Measurement of top quark polarization in $\bar{t} t$ lepton + jets final states


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We present a measurement of top quark polarization in $t\bar{t}$ pair production in $p\bar{p}$ collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 1.96$ TeV using data corresponding to 9.7 fb$^{-1}$ of integrated luminosity recorded with the D0 detector at the Fermilab Tevatron Collider. We consider final states containing a lepton and at least three jets. The polarization is measured through the distribution of lepton angles along three axes: the beam axis, the helicity axis, and the transverse axis normal to the $t\bar{t}$ production plane. This is the first measurement of top quark polarization at the Tevatron using lepton + jet final states and the first measurement of the transverse polarization in $t\bar{t}$ production. The observed distributions are consistent with standard model predictions of nearly no polarization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The standard model (SM) predicts that top quarks produced at the Tevatron collider are almost unpolarized, while models beyond the standard model (BSM) predict enhanced polarizations [1]. The top quark polarization $P_{\hat{n}}$ can be measured in the top quark rest frame through the angular distributions of the top quark decay products relative to some chosen axis $\hat{n}$ [2],

$$\frac{1}{\Gamma} \frac{d\Gamma}{d\cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}}} = \frac{1}{2} (1 + P_{\hat{n}} \kappa_i \cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}}),$$

where $i$ is the decay product (lepton, quark, or neutrino), $\kappa_i$ is its spin-analyzing power ($\approx 1$ for charged leptons, 0.97 for $d$-type quarks, $-0.4$ for $b$-quarks, and $-0.3$ for neutrinos and $u$-type quarks [3]), and $\theta_{i,\hat{n}}$ is the angle between the direction of the decay product $i$ and the quantization axis $\hat{n}$. The mean polarizations of the top and antitop quarks are expected to be identical because of $CP$ conservation. The $P_{\hat{n}}$ can be obtained from the asymmetry of the $\cos \theta$ distribution

$$A_{P,\hat{n}} = \frac{N(\cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}} > 0) - N(\cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}} < 0)}{N(\cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}} > 0) + N(\cos \theta_{i,\hat{n}} < 0)},$$

where $N(x)$ is the number of events passing the requirement $x$ and the polarization is then $P_{\hat{n}} = 2A_{P,\hat{n}}$. The quantization axes are defined in the $t\bar{t}$ rest frame, while
the decay product directions are defined after successively boosting the particles to the $t\bar{t}$ rest frame and then to the parent top quark rest frame. We measure the polarization along three quantization axes: (i) the beam axis $\hat{n}_b$, given by the direction of the proton beam [2]; (ii) the helicity axis $\hat{n}_h$, given by the direction of the parent top or antitop quark; and (iii) the transverse axis $\hat{n}_T$, given as perpendicular to the production plane defined by the proton and parent top quark directions, i.e., $\hat{n}_p \times \hat{n}_T$ (or by $\hat{n}_p \times -\hat{n}_T$ for the antitop quark) [4,5].

The D0 Collaboration published a short study of the top quark polarization along the helicity axis in $p\bar{p}$ collisions as part of the measurement of angular asymmetries of leptons [6], but no measured value was presented. Recently, the D0 Collaboration measured the top quark polarization along the beam axis in $t\bar{t}$ final states with two leptons [7], finding it to be consistent with the SM. The ATLAS and CMS collaborations measured the top quark polarization along the helicity axis in $pp$ collisions, and the results are consistent with no polarization [8,9]. The polarization at the Tevatron and LHC are expected to be different because of the difference in the initial states, which motivates the use of a multivariate algorithm [19]. In $\mu$ + jets events, upper limits are required on the transverse mass of the reconstructed $W$ boson [20] of $M_{T}^{W} < 250$ GeV and $p_T > 250$ GeV to remove events with misreconstructed muon $p_T$. Additional selections are applied to reduce backgrounds in muon events and to suppress contributions from multijet production. A detailed description of these requirements can be found in Ref. [21]. In addition, we require the curvature of the track associated with the lepton to be well measured to reduce lepton charge misidentification.

III. SIGNAL AND BACKGROUND SAMPLES

We simulate $t\bar{t}$ events at the next-to-leading-order (NLO) in perturbative QCD with the MC@NLO event generator version 3.4 [22] and at the leading-order (LO) with ALPGEN event generator version 2.11 [23]. Parton showering, hadronization, and modeling of the underlying event are performed with HERWIG [24] for MC@NLO events and with PYTHIA 6.4 [25] for ALPGEN events. The detector response is simulated using GEANT3 [26]. To model the effects of multiple $p\bar{p}$ interactions, the MC events are overlaid with events from random $p\bar{p}$ collisions with the same luminosity distribution as the data. The main background to the $t\bar{t}$ signal is $W +$ jets events, where the $W$ boson is produced via the electroweak interaction together with additional partons from QCD radiation. The $W +$ jets final state can be split into four subsamples according to parton flavor, $Wb\bar{b}$ + jets, $Wc\bar{c}$ + jets, $Wu\bar{u}$ + jets, and $W +$ light jets, where light refers to gluons, $u, d,$ or $s$ quarks. The $W +$ jets
background is modeled with ALPGEN and PYTHIA [23,25], as is the background from $Z + \text{jets}$ events. Other background processes include $WW$, $WZ$, and $ZZ$ diboson productions simulated using PYTHIA and single top quark electroweak production simulated using COMPPPHEP [27]. The multijet background, where a jet is misidentified as an isolated lepton, is estimated from the data using the matrix method [21,28]. We use six different BSM models [29] to study modified $t\bar{t}$ production: one $Z'$ boson model and five axigluon models with different axigluon masses and couplings ($m200R$, $m200L$, $m200A$, $m2000R$, and $m2000A$, where $L$, $R$, and $A$ refer to left-handed, right-handed, and axial couplings and numbers are the particle masses in GeV). Some additional axigluon models such as $m2000L$ are not simulated as they are excluded by other measurements of top quark properties. The BSM events are generated with LO MADGRAPH 5 [30] interfaced to PYTHIA for parton evolution.

IV. ANALYSIS METHOD

A constrained kinematic $\chi^2$ fit is used to associate the observed leptons and jets with the individual top quarks using a likelihood term for each jet-to-quark assignment, as described in Ref. [31]. We assume the four jets with largest $p_T$ to originate from $t\bar{t}$ decay in events with more than four jets. The algorithm includes a technique that reconstructs events with a lepton and only three jets [32]. The addition of the three-jet sample almost doubles the signal sample as shown in Table I. In our analysis, all possible assignments of jets to final state quarks are considered and weighted by the $\chi^2$ probability of each kinematic fit and by the $b$ tagging probability.

To determine the sample composition, we construct a kinematic discriminant based on the approximate likelihood ratio of expectations for $t\bar{t}$ and $W + \text{jets}$ events [33]. The input variables are chosen to achieve good separation between $t\bar{t}$ and $W + \text{jets}$ events and required to be well modeled and not strongly correlated with one another or with the lepton polar angles used in the measurement. Sets of input variables are selected independently for the $\ell + 3$ jet and the $\ell + \geq 4$ jet events, each in three subchannels according to the number of $b$ tagged jets: 0, 1, $\geq 2$. The channels without $b$ tagged jets are used to determine the sample composition and background calibration, not to measure the polarization.

The input variables used for the $\ell + 3$ jet kinematic discriminant are $k_T^{\text{min}} = \min(p_T, a, p_T, b) \cdot \Delta R_{ab}$, where $\Delta R_{ab} = \sqrt{(\eta_a - \eta_b)^2 + (\phi_a - \phi_b)^2}$ is the angular distance between the two closest jets ($a$ and $b$), $\min(p_T, a, p_T, b)$ represents the smaller transverse momentum of the two jets, and the $\phi$ are their azimuths in radians; aplanarity $A = 3/2k_3$, where $k_3$ is the smallest eigenvalue of the normalized momentum tensor; $H_T$, which is the scalar sum of the $p_T$ of the jets and lepton; $\Delta R$ between the leading jet and the next-to-leading jet; and $\Delta R$ between the lepton and the leading jet.

The input variables for the $\ell + \geq 4$ jet discriminant are $k_T^{\text{min}}$; aplanarity; $H_T^j$, centrality, $C = H_T^j/H$, where $H_T$ is the scalar sum of all jet $p_T$ values and $H$ is the scalar sum of all jet energies; the lowest $x^2$ among the different kinematic fit solutions in each event; $(p_T^h - p_T^b)/(p_T^h + p_T^b)$, the relative $p_T$ difference between $b_{\text{lep}}$, the $b$ jet candidate from the $t \rightarrow b\ell\nu$ decay, and $b_{\text{had}}$, the $b$ jet candidate from the $t \rightarrow bqq'$ decay; and $m_{jj}$, the invariant mass of the two jets corresponding to the $W \rightarrow q\bar{q}'$ decay.

The sample composition is determined from a simultaneous maximum-likelihood fit to the kinematic discriminant distributions. The $W + \text{jets}$ background is normalized separately for the heavy-flavor contribution ($Wbb$ + jets and $Wc\bar{c}$ + jets) and for the light-parton contribution ($Wc$ + jets and $W + \text{light jets}$). The sample composition after implementing the selections, and fitting the maximum likelihood to data, is broken down into individual channels by lepton flavor and number of jets and summarized in Table I. The obtained $t\bar{t}$ yield is close to the expectations.

The lepton angular distributions in $W + \text{jets}$ events must be well modeled since these events form the leading background, especially in the $\ell + 3$ jet sample. We therefore use a control sample of $\ell + 3$ jet events without $b$ tagged jets, as such events are dominated by $W + \text{jets}$ production with $> 70\%$ contribution. This sample is not used for the polarization measurement. We reweight the $W + \text{jets}$ MC events so that the $\cos \theta_L$ distributions agree with those for the control event data in $t\bar{t}$ and other background components subtracted. We use the relative polarization asymmetry defined as $[N_j(\cos \theta_L) - N_{-j}(\cos \theta_L)]/[N_j(\cos \theta_L) + N_{-j}(\cos \theta_L)]$, where $j$ refers to bins of $\cos \theta_L$ values between 0 and 1 and $-j$ refers to bins between $-1$ and 0. The distributions of simulated $W + \text{jets}$ events and subtracted data are shown in Fig. 1. The correction to MC obtained from the control sample is applied to the background templates used in our signal extraction. The corrections are $0.047 \pm 0.002$ for polarization along the beam axis, $0.011 \pm 0.001$ for the

| Table I. Sample composition and event yields after implementing the selection requirements and the maximum-likelihood fit to kinematic distributions in data. Only statistical uncertainties are shown. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Source | $\ell + 3$ jets | $\ell + 4$ jets |
| $W + \text{jets}$ | | |
| e + jets | 1741 $\pm$ 26 | 1567 $\pm$ 15 | 339 $\pm$ 3 | 295 $\pm$ 3 |
| $\mu$ + jets | 494 $\pm$ 7 | 128 $\pm$ 3 | 147 $\pm$ 4 | 49 $\pm$ 2 |
| Multijet | | | |
| Other Bkg | 446 $\pm$ 5 | 378 $\pm$ 2 | 87 $\pm$ 1 | 73 $\pm$ 1 |
| $t\bar{t}$ signal | 1200 $\pm$ 25 | 817 $\pm$ 20 | 1137 $\pm$ 24 | 904 $\pm$ 23 |
| Sum | 3881 $\pm$ 37 | 2890 $\pm$ 25 | 1710 $\pm$ 25 | 1321 $\pm$ 23 |
| Data | 3872 | 2901 | 1719 | 1352 |
transverse axis, and a negligible amount for the helicity axis. The uncertainties are propagated to the measurement as a systematic uncertainty of the background modeling. We observe the $W + \text{jets}$ events to have polarization, calculated as in Eq. (2), of $+0.18$ along the beam axis, $-0.23$ along the helicity axis, and $-0.02$ along the transverse axis. Other backgrounds give polarizations of $+0.05$ (beam axis), $-0.30$ (helicity axis), and $+0.01$ (transverse axis).

To measure the polarization, a fit is performed to the reconstructed $\cos \theta_{\ell,\hat{n}}$ distribution using $\ell \bar{t}$ templates of $+1$ and $-1$ polarizations and background templates normalized to the expected event yield. The signal templates arise from the $\ell \bar{t}$ MC sample generated with no polarization but reweighted to accommodate the polarizations. We then use a correction for the difference between the nominal MC@NLO and $C = 0.791$ (beam axis), both calculated at NLO in QCD and in electroweak couplings in Ref. [2]. The spin correlation factor is not known for the transverse axis, and thus we set $C = 0$ and assign a systematic uncertainty by varying the choice of this factor. The $P_{\hat{n},1}$ represents the polarization state we model (here $P_{\hat{n},c} = \pm 1$) along the chosen axis $\hat{n}$. In the SM, assuming $CP$ invariance, $P_{\hat{n},1} = P_{\hat{n},2}$ and gives the relative sign factor $\rho$ a value of $+1$ for the helicity axis and $-1$ for the beam and transverse axes [2].

A simultaneous fit is performed for the eight samples defined according to lepton flavor ($e$ or $\mu$), lepton charge, and number of jets (3 or $\geq 4$). The observed polarization is taken as $P = f_+ - f_-$, where $f_\pm$ are the fraction of events with $P = +1$ and $-1$ returned from the fit. The fitting procedure and methodological approach are verified using pseudoexperiments for five values of polarization and through a check of consistency with predictions, using the BSM models with nonzero generated longitudinal polarizations. The fitted polarizations and the model inputs are in good agreement, as shown in Fig. 2 for the polarizations along the beam axis, thus verifying our template methodology. The distributions in the cosine of the polar angle of leptons from $\ell \bar{t}$ decay for all three axes are shown in Fig. 3.

A previous measurement of top quark polarization and the forward-backward $t$ and $\bar{t}$ asymmetry in dilepton final states [7] noted a correlation between these two measurements. This correlation is caused by acceptance and resolution effects in the kinematic reconstruction of the events. We determine the dependence of the observed polarization on the forward-backward asymmetry at the parton level, $A_{FB}$, using samples in which the $t$ and $\bar{t}$ rapidity distributions are reweighted to accommodate the polarizations. We then use a correction for the difference between the nominal MC@NLO and experimental $A_{FB}$ values.

FIG. 1. The simulated $W + \text{jets}$ events before correction and data with $\ell \bar{t}$ and other $W + \text{jets}$ background components subtracted compared in $\cos \theta_{\ell,\hat{n}}$ distributions in the $\ell + 3$ jet and no $b$ tagged jet control sample.

FIG. 2. Comparison of measured and generated polarizations along the beam axis for the SM and several non-SM models. The uncertainties are statistical.
production-level $A_{FB}$ of $(5.01 \pm 0.03)\%$ and the next-to-next-to-leading-order (NNLO) calculation \cite{34} of $(9.5 \pm 0.7)\%$. The observed correction is $-0.030$ for the polarization along the beam axis, less than 0.002 for the polarization along the helicity axis, and is negligible for the transverse polarization. The uncertainty on the expected $A_{FB}$ is propagated to the measurement as part of the methodology systematic uncertainty.

\section*{V. SYSTEMATIC UNCERTAINTIES}

We have evaluated several categories of systematic uncertainties using fully simulated events: uncertainties

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
Source & Beam & Helicity & Transverse \\
\hline
Jet reconstruction & $\pm 0.010$ & $\pm 0.008$ & $\pm 0.008$ \\
Jet energy measurement & $\pm 0.010$ & $\pm 0.023$ & $\pm 0.006$ \\
b tagging & $\pm 0.009$ & $\pm 0.014$ & $\pm 0.005$ \\
Background modeling & $\pm 0.007$ & $\pm 0.021$ & $\pm 0.004$ \\
Signal modeling & $\pm 0.016$ & $\pm 0.020$ & $\pm 0.008$ \\
PDFs & $\pm 0.013$ & $\pm 0.011$ & $\pm 0.003$ \\
Methodology & $\pm 0.013$ & $\pm 0.007$ & $\pm 0.009$ \\
Total systematic uncertainty & $\pm 0.030$ & $\pm 0.042$ & $\pm 0.017$ \\
Statistical uncertainty & $\pm 0.046$ & $\pm 0.044$ & $\pm 0.030$ \\
Total uncertainty & $\pm 0.055$ & $\pm 0.061$ & $\pm 0.035$ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Summary of the uncertainties in the measured top quark polarization along three axes. The systematic uncertainty source indicates the difference in polarization when the measurement is repeated using alternative modeling, after applying uncertainties from the employed methods, or from assumptions made in the measurement. The uncertainties are added in quadrature to form groups of systematic sources and the total uncertainty.}
\end{table}

The measured polarizations for the three spin-quantization axes are shown in Table III. Results on the longitudinal polarizations are presented in Fig. 4 and compared to SM predictions and several of the BSM models discussed previously. The measurement along the beam axis is consistent with the previous D0 result in the dilepton channel.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Axis & Measured polarization & SM prediction \\
\hline
Beam & $+0.070 \pm 0.055$ & $-0.002$ \\
\textit{Beam—D0 comb.} & $+0.081 \pm 0.048$ & $-0.002$ \\
Helicity & $-0.102 \pm 0.061$ & $-0.004$ \\
Transverse & $+0.040 \pm 0.035$ & $+0.011$ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Measured top quark polarization from the $t\bar{t} \ell +$ jets channel along the beam, helicity, and transverse axes and the combined polarization for beam axis with the dilepton result by the D0 Collaboration denoted as \textit{Beam—D0 comb.}. The total uncertainties are obtained by adding the statistical and systematic uncertainties in quadrature.}
\end{table}

The hashed areas represent systematic uncertainties. The direction of the cos $\theta$ axis plots.
channel [7], $P = 0.113 \pm 0.093$. We estimate the correlation between this result for the beam axis and that of Ref. [7] to be 5%. The combination using the method of Refs. [36,37] yields a top quark polarization along the beam axis $P = 0.081 \pm 0.048$.

VII. CONCLUSION

In summary, we measure the top quark polarization for $t\bar{t}$ production in $p\bar{p}$ collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 1.96$ TeV along several spin-quantization axes. The polarizations are consistent with SM predictions. The transverse polarization is measured for the first time. These are the most precise measurements of top quark polarization in $p\bar{p}$ collisions.

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