Determining 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 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.

INTRODUCTION

Each day, the human body is confronted with numerous pathogens that need to be eliminated to prevent severe diseases. The adaptive immune system is able to cope with the plethora of different antigenic structures by employing a diverse repertoire of lymphocytes, each of which expresses its own unique immune receptor as a consequence of V(D)J recombination during lymphopoiesis *(1)*. B cell receptors (BCRs) further diversify during the process of affinity maturation by somatic hypermutation (SHM) *(2, 3)*. Both processes lead to the generation of antibodies with high affinity that can target and neutralize infectious pathogens.

Despite the diversity and flexibility of the BCR repertoire, some pathogens can evolve quickly and outpace the adaptive immune system. The human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1), for example, proliferates into antigenically diverse quasispecies within a short timeframe 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) could have been isolated (reviewed in *(6–9)*). Although the autologous virus is typically resistant against the hosts bNAbs, they can be used to efficiently prevent and treat heterologous HIV-1 as well as chimeric simian-(S)HIV-1 infections in animal models *(10–15)*, or to suppress viremia in HIV-1-infected individuals without notable adverse events or side effects *(16–25)*. Recent prevention studies with the bNAb VRC01 could not demonstrate a higher overall protection against HIV-1 acquisition in humans *(26)*. However, subgroup analyses of VRC01-sensitive HIV-1 strains revealed that infections with VRC01-sensitive HIV-1 strains were significantly reduced. This translates into an estimated prevention efficacy of about 75% in this subgroup and is the first proof of concept that bNAbs are in principle able to prevent infections in humans *(27)*. Importantly, technical advances and global efforts to screen thousands of HIV-1-infected individuals have recently promoted the isolation of nearly pan-neutralizing bNAbs *(28–30)*. This next generation of bNAbs, engineered bi- or trispecific antibodies *(31–34)*, and combination therapies composed of complementary bNAbs *(20, 21, 24)* have the potential to constrict viral escape as well as resistance and therefore to improve future approaches to treat and prevent HIV-1 infections.

Contrary to the progress in passive antibody administration, all efforts to induce highly potent bNAbs through vaccination have failed so far. One commonality across bNAbs is their tendency to accumulate unusual sequence properties, including a high number of somatic mutations *(28–30, 35–38)*, insertions/deletions *(30, 35, 36, 38, 39)*, distinct V_H gene segment use *(40–42)*, or exceptionally long complementarity determining regions (CDRs) *(37)*. Notably, long CDRH3 regions as well as the usage of the V_H gene segment 4-34 have previously been associated with self-reactive antibodies in autoimmune diseases *(43–45)* and several bNAbs proved to be auto- and polyreactive *(46, 47)*. Since autoreactive B cells are stringently counter-selected during B cell development in healthy individuals *(45)*, it has been speculated that the development of certain bNAbs is normally blocked by immune checkpoints that are

bypassed during chronic infection *(48)*. In line with this, it has been demonstrated that
BCRs of chronically Hepatitis C virus (HCV)-infected individuals show increased
CDRH3s lengths in comparison to healthy controls *(49)*. In addition, many potent HIV-1
bNAbs have been isolated after several years of chronic infection *(30, 42, 50)*,
suggesting that a prolonged virus-antibody co-evolution within the HIV-1-infected host is
a requirement for their induction. Guided vaccine design builds on this idea and
attempts to mimic virus-antibody co-evolution by serial immunizations with varying
immunogens *(51, 52)*. However, it remains to be defined which bNAbs have the highest
chance to be elicited and should thus be selected for these strategies. In this regard,
precursor frequencies for VRC01-class bNAbs and BG18 have previously been
estimated in healthy individuals by CDRH3 similarity searches *(52–54)* and probabilities
for mutations at distinct positions in bNAbs have been estimated *(55)*. However,
systematic approaches to assess the combined probabilities of V(D)J recombination
and overall mutation patterns of bNAbs are lacking. Consequently, there is currently no
comprehensive analysis that compares the overall generation probabilities of bNAbs
among each other and determines the impact of chronic infection on these probabilities.

Here, we performed unbiased next-generation sequencing (NGS) and learned
probabilistic models for somatic point mutations and V(D)J recombinations on B cell
receptor 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 of a healthy control cohort to infer antibody
sequence statistics with high confidence (**Fig. 1A**). 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, **fig. S1**) and developed a 5'-rapid
amplification of cDNA ends (RACE)-based sequencing protocol that includes unique
molecular identifiers (UMIs) for computational error correction (**Fig. 1A**).

To test whether this sequencing approach yields sufficient high-quality reads, we
analyzed 100,000 IgG$^+$ B cells in biological duplicates from three different healthy blood
donors each (**Fig. 1B**). 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 (see **fig. S2** for UMI copy
number distribution, **table S1** for complete sequencing statistics, and Methods section
for details on quality filtering). 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%, **Fig. 1C**). Moreover, repertoire features such as CDRH3 length distribution
(**Fig. 1D**) or V_H gene germline identity (**Fig. 1E**) were indistinguishable between
biological replicates, but significantly differed across individuals. To estimate the
resolution of the sequencing approach, we spiked in different concentrations (0.01 to
10%) of two monoclonal IgM positive B cell lymphoma (BCL) cell lines into naive B cells
from a healthy donor (**fig. S3**). Plotting the pairwise Levenshtein distance between all
CDRH3s in the sample and the B cell line-derived CDRH3s reveals a bimodal
distribution. Spiked-in B cells, which correspond to the first peak of this distribution,
could be detected at all concentrations, including as few as 10 in a total of 100,000
cells. Concluding that the sequencing pipeline yields reproducible and representative
statistics, we collected blood samples from a healthy reference cohort of 57 individuals
that comprised 54% male and 46% female donors with a mean age of 33 years (**Fig.
1F**). 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 (**Fig. 1G**, **table S2**). Although sequence
features were predictive of the repertoire's origin (**Fig. 1, D and E**), they are mostly
conserved between individuals on a global level (**Fig. 1H**). 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 (**fig.
S4** and **table S3**) from the CATNAP (Compile, Analyze and Tally NAb Panels) database
(59).

The 75 antibodies target various sites on the envelope spike-protein (**Fig. 2A,**
adapted from *(7, 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 (**Fig. 2B**, black line, **table S4**; see method section for details).
Overall, the 75 bNAbs show broad distributions for V_H gene usage (**Fig. 2C**), CDRH3
lengths (**Fig. 2D**), and V_H gene germline identities (**Fig. 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 (**Fig. 2, C to E**, blue bars). V2-apex
antibodies, on the other hand, typically exhibit exceptionally long CDRH3s, but are also
less mutated (**Fig. 2, D and E**, yellow bars). Both classes of antibodies can be found
among the top neutralizing antibodies (**Fig. 2B**).

While long CDRH3s and high levels of somatic hypermutations 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 strongly
bias V(D)J recombination and somatic hypermutation *(61)*. To provide more
comprehensive estimates for the probability of generating a given bNAb CDRH3 (P_{gen})
and accumulating a unique pattern of point mutations (P_{SHM}), we applied the Inference
and Generation Of Repertoires (IGoR) tool *(62)*. 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. By learning both models on the quality-
filtered productive IgG sequences of all 57 healthy individuals, we determined P_{gen} and
P_{SHM} for the 75 bNAb heavy chain sequences (**Fig. 2F**, **table S5**). 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 (**Fig. 2D and E)**. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between these
sequence features and the probabilities (**fig. S5**), 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 determinants such as
biases in V(D)J recombination and SHM (**fig. S5**).

Given the broad distributions of P_{gen} and P_{SHM} for the different bNAbs, we asked
whether neutralization efficacy is correlated with these probabilities, and whether we
can identify highly potent bNAbs that are more likely to be generated than other ones.
The neutralization score is not correlated with P_{gen} but slightly correlated with P_{SHM}
alone for the 75 bNAbs (**Fig. 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 (**Fig. 2B**, right panel, **table S5**) 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 the identification of bNAbs that are highly potent, but
easier to generate than other bNAbs (**Fig. 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 bNAb light chains (**fig. S6**, **table S5**).

We conclude that bNAbs are in general unlikely outcomes of the B cell
development and that a linear combination of the logarithms of P_{gen} and P_{SHM} is highly

predictive of the neutralization capacity with the overall tendency of less likely bNAbs to
be the most potent ones.

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 functionalities on several levels (reviewed in *(63)*), we wondered whether and to
what extent they influence memory IgG B cell receptor 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 control repertoires (**Fig. 3A**).

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 (**tables S6 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 (**Fig. 3, B to D**), although HCV-infected
individuals showed slightly longer mean CDRH3 lengths (**Fig. 3C**). Similarly, no obvious
differences were observed in B cell lineage tree structures (**Fig. 3E**) with respect to
skewedness (**Fig. 3F**), size distribution (**Fig. 3G**), or diversity (**Fig. 3H**) across the three
cohorts (see methods section for details). 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 (**fig. S7**). 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 between the
stratified subgroups, although the untreated subgroup contains one individual with
noticeably less somatic mutations (i.e. a higher mean V gene germline identity), which is
mainly responsible for the visible shift in the V gene germline identity distributions (**Fig.
3D**, **fig. S7**). 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 (**table S8**). Of
note, broad serum neutralization is found in ART-naive (untreated) as well as ART-
treated individuals of our cohort (**table S8**). 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 (**fig. S8**). 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 in this study.

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 heavy chain 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 (**Fig. 4A**). Repertoire P_{SHM} distributions on the other hand were slightly shifted towards less negative values for HCV- and HIV-1-infected individuals (**Fig. 4B**), which closely resembles the increase in V_H gene germline identity (i.e. less somatic mutations) that we already observed in the repertoire data (**Fig. 3D**). We speculated that marginal differences in these distributions could still influence the probability for a 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 (**table S5**). 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} (**Fig. 4, C and D**). There are a few bNAb heavy and light chain probabilities that deviate by more than 25% of the range of all observed values in comparison to the healthy cohort (**Fig. 4, C and D**, black outlines). 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 induction 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 compare the overall probability of the individual bNAbs between the three cohorts, we 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 (**table S5**). As already suggested by the highly similar P_{gen}/P_{SHM} values, combined probability scores for bNAbs were almost identical between healthy and infected individuals (**Fig. 4E**). Despite the slight differences in the repertoire characteristics in untreated individuals (compare **fig. S7**), treatment status had no influence on bNAb probability scores (**Fig. 4F**). Similarly, we found no global change in probability scores in repertoires stratified 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, **Fig. 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 *(11, 12, 14, 65)* and are considered promising tools for next-generation 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 *(7, 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 B cell receptor 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 the frequencies of indels 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 a long
CDRH3 to penetrate the envelope glycan shield *(71–73)*, but also certain CD4bs
antibodies with average CDR3 lengths that represent unlikely V(D)J recombinations.
These results support the hypothesis that bNAbs are rare, because the sum of their
sequence features represents unlikely events in B cell development.

Previously, ongoing affinity maturation as well as the mean frequency of somatic
mutations have been correlated with neutralization breadth and potency of bNAb
lineages in HIV-1-infected individuals *(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 pattern of somatic
mutations (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 receive 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
analysis on HIV-1-neutralizing antibodies suggests that bNAbs are generally 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

Blood donors and 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).
Subsequently, the eluate was buffered in 0.1 M Tris (pH = 8.0). Buffer was exchanged
to PBS using Amicon 30 kDa spin membranes (Millipore). The concentration of purified
IgGs was determined by UV/Vis spectroscopy using Nanodrop (A280) and samples
were stored at 4°C.

Serum IgG virus neutralization tests for HIV-1-infected individuals

Neutralization assays with serum IgG from HIV-1-infected against the 12-strain "global"
virus panel, were performed as previously described *(30, 80)*. In brief, 12 HIV-1
pseudovirus strains were mixed with 1:2 serial dilutions of purified IgG (1 mg/ml final
starting concentration, 8 dilutions) and incubated for 1 hour at 37°C. After incubation,
10^4 TZM-bl cells were added per well on a 96-well plate in 250 µl medium
supplemented with DEAE-dextran at a final concentration of 10 µg/ml. This mixture was
incubated for 2 days at 37°C and 5% CO_2. Before adding 100 µl luciferase assay
reagent to the well 150 µl culture supernatant was removed. After 2 min incubation the
mixture was transferred to a microtiter assay plate and luminescence signal was
captured using a luminometer (Berthold TriStar^2 LB942) with relative luminescence
units (RLUs) as output unit. To assess the 50% inhibitory concentration (IC$_{50}$), first, the
background signal was determined using non-infected TZM-bl cells and subtracted.
Finally, 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

Collection of peripheral blood samples was performed with syringes pre-filled with
Heparin-Natrium. PBMCs were isolated by standard density gradient centrifugation
using Histopaque separation medium (Sigma Aldrich) and Leucosep cell tubes (Greiner
Bio-one) according to the manufacturer's instructions. 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. CD19+ B cells were selected from PBMCs by
magnetic-activated cell sorting (MACS) using CD19 microbeads (Miltenyi Biotec). For
cell sorting, 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). For each individual, 100,000 CD20$^+$IgG$^+$ and 100,000
CD20$^+$IgD$^+$IgM$^+$CD27$^-$IgG$^-$ B cells were sorted into FBS-coated (Sigma-Aldrich) 2 mL
tubes using a FACSAria Fusion cell sorter (Becton Dickinson). After the sort the cells
were centrifuged for 5 minutes at 400 x g to remove the supernatant. Cell pellets were
placed on dry-ice or frozen at -80°C before RNA-Isolation was performed using the
RNeasy Micro Kit (Qiagen) on a QiaCube (Qiagen) instrument and RNA was eluted in
25 µl RNAse free water.

RT-PCR and next generation sequencing

B cell receptor repertoire sequence data was generated by an unbiased template-
switch-based approach. cDNA was generated from 10 µl RNA according to the
SMARTer RACE 5'/3' manual using the SMARTScribe Reverse Transcriptase (Takara)
and a self-designed template-switch oligo
(AGGGCAGTCAGTCGCAGNNNNWSNNNNWSNNNNWSGCrGrGrG) including an 18-
nucleotide unique molecular identifier (UMI) in a 20 µl batch. 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 of a universal
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) according to the manual with the cDNA
being initially filled upt with a 1/6 dilution of NTI buffer in RNAse-free water to remove
primers and low molecular weight products. Samples were eluted in 15 µl pre-warmed
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. For thermocycling, reactions were split into 2x50 µl and run on a thermocycler (Applied Biosystems) with 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, as well as a final extension cycle at 72°C/5 min. PCR amplicons separated on a 1% Agarose gel and purified with a PCR and Gel Clean Up Kit (Macherey Nagel), eluted in 23 µl elution buffer (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.1.1.5), 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 80 were listed as polyclonal antibodies or antibody mixtures and excluded from further analyses. The remaining set of 427 entries required further polishing to remove non-human and engineered antibodies. To this end, antibody entries were filtered to exclude any of the keywords 'llama', 'chimeric', 'mouse', 'rabbit', 'bispecific', 'trispecific', 'IgG3C' in the 'LANL comments' column or any '/', '-LS', or 'mutant' in the entry name. Finally, the remaining mutants/chimeras and non-antibody proteins '10-1074GM', '10-1074V', '10E8v4', '10E8v4-5R-100cF', '45-46m2', '45-46m25', '45-46m28', '45-46m7', 'sCD4', 'CD4-Ig', 'gVRC-H1dC38-VRC01L', 'iMab', 'm66-G30K', 'm66-S28H', 'm66-S28H-G30K', 'm66-S28H-G30K-S31K', 'm66-S31K', 'm66-Y100eW', 'NIH45-46G54F', 'NIH45-46G54W',

'NIH45-46G54Y', 'NIH45-46WPY', 'NIH45-46WY', 'PGT121GM', 'VRC34YD.01', 'VRC34YD.02', 'VRC34YD.03', 'VRC34YD.04', 'VRC34YD.05', 'VRC34YD.06', 'VRC34YD.07', 'VRC38.12', 'VRC38.13', 'VRC38.14' were manually removed to yield a final set of 291 antibodies.

Although several standard virus panels such as the 12-strain 'global' panel *(64)* and the 118-strain multi-clade panel *(87)* have already been established, there is currently no consensus panel. As a consequence, the 291 antibodies were tested against different or only partially overlapping viral panels, making it difficult to compare them in terms of breadth and potency *(88)*. Neutralization data against the global and the 118 multi-clade panel were downloaded separately from the CATNAP database. The database outputs antibody information for a given panel, if at least one strain of this panel has been analyzed by a study. Missing values for virus neutralization data (i.e., viruses against which no assay has been performed in any study) are marked with '-'. To identify the number of antibodies that have been tested against the complete panels, we excluded any of the 291 antibodies that had missing values ('-') against one or more viral strain of the respective panel (i.e. 19 antibodies remaining for the 118-strain panel and 50 antibodies remaining for the global 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 (**fig. S4**, **table S3**). 89 out of 291 antibodies have been tested against the 56 strain panel. 75 out of the 89 antibodies were published with complete heavy chain nucleotide sequences (covering the full V region, including the CDR3), neutralized at least 1 of the 56 strains, and were therefore used for the downstream analyses. For 69 out of the 75 antibodies, complete light chain nucleotide sequences were published. Heavy and light chains of the 75 bNAbs were annotated with the same IgBLAST/IMGT-based pipeline as the NGS data (64 of the 69 light chains could be properly annotated and were used for analyses).

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 (**Fig. 2B**), the neutralization score is given as percentage of the highest score among the 75 antibodies. For correlation of probabilities and neutralization (**Fig. 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 analyses

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 (**Fig. 1C**), 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 (**Fig. 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 (**fig. S3**), 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 (**fig. S3**), 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 (**fig. S4**) 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 (**Fig. 3, C** and **D**, **fig. S7 and S8**) 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 (**Fig. 3B**, **fig. S7 and S8**) 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.

Supplementary Materials

Figs. S1 to S8

Tables S1 to S7

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1208   **Figures**:

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Fig. 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. A₂ 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.

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Fig. 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 $c_1 = 4.0 \times 10^{-03}$ and $c_2 = 3.2 \times 10^{-03}$. 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 $p = 6.031 \times 10^{-5}$. 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.

Fig. 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.

Fig. 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 probability 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.