

Topological Surveillance of Recurrent Mutations in SARS-CoV-2

CoVtRec report as of 24 March 2023

Michael Bleher^{2*}, Lukas Hahn^{2*}, Maximilian Neumann^{*}, Samuel Braun³, Holger Obermaier³, Mehmet Soysal³, René Caspart³, Andreas Ott^{1,2*}

¹Mathematics Department, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany

²Mathematical Institute, Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany

³Steinbuch Centre for Computing, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany

*Correspondence: mbleher@mathi.uni-heidelberg.de (M.B.)
lhahn@mathi.uni-heidelberg.de (L.H.)
neumann.mn@icloud.com (M.N.)
andreas.ott@kit.edu (A.O.)

Abstract

The appearance of new variants in the evolution of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 underlines the importance of being able to quickly identify mutations that could confer some adaptive advantage to the virus, such as immune evasion or higher infectivity. Here we apply CoVtRec, a fast and scalable early warning system based on Topological Data Analysis, for the identification and surveillance of emerging potentially adaptive mutations in the ongoing evolution of SARS-CoV-2. CoVtRec is based on a new topological approach to the study of recurrent mutations in large genomic datasets developed in [1].

Results

We analyzed topological signals for the ongoing convergent evolution of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 on the Spike gene from 24 September 2021 until 24 March 2023. To that end, we performed a topological recurrence analysis for a curated alignment of 13,766,674 high-quality SARS-CoV-2 Spike gene sequences shared via GISAID, the global data science initiative [2, 3]. For each Spike mutation we computed its topological recurrence index (tRI) and the corresponding time series analysis chart. The topological recurrence index is a topological measure for the potential adaptiveness of a given mutation (see [1, 4] for details).

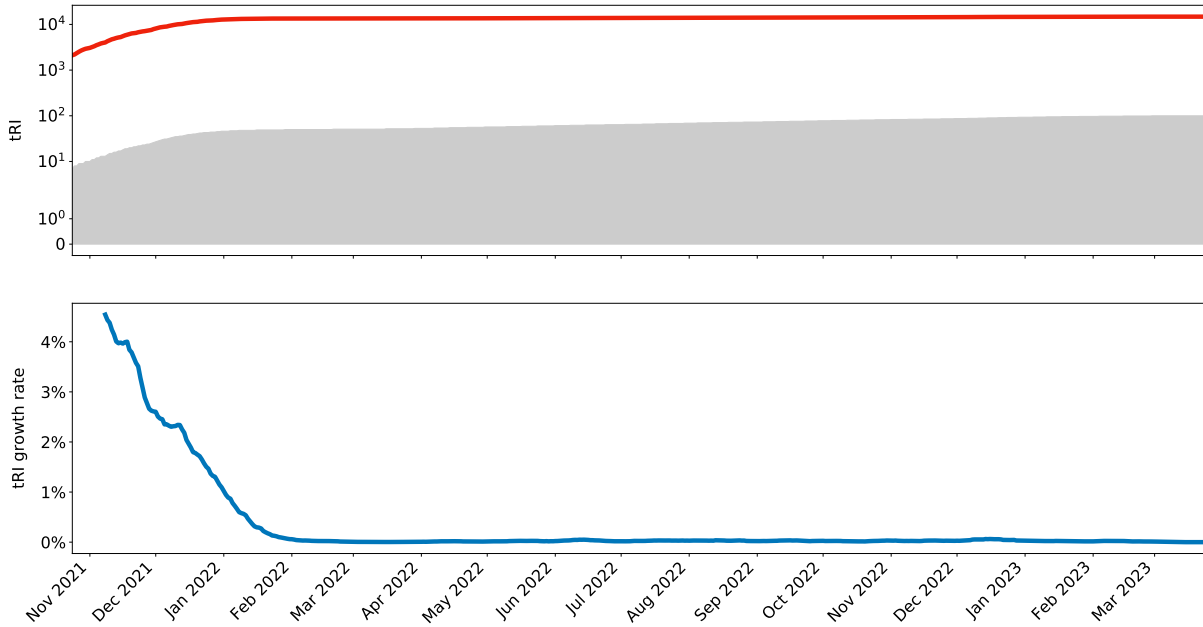
We present a list featuring the top ten amino acid variations on the Spike gene that show strongest topological recurrence index as of 24 March 2023 (see [Table 1](#)). Here signals with $tRI \geq 100$ are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). It was demonstrated in [1] that these mutations are potentially adaptive and might therefore appear in future variants. We also present time series analysis charts (see [Figure 1](#)) showing (i) the development of the topological signal as well as its significance over time, (ii) major lineages containing the mutation, and (iii) the date from which on the topological signal became significant.

SAAV	tRI	notable variants
G142D	14787	Delta, Omicron, Kappa
T95I	5611	Delta, Omicron, Iota, Kappa, Mu
R346T	5185	Omicron
L5F	5135	Iota
N440K	4227	Omicron
R408S	3833	Omicron
D950N	2674	Delta, Mu
K417N	2148	Beta, Omicron, Mu
A1020S	2125	
V1264L	1813	Omicron

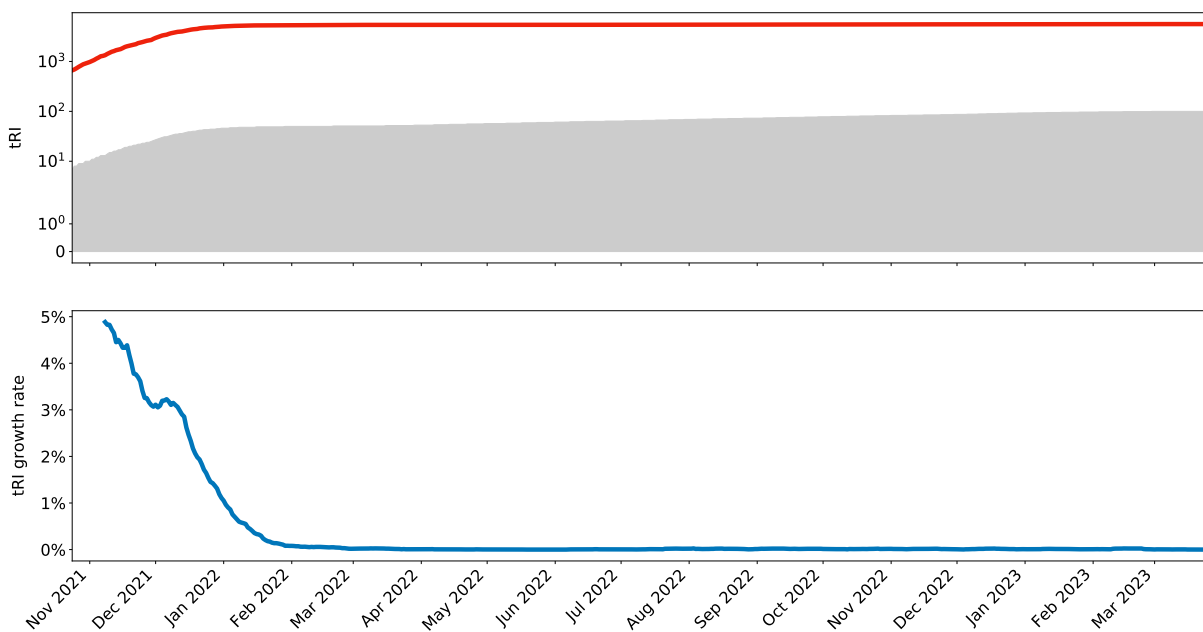
Table 1. The top ten amino acid changes on the Spike gene showing strongest topological recurrence index as of 24 March 2023. For a given mutation, the table displays its topological recurrence index (tRI) and notable variants containing the mutation.

Figure 1. Time series analysis charts for the mutations listed in [Table 1](#). Each chart shows the topological recurrence index (tRI, in red) and the tRI growth rate (in blue) from 24 September 2021 until 24 March 2023. In each chart, in the upper diagram the shaded region marks the level of significance.

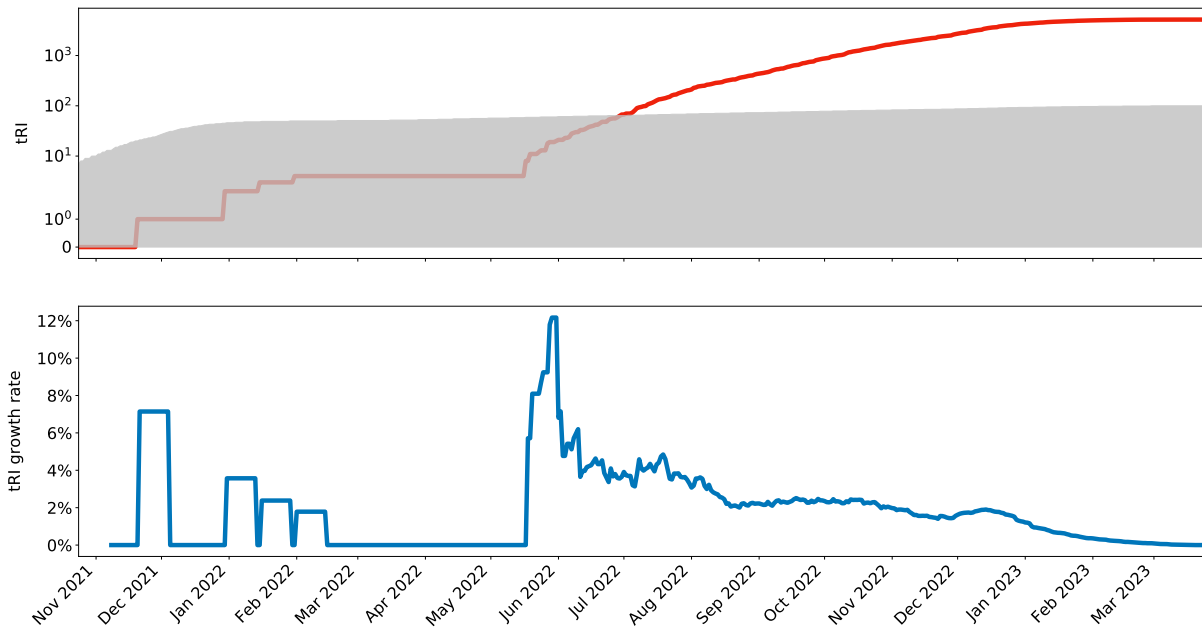
S:G142D | contained in Delta, Omicron, Kappa



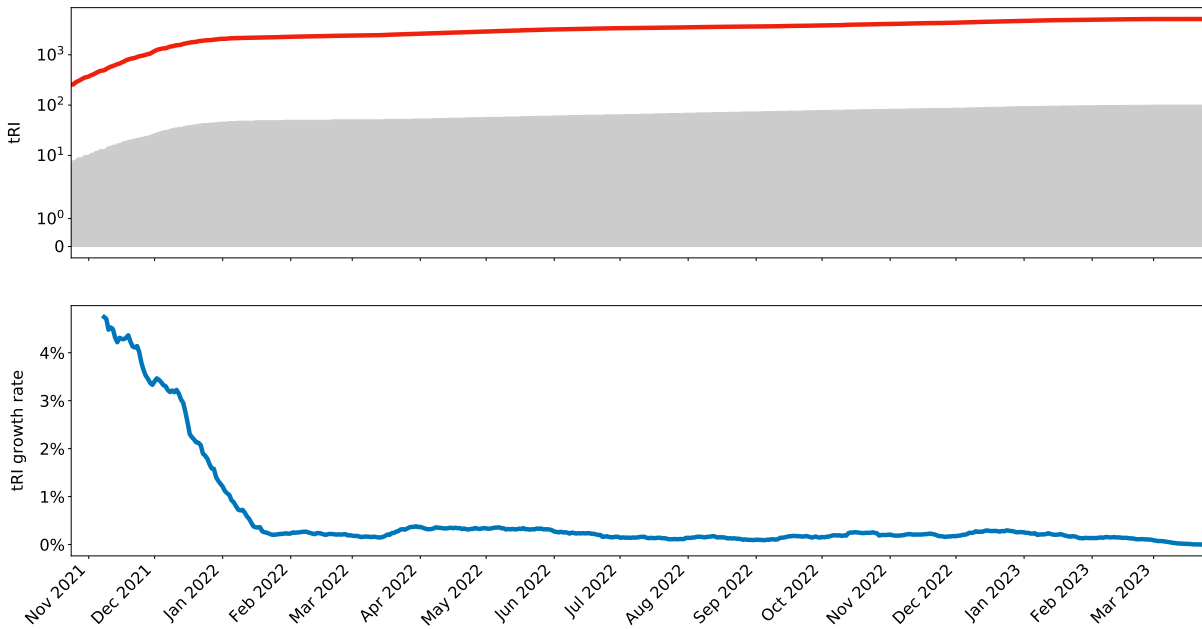
S:T95I | contained in Delta, Omicron, Iota, Kappa, Mu



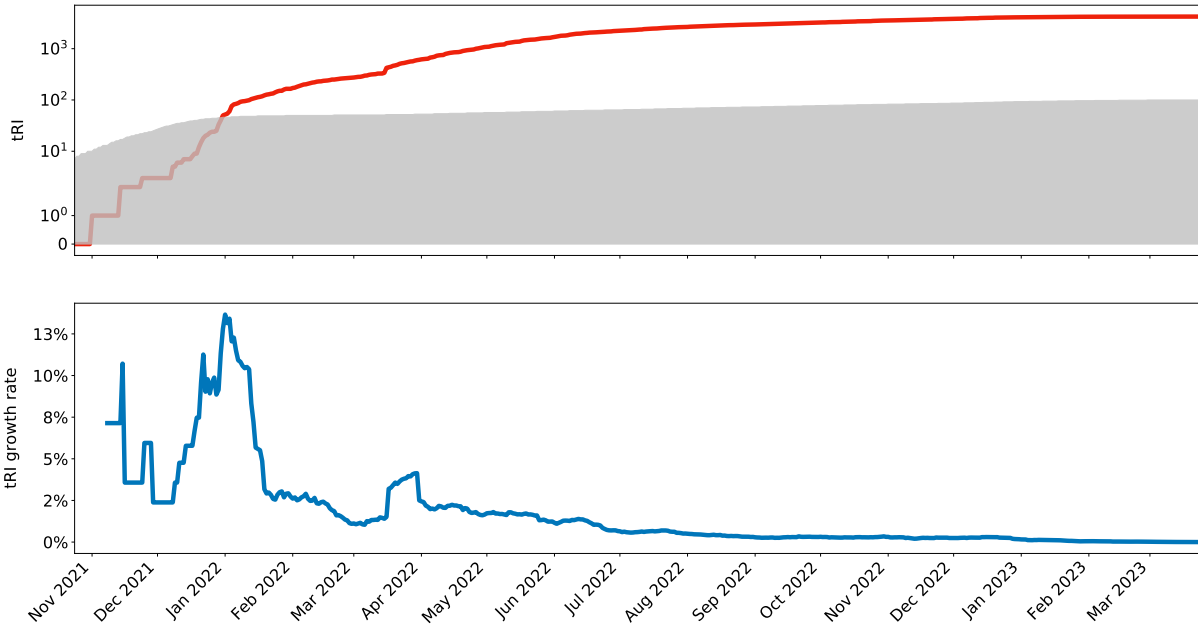
S:R346T | contained in Omicron



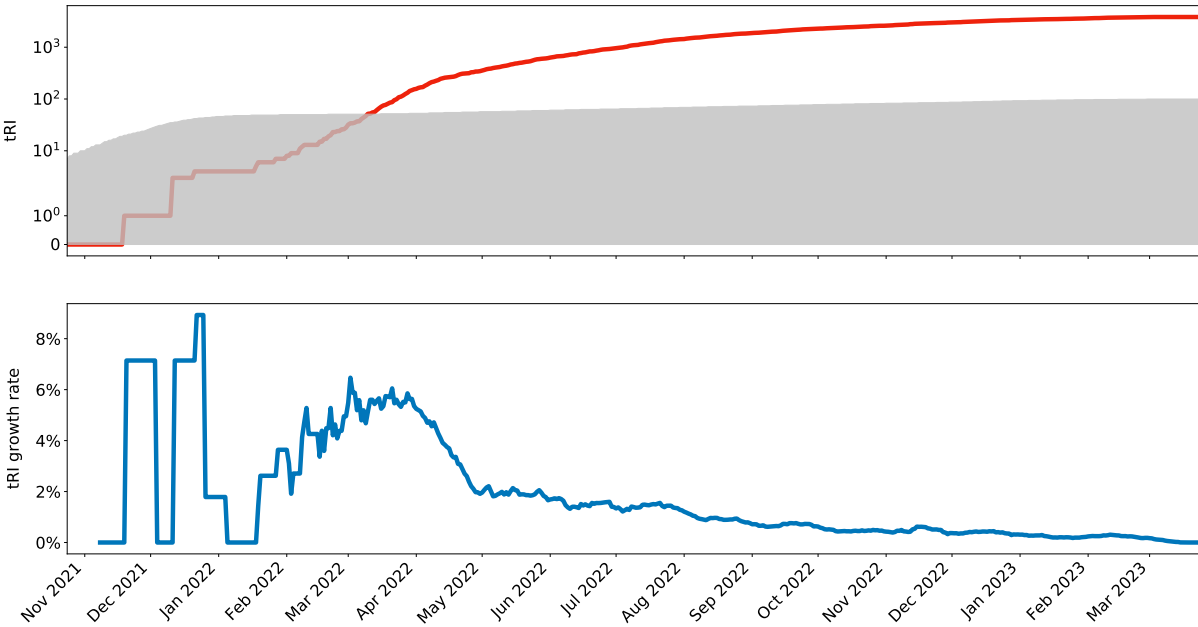
S:L5F | contained in Iota



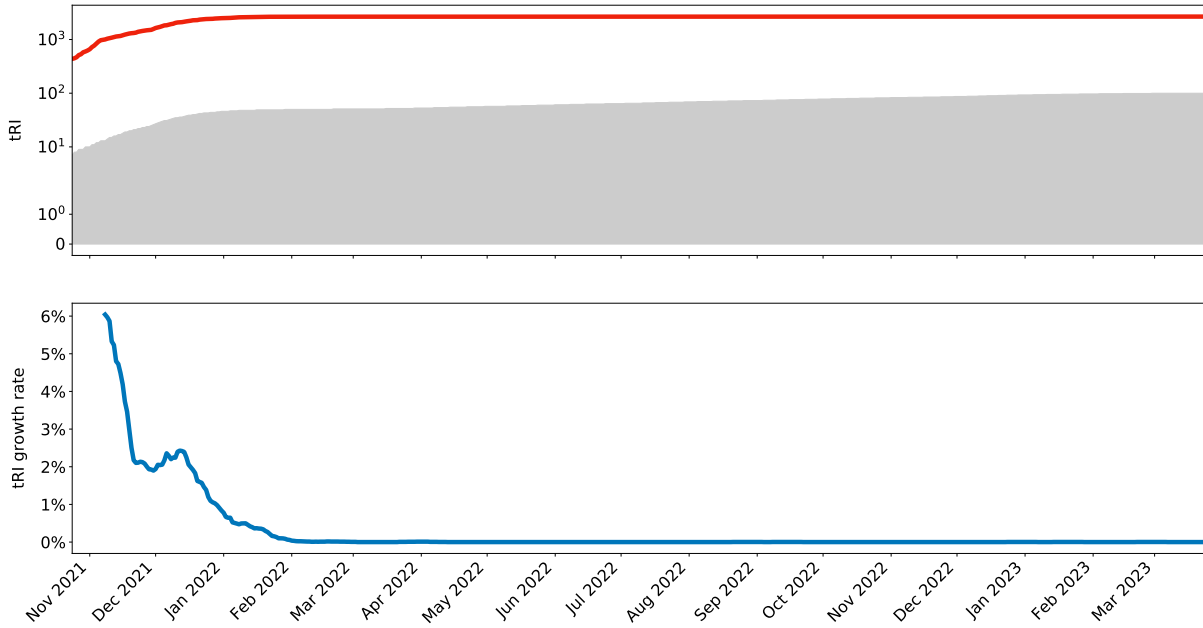
S:N440K | contained in Omicron



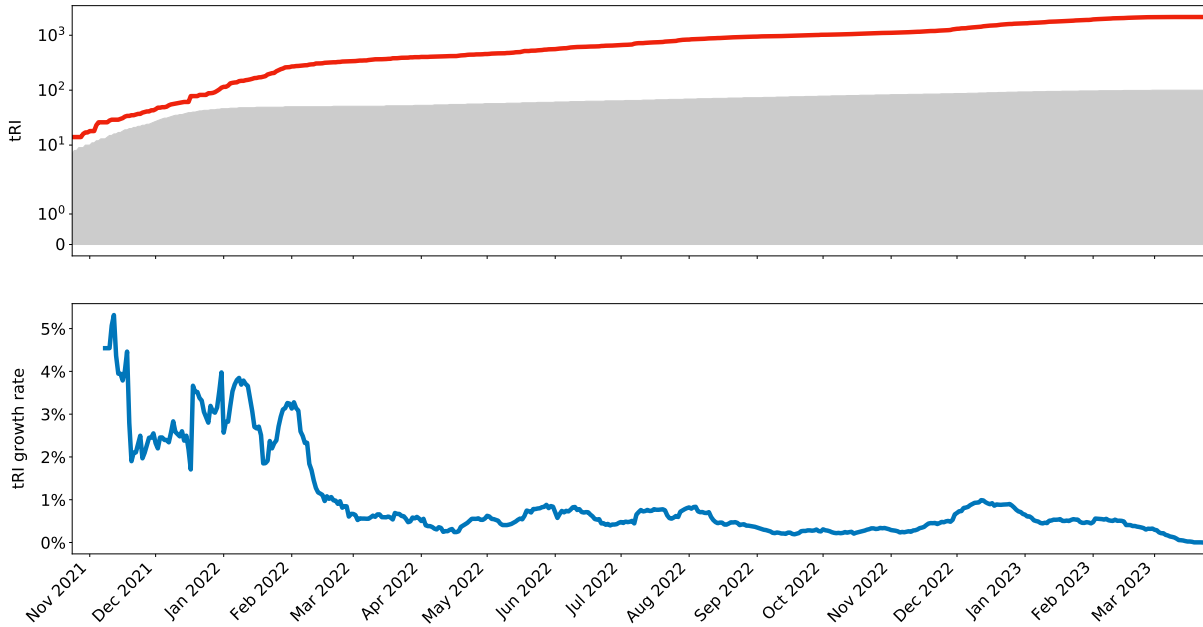
S:R408S | contained in Omicron



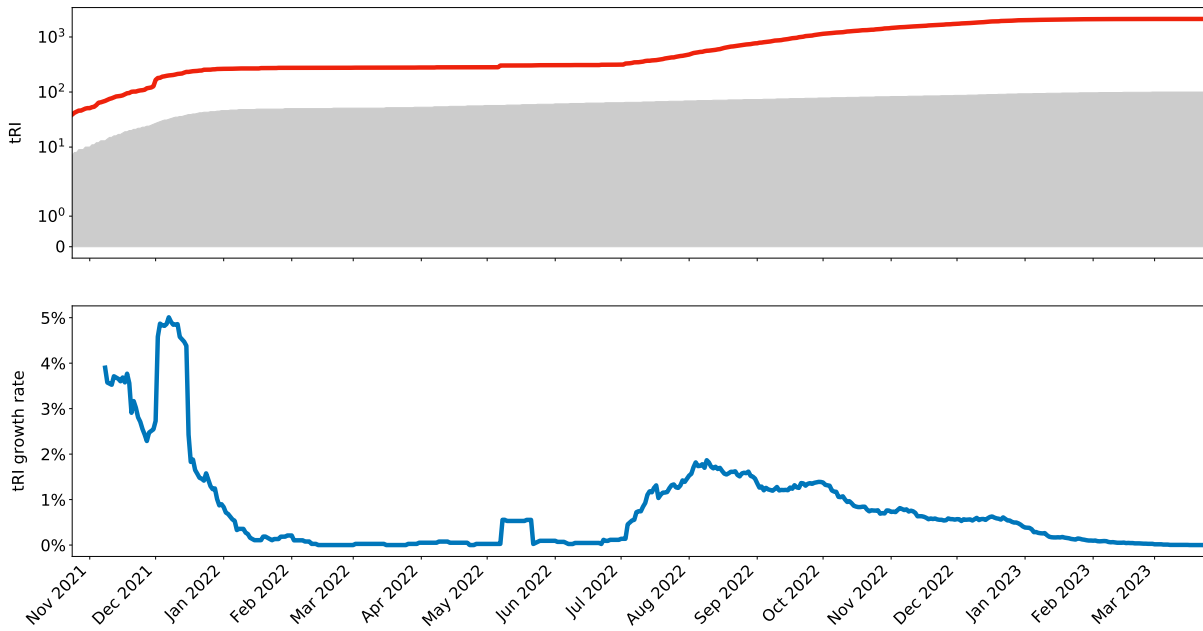
S:D950N | contained in Delta, Mu



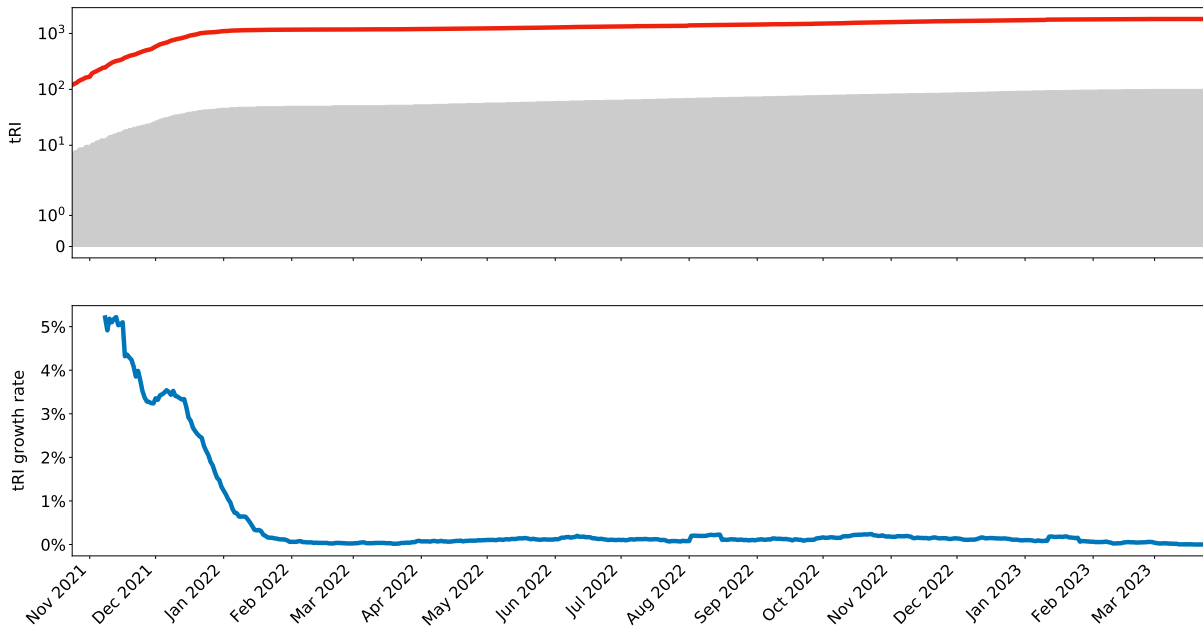
S:K417N | contained in Beta, Omicron, Mu



S:A10205



S:V1264L | contained in Omicron



Methods

Data acquisition and data preparation

Our analysis is based on the alignment `msa_0324.fasta` downloaded from the GISAID EpiCoV Database [2, 3] on 29 March 2023. This alignment comprises 13,766,674 SARS-CoV-2 whole genome sequences that have been aligned to the reference sequence Wuhan/WIV04 with GISAID accession number EPI_ISL_402124 using MAFFT [5]. Sequences in this alignment were truncated to the Spike gene (reference site positions 21,563 to 25,384), and subsequently sequences containing any characters other than A, C, T, G or - were removed. This resulted in an alignment comprising 5,928,855 complete SARS-CoV-2 Spike genes of length 7,942nt. A list of accession numbers of all sequences in this alignment, along with an acknowledgement of the contributions of both the submitting and the originating laboratories, is accessible at <https://doi.org/10.55876/gis8.230330yc>.

Topological recurrence analysis

The Spike gene alignment contains 367,967 genetically distinct sequences. We used `Hammingdist` (Version 0.18.0) [6] to compute the genetic distance matrix of this alignment. Subsequently we used `Ripser` [7] to compute the representative cycles for the persistent homology of the Vietoris–Rips filtration associated to the genetic distance matrix. The computation of persistence barcodes was restricted to small genetic distance scales (`Ripser` scale parameter threshold set to 2). Next a complete list of SNV cycles (topological cycles all of whose edges correspond to single nucleotide variations) in the given alignment was generated from the corresponding `Ripser` output. Then we used custom code implemented in Python to compute the *topological recurrence index (tRI)* for each such SNV. Summing over all SNVs determining an SAAV (single amino acid variation), we computed the tRI for each SAAV. Lastly, from the distribution of the tRI measurements over the whole Spike gene we inferred the level of significance for the tRI per SAAV. Using Vietoris-Rips transformations in multipersistent homology, we computed tRI time series analysis charts at daily resolution from the natural stratification by time of genomic data. We also computed the tRI growth rate (14 days moving average). For a more detailed description of the topological recurrence analysis see [1, 4].

Data availability

All SARS-CoV-2 genome data used in this work are available from the GISAID EpiCov Database [2, 3] at <https://www.gisaid.org> and are accessible at <https://doi.org/10.55876/gis8.230330yc>.

Code availability

Code used for the analyses is available at <https://github.com/ssciwr/hammingdist> and <https://github.com/Ripser/ripser/tree/tight-representative-cycles>. All other code is available from the corresponding authors upon request.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge all data contributors, i.e. the Authors and their Originating laboratories responsible for obtaining the specimens, and their Submitting laboratories for generating the genetic sequence and metadata and sharing via the GISAID Initiative [2, 3], on which this research is based. An acknowledgement table is accessible at <https://doi.org/10.55876/gis8.230330yc>. The authors acknowledge the use of de.NBI Cloud and the support by the High Performance and

Cloud Computing Group at the Zentrum für Datenverarbeitung of the University of Tübingen and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) through grant no 031 A535A. They thank M. Hanussek for IT support and early access to VALET [8]. The authors further acknowledge support from the Interdisciplinary Center for Scientific Computing at Heidelberg University and the development work of the Scientific Software Center of Heidelberg University carried out by L. Keegan and D. Kempf [6]. This research was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science as part of the Excellence Strategy of the German Federal and State Governments (KIT Centers, “Topological Genomics”), and by the Vector Foundation (“Topological Genomics”). M.B. and L.H. were supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy EXC 2181/1 - 390900948 (the Heidelberg STRUCTURES Excellence Cluster). L.H. thanks the Evangelisches Studienwerk Villigst for their support.

Author contributions

M.B., L.H., M.N., A.O. designed the study; A.O. curated data; A.O. performed computational analyses; M.B., L.H., M.N., A.O., S.B., H.O., M.S., R.C. developed and implemented software; M.B., L.H., A.O. acquired computing resources; M.B., L.H., A.O., M.N. drafted the manuscript; all authors contributed to the final version of the report.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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