

## Reporting Summary

Nature Portfolio wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Portfolio policies, see our [Editorial Policies](#) and the [Editorial Policy Checklist](#).

### Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a | Confirmed

- The exact sample size ( $n$ ) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
- A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
- The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided  
*Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.*
- A description of all covariates tested
- A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
- A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
- For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g.  $F$ ,  $t$ ,  $r$ ) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and  $P$  value noted  
*Give  $P$  values as exact values whenever suitable.*
- For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
- For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
- Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's  $d$ , Pearson's  $r$ ), indicating how they were calculated

*Our web collection on [statistics for biologists](#) contains articles on many of the points above.*

### Software and code

Policy information about [availability of computer code](#)

Data collection For smFRET data collection we use commercial software SPCM (Becker & Hickl)

Data analysis All analyses of experimental smFRET data were performed in the software package PAM (PIE Analysis with MATLAB)91. The software is available as a source code, requiring MATLAB to run, or as pre-compiled standalone distributions for Windows or MacOS at <http://www.cup.uni-muenchen.de/pc/lamb/software/pam.html> and hosted in Git repositories under <http://www.gitlab.com/PAM-PIE/PAM> and <http://www.gitlab.com/PAM-PIE/PAMcompiled>. A detailed manual is located under <http://pam.readthedocs.io>. The version of PAM used for the analysis of smFRET data is also available in Zenodo with the identifier <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7722845>.

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Portfolio [guidelines for submitting code & software](#) for further information.

## Data

Policy information about [availability of data](#)

All manuscripts must include a [data availability statement](#). This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A description of any restrictions on data availability
- For clinical datasets or third party data, please ensure that the statement adheres to our [policy](#)

All data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The burst data from smFRET experiments and data from molecular dynamics simulations are available in Zenodo with the identifier <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7722845>.

## Human research participants

Policy information about [studies involving human research participants and Sex and Gender in Research](#).

Reporting on sex and gender	<input type="text" value="n/a (no human participants in the study)"/>
Population characteristics	<input type="text" value="n/a (no human participants in the study)"/>
Recruitment	<input type="text" value="n/a (no human participants in the study)"/>
Ethics oversight	<input type="text" value="n/a (no human participants in the study)"/>

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.

## Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

Life sciences       Behavioural & social sciences       Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see [nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf](https://www.nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf)

## Life sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Sample size	<input type="text" value="no sample size calculation was performed; the arbitrary threshold of &gt; 10 000 molecules/sample was used for smFRET data collection, because it typically allows good quality data in similar experiments"/>
Data exclusions	<input type="text" value="no data were excluded from the analysis"/>
Replication	<input type="text" value="the most important conclusions were confirmed with three experiments with different protein aliquotes"/>
Randomization	<input type="text" value="randomization was not applicable because we use identical protein samples (different aliquotes from the same protein bench) for each measurement with new ligand"/>
Blinding	<input type="text" value="blinding was not used"/>

## Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

## Materials & experimental systems

- | n/a                                 | Included in the study                                  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Antibodies                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Eukaryotic cell lines         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Palaeontology and archaeology |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Animals and other organisms   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical data                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Dual use research of concern  |

## Methods

- | n/a                                 | Included in the study                           |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> ChIP-seq               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Flow cytometry         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> MRI-based neuroimaging |