# AUTO-TUNE: FINDING AN OPTIMAL DISTANCE THRESHOLD FOR INFERRING HIV TRANSMISSION CLUSTERS

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#### 2 ABSTRACT

- 3 Choosing an appropriate distance threshold is an important part of inferring a transmission net-
- 4 work to determine the relative growth of clusters within a localized epidemic. This distance
- 5 threshold determines how close two consensus sequences must be in order for a link to be
- 6 created between them in the network. Using a distance threshold that is too high can result in a
- 7 network with many unnecessary links, making it difficult to interpret and analyze. On the other
- 8 hand, using a distance threshold that is too low can result in a network with too few links, which
- 9 may not capture key insights into rapidly growing clusters among patients with shared attributes
- 10 that could benefit from public health intervention measures.
- Here, we present a heuristic scoring approach for tuning a distance threshold by associating
- 12 each tested threshold against the maximal number of clusters created across all thresholds and
- the difference between the ratio  $(R_{12})$  of the largest cluster in the network to the second largest
- 14 cluster at each iteration. The number of clusters is normalized between [0,1] then gated via a
- 15 Gompertz function transform. Meanwhile, the distribution of all  $R_{12}$  ratios are converted to Z
- scores, and normalized relative to the largest positive Z score across all candidate distances.
- 17 The priority score is the sum of aforementioned two components.
- Published research using the HIV-TRACE software package frequently use the default thresh-
- old of 1.5% for HIV pol gene sequences. We apply our scoring heuristic to outbreaks with different
- 20 characteristics, such as regional or temporal variability, and demonstrate the utility of using the
- 21 scoring mechanism's suggested distance threshold to identify clusters exhibiting risk factors that
- would have otherwise been more difficult to identify. For example, while we found that a 1.5%
- 23 distance threshold is typical for US-like epidemics, recent outbreaks like the CRF07\_BC subtype
- 24 among men who have sex with men (MSM) in China has been found to have a lower optimal
- threshold of 0.5% to better capture the transition from injected drug use (IDU) to MSM as the pri-
- 26 mary risk factor. Alternatively, in communities surrounding Lake Victoria, where there has been
- 27 sustained transmission for several years, we found that a larger distance threshold is suitable to

- 28 capture a more risk factor diverse populace with sparse sampling over a longer period of time.
- 29 Such identification may allow for more informed intervention action by respective public health
- 30 officials.
- 31 Keywords: molecular epidemiology, HIV, network, transmission cluster, surveillance

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 32 Choosing an appropriate distance threshold is an important part of using a transmission network to track
- 33 the spread of a contagious disease. This distance threshold determines how close two individuals must be
- 34 in order for a link to be created between them in the network.
- Using a distance threshold that is too small can result in a network with many unnecessary links, making
- 36 it difficult to interpret and analyze. On the other hand, using a distance threshold that is too large can result
- 37 in a network with too few links, making it difficult to accurately track the spread of the disease.
- 38 To ensure that the transmission network is useful and informative, it is important to carefully consider
- 39 the appropriate distance threshold. This may vary depending on the specific disease and the context in
- 40 which it is spreading. For example, a highly contagious respiratory illness may require a smaller distance
- 41 threshold than a less contagious illness that is primarily spread through direct contact.
- In general, the goal is to strike a balance between having enough links to accurately track the spread of
- 43 the disease, while not having so many links that the network becomes difficult to interpret. This can be
- 44 achieved through careful analysis and consideration of the specific disease and context.
- Overall, choosing an appropriate distance threshold is an important step in using a transmission network
- 46 to track the spread of a contagious disease. It can help ensure that the network is useful and informative,
- 47 and can ultimately aid in efforts to control and prevent the spread of the disease.

## 2 METHODS

## 48 2.1 Scoring Heuristic Procedure

- 49 Network threshold selection procedure proceeds as follows:
- 50 1. For each candidate threshold  $d_L$ , in increasing order, ranging from the smallest genetic distance in 51 the dataset, up to either the largest distance or a predetermined maximal threshold, we compute two
- network statistics:  $R_{12}$ , the ratio of the largest cluster to the second largest cluster, and C the number
- of clusters in the network.
- 2. A priority score is assigned to each  $d_L$ . This score measures two properties of the threshold: Does  $R_{12}$  jump at  $d_L$ ? How far is the number of clusters C at  $d_L$  from the maximal number of clusters over all threshold values? Let there be N overall  $d_L$  candidate values, and assume we are examining the
- ith candidate,  $d_L^i$  with  $W < i \le N W$  (W is a positive integer defined below).
- a. The  $R_{12}$  jump is computed by looking at the normalized ratio of the mean  $R_{12}$  values computed over the leading window  $d_L^{i+1} \dots d_L^{i+W}$  and the trailing window  $d_L^{i-W} \dots d_L^{i-1}$ . The width of the window, W, is defined as  $(([\frac{N}{100}], 3), 30)$ . The distribution of ratios is converted to Z scores, and
- normalized relative to the largest positive Z score across all candidate distances, yielding the jump component of the score.

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- b. The number of clusters,  $C_i$  at threshold  $d_L^i$  is first normalized to [0,1] through  $\frac{C_{max}-C_i}{C_{max}-C_{min}}$  and next gated via a Gompertz function transform  $1-e^{-e^{-25x+3}}$  This function provides an ad hoc means for penalizing having too few clusters relative to the maximum over all ranges. For example, a threshold that yields 95% of the maximal number of clusters receives a score of 0.996, while a threshold that yields 85% a score of 0.376.
  - c. The priority score for  $d_L^i$  is the sum of the two components defined in (a) and (b).
- 3. The threshold with the highest priority score will be selected as the suggested automatic distance threshold, if the score is high enough (1.9 or more), and either of the two conditions hold.
  - a. No other thresholds have priority scores of 1.9 or higher
- b. If other thresholds have priority scores of 1.9 or higher, then the range of thresholds represented by these options is small (no more than log(N) times the mean step between successive  $d_L^i$ ).
  - 4. If no single threshold can be selected in step 3, then the one with the highest priority score is suggested, and an inspection of the plot like the one on the analyze page is recommended to ensure that the threshold is sensible.

# 77 2.2 Assortativity

- Degree-weighted homophily (DWH) is a measure of similarity between nodes in a network based on their attributes (such as demographic characteristics or behaviors) and their degree (i.e., the number of connections they have to other nodes in the network). It is used to quantify the extent to which nodes with similar attributes tend to be connected to each other more frequently than would be expected by chance. DWH is calculated as the ratio of the observed number of connections between nodes with similar attributes to the expected number of connections between such nodes, based on their degree.
- 84 In mathematical terms, it is defined as:

$$DWH = \frac{W_M + W_C - 2W_X}{\frac{d_{in}}{nodes_{in}^2} + \frac{d_{out}}{nodes_{out}^2}}$$
(1)

- 85 Where
- $W_M$ : Weight of in-group connections
- $W_C$ : Weight of out-group connections
- $W_X$ : Weight of cross-group connections
- $d_{in}$ : In-group degree
- $d_{out}$ : Out-group degree
- $nodes_{in}$ : number of in-group nodes
- $nodes_{out}$ : number of out-group nodes
- 93 DWH ranges from -1 to 1. A DWH value of 0 indicates that there is no more homophily than expected
- 94 with chance, while a value of 1 indicates that there is perfect homophily (e.g. Birds always link to birds,
- 95 and only birds). A value of -1 is achieved for perfectly disassortative networks (e.g. Bird never linking
- 96 with another bird).
- 97 DWH is used in social network analysis and in the study of how different attributes are related to the
- 98 formation of connections between individuals. It is used as a way to measure the similarity of attributes

between individuals in a network. Additionally, randomization is performed by shuffling attribute labels among nodes, then performing DWH computation. This is useful in creating a null distribution of DWH scores under random mixing. A panmictic range is reported by shuffling attributes multiple times and reporting the minimum and maximum score.

## 103 2.3 Implementation

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- The software implementation involves a step-by-step process that utilizes the HIV-TRACE suite of packages. It starts with calculating pairwise distances with the tn93 tool and a supplied multiple sequence alignment. This generated pairwise distances are supplied to the hivnetworkesv script while providing the -A keyword argument. A brief outline of the software's implementation are as follows
- 1. Calculate pairwise distances: The user first calculates the pairwise distances using the tn93 fast pairwise distance calculator, providing the necessary threshold value and the input FASTA file. The command for this step is

```
tn93 -t 0.030 pol.fasta > pairwise_distances.15.tn93.csv
```

- Please note that the threshold should include the maximal range one is intending to test.
- 2. Compute distance threshold scores: The hivnetworkesv script is then executed with the required input
  file, format, and autotune option to generate a tab-separated output file, as shown below

```
hivnetworkcsv -i pairwise_distances.15.tn93.csv -f plain -A 0 > autotune_report.tsv
```

- 3. Visualize the report: Users can upload the generated autotune\_report.tsv file to
  http://autotune.datamonkey.org/analyze for visualization and further analysis of the
  data. This web-based platform provides an interactive environment to explore scores and other metrics
  across the range of tested outputs.
- 4. Run HIV-TRACE: Once AUTO-TUNEd threshold(s) are settled upon after review, the user runs the HIV-TRACE command with the appropriate input FASTA file, distance threshold, and other required arguments. The output is saved as a JSON file. An example command is

```
1 hivtrace -i ./INPUT.FASTA -a resolve -r HXB2_prrt -t < autotune_threshold > -m 500 -g .05 \hookrightarrow > hivtrace.results.json
```

# 2.3.1 Optional: Compute Assortatviity Metrics

5. Annotate results: The hivnetworkannotate script is used to annotate the results obtained from the HIV-TRACE step with attributes. The script takes the JSON results file, node attributes file, schema file, and a resolve flag as input.

```
1 hivnetworkannotate -n hivtrace.results.json -a node_attributes.json -g schema.json -r
```

For more information, users can refer to the hivnetworkannotate documentation.

- 6. Analyze the results with DWH: After the results file has been annotated, the user can proceed to the assortativity page, http://autotune.datamonkey.org/assortativity, for further analysis of the output.
- AUTO-TUNE is readily accessible on GitHub as part of the hivclustering repository (https://github.com/veg/hivclustering). It is integrated into the command-line interface of the software as the -A or –auto-profile argument. hivclustering is a key component of the HIV-TRACE suite of tools, a resource for the inference, analysis and visualization of HIV transmission networks.

145 The Degree Weighted Homophily (DWH) calculation tool, an integral component of the assortativity step, is developed using TypeScript, a statically typed superset of JavaScript that ensures 146 robustness and scalability. In an effort to promote accessibility and ease of integration, the DWH tool 147 is packaged and distributed through the Node Package Manager (NPM), enabling researchers and 148 developers to conveniently incorporate this advanced analytical tool into their own projects and work-149 flows. DWH can be used in-browser or as a command line tool, allowing researchers and developers 150 to employ the tool in an interactive command-line interface or integrate it into larger software appli-151 cations, thus catering to a diverse array of technical needs and preferences. Instructions for usage and 152 153 installation is found on Github (https://github.com/veg/dwh).

The described workflow offers a systematic approach to analyze potential distance thresholds for one's data with AUTO-TUNE, from calculating pairwise distances to visualizing and annotating results.

## 156 2.4 Visualization

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157 Visualizations of AUTO-TUNE results are accessible at http://autotune.datamonkey.org/analyze. It is a 158 dynamic and interactive web-based platform that offers visualization and analysis of results generated by AUTO-TUNE. The website provides a comprehensive view of the data by generating various plots across 159 160 candidate distance thresholds. These include a score plot, allowing users to identify trends and anomalies 161 across the full range of thresholds. Additionally, it generates a graph showing the number of clusters across candidate thresholds, one of the components that contribute to the score. The site also includes 162 163 an R1/R2 plot that displays the ratio of the largest cluster to the second largest cluster across candidate 164 thresholds, which is the other metric that contributes to the scoring heuristic.

alytical tool engineered to facilitate the calculation of Degree Weighted Homophily (DWH) values. It utilizes the DWH NPM package to generate a tabular representation of DWH values corresponding to each value for a selected attribute annotation, providing an exhaustive examination of the interrelationships for the field. A notable feature is the computation of the panmictic range, which involves a label permutation test to generate the null distribution of DWH values. This feature establishes a comparative baseline that aids in determining the significance of homophily versus what would be expected by chance. Lastly, the site also provides a plot of the fraction of pairwise connections, normalized by degree, for each value pertinent to the selected field. This visual depiction facilitates an intuitive comprehension of the distribution and interconnections within the dataset.

An assortativity tool is available at http://autotune.datamonkey.org/assortativity, and is an advanced an-

The site aims to offer a user-friendly interface for data visualization, playing an important role in interpreting and understanding AUTO-TUNE's output data. The visualization code is available on Github (https://github.com/stevenweaver/autotune-app/).

# 178 2.5 Comparisons with previously published analyses

- 179 In conducting our comparisons with the established clustuneR method, we procured our datasets from
- 180 Wolf et al. (2017) and Vrancken et al. (2017) utilizing the identical approach delineated in Chato et al.
- 181 (2020). These datasets, namely Middle Tennessee, Seattle, and Alberta, were processed using the work-
- 182 flow prescribed in Section 2.3. This enabled us to determine an optimal threshold for each dataset using
- 183 our proposed method, AUTO-TUNE. We further executed the command as detailed in step 4 of Section
- 184 2.3, deploying thresholds previously established as optimal by Chato et al. (2020).

To perform comparisons, we computed the average degree-weighted homophily score over a set of threeyear sliding windows. Specifically, the homophily among nodes was calculated for a collection of date ranges as follows:

$$\bar{H} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} H(w_i)$$
 (2)

where H represents the average degree-weighted homophily score, N is the total number of sliding windows,  $H(w_i)$  is the homophily score for the i-th window, and the windows  $w_i$  correspond to the date ranges, e.g., '2012-2015', '2013-2016', '2014-2017', etc. This methodology allowed us to compare the "best thresholds" derived from our proposed AUTO-TUNE method against those defined as optimal in Chato et al. (2020).

Second, we set out to compare the thresholds obtained in original investigations with those obtained by AUTO-TUNE. To select the data sets for this analysis, we conducted a scientific literature search to identify studies focused on HIV networks for public health purposes. We then filtered the studies that utilized HIV-TRACE to infer genetic networks and had publicly available sequences. Thus, we attempted to include studies from different countries and regions, enabling us to assess the performance of our method across various epidemic contexts, risk groups, and network sizes in real-data sets that used variable clustering thresholds.

In order to evaluate the influence of sampling density on the genetic distance threshold as determined 200 by AUTO-TUNE, we implemented a strategy of random subsampling from the original dataset sourced 201 from Rhee et al. (2019). This study was selected due to its satisfactory AUTO-TUNE score when utilized 202 in its entirety, as well as its inherent design as a Geographically-Stratified set of 716 Pol Subtype/CRF 203 (GSPS) reference sequence dataset. The dataset, which comprises 6034 samples gathered between 1959 204 and 2016, was subjected to random subsampling ten times at proportions of 25\%, 50\%, and 75\% of the 205 original sample size. For each subsample, the optimal threshold and associated scores were determined 206 via AUTO-TUNE. 207

# 3 RESULTS

## 3.1 Comparison with clustuneR

We compared results to clustuneR, which employs the recency of sample collection or diagnosis as individual-level weights in a predictive model to estimate the growth of HIV clusters. The thresholds determined optimal by clustuneR were found by finding the minimum GAIC (generalized AIC) across candidate distances between 0 and 0.04 in steps of  $8 \times 10^{-4}$ . GAIC is the difference between a null model that is only influenced by cluster size, and a weighted model model that includes individual-level attributes among known cases in the cluster. Using the minimum GAIC metric, it was found that 0.016 was the optimal threshold for Tennessee and Seattle, and 0.0104 for Northern Alberta.

In contrast, AUTO-TUNE does not incorporate any attribute data in its scoring heuristic. Instead, it relies on clustering metrics constructed purely from pairwise distances between sequences. Using the same datasets analyzed by clustuneR Chato et al. (2020), AUTO-TUNE found the thresholds with the highest scores to be 0.01431 for Middle Tennessee, 0.01354 for Seattle, and 0.01099 for Northern Alberta.

220 Table 1

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221 Performance of the inferred optimal thresholds were performed using an average degree-weighted ho-222 mophily (DWH) score across 3-year collection date windows starting from the oldest collection year for 223 each respective dataset, as that is the metadata that was consistently available across all three datasets and 224 was the attribute of focus used by clustuneR. DWH in this case measures the affinity for nodes within 225 the network to link with other nodes in the same collection date window. For example, samples collected 226 between 2012-2015 linking more often with other samples within the same time window would result in a higher DWH score. It was found that, across all three datasets, using the threshold with the highest score 227 reported by AUTO-TUNE resulted in a higher average DWH score across all three datasets. 228

When reviewing scores across all candidate thresholds with AUTO-TUNE. none of the three datasets 229 reached one confident score over any other. The most confident score was achieved by the Seattle dataset at 230 1.53325, then Tennessee with a high score of 1.25807, and lastly Canada at 1.01678. When finding peaks, 231 232 a second peak in Seattle denotes that 0.01166 may also be an optimal threshold to consider, as its score, 233 1.52976, is only 0.003 less than the highest score. The optimal score for Tennessee and Canada are a bit more dubious, as there are multiple peaks within close scores of each other. Indeed, after applying a 0.75 234 minimum score threshold after visual inspection for peak ranges, standard deviation among scores were 235 0.0475, 0.0089, and 0.0084 for Seattle, northern Alberta, and Tennessee, respectively. This implies there 236 may be multiple thresholds that would be considered reasonable, and downstream homophily metrics with 237 238 attributes may aid in coming to a decision.

# 3.2 Comparison with Prior Publications Citing HIV-TRACE

240 Next, we curated publications citing HIV-TRACE that also had publicly accessible data associated with 241 the study Rhee et al. (2019); Brenner et al. (2021); H et al. (2021); Liu et al. (2020); Bbosa et al. (2020); 242 Yan et al. (2020); Dalai et al. (2018); Sivay et al. (2018). We found that a variety of different ways were 243 used to determine distance thresholds, from precedent set by the CDC for detecting recent and rapid 244 clusters Yan et al. (2020), because they've been used before in other studies Sivay et al. (2018), to visual inspection of number of clusters and nodes across candidate distance thresholds Liu et al. (2020). As a 245 246 result, it was found that since these thresholds are determined largely qualitatively, the distance thresholds 247 used tend to be round numbers and only somewhat tuned to their respective geographic region of research. Table 2 When utilizing AUTO-TUNE for the same datasets, more granularity in selecting thresholds can 248 249 be performed in a straightforward manner. While it may seem appealing to assume that being within a 250 0.5% threshold of what AUTO-TUNE considers optimal is good enough, further inspection into results reveals that scores can vary widely within a very short distance. For example, when reviewing the distribu-251 252 tion of scores for the dataset used by Dalai et al. (2018), the score is exactly 2 at 0.01848, but at thresholds 253 tested at just 0.00002 difference, scores drop preciptously to 1.638 and 0.826 for candidates 0.01846 and 254 0.0185, respectively. Another example of a seemingly close threshold yet perhaps not optimal is found with Bbosa et al. (2020). While no score across candidate thresholds was found to be above 1.9, a high 255 256 score was found at distance 1.707, with 1.2415. Contrast this with the threshold used, 1.5%, with a score 257 of 0.0124.

### 3.3 Evaluating Performance with DWH

To evaluate the performance of an AUTO-TUNEd optimized threshold using degree-weighted homophily, we first evaluated a CRF07\_BC network with data from China. 8178 HIV-1 CRF07\_BC pol sequences were used from China to construct longitudinal transmission networks, each pol sequence were annotated with risk factor detailing whether the patient was heterosexual (Hetero), Person With Injected Drug Use (PWID), or Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), among other attributes. Using AUTO-TUNE,

- 264 no distance threshold receives a score above 1.9, but using the default 1.5% threshold is clearly suboptimal
- 265 . Using a 1.5% threshold, the network captures 5923 nodes, of which 559 are PWID, 3371 MSM, 1993
- 266 Hetero, and received an AUTO-TUNE score of 0.029. When evaluating DWH among risk factors, MSM,
- 267 Hetero, and PWID had scores of 0.211, 0.133, and 0.168, respectively.
- 268 When using AUTO-TUNE, two separate ranges appear. The highest score is obtained with distance
- 269 threshold 0.76% at 1.1369. The second highest score is 1.0303 at distance threshold 0.0019. Networks at
- both thresholds were also evaluated with DWH based on risk factor. The network at 0.76% captured 3537
- 271 nodes, of which 236 are PWID, 2271 MSM, 1030 Hetero. When evaluating DWH among risk factors,
- 272 MSM and Hetero both had slightly increased scores of 0.237 and 0.185, respectively. PWID DWH dra-
- 273 matically increased to 0.401. The network at 0.19% captures 1654 nodes, of which 151 are PWID, 1075
- 274 MSM, 428 Hetero. When evaluating DWH among risk factors, MSM, Hetero, and PWID had slightly
- increased scores over 0.76% of 0.292, 0.25, and 0.445, respectively.
- We next evaluated Rhee et al. (2019) with DWH. The dataset received a clear optimal threshold of
- 277 0.01699 with an AUTO-TUNE score of 1.9998. At the default threshold of 1.5%, the AUTO-TUNE score
- was 0.9782. At threshold 1.5%, the network captured 1351 nodes, compared with 1592 nodes out of 6034
- 279 captured at threshold 1.699%. When evaluating DWH with country, substantial change were only found
- 280 for China and Thailand, improving from no better than random linkage at threshold 1.5% with DWH
- 281 0.166 and -0.051, to 0.116 and 0.132 at threshold 1.699%, respectively. Notably, no country scored
- 282 worse with the optimal AUTO-TUNE threshold, despite it being larger than the default 1.5%.

# 283 3.4 Subsampling's Effect on Optimal Thresholds and AUTO-TUNE Scores

- Next, we evaluated the performance of AUTO-TUNE when subsampling a dataset. Since the Rhee et al.
- 285 (2019) dataset exhibited a clear optimal peak, we used the dataset for analysis, and randomly sampled 10
- 286 times from the entire dataset at 25%, 50%, and 75% each. The original full dataset confidently determined
- 287 0.01699 (AUTO-TUNE score 1.9998).
- Sampling at 25% yielded a mean top threshold of 0.021509, median at 0.019765, and standard deviation
- of  $0.004388 \cdot 50\%$  yielded 0.018581 and 0.01871 mean and median, respectively with a standard deviation
- 290 of 0.001629. Finally, 75% calculated mean is approximately 0.017403, with a median of approximately
- **291** 0.01699. The standard deviation was 0.000924.
- As the proportion increased from 25% to 50% and 75%, observable shifts were also noted in the mean,
- 293 median, and standard deviation of the AUTO-TUNE scores. At 25%, the mean and median scores were
- 294 1.5585 and 1.5014 respectively, with a standard deviation of 0.3568. At 50%, both mean and median scores
- significantly increased to 1.8171 and 1.9191 respectively, and the standard deviation dropped to 0.2482.
- Upon reaching an AUTO-TUNE of 75%, the mean and median scores rose further to 1.9870 and 1.9997
- 297 respectively, while the standard deviation shrank substantially to 0.0364, indicating higher consistency in
- 298 scores
- As the sample proportion increased, an upward trend was noted in average AUTO-TUNE scores. Addi-
- 300 tionally, standard deviation reduced significantly with sample proportion. This implies that as sampling
- 301 becomes denser, AUTO-TUNE will become more confident in determining the optimal threshold for a
- 302 particular dataset.

### 4 DISCUSSION

- 303 The results of our study suggest that AUTO-TUNE, which relies solely on clustering metrics from pair-
- 304 wise distances, could be an effective alternative to the clustuneR methodology. AUTO-TUNE generated
- 305 thresholds for all three examined datasets (Middle Tennessee, Seattle, and Northern Alberta) that outper-
- 306 formed clustuneR using DWH on 3-year collection date windows across all three datasets. This indicates
- 307 that even without incorporating attribute data, AUTO-TUNE's scoring heuristic could provide reliable
- 308 thresholds for HIV clusters.
- 309 Our evaluation of publications citing HIV-TRACE revealed the largely qualitative determination of dis-
- 310 tance thresholds. This approach may result in less accurate or suboptimal thresholds due to a lack of
- 311 systematic analysis. In contrast, AUTO-TUNE offers a more systematic and granular approach to thresh-
- 312 old selection, with our findings demonstrating that even minor adjustments to the distance can drastically
- 313 change the score. Therefore, using AUTO-TUNE could potentially improve the quality of HIV clustering
- 314 and transmission network studies.

# 4.1 When a Score is Below Two

## 5 CONCLUSION

- 316 AUTO-TUNE operates solely utilizing genetic sequence data to ascertain a decisive threshold. It employs
- a scoring heuristic, which is based on the number of clusters produced by a pairwise distance threshold
- and the ratio of the largest cluster to the second largest across a range of possible thresholds using sliding
- 319 windows.

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- A key advantage of this approach is its autonomy from supplementary data. When a patient tests positive
- 321 for HIV, data collection protocols can greatly vary, and additional data are not always available or con-
- 322 sistent. However, by leveraging only genetic sequence data, AUTO-TUNE eliminates the need for such
- 323 information.
- 324 Consequently, AUTO-TUNE's performance is consistently controlled, irrespective of the fluctuations
- 325 seen in data collection protocols after a positive HIV diagnosis. This level of adaptability demonstrates its
- 326 suitability for integration into various contexts related to HIV, and possibly other viral cluster detection and
- 327 response protocols. This versatility underscores the strong methodological foundation of AUTO-TUNE
- 328 and its potential utility.

# **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

- 329 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial
- 330 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

- 331 The Author Contributions section is mandatory for all articles, including articles by sole authors. If an
- 332 appropriate statement is not provided on submission, a standard one will be inserted during the production
- 333 process. The Author Contributions statement must describe the contributions of individual authors referred
- 334 to by their initials and, in doing so, all authors agree to be accountable for the content of the work. Please
- 335 see here for full authorship criteria.

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- 337 add all necessary funding information, as after publication this is no longer possible.

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## SUPPLEMENTAL DATA

- 340 Supplementary Material should be uploaded separately on submission, if there are Supplementary Figures,
- 341 please include the caption in the same file as the figure. LaTeX Supplementary Material templates can be
- 342 found in the Frontiers LaTeX folder.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

- Data are available at GenBank accession numbers JX160108-JX161480, JX498971-JX498972, JX498976-
- 344 JX498990,JX498992-JX499018,KU190031-KU190839,KY34691-KY37792,KY883695-KY883762,KY888784-
- 345 KY888875,KY921717-KY921757,MG434786-MG435347,MG435358-MG436769,MH352627-MH355541,MK2
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## **TABLES**

Table 1. clustuneR Comparison

| Dataset          | clustuneR |                | AUTO-TUNE |                |           |
|------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
|                  | Threshold | Avg. Homophily | Threshold | Avg. Homophily | Max Score |
| Middle Tennessee | 0.0160    | 0.0079         | 0.01431   | 0.0147         | 1.25807   |
| Seattle          | 0.0160    | 0.0259         | 0.01354   | 0.0348         | 1.53325   |
| Northern Alberta | 0.0104    | -0.0536        | 0.01099   | -0.0448        | 1.01678   |

# **6 FIGURE CAPTIONS**

Figure 1. Hola

Table 2. Threshold Comparison with Prior Publications Citing HIV-TRACE

| PMID     | Country      | Collection Date | Threshold Used | AUTO-TUNE |
|----------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|
| 29975689 | South Africa | 2011-2015       | 2.5%           | 2.584%    |
| 30574123 | USA          | 1997-2008       | 2%             | 1.848%    |
| 32500089 | China        | 2008-2015       | 0.5%           | 0.675%    |
| 32693608 | Uganda       | 2009-2016       | 1.5%           | 1.707%    |
| 33281803 | China        | 2000-2016       | 0.5%/0.7%      | 0.676%    |
| 33901684 | China        | 2008-2012       | 1.5%           | 1.215%    |
| 34452506 | Canada       | 1996-2017       | 1.5%/2.5%      | 0.547%    |
| 31041344 | USA          | 1997-2017       | 1.5%           | 0.927%    |

Table 3. CRF07\_BC DWH and Panmictic Range at Different Thresholds

|        | Threshold 1.5% |                  | Threshold 0.76% |                 | Threshold 0.19% |                  |
|--------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Record | DWH            | Panmictic Range  | DWH             | Panmictic Range | DWH             | Panmictic Range  |
| MSM    | 0.211          | [-0.105, -0.205] | 0.237           | [-0.120,-0.240] | 0.292           | [-0.146, -0.280] |
| Hetero | 0.133          | [-0.092, -0.190] | 0.185           | [-0.100,-0.211] | 0.25            | [-0.093, -0.256] |
| PWID   | 0.168          | [-0.001, -0.089] | 0.401           | [-0.005,-0.081] | 0.445           | [-0.012, -0.129] |

Figure 2. Hola 2

**Figure 3.** Hola 3

Figure 4. Hola 4

**Figure 5.** Hola 5