Probabilities of HIV-1 bNAb development in healthy and chronically infected individuals

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Abstract

HIV-1 broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) are able to suppress viremia and

prevent infection. Their induction by vaccination is therefore a major goal. However,

in contrast to antibodies that neutralize other pathogens, HIV-1-specific bNAbs

frequently carry uncommon molecular characteristics that might prevent their

induction. Here, we performed unbiased sequence analyses of B cell receptor

repertoires from 57 healthy and 46 chronically HIV-1- or HCV-infected individuals and

learned probabilistic models to predict the likelihood of bNAb development. We

formally show that lower probabilities for bNAbs are predictive of higher HIV-1

neutralization activity. Moreover, ranking of bNAbs by their probabilities allowed to

identify highly potent antibodies with superior generation probabilities as preferential

targets for vaccination approaches. Importantly, we found equal bNAb probabilities

across infected and healthy donors. This implies that chronic infection is not a

prerequisite for the generation of bNAbs, fostering the hope that HIV-1 vaccines can

induce bNAb development in healthy individuals.

Significance Statement

While HIV-1 broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) can develop in chronically HIV-

1-infected individuals, they could not yet be elicited by active vaccination. Here, we

computationally demonstrate that HIV-1 bNAbs carry distinct sequence features

making them unlikely outcomes of the antibody evolution. However, our approach

allowed us to identify bNAbs with higher probabilities of being generated. These

candidates can now serve as the most promising targets to be induced by

vaccination. Moreover, we show that chronic infection has no influence on the

probabilities of finding typical bNAb sequence features in the memory B cell

compartment. Both findings are critical to design effective vaccination strategies.

Main Text

Introduction

The adaptive immune system is able to cope with a plethora of different antigenic structures by employing a diverse repertoire of lymphocytes, which express unique immune receptors as a consequence of V(D)J recombination during lymphopoiesis (1). B cell receptors (BCRs) further diversify during affinity maturation by somatic hypermutation (SHM) (2, 3), leading to the generation of antibodies with high affinities that can target and neutralize infectious pathogens.

The human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1), however, is able to outpace the adaptive immune system by quickly evolving into antigenically diverse quasispecies due to its error-prone replication machinery (4). These quasispecies contain viral variants that can escape from autologous circulating antibodies. As a consequence, the immune system adapts to the emerged variants, resembling an ongoing immunological arms race (5). Notably, there is a rare fraction of HIV-1-infected individuals who develop a broad serum neutralization response against numerous viral variants, and from whom monoclonal broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) have been isolated (6–9; reviewed in 10–13). These antibodies target various sites on the homotrimeric envelope glycoprotein (Env), including the CD4 binding site (CD4bs), the variable loop 1 and 2 apex region (V1/V2 apex), the V3 loop base with its surrounding glycans (V3 loop), the gp120/gp41 interface region with the fusion peptide, the membrane-proximal external region (MPER) of gp41, and the so-called 'silent-face' (14). Importantly, bNAbs are able to prevent and treat HIV-1 as well as chimeric simian-(S)HIV-1 infections in animal models (15–20), and have been demonstrated to suppress viremia in HIV-1-infected individuals without notable adverse events or side effects (21–30). For instance, a combination of the CD4bs antibody 3BNC117 and the V3 loop antibody 10-1074 was able to control viremia in

76% of study participants for at least 20 weeks in the absence of antiretroviral therapy (ART) (27). Moreover, preventive treatment with the CD4bs bNAb VRC01 significantly reduced infections with VRC01-sensitive HIV-1 (31), demonstrating that bNAbs are in principle able to prevent infections in humans. Importantly, technical advances and efforts to screen thousands of HIV-1-infected individuals have promoted the isolation of nearly pan-neutralizing bNAbs (9, 32, 33). This next generation of bNAbs, engineered bi- or trispecific antibodies (34–37), and combination therapies with complementary bNAbs (25, 26, 29) have the potential to constrict viral escape and thus improve HIV-1 treatment and prevention strategies.

Despite the progress in passive administration, all efforts to induce highly potent bNAbs through vaccination have failed so far. bNAbs tend to accumulate unusual sequence properties, including high numbers of somatic mutations (6–9, 32, 33, 38), insertions/deletions (6, 8, 9, 38, 39), distinct V_H gene segment use (40–42), or exceptionally long complementarity determining regions (CDRs) (7). Long CDRH3 regions as well as the usage of V_H4-34 have previously been associated with self-reactive antibodies in autoimmune diseases (43–45) and several bNAbs proved indeed to be auto- and polyreactive (46, 47). Since autoreactive B cells are counter-selected during B cell development (45), it has been speculated that bNAb development is normally blocked by immune checkpoints that can only be bypassed through chronic infection (48). In line with this, BCRs of chronically Hepatitis C virus (HCV)-infected individuals show increased CDRH3s lengths (i.e. potentially higher self-reactivity) in comparison to healthy controls (49). In addition, many potent HIV-1 bNAbs have been isolated after several years of infection (9, 42, 50), suggesting that a prolonged virus-antibody co-evolution is a requirement for their induction. Guided vaccine design attempts to mimic this co-evolution by serial immunizations with varying immunogens (51, 52). Yet it is currently unclear which bNAbs have the

highest chance to be elicited and should thus be selected for these strategies.

Previously, precursor frequencies of VRC01-like bNAbs and BG18 have been

estimated in healthy individuals by CDRH3 similarity searches (52–54) and

probabilities of distinct mutations have been determined for a subset of bNAbs (55).

However, comprehensive methods and analyses that compare the combined

probabilities of V(D)J recombination and overall mutation patterns across different

bNAb classes are still lacking and it remains elusive how these probabilities are

influenced by chronic infection.

Here, we performed unbiased next-generation sequencing (NGS) and learned

probabilistic models for somatic point mutations and V(D)J recombinations on BCR

repertoire data from 57 healthy individuals. We applied these models to determine

and compare the generation probabilities of 75 bNAbs. By correlating probabilities

with neutralization efficacies, we identified broad and potent candidate bNAbs that

are more likely to be elicited than others and are thus particularly suited as targets for

vaccination strategies. Finally, we sequenced 34 HIV-1- and 12 hepatitis C virus

(HCV)-infected individuals, to infer repertoire characteristics and learn models to

determine bNAb generation probabilities in the presence of chronic infections.

Results

Performing unbiased sequencing of the B cell receptor repertoire

In order to determine and compare the probability of developing an antibody with a specific sequence, we aimed to establish a pipeline for collecting unbiased BCR repertoire data from peripheral B cells and infer antibody sequence statistics with high confidence (**Figure 1 A**). To this end, we set up a sorting strategy to isolate naive or IgG-class-switched (i.e. antigen-experienced) B cells from peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs, **Supplementary Figure 1**) and developed a 5'-rapid amplification of cDNA ends (RACE)-based sequencing protocol including unique molecular identifiers (UMIs) for computational error correction (**Figure 1 A**).

To test whether this sequencing approach yields sufficient high-quality reads, we analyzed biological duplicates of 100,000 IgG$^+$ B cells from three healthy blood donors (**Figure 1 B**). From 1,354,097 to 2,552,903 raw reads per replicate, we reconstituted on average 6,121 IgG heavy, 18,868 kappa, and 12,000 lambda chains after filtering for error-corrected and productive sequences (**Supplementary Figure 2**, **Supplementary Table 1**). There was substantial overlap in unique CDRH3s within samples from the same individuals (on average 2.4 to 4.1% for biological replicates and 81% for the technical replicate) in comparison to the overlap between different donors (<0.02%, **Figure 1 C**). Moreover, repertoire features such as CDRH3 length distribution (**Figure 1 D**) or V_H gene germline identity (**Figure 1 E**) were indistinguishable between biological replicates, but significantly differed across individuals. To estimate the resolution of the sequencing approach, we spiked in varying concentrations (0.01 to 10%) of two B cell lymphoma (BCL) cell lines into naive B cells from a healthy donor. Spiked-in cells could be detected at all concentrations, including as few as 10 in a total of 100,000 cells (**Supplementary Figure 3**). Concluding that the sequencing pipeline yields reproducible and

representative statistics, we collected blood samples from 57 healthy individuals that

comprised 54% male and 46% female donors with a mean age of 33 years (**Figure 1**

F). By sorting and sequencing in total 5,700,000 IgG positive B cells we generated

96,825,014 raw reads, yielding high-quality productive sequences for 287,505 heavy,

839,776 kappa, and 476,835 lambda chains, with on average 5,044 heavy, 14,733

kappa, and 8,366 lambda chains per individual (**Figure 1 G**, **Supplementary Table**

2). Although sequence features were predictive of the repertoire's origin (**Figure 1 D,**

E), they are relatively conserved between individuals on a global level (**Figure 1 H**).

In accordance with previous studies (56–58) we find particular V genes (such as V_H1-

69 or V_H3-23) to be highly abundant in our cohort, CDR3 lengths to average around

15-16, 9, and 11 amino acids and average mutational loads to peak around 93, 96,

and 96% nucleotide V gene germline identity for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains,

respectively.

We conclude that the presented pipeline allows for inferring high-quality

repertoire statistics from a starting material of 100,000 B cells, and that this sample is

representative of the unique IgG BCR repertoire feature distributions of a single

individual. On average, IgG repertoires show conserved sequence feature

distributions that reflect different probabilities for specific sequence characteristics to

develop during B cell development and maturation.

Predicting bNAb probabilities for V(D)J recombination and somatic

hypermutation

To predict the probabilities of developing HIV-1 specific bNAbs, we retrieved

sequence and neutralization data for 75 HIV-1 neutralizing antibodies with varying

neutralization breadths and potencies against a panel of 56 different HIV-1 strains

(**Supplementary Figure 4** and **Supplementary Table 3**) from the CATNAP

database (59).

The 75 antibodies target various sites on the envelope spike-protein (**Figure**

2A, adapted from (11, 60)) and cover geometric mean IC_{50} values from 0.005 to

16.991 µg/ml as well as neutralization breadths between 10.7 and 98.2%, both of

which we combined into a single neutralization score, to compare and rank bNAbs by

their overall neutralization efficacy (**Supplementary Table 4, Figure 2B**). Overall,

the 75 bNAbs show broad distributions for V_H gene usage (**Figure 2C**), CDRH3

lengths (**Figure 2D**), and V_H gene germline identities (**Figure 2E**), which differ

substantially from the averaged IgG memory B cell repertoire statistics of the 57

healthy individuals. Notably, separating bNAbs into binding classes demonstrates

that individual bNAbs are not necessarily extreme in all features. CD4 binding site

antibodies, for example, often incorporate V_H1-2 or 1-46 and are highly mutated,

while their CDRH3 lengths are within the range of the memory IgG reference

distribution (**Figure 2 C**, **D**, and **E**, blue bars). V2-apex antibodies, on the other hand,

typically exhibit long CDRH3s, but are also less mutated (**Figure 2 D**, and **E**, yellow

bars). Both classes of antibodies can be found among the top neutralizing antibodies

(**Figure 2B**).

While long CDRH3s and high levels of somatic mutations could in part explain

the rare occurrence of bNAbs, they do not account for heterogeneity in gene

segment selection probabilities, or for any sequence context, which is known to bias

V(D)J recombination and somatic hypermutation (61). Moreover, simple descriptive

statistics may suffer from undersampling of rare B cell sequences. We therefore

applied the Inference and Generation Of Repertoires (IGoR) tool (62), to provide

quantitative and comprehensive estimates for the probabilities of generating a given

CDRH3 (P_{gen}) and accumulating a unique pattern of point mutations (P_{SHM}). IGoR

infers a probabilistic model that accounts for the statistics of V(D)J usage as well as

insertions and deletions in the junctional regions and sums over all generation

scenarios consistent with the given BCR sequence to evaluate its overall generation

probability. The SHM model learns the identities of mutated 5-mer subsequences.

Importantly, estimating probabilities with models allows for overcoming limitations of

sequencing depth through generalization. To investigate probabilities of bNAb

sequence features after selection and affinity maturation, we took the combined

quality-filtered and productive IgG sequences of all 57 healthy individuals to learn the

models and determined P_{gen} and P_{SHM} for the 75 bNAb heavy chain sequences

(**Figure 2F**, **Supplementary Table 5**). Almost all bNAbs show lower P_{gen} and P_{SHM}

values (i.e., are less likely) than the median healthy IgG repertoire distribution,

resembling the CDRH3 length and V_H gene germline identity comparison in **Figure**

2D and **E**. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between these sequence features and

the probabilities (**Supplementary Figure 5**), suggesting that CDRH3 length and

numbers of mutations are strong determinants of antibody probabilities. However,

there are also antibodies with equal CDRH3 lengths (e.g. VRC03/DH511.11P) or

similar amounts of SHM (e.g. VRC06b/3BNC117) but substantially different

probabilities (over several log steps), highlighting the contribution of additional factors

such as biases in V(D)J recombination and SHM (**Supplementary Figure 5**).

Given the broad distributions of P_{gen} and P_{SHM} for the different bNAbs, we asked

whether they are correlated with neutralization efficacy , and whether we can identify

highly potent bNAbs that are more likely to be generated. The neutralization score is

not correlated with P_{gen} but slightly correlated with P_{SHM} alone for the 75 bNAbs

(**Figure 2G** left and middle panel). Performing a linear regression that takes into

account the logarithms of P_{gen} and P_{SHM} yields a combined probability score S

(**Figure 2B** right panel, **Supplementary Table 5**) that is highly predictive of the

neutralization score (r = -0.446 and p = 6.031×10^{-5} for the linear regression). Based

on this regression, lower probability scores (i.e. less likely bNAbs) are correlated with

better neutralization. Importantly, the correlation allows for identifying bNAbs that are

highly potent, but easier to generate than others (**Figure 2G** right panel, upper right

corner). Similar results for the correlation of P_{gen}, P_{SHM}, and the probability score S

with the neutralization score were also obtained for light chains (**Supplementary**

Figure 6, **Supplementary Table 5**).

We conclude that the linear combination of the logarithms of P_{gen} and P_{SHM} (i.e.

the combined probability score S) is highly predictive of the neutralization capacity

with the overall tendency of less likely bNAbs to be the most potent ones. In addition,

our modeling approach not only confirms that bNAbs are in general unlikely

outcomes of the B cell development, but also provides a framework for ranking

bNAbs by their overall sequence probabilities.

Global BCR repertoire features under chronic infections are similar to healthy

repertoires with marginal differences

Since chronic infections have been described to interfere with B cell

development and functionality (63), we wondered whether and to what extent they

influence memory IgG BCR sequence characteristics. To answer this question, we

sequenced BCRs from the IgG[+] memory compartment of 34 HIV-1 and 12 hepatitis C

virus (HCV)-infected individuals and compared them to the 57 healthy repertoires

(**Figure 3 A**).

Processing and filtering of 54,628,577 HIV-1 and 19,767,705 HCV raw reads

yielded in total 1,382,301 (HIV-1) as well as 486,488 (HCV) heavy and light chain

sequences (**Supplementary Tables 6 and 7**). Overall, sequence characteristics,

including V gene segment usage, CDR3 length, and V gene germline identity, were

comparable to the healthy control cohort for both chain types (**Figures 3B, 3C, 3D**), although HCV-infected individuals showed slightly longer mean CDRH3 lengths (**Figure 3C**). Similarly, no obvious differences were observed in B cell lineage tree structures (**Figure 3E**) with respect to skewedness (**Figure 3F**), size distribution (**Figure 3G**), or diversity (**Figure 3H**). Since antiretroviral therapy (ART) is suppressing virus replication and thus may dampen anti-HIV-1 immune responses, we stratified the HIV-1 cohort by treatment (**Supplementary Figure 7**). Whereas repertoires from treated HIV-1-infected individuals were indistinguishable from healthy individuals, we found a substantially higher fraction of V_H genes 1-69 and 4-34 in untreated HIV-1-infected individuals, which did not reach significance after correcting for multiple testing. In addition, mean CDRH3 lengths were slightly but significantly longer in untreated individuals. Mean V gene germline identities did not differ significantly, although the untreated subgroup contains one individual with noticeably less somatic mutations, which is mainly responsible for the visible shift in the V gene germline identity distributions (**Figure 3D**, **Supplementary Figures 7**). We also measured serum-derived poly-IgG neutralization breadth against the 12-strain global panel (64) for 33 of the 34 HIV-1-infected individuals (**Supplementary Table 8**). Of note, broad serum neutralization is found in ART-naive (untreated) as well as ART-treated individuals of our cohort (**Supplementary Table 8**). Stratifying BCR repertoires by neutralization breadth into high (≥66%), intermediate (<66% and ≥33%), or low (<33% and >0%) breadth and no neutralization (0%) did not yield any evidence that serum neutralization breadth is linked to relevant global changes in BCR repertoire features (**Supplementary Figure 8**). Neither of the stratifications had any influence on the lineage characteristics (data not shown).

We conclude that V gene usages and CDRH3 lengths are marginally skewed in

untreated, chronically infected individuals. However, on average, repertoire features

remain almost constant between the cohorts.

Equal probabilities for bNAb development in healthy and chronically infected

individuals

To investigate whether chronic infection shifts the probability to develop distinct

bNAb sequences, we used the IgG repertoire data from HIV-1 and HCV-infected

individuals to train IGoR and learn models for P_{gen} and P_{SHM}.

Whole repertoire P_{gen} distributions of both cohorts were almost identical to the

healthy control data for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains (**Figure 4A**). Repertoire

P_{SHM} distributions on the other hand were slightly shifted towards less negative

values for HCV- and HIV-1-infected individuals (**Figure 4B**), which resembles the

increase in V_H gene germline identity (i.e. less somatic mutations) that was already

observed in the repertoire data (**Figure 3D**). We speculated that marginal differences

in these distributions could still influence the probability for certain rare V(D)J

recombinations or mutational patterns of distinct bNAb sequences. Therefore, we

calculated P_{gen} and P_{SHM} for the individual 75 bNAbs with the models that have been

trained on the repertoire data from infected individuals (**Supplementary Table 5**).

When comparing those to the values that have been inferred from the healthy cohort,

there is only little deviation in P_{gen} or P_{SHM} except for three probabilities that deviate

more than 25% from the healthy cohort (**Figure 4C** and **D**). Interestingly, P_{gen} for the

light chain of 10-1074 is >5 log-fold higher (i.e., more likely) in healthy individuals

than in both chronically infected cohorts, suggesting that the selection of this

particular light chain sequence is somehow hampered by chronic infections. There is

however no tendency for a whole antibody epitope group to be favored in one or the

other cohort. To finally compare the overall probabilities of individual bNAbs between

the cohorts, we finally calculated the combined probability score (S) using the cohort-

specific P_{gen} and P_{SHM} values together with the coefficients from the healthy

repertoire linear regression model of Figure 2G (**Supplementary Table 5**). In line

with the similar P_{gen} and P_{SHM} values (**Figure 4C** and **D**), combined probability scores

were almost identical between healthy and infected individuals (**Figure 4E**). Despite

the slight differences in the repertoire characteristics of untreated individuals

(**Supplementary Figure 7**), treatment status had no influence on bNAb probability

scores (**Figure 4F**). Similarly, we found no global change in probability scores when

stratifying by serum neutralization breadth, except for three less probable chains in

high (CH103 light chain), intermediate (10-1074 heavy chain), and low breadth

subgroups (179NC75 heavy chain, **Figure 4G**). Taken together, these results

suggest no substantial differences in the overall probability of bNAb generation in the

absence or presence of chronic HIV-1 or HCV infection.

Discussion

Broadly HIV-1 neutralizing antibodies can effectively prevent and treat HIV-1

infections in animal models (16, 17, 19, 65) and are considered promising tools for

HIV-1 prevention and therapy in humans (66, 67). However, bNAbs have only been

identified in a minor fraction of HIV-1-infected individuals and to elicit highly broad

and potent bNAbs by vaccination remains a yet unreached goal (11, 68, 69). The

presence of high amounts of somatic mutations, insertions/deletions, or exceptionally

long CDRH3s in bNAbs raised the questions of (i) whether these outstanding

features explain their rareness, (ii) whether rareness is correlated with neutralization

capacity, and (iii) if chronic infection is a prerequisite for their induction. By learning

models from IgG[+] memory BCR sequences of 57 healthy individuals, we estimated

the probability for specific V(D)J recombinations (P_{gen}) and for accumulating patterns

of somatic point mutations (P_{SHM}) in a representative set of HIV-1-neutralizing

antibodies. We also tried to include insertions and deletions (indels). However, it was

not possible to build a robust model, since their frequencies were too low in the

repertoire data. In line with previous studies, we found that numerous bNAbs

accumulate improbable mutation patterns (55, 70). Our analysis illustrates that the

degree of improbable mutations is correlated with the binding site and is not a

common feature of bNAbs per se. Similarly, we identified a subset of antibodies with

highly improbable CDRH3 recombinations. These mainly comprise V2 apex

antibodies that require long CDRH3s to penetrate the envelope glycan shield (71–

73), but also some CD4bs antibodies with average CDRH3 lengths. These results

support the hypothesis that bNAbs are rare, because some of their sequence

features are unlikely to develop.

Previously, ongoing affinity maturation as well as the mean frequency of

somatic mutations have been correlated with neutralization breadth and potency of

bNAb lineages (74, 75). In line with this, we detected a weak correlation for the

neutralization power of monoclonal bNAbs and SHM, looking not only at the

frequency but also at the probability to accumulate a specific mutation pattern (i.e.,

P_{SHM}). Notably, we found that a linear combination of the logarithms of P_{gen} and P_{SHM}

is predictive of bNAb neutralization efficacy, suggesting that bNAbs tend to be better,

the more unlikely they are. Importantly, the correlation allows for identifying bNAbs

that are highly potent but on average more likely than other, similarly potent ones.

These highly potent and probable antibodies include the above-mentioned V2 apex

antibodies, which in contrast to their improbable CDRH3 showed more probable

patterns of somatic hypermutations. Interestingly, V2 apex antibodies have been

reported to occur relatively early during infection (76–78). This suggests that the

selection of rare precursors outperforms the accumulation of distinct SHM in timing

and that this bNAb subclass could thus be a preferential target for vaccination

strategies.

In addition to healthy individuals, we also sequenced the repertoires of 34 HIV-

1- and 12 HCV-infected individuals. In concordance with previous studies (49, 79),

we detected marginally longer mean CDRH3 lengths in HCV-infected as well as HIV-

1-infected individuals that do not re   ceive antiretroviral therapy. Similar to the

findings from Roskin et al. (79), we also detected an increase of the inherently auto-

reactive gene segment V_H4-34 in our ART-naive HIV-1-infected subgroup. However,

we do not see substantial differences in bNAb sequence probability scores in the

IgG$^+$ memory compartment when averaging over individuals in the cohorts. This

suggests that chronic infection itself does not alter the probabilities to develop

specific bNAbs substantially in any direction, even if it leaves traces of particular

sequence features within the whole IgG repertoire. Of note, we detected high

variability in the repertoire composition within each cohort. As a consequence, some

individuals might still have better chances of developing certain bNAb classes

because of other predispositions, e.g. by carrying specific gene segment alleles that

encode for critical contact sites, as it has been previously demonstrated for VRC01-

like bNAbs (53).

Taken together, we present a framework for assessing the overall probability to

develop an antibody with a specific CDR3 motif and pattern of point mutations. Our

modeling approach on HIV-1-neutralizing antibodies quantitatively confirms that

bNAbs are unlikely outcomes of the B cell evolution within a host due to individual or

a combination of improbable sequence features. Using neutralization data and

probability scores, we demonstrate that the more unlikely bNAbs tend to have a

higher neutralization efficacy. Moreover, this approach allows us to identify potent

antibodies with higher chances to be elicited by vaccination. Finally, the data suggest

that chronic infection has no impact on the generation of bNAb sequences within the

IgG$^+$ B cell memory compartment, fostering the hope that a potent vaccine should be

able to elicit bNAbs in healthy individuals.

Materials and Methods

Data and Material Availability

FASTQ files for all repertoires have been deposited at the Sequence Read Archive (SRA) with accession numbers SAMN29624595-713 (BioProject Accession Number PRJNA857338). IGoR is freely available from a github repository (https://github.com/statbiophys/IGoR). Requests for materials or additional code should be directed to the corresponding author and may be subject to restrictions based on data and privacy protection regulations and/or may require a Material Transfer Agreement (MTA).

Sample collection

Samples were obtained under a study protocol approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Cologne, University of Bonn, and the respective local IRBs (study protocols 16-054 and 017/16). All participants provided written informed consent and were recruited at hospitals or as outpatients.

Serum IgG isolation

Serum samples from HIV-1-infected individuals were heat-inactivated at 56 °C for 40 min and incubated with Protein G Sepharose (GE Life Sciences) overnight at 4 °C. IgGs were eluted from chromatography columns using 0.1 M glycine (pH = 3.0) into 0.1 M Tris (pH = 8.0). Buffer was exchanged to PBS through Amicon 30 kDa spin membranes (Millipore). Concentrations of purified IgGs were determined by UV/Vis spectroscopy (A280) on a Nanodrop 2000 and samples were stored at 4°C.

Serum IgG neutralization test

Neutralization assays with serum IgGs against the 12-strain "global" virus panel,

were performed in 96-well plates as previously described (9, 80). In brief, 12 HIV-1

pseudovirus strains were mixed with 1:2 serial dilutions of purified IgG (1 mg/ml

starting concentration, 8 dilutions) and incubated for 1 h at 37°C. TZM-bl cells were

added (10^4 per well) with DEAE-dextran at a final concentration of 10 µg/ml and

incubated for 2 days. Luciferin-containing lysis buffer was added and after 2 min

incubation samples were resuspended and luminescence was measured with a

luminometer (Berthold TriStar^2 LB942). For IC_{50} determination, the background signal

(non-infected TZM-bl cells) was subtracted and IgG concentrations resulting in a 50%

RLU reduction compared to untreated virus control wells were determined by using

murine leukemia virus (MuLV)-pseudotyped virus as a control for unspecific activity.

All samples were tested in duplicates.

Isolation of B cells and RNA Isolation

PBMCs were isolated by standard density gradient centrifugation using Histopaque

(Sigma Aldrich) and LeucoSep tubes (Greiner Bio-one). Cells were stored at -150°C

in 90% (v/v) FBS (Sigma Aldrich) and 10% (v/v) DMSO (Sigma Aldrich). Plasma was

collected and stored separately at -80°C. B cells were enriched from PBMCs with

CD19 microbeads (Miltenyi Biotec). $CD19^+$ cells were stained with anti-human

AF700-CD20 (BD), APC-IgG (BD), PE-Cy-7-IgD (BD), FITC-IgM (BD), PerCP-Cy5.5

(BD) or PE-CD27 (BD) and DAPI (Thermo Fischer). $CD20^+IgG^+$ or

$CD20^+IgD^+IgM^+CD27^-IgG^-$ B cells were sorted into FBS (Sigma-Aldrich) using a

FACSAria Fusion cell sorter (Becton Dickinson). RNA-Isolation was performed using

the RNeasy Micro Kit (Qiagen) on a QiaCube (Qiagen) instrument.

RT-PCR and next generation sequencing

BCR repertoire sequence data was generated by template-switch RT-PCR. cDNA

was generated from 10 µl RNA according to the SMARTer RACE 5'/3' manual using

SMARTScribe Reverse Transcriptase (Takara) and a self-designed template-switch

oligo (AGGGCAGTCAGTCGCAGNNNNWSNNNNWSNNNNWSGCrGrGrG). cDNA

was diluted with 10 µl Tricine-EDTA buffer (Takara) according to the manual. Heavy

and light chain variable regions were pre-amplified from 5 µl cDNA each by PCR with

1 µM forward primer (CTGATACGATTCACGCTAGGGCAGTCAGTCGCAG) and

0.33   µM   constant   region-specific   reverse   primers   (IgM:

ATGGAGTCGGGAAGGAAGTC,   IgG: AGGTGTGCACGCCGCTGGTC,   IgK:

GGTGACTTCGCAGGCGTAG,   IgL: GCCGCGTACTTGTTGTTGC)   in   a   30   µl

reaction with Q5 DNA polymerase (New England Biolabs). Cycling conditions were

one cycle 98°C/30 s, four cycles 98°C/10 s and 72°C/30 s, four cycles 98°C/10 s,

62°C/30 s (IgG/IgM) or 68°C(IgK/IgL)/30 s, and 72°C/30 s, as well as a final

extension cycle at 72°C/5 min. PCR products were purified with a PCR clean-up Kit

(Macherey Nagel) with a 1/6 dilution of NTI binding buffer in RNAse-free water.

Samples were eluted in 15 µl elution buffer (Macherey Nagel). Heavy and light chain

amplicons were enriched from 5 µl purified pre-amplification product by a nested

PCR with 0.33 µM forward primer (IgG: NNNNNCACGCTAGGGCAGTCAG; IgM:

NNNNNNCACGCTAGGGCAGTCAG; IgK/IgL: NNNNCACGCTAGGGCAGTCAG)

and   0.33   µM   nested   reverse   primers   (IgG:

NNNNNSGATGGGCCCTTGGTGGARGC;   IgM:

NNNNGGTTGGGGCGGATGCACTCC;   IgK:

NNNNNNGGGAAGATGAAGACAGATGGT,   IgL:

NNNNNNGGGYGGGAACAGAGTGACC) with Q5 DNA Polymerase (New England

Biolabs) in a 100 µl reactions. PCR conditions were one cycle 98°C/30 s, five cycles

98°C/10 s and 72°C/30 s, five cycles 98°C/10 s and 70°C/30 s, 17 cycles 98°C/10 s,

68°C/30 s (IgG/IgM) or 62°C(IgK/IgL)/30 s, and 72°C/30 s, one final extension cycle

at 72°C/5 min. Amplicons were separated on a 1% Agarose gel, purified with a PCR

and Gel Clean Up Kit (Macherey Nagel) and subjected to library preparation and

Illumina MiSeq 2 x 300 bp sequencing (v3) at the Cologne Center for Genomics

sequencing core facility.

NGS data processing and sequence annotation

Data pre-processing was performed with a Python (v.3.6)-based pipeline, including

python packages BioPython (v.1.78), pandas (v.0.23.4), Numpy (v.1.19.2), Matplotlib

(v.3.3.4), and Levensthein (v.0.12.0). Raw NGS reads were filtered for a mean Phred

score of 25 and read-lengths of at least 250 bp. Reads were annotated with IgBLAST

(81) to identify read-orientation and CDR3 sequence. Reads were then grouped by

the UMI and wrongly assigned reads (collisions) were identified by comparison of V

gene calls and a second 18-nucleotide molecular identifier within the CDR3. Reads

were then aligned with Clustal Omega (82, 83) and consensus sequences were

generated by taking into account the quality score-weighted base-calls for each

position. The 2x 300pb consensus read pairs were then aligned and combined using

the AssemblePairs.py script form the pRESTO toolkit with a minimal overlap of 6

nucleotides (84). Annotation of pre-processed reads was performed by using BLAST

(v.2.9) and IgBLAST(v.1.13) (81). Reference templates for all functional heavy and

light chain V(D)J genes were retrieved from the IMGT database (85, 86) (265 IGHV,

30 IGHD, 13 IGHJ, 66 IGKV, 9 IGKJ, 70 IGLV, and 7 IGLJ at the time point of this

study). After sequence annotation with IgBLAST, sequences were filtered to include

complete V/J annotations covering at least 250 nucleotides of the V gene as well as

productive sequences (i.e., no STOP codon and in-frame CDR3 recombination, as

determined by IgBLAST) only. To minimize the influence of sequencing and PCR

errors, annotated sequences were only used for downstream analyses, when their UMIs were initially found in at least three reads (high-quality reads). For learning P_{gen} and P_{SHM} models, sequences were additionally filtered out, when they contained gaps (i.e. insertions/deletions).

Antibody selection

Antibody information was retrieved from the CATNAP database (59). At the time of this study, the available antibody dataset comprised 507 entries, from which non-human antibodies, polyclonal antibodies, antibody mixtures, as well as mutants/chimeras and non-antibody proteins were removed to yield a final set of 291 antibodies. The 291 antibodies were tested against different or only partially overlapping viral panels (such as the 12-strain 'global' panel (64) or the 118-strain multi-clade panel (87)), making it difficult to compare them in terms of breadth and potency (88). Of the 291 antibodies, 50 have been tested against the global panel and 19 against the 118 multi-clade panel. As a trade-off between number of antibodies and accuracy of breadth and potency, we selected a subset of 56 strains from the 118 multi-clade panel, which resembles its clade distribution, its tiered categorization, and yields similar values for breadth and potency (**Supplementary Figure 4**, **Supplementary Table 3**). 75 out of 291 antibodies have been tested against this 56 strain panel, are published with complete heavy chain nucleotide sequences (including 69 light chains) and neutralized at least 1 of the 56 strains. Heavy and light chains were annotated with the same IgBLAST/IMGT-based pipeline as the NGS data. Five light chains could not be annotated and were excluded.

Determination of antibody breadth, mean potency and neutralization score

IC_{50} values for individual antibody-virus combinations were derived from the CATNAP

database (59) as the geometric mean of all published IC_{50} values (i.e. from different

studies). IC_{50} values below the detection limit were set to an arbitrary threshold of

100 µg/ml. The mean potency of an antibody against a viral panel was determined by

the geometric mean of all geometric mean IC_{50} values that were below the arbitrary

threshold of 100 µg/ml (also known as the mean potency of all neutralized strains).

Antibody breadth was defined as the percentage of neutralized strains (i.e. geometric

mean IC_{50} above the arbitrary threshold of 100 µg/ml) to the total number of strains

tested and is given as percentage. To determine the combined neutralization score,

we took all IC_{50} values that were below the threshold of 100 µg/ml for each antibody

and sorted them from lowest to highest. We then divided the maximum coverage

(100%) into 56 equally spaced increments (~1.786% coverage per strain), and

assigned cumulative increments to the sorted IC_{50} values, i.e. the lowest IC_{50} is

assigned to a coverage of 1.786%, the second lowest to 3.572%, and so on. Finally

we plotted the $\log_{10}$ of the sorted IC_{50} values against the cumulative coverage and

determined the area under the curve. Low IC_{50} values (i.e. highly potent antibodies)

will increase the area by shifting the curves to the left, while higher breadth will

increase the area by shifting the plateau of the curve to the top. For the ranking of

bNAbs in **Figure 2B**, the neutralization score is given as percentage of the highest

score among the 75 antibodies. For correlation of probabilities and neutralization

(**Figures 2 and 4**), the $\log_{10}$ of the neutralization score was used.

IGoR inference and prediction of bNAb probabilities

Models for the probability of generation (P_{gen}) and somatic hypermutation (P_{SHM})

were learned by using the Inference and Generation Of Repertoires (IGoR) tool (62).

To reduce uncertainty in model inference and focus on comparison between cohorts,

we pooled all productive sequences from all patients in a cohort. Productive

sequences were chosen to explore the effect of possible selection effects on P_{gen} and

P_{SHM} of a given BCR sequence. The somatic hypermutation (SHM) model is 5-mer

based, taking into account the mutated position and its two neighbors on both sides.

The model takes into account the full composition of these 5-mers and is context

dependent. P_{gen} generation models were consistent with models inferred on

previously published repertoires (58, 89) (data not shown). Indels in bNAbs were

reverted to the most likely V and J templates according to the IgBLAST annotation

before model building to improve alignment by IGoR. Masking of indels has no

influence on P_{gen} or P_{SHM}. To test correlations between the neutralization score and

the overall likelihood of seeing a given bNAb, we defined a score S for each bNAb as

$S = c_1 \log_{10} P_{gen} + c_2 \log_{10} P_{SHM}$. Coefficients c_1 and c_2 were determined by linear

regression of score S versus the $\log_{10}$ of neutralization score.

Lineages and trees

After V, D and J annotation, unique sequences were partitioned into lineages. First,

the sequences were grouped into classes of identical V and J genes and equal

CDR3 length. Within each class, lineages were identified using single linkage

clustering with a fixed threshold of 90% CDR3 nucleotide identity. Tree length was

then estimated as the total number of unique mutations found in a given lineage (a

lower bound on the true tree length). For productive lineages of more than 50 unique

sequences tree topologies and branch lengths were inferred using RAxML with the

GTRGAMMA model of nucleotide substitution (90). Germline V and J genes were

provided as an outgroup to aid the inference. To quantify the asymmetry of the

phylogenies within each cohort we examined the distributions of two indices of

imbalance, following (91). We compare the weight of the common ancestor of the

lineage w_{anc} with the weights of its immediate descendants, w_D. The weight of a node

is the number of leaves that stem from it and the ratio w_D/w_{anc} quantifies the

imbalance at the first branching. Additionally, we estimated the distribution of the

ratio of mean terminal branch length to the mean length of all branches.

Quantification and Statistical Analysis

Flow cytometry analysis and quantifications were done with FlowJo10 software.

Statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism (v8), Microsoft Excel for

Mac (v14.7.3), Python (v3.6.8), and R (v4.0.0). For the identification of overlapping

clonotypes in healthy individuals a maximum of one amino acid length difference and

three or less differences in absolute amino acid composition of CDR3s were

considered as similar. To calculate the CDRH3 sequence overlap between replicates

in the control experiment (**Figure 1 C**), a random sample of n=3623 (i.e. the size of

the smallest dataset) was drawn from all unique CDRH3s of each set and the overlap

(i.e. identical CDRH3 sequences) between these random samples was determined.

Sampling and overlap determination was repeated 100 times and the mean overlap

over all iterations was reported. Testing for significant differences between CDR3

length distributions and V gene germline identity distributions (**Figure 1 D** and **E**) was

performed by global Kruskal wallis tests (stats.kruskal, Scipy v.1.5.2) and Dunn post-

hoc tests (posthoc_dunn, scikit_posthocs v. 0.4.0 with 'holm' method for p value

adjustment). To estimate the fraction of spiked-in lymphoma B cells among naive B

cells from a healthy donor (**Supplementary Figure 3**), the pairwise Levenshtein

distance of all re-constituted CDRH3s was determined (python-Levenshtein v.0.12.2)

in comparison to the most frequent cell line CDRH3 (experimentally determined by

sequencing 24 single B cells for each cell line, data not shown). The observed

distance frequencies revealed a bimodal distribution from which all comparisons with

<4 amino acid distance (first peak) were counted as a B cell line CDRH3 and divided

by all comparisons to get the fraction. For cluster analysis of the mixed cell sample

(**Supplementary Figure 3**), a network analysis was performed with the networkx

python package (v.2.2). Each node represents a unique CDRH3. The node size is

proportional to the frequency among all identified CDRH3s and nodes are connected,

if they share at least 75% of their CDRH3 amino acid sequence. Nodes are colored

according to the cell lines if they share at least 75% of the CDRH3 amino acid

sequence with a cell line. Phylogenetic trees of viral panels (**Supplementary Figure**

4) were generated and illustrated from aligned viral sequences from the CATNAP

database (59) with Geneious Prime software (v.2020.2.4, Jukes-Cantor genetic

distance model and Neighbor-Joining method with 100 bootstrap replicates). Testing

for significant differences in mean CDR3 lengths and mean V gene germline

identities (**Figure 3 C** and **D**, **Supplementary Figures 7** and **8**) was performed by

one-way ANOVA (stats.f_oneway, Scipy v.1.5.2) followed by Tukey-HSD post hoc

test (stats.multicomp.pairwise_tukeyhsd, statsmodels v.0.12.2). Differences in V

gene distributions (**Figure 3 B**, **Supplementary Figures 7** and **8**) were investigated

by individual Kruskal-Wallis tests (stats.kruskal, Scipy v.1.5.2) for each V gene with

Bonferroni correction for multiple testing. In the case of significant differences in the

global test, a Dunn post hoc test (posthoc_dunn, scikit_posthocs v.0.4.0 with 'holm'

method for p value adjustment) was performed for subgroup analysis.

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Figure 1

Figure 1: Overall approach and unbiased repertoire sequencing. (**A**) B cells are purified from peripheral blood and total mRNA is isolated. 5' rapid amplification of cDNA ends (5'RACE) is performed to add unique molecular identifiers (UMI) and amplify variable regions. Amplicons are sequenced by 2x300 bp Illumina sequencing and UMIs are exploited for error correction. High-quality sequences are used to learn probabilistic models and predict probabilities of bNAb sequences, which are derived from the CATNAP database. Correlation of probabilities and neutralization allows for identifying highly probable and potent bNAbs. (**B**) Biological replicate samples of 100,000 IgG⁺ B cells were isolated from three healthy donors for sequencing pipeline validation. A_2 represents a technical replicate of A (i.e., the same PCR product, for which library preparation and sequencing have been performed independently). (**C**) Overlap of unique CDRH3s between replicates from the samples in (B). Upper panel shows the total number of overlapping CDRH3s between biological and technical replicates. Lower panel shows mean CDRH3 overlap across all samples after 100 iterations of subsampling n=3623 CDRH3s from each dataset. (**D**) CDRH3 length distributions from samples in (B). Upper panel shows overlayed distributions for biological replicates. Lower panel shows p-values from Dunn post-hoc test after global Kruskal Wallis test. (**E**) V_H gene germline identity distributions from samples in (B). As for (D), upper panel shows overlayed distributions for biological replicates and lower panel p-values from Dunn post-hoc test after global Kruskal Wallis test. (**F**) Cohort sex and age distributions of n=57 healthy individuals for IgG⁺ repertoire sequencing. (**G**) Total and mean number of raw reads, annotated reads, and identical sequences (identified by the same UMI) that were found at least three times. (**H**) V gene distributions, mean CDR3 lengths and mean V gene germline identities for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains of all 57 individuals. CDR: Complementarity determining region; SHM: Somatic hypermutation; HC: heavy chain; KC: kappa chain; LC: lambda chain.

Figure 2: Neutralization efficacy and sequence characteristics of broadly neutralizing antibodies targeting HIV-1. (**A**) bNAb epitopes on the HIV-1 envelope spike. MPER: membrane proximal external region; CD4bs: CD4 binding site; FP: fusion peptide. (**B**) Breadth, geometric mean half inhibitory concentration (IC_{50}) of neutralized strains, and normalized neutralization score for 75 bNAbs that have been tested against the same 56 HIV-1 strains. (**C**) Heavy chain V gene frequencies for the selected bNAbs. (**D**) Heavy chain CDR3 length distribution for the selected bNAbs in amino acids (aa). (**E**) Heavy chain V gene germline identity distribution for selected bNAbs. Controls in (C), (D) and (E) refer to sequence features from productive sequences of the 57 healthy individuals (Figure 1 F-H). (**F**) Heavy chain P_{gen} and P_{SHM} distribution for selected bNAbs derived by a model learned on productive sequences from 57 healthy individuals. Controls represent P_{gen} and P_{SHM} distributions for productive sequences from the 57 healthy individuals. (**G**) Correlation plots of bNAb neutralization scores against heavy chain P_{gen}, P_{SHM} and a combined probability score $S = c_1\log_{10}(P_{gen}) + c_2\log_{10}(P_{SHM})$, which was derived by a linear regression (dashed line) with $c_1 = 4.0\times10^{-03}$ and $c_2 = 3.2\times10^{-03}$. Spearman correlation coefficients r_s and p values are given in the figure. Correlation coefficient and p value from linear regression for S are $r = -0.446$ and $p = 6.031\times10^{-5}$. Two near pan-neutralizing antibodies (N6 and 561-01-18) are highlighted by black outlines, two antibodies that have been used for structure-guided vaccine approaches (VRC01 and BG18) are highlighted by 'x'. Gradients on the right and bottom show directions for increasing neutralization activity and generation probability, respectively.

Figure 3

Figure 3: IgG heavy chain repertoire characteristics of healthy and chronically infected individuals. (**A**) Cohort overview with age and sex distributions. Single dots in age distributions represent individuals, bar graphs and error bars depict mean cohort age with standard deviations. (**B**) V gene distributions for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains. V genes were ordered by descending frequencies according to the healthy control group. Bars depict mean frequencies across individuals for each cohort, error bars show standard deviations. (**C**) Mean CDR3 length distributions for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains in amino acids (aa). Upper panel shows the mean CDR3 length distributions across individuals for each cohort as solid lines and standard deviations as shaded areas. Lower panel shows mean CDR3 amino acid length as dots for each individual and cohort statistics as box plots on top. (**D**) Mean V gene germline nucleotide identity distributions for heavy, kappa, and lambda chains. Representation of mean distributions (upper panel) and individual means (lower panel) as in C. One-way ANOVA with Tukey-HSD post-hoc test was performed on the means in (C) and (D). (**E**) Representative examples of lineages for the different cohorts based on heavy chain sequences. (**F**) Skewedness distribution of lineage trees (left panel, dashed line = neutral) and mean terminal/mean branch length distribution for lineage trees. (**G**) Lineage size distribution for the three cohorts. (**H**) Lineage diversity determined by Gini-Simpson index and entropy. CTRL = healthy control.

Figure 4: Probability distributions and bNAb probability scores across cohorts. (**A**) P_{gen} distribution as well as mean and median P_{gen} for heavy and light chains derived from healthy control (CTRL), HIV-1-infected, and HCV-infected cohorts. (**B**) P_{SHM} distributions for heavy and light chains as in (A). (**C**) Correlation plots of P_{gen} for neutralizing antibody heavy, kappa, and lambda chains derived from either healthy control (x-axis) or chronically infected cohorts (HIV-1, HCV, y-axis). (**D**) Correlation plots of P_{SHM} as in (C). Highlighted antibodies in (C) and (D) deviate >25% of the range of all observed values in comparison to the healthy cohort. (**E**) Correlation plot for bNAb heavy and light chain probabilty scores derived from HCV or HIV-1 cohorts (x-axis) in comparison to healthy control (CTRL, y-axis). Cohort-specific P_{gen} and P_{SHM} of bNAbs were used to calculate the bNAb probability scores S using coefficients from the linear regression on healthy individuals (Figure 3G). The dashed line represents identity. (**F**) Comparison as in (E) with the HIV-1 cohort stratified by antiretroviral therapy (on ART, n=22; off ART, n=12). (**G**) Comparison as in (E) with the HIV-1 cohort stratified by serum neutralization breadth against the global HIV-1 panel into high (≥66%, n=8), intermediate (≥33%, n=5), or low (>0%, n=16) breadth and no neutralization (0 %, n=4) to recalculate P_{gen} and P_{SHM} of bNAbs for these cohorts. Serum neutralization data for one individual was not available. ART: anti-retroviral therapy. Numbers in brackets in (C - G) indicate bNAbs for which P_{gen}/P_{SHM} and scores could be inferred.