

# The Novel Coronavirus Is Evolving Gradually

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Here, we describe and compare the mode of SARS-CoV-2 genomic evolution to its tempo, which so far has been much slower than that of SARS-CoV [1]. Once SARS-CoV-2 jumped and spread among humans, has it been evolving in a punctuated manner, so that a large proportion of their genomic divergences occurred during transmission events? Or has SARS-CoV-2 evolution been gradual?

To test for punctuated evolution [2,3], we regressed total phylogenetic path lengths of SARS-CoV-2 genomes (root-to-tip distances) on the net number of transmission events (nodes). We acquired a molecular tree of 3,944 genomes from Nextstrain [4,5]. And we used the maximum likelihood algorithm in BAYESTRAITS 3.0.1 [6], under a phylogenetic generalized least squares (PGLS), to estimate the parameters of the regression above. Punctuation would be consistent with a strong positive correlation.

We, however, find little evidence for a punctuated genome evolution (slope =  $.0084 \pm .0032$ ;  $R^2 = .0018$ ; Figure 1). Diagnostics indicate no violation of linear regression assumptions (Figure A2). But, the node-density artifact [2,7], which is the underestimation of branch lengths in tree regions with fewer taxa, may bias our analysis. The relationship between path length and the number of nodes seems to be curvilinear ( $\delta = 8.17$ ), a symptom of the artifact. Still, the power regression used to assess this bias may not be reliable ( $R^2 = .00011$ ). Altogether, the evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 genomes are evolving gradually, with much of the mutations occurring in between net transmission events. The tempo and mode of SARS-CoV-2 evolution are likely linked.

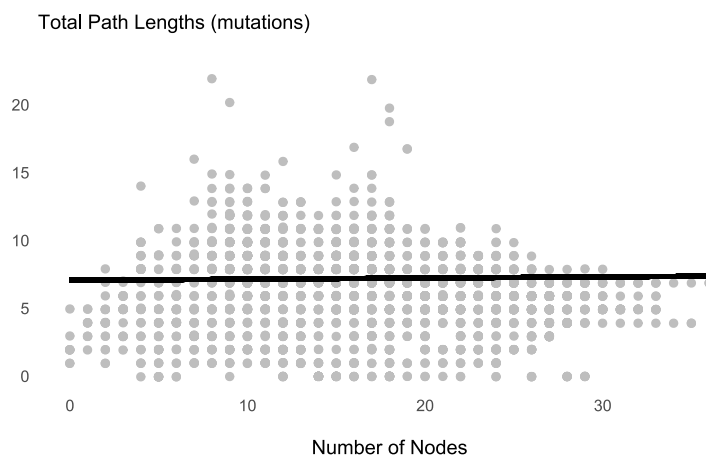
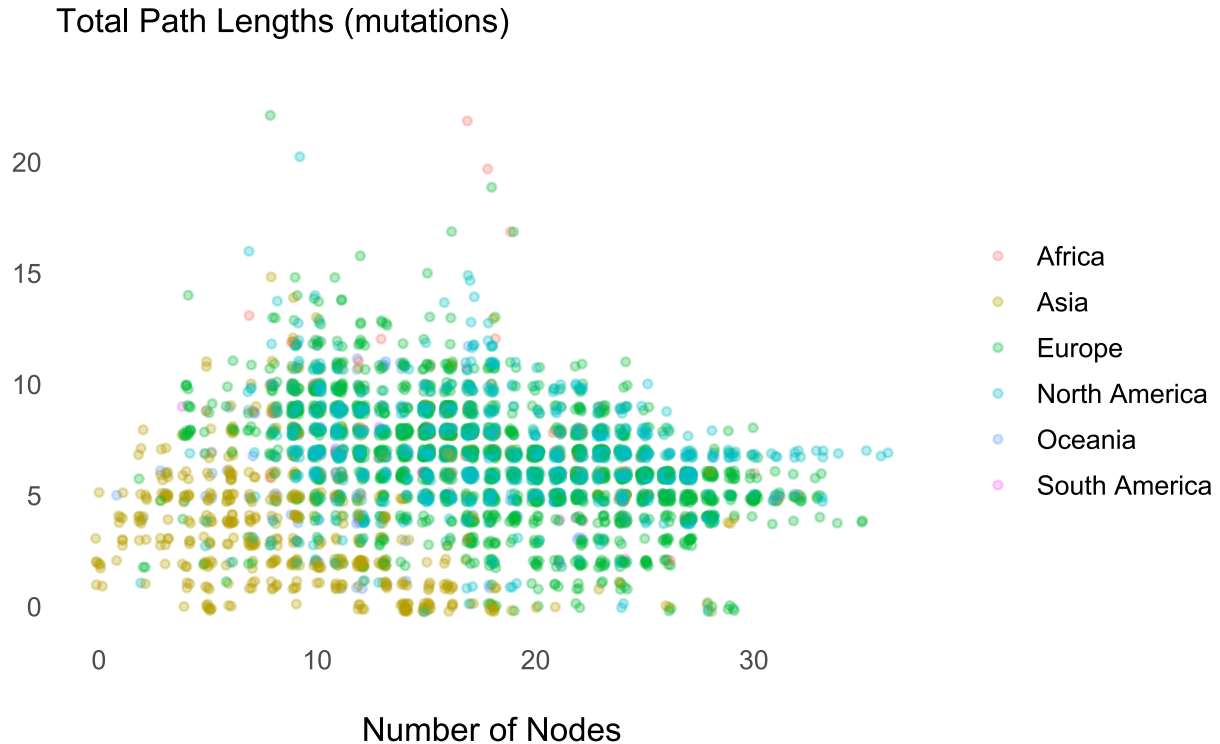


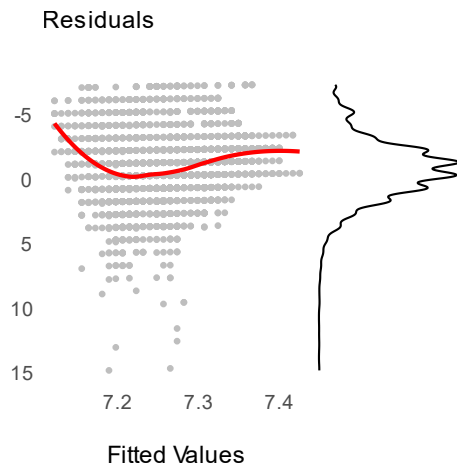
Figure 1. The number of nodes along the SARS-CoV-2 lineages (net transmission events) does not correlate with, nor does it explain the variation in total path lengths (accumulated mutations in the genome). Equation:  $y = 7.12 + .0084x$ .

## References

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**Figure A1.** There may also not be punctuation at the continental level. See the interactive plot in the supplementary file folder to explore this data further. But, note that every continent has multiple introductions (see the Nextstrain website).



**Figure A2.** Regression diagnostics. The residuals vs. fitted values plot does not indicate a violation of residual homogeneity. The histogram shows that the residuals are normally distributed.