that, you should realize a separate inversion using only TROPOMI HCHO and compare with the standard inversion.

We addressed this earlier.

Technical/language comments

l 32 "estimate of the NO₂ reduction is underestimated": rephrase

Changed to “Comparisons against surface monitoring stations indicate that **the constrained** model **underrepresents the reduction** in surface NO₂. **This underrepresentation** correlates with the TROPOMI frequency impacted by cloudiness.”

l 32 "a picture that correlates with the TROPOMI etc.": unclear

“This underrepresentation correlates with the TROPOMI frequency impacted by cloudiness.”

l 37 "TROPOMI HCHO sets an upper limit for HCHO changes such that the chemical feedback (...) reveals a non-negligible decline..." : unclear. That a feedback reveals a decline doesn't make sense.

We removed this part.

l 44 "Results of integrated process rates of MDA8 surface ozone": unclear

We changed it “**The model suggests** that physical processes (dry deposition, advection and diffusion) decrease MDA8 surface ozone in the same month on average by -4.83 ppbv, while ozone production rates dampened by largely negative $J_{\text{NO}_2}[\text{NO}_2] - k_{\text{NO}+\text{O}_3}[\text{NO}][\text{O}_3]$ become less negative, leading ozone to increase by +5.89 ppbv.”

l 51 "capture the essential character changes..." essential in what sense? Unclear.

We removed it.

l 57 "has exponentially become more polluted during previous decades": wrong over Europe

We changed this: “**Earth’s atmosphere has substantially become more polluted since the industrial era in comparison to its original environmental condition [Li and Lin, 2015], thus any abrupt hiatus in anthropogenic (man-made) emissions”**

We simply want to say the anthropogenic-emissions are large.

l 59 "impulsive and sweeping" : not clear what is meant

Changed to “immediate impact”

l 78 "particulate matter" (drop the s)

Removed.

l 100 Why the indentation?

Unclear.

l 143 low spatial resolution (remove hyphen)

Removed.

l. 154 "while considering" unclear

This part has been rewritten: “In the case of NO₂, we uniformly scale up the satellite tropospheric columns by 25%. This bias estimate is derived by first assuming a 37% low bias in the columns over polluted regions as reported by Verhoelst et al. [2021]. In turn, this low bias can be mitigated somewhat by the application of high spatial resolution profiles in the air mass factor calculation, such as the ones used in this study. Table 1 summarizes the results from several TROPOMI validation studies at specific locations that calculated NO₂ using model profiles with higher spatial resolution than the operational TROPOMI (1°×1°) profiles (see Table 1 columns “Modification” and “Modified Bias”). In these studies, modified columns show increases ranging from 0 - 25%. Based on these results, we assume a low bias of 37% can be mitigated by ~12% through the use of high spatial resolution profiles, for a resulting total low bias of 25%. This bias is likely not valid over pristine areas, where validation studies show lower biases in TROPOMI NO₂ [Verhoelst et al., 2021, Wang et al., 2020, Zhao et al., 2020]; nonetheless, we previously observed in Sourì et al. [2020a] that the low signal-to-noise ratios of those column amounts resulted in small changes in the top-down emissions.”

l 156 The sentence should make more clear that "clear" is <6x10¹⁵ molec/cm² and polluted is above that level. Use the proper symbol for >=

We changed it “clean”.

l 176 "Those biases oscillates around 8x10¹⁵ molec/cm²": completely unclear.

We removed it.

l 177 "majorly" -> mainly

Changed.

l 236-237 The sentence "We nudge moisture (...) data used only outside of the PBL layer" is a bit ambiguous,

We clarified it: “To minimize the deviation of the model from the reanalysis data, we turn on the grid nudging option with respect to wind, moisture, and temperature only outside of the PBL region. The inclusion of this option outside of the PBL is because we do not want the coarse reanalysis data washes out the relatively high-resolution dynamics.”

please rephrase

l 237 "PBL layer" is redundant

Changed.

l 240 the correspondence is good, not striking.

We disagree. The performance of the model, especially in terms of U and V are striking in the modeling world.

l 255 are assumed diagonal

Corrected.

l 277 "unintended" is weird. NO₂ columns have no intention. Rephrase.

Changed to “This sequential decline of NO₂ obscures the quantitative interpretation of the satellite observations in two ways: first, as noted by Silvern et al. [2019], the free tropospheric background NO₂, which are highly uncertain, becomes comparable to those located near-surface, and second, the relatively lower signal-to-noise ratios reduce the amount of information obtained on NO_x estimates (discussed later).”

l 278 "are first the free-tropospheric region complication": what does this mean? Not clear at all.

See above.

l 279 "a barrier to obtaining high amount of information from the sensor..." unclear, rephrase.

See above.

l 296 "suggests an abrupt hiatus in the ongoing reduced NO_x emissions": unclear

Changed to “the anomaly of the tropospheric NO₂ suggests that the reduction in NO_x emissions abruptly experiences a hiatus...”

l 300 Why "potential"?

Thanks, removed.

l 302 "leading to striking HCHO column patterns with large variations" does not tell anything, please remove.

Unclear (?), but removed.

l 303 "higher chance": is it really a matter of chance? Rephrase.

Changed to “it is easier to single out”

l 304 "looking at": rephrase

Changed to “it is easier to single out anthropogenic-derived HCHO concentration by HCHO measurements made in wintertime”

l 312-313 "are below the detection limit (...) to relate them to the lockdown...": lousy wording, please rephrase

(e.g. remove the last part of sentence"

We removed it.

l 313 "nonetheless TROPOMI sets an upper limit of these changes": not useful

We removed it.

l 363 "we surprisingly observe": weird wording

We removed it.

l. 426-427 "ignoring spatial representivity function to directly compare point measurements...": unclear, rephrase

Changed to “not accounting for spatial representivity function when it comes to directly comparing two datasets at different scales (i.e., point measurements vs the model grids);”

l 430 "then are then"

Unclear

l 433 "heterogenicity" --> "heterogeneity"

Changed.

l 440 "The surface measurements reinforce the less pronounced reduction in NO₂ in northern Germany and UK": unclear.

“The surface measurements **in March** reinforce **increases (or negligible changes)** in NO₂ in **northeastern** Germany and UK, although the magnitudes are not as large as those suggested by the model.”

L 458-460 The sentence "This tendency potentially is driven (...) has drawn much attention" is grammatically incorrect.

Thanks, changed to “This tendency potentially driven by ozone chemistry”

l 461 "The challenge is to simulate a model": unclear

Changed to “The challenge is to **set up a model**”

l 463 "essential character": unclear, rephrase

Removed.

l 475 "namely as": delete "as"

Removed.

l 523 In Equation (6), the rate constant should be $k(\text{O}_3 + \text{NO})$, not $k(\text{OH} + \text{NO}_2 + \text{M})$

Thanks, changed.

l 560 Remove comma at end of sentence

Changed.

l 1009 "explain" --> "describe"

Changed.

Table 1 hyphen in MAX-DOAS

Changed.

Table 2: too many significant digits are given.

We removed one digit.