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# USA OUTLOOK

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Foto: CNN

## Technology is transforming the nature of money. Here's how it will affect our lives

In his latest book, "The Future of Money: How the Digital Revolution Is Transforming Currencies and Finance," Cornell University professor Eswar S. Prasad describes how digital currencies and other financial technologies are reshaping everything from consumer banking to monetary policy and international payments. In a conversation with the International Monetary Fund, Prasad lays out the advantages and perils of the new forms of money.

**IMF:** Is cash destined to wither away?

**Prasad:** The convenience of digital payments to both consumers and businesses makes it highly unlikely that cash will survive much longer. In China there are two private payment providers, Alipay and WeChat Pay, that have blanketed the entire Chinese economy with very low-cost digital payments. You can use those for something as simple as buying, say, a piece of fruit or a couple of dumplings from a street vendor. In advanced economies like Sweden, the private sector is doing an equally good job of providing very low-cost digital payments.

## AI in Insurance: How three forward-looking insurers are infusing AI into their front, middle, and back offices

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to drive consumers online, the pressure for incumbent insurance companies to adopt digital technology is intensifying. Incumbent insurers have been pushed to accelerate their use of mature AI deployments over the past year to meet changing customer expectations and better compete with tech-centric firms. For context, consumers are now twice as likely to buy insurance from big tech firms, versus four years ago.

This digital, tech-centric environment makes it all the more necessary for insurers to look at real AI use cases that can offer more competitive services. For example, some insurers are using AI to more accurately underwrite customers, allowing them to offer better-priced policies. And insurers are integrating AI implementations across their front, middle, and back offices in order to fend off tech-savvy startups.

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## AI in Insurance

How 3 Forward-Looking Insurers Are Infusing AI Into Their Front, Middle, and Back Offices to Better Compete with Insurtechs and Meet Changing Customer Expectations

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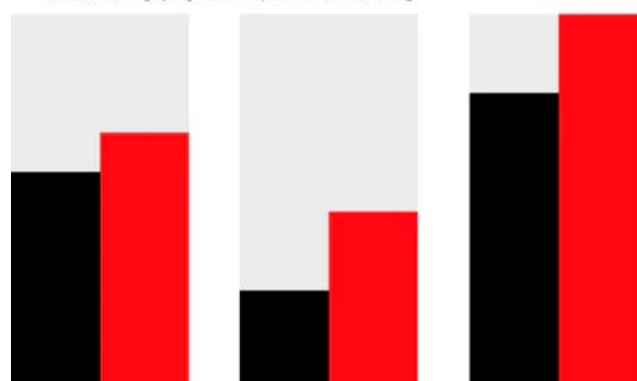


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Foto: CNBC

## Omicron BA.2 subvariant will soon dominate in U.S., but Fauci doesn't expect another surge

Omicron's more contagious subvariant, BA.2, has more than doubled in prevalence over the past two weeks in the U.S. and now represents more than 34% of Covid-19 infections that have undergone genetic sequencing, according to data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week.

BA.2 has been steadily growing as a proportion of the Covid variants circulating in the U.S. since Feb. 5, when it represented about 1% of genetically sequenced virus samples, according to the CDC. BA.2 probably already accounts for 50% of new infections in the U.S. because many people are taking tests at home that aren't picked up in the official data, according to Ali Mokdad, an epidemiologist at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

Data from Walgreens, which conducts testing at its pharmacies nationwide, shows BA.2 as the dominant variant, at 51% of all positive Covid cases for the week ending March 19.

## US states seek to ease inflation burden with direct payments

With inflation raging and state coffers flush with cash, governors and lawmakers across the U.S. are considering a relatively simple solution to help ease the pain people are feeling at the gas pump and grocery store — sending money.

At least a dozen states have proposed giving rebate checks of several hundred dollars directly to taxpayers, among them California, Kansas and Minnesota. Critics, including many Republican lawmakers, say those checks won't go far enough given the pace of inflation and are pushing instead for permanent tax cuts.

A proposal from Maine Gov. Janet Mills is among the most generous in a state where the cost of food and fuel has skyrocketed in recent months. The Democratic governor wants to send \$850 to most residents as part of the state's budget bill.

The rebate "will help Maine people grapple with these increased costs by putting money directly back into their pockets," Mills said.



Foto: ABC News - Walt Disney



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## Gas prices are high. Oil CEOs reveal why they're not drilling more

The US oil industry doesn't appear to be in any rush to come to the rescue of Americans struggling with high gas prices. Oil company CEOs say Wall Street is to blame.

Fifty-nine percent of oil executives said investor pressure to maintain capital discipline is the primary reason publicly traded oil producers are restraining growth, according to a Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas survey released Wednesday.

For years, the boom-to-bust oil industry spent

lavishly to fund all-out production growth. US oil output skyrocketed, keeping prices low. Yet sustaining profits proved elusive. Hundreds of oil companies went bankrupt during multiple oil price crashes, leading investors to demand more restraint from energy CEOs.

Today, oil companies are under enormous pressure from Wall Street to return cash to shareholders through dividends and buybacks, instead of investing in badly needed supply.