Measurement of spin correlation between top and antitop quarks produced in $p\bar{p}$ collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 1.96$ TeV


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We present a measurement of the correlation between the spins of $t$ and $\bar{t}$ quarks produced in proton-antiproton collisions at the Tevatron Collider at a center-of-mass energy of 1.96 TeV. We apply a matrix element technique to dilepton and single-lepton+jets final states in data accumulated with the D0 detector that correspond to an integrated luminosity of $9.7 \text{ fb}^{-1}$. The measured value of the correlation coefficient in the off-diagonal basis, $O_{\text{off}} = 0.89 \pm 0.22 \text{ (stat+syst)}$, is in agreement with the standard model prediction, and represents evidence for a top-antitop quark spin correlation difference from zero at a level of 4.2 standard deviations.

PACS numbers: 14.65.Ha, 13.88.+e

I. INTRODUCTION

The top quark is the heaviest elementary particle in the standard model (SM). Despite the fact that the top quark decays weakly, its large mass leads to a very short lifetime of $\approx 5 \cdot 10^{-25} \text{ s}$. It decays to a $W$ boson and a $b$ quark before hadronizing, a process that has a characteristic time of $1/\Lambda_{\text{QCD}} \approx (200 \text{ MeV})^{-1}$ equivalent to $\tau_{\text{had}} \approx 3.3 \cdot 10^{-24} \text{ s}$, where $\Lambda_{\text{QCD}}$ is the fundamental scale of quantum chromodynamics (QCD). The top quark lifetime is also smaller than the spin-correlation time from spin-spin interactions with the light quarks generated in the fragmentation process $\bar{t}t$. The measured value of $\tau_{\text{spin}} \approx m_t/\Lambda_{\text{QCD}} \approx (0.2 \text{ MeV})^{-1} \approx 3 \cdot 10^{-21} \text{ s}$. The top quark thus provides a unique opportunity to measure spin-related phenomena in the quark sector by exploiting kinematic properties of its decay products.

In proton-antiproton ($p\bar{p}$) collisions, the dominant process for producing top quarks is through top-antitop ($t\bar{t}$) quark pairs. This QCD process yields unpolarized $t$ and $\bar{t}$ quarks, but leaves the spins of $t$ and $\bar{t}$ correlated. A spin correlation observable can be defined as

$$O_{ab} = \langle 4(\hat{S}_t \cdot \hat{a})(\hat{S}_t \cdot \hat{b}) \rangle = \frac{\sigma(\hat{\uparrow}\downarrow) + \sigma(\downarrow\uparrow) - \sigma(\hat{\uparrow}\downarrow) - \sigma(\downarrow\uparrow)}{\sigma(\hat{\uparrow}\uparrow) + \sigma(\downarrow\downarrow) + \sigma(\uparrow\downarrow) + \sigma(\downarrow\uparrow)},$$

where $S$ is a spin operator, $\hat{a}$ and $\hat{b}$ are the spin quantization axes for the top quark ($\hat{a}$) and the antitop quark ($\hat{b}$), $\langle \rangle$ refers to an expectation value, $\sigma$ is the $t\bar{t}$ production cross section, and the arrows refer to the spin states of the $t$ and $\bar{t}$ quarks relative to the $\hat{a}$ and $\hat{b}$ axes. The strength of the correlation depends on the $t\bar{t}$ production mechanism. In $p\bar{p}$ collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 1.96 TeV, the correlation of spins is predicted to be $O_{\text{off}} = 0.80^{-0.01}_{+0.02}$ in the off-diagonal spin basis, the basis in which the strength of the spin correlation is maximal at the Tevatron. The most significant contribution is from the quark-antiquark annihilation process ($gq \rightarrow t\bar{t}$) with a spin correlation strength of $\approx 0.99$, while the gluon-gluon ($gg$) fusion process ($gg \rightarrow t\bar{t}$) has anticorrelated spins with a typical strength of $\approx -0.36$ at next-to-leading order (NLO) in QCD. Contributions to $t\bar{t}$ production from beyond the SM can have different dynamics that affect the strength of the $t\bar{t}$ spin correlation.

Evidence for $t\bar{t}$ spin correlations based on a matrix element technique was presented by the D0 collaboration. Earlier lower precision measurements used a tem-
plate method\textsuperscript{17,18}. Spin correlation effects have also been measured in proton-proton (pp) collisions by two LHC collaborations, ATLAS and CMS, at a center-of-mass energy of 7 TeV \textsuperscript{19,22} and at 8 TeV \textsuperscript{23,24}. The main mechanism for \( t\bar{t} \) production at the LHC is the gg fusion process. The spin correlation at the LHC arises mainly from the fusion of like-helicity gluons \textsuperscript{22}. The differences between pp and p\bar{p} incident channels, the different sources of spin correlation (quark-antiquark annihilation versus like-helicity gg fusion), and their different collision energies, make the measurements of the strength of the spin correlation at both the Tevatron and LHC interesting and complementary.

In this letter, we present an updated measurement of the \( t\bar{t} \) spin correlation strength in pp collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 1.96 \) TeV. The measurement uses the statistics accumulated during 2001 – 2011 data taking period of the Fermilab Tevatron Collider, which corresponds to an accumulated luminosity of 9.7 fb\(^{-1}\), which is almost two times more than in our previous publication \textsuperscript{16}.

II. DETECTOR, EVENT SELECTION AND SIMULATION, BACKGROUND

The D0 detector is described in Refs. \textsuperscript{20,22}. It has a central tracking system consisting of a silicon microstrip tracker and a central fiber tracker, both located within an \( \sim 2 \) T superconducting solenoidal magnet. The central tracking system is designed to optimize tracking and vertexing at detector pseudorapidities of \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 2.5 \). The liquid-argon sampling calorimeter has a central section covering pseudorapidities \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| \) up to \( \approx 1.1 \), and two end calorimeters that extend coverage to \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| \approx 4.2 \), with all three housed in separate cryostats. A outer muon system, with pseudorapidity coverage of \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 2 \), consists of a layer of tracking detectors and scintillation trigger counters in front of 1.8 T iron toroids, followed by two similar layers after the toroids.

Within the SM, the top quark decays with almost 100\% probability into a W boson and a b quark. We also include two final states: the dilepton final state (\( \ell\ell \)), where both W bosons decay to leptons, and the lepton+jets final state (\( \ell+\text{jets} \)), where one of the W bosons decays into a pair of quarks and one decays to a lepton and a neutrino. The \( \ell+\text{jets} \) and \( \ell\ell \) final states contain, respectively, one or two isolated charged leptons. In both final states we consider only electrons and muons, including those from \( \tau \)-lepton decay, \( W \rightarrow \tau\nu_{\tau} \rightarrow \ell\nu_{\ell}\nu_{\tau} \). We also require the presence of two b quark jets, two light-quark jets from W decay (in \( \ell+\text{jets} \)), and a significant missing transverse momentum \( (p_T) \) due to the escaping neutrinos.

We use the following selection criteria. In the \( \ell\ell \) channels, we require two isolated leptons with \( p_T > 15 \) GeV, both originating from the same pp interaction vertex. The \( \ell+\text{jets} \) channels require one isolated lepton with \( p_T > 20 \) GeV. We consider electrons and muons identified using the standard D0 criteria \textsuperscript{23,24}. In the pseudorapidity range of \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 2.0 \) for muons, and \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 1.1 \) for electrons. In the \( \ell\ell \) channels, we consider in addition forward electrons in the range of \( 1.5 < |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 2.5 \). Jets are reconstructed and identified from energy deposition in the calorimeter using an iterative midpoint cone algorithm \textsuperscript{35} of radius \( \sqrt{(\Delta\phi)^2 + (\Delta\eta)^2} = 0.5 \). Their energies are corrected using the jet energy scale (JES) algorithm \textsuperscript{37}. All \( \ell\ell \) channels also require the presence of at least two jets with \( p_T > 20 \) GeV and \( |\eta_{\text{det}}| < 2.5 \). For the \( \ell+\text{jets} \) final state, at least four jets must be identified with the same \( p_T \) and \( \eta_{\text{det}} \) cutoffs, but with the leading jet required to have \( p_T > 40 \) GeV. When a muon track is found within a jet cone, the JES calculation takes that muon momentum into account, assuming that the muon originates from the semileptonic decay of a heavy-flavor hadron belonging to the jet. To identify b quark jets, we use a multivariate b quark jet identification discriminant that combines information from the impact parameters of the tracks and variables that characterize the presence and properties of secondary vertices within the jet \textsuperscript{37}. We require that at least one jet is identified as a b quark jet in the \( \ell\ell \) channels, and at least two such jets in the \( \ell+\text{jets} \) channels. To improve signal purity, additional selections based on the global event topology are applied \textsuperscript{38,39} in each final state. A detailed description of event selection can be found in Ref. \textsuperscript{38} for the \( \ell\ell \) and in Ref. \textsuperscript{39} for the \( \ell+\text{jets} \) final states.

To simulate \( t\bar{t} \) events we use the next-to-leading (NLO) order Monte Carlo (MC) QCD generator MC@NLO (version 3.4) \textsuperscript{40,41}, interfaced to HERWIG (version 6.510) \textsuperscript{42} for parton showering and hadronization. The CTEQ6M parton distribution functions (PDF) \textsuperscript{43,44} are used to generate events at a top quark mass of \( m_t = 172.5 \) GeV. We use two samples, one including spin correlation effects, and the other without correlation. The generated events are processed through a GEANT3-based simulation of the D0 detector. To simulate effects from additional overlapping pp interactions, “zero bias” events taken from collider data with an unbiased trigger based solely on beam bunch crossings are overlaid on the simulated events. Simulated events are then processed with the same reconstruction program as data.

In the \( \ell\ell \) channels, the main sources of background are Drell-Yan production, \( q\bar{q} \rightarrow Z/\gamma^* \rightarrow \ell\ell \), diboson WW, WZ, ZZ production, and instrumental background. The instrumental background arises mainly from multijet and \( (W \rightarrow \ell\nu) + \text{jets} \) events, in which one jet in W+jets or two jets in multijet events are misidentified as electrons, or where muons or electrons origi-
TABLE I: Numbers of expected events, and numbers of events found in data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Expected Events</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(e\mu)</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ee)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\mu\mu)</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(W+jets)</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\mu+jets)</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our measurement uses the same matrix element (ME) approach as Refs. [16, 50], adapted to the spin correlation measurement. This method consists of calculating the spin correlation discriminant

\[
R(x) = \frac{P_{\bar{t}t}(x, SM)}{P_{\bar{t}t}(x, SM) + P_{\bar{t}t}(x, null)},
\]

where \(P_{\bar{t}t}(x, \mathcal{H})\) is a per-event probability for hypothesis \(\mathcal{H}\) for the vector of the reconstructed object parameters \(x\). Hypothesis \(\mathcal{H} = SM\) assumes the \(\bar{t}t\) spin correlation strength predicted by the SM, and \(\mathcal{H} = \text{null}\) assumes uncorrelated spins. These probabilities are calculated from the integral

\[
P_{\bar{t}t}(x, \mathcal{H}) = \frac{1}{\sigma_{obs}} \int f_{PDF}(q_1) f_{PDF}(q_2) \times (2\pi)^4 |\mathcal{M}(y, \mathcal{H}|y, y)|^2 W(x, y) d\Phi^6 dq_1 dq_2.
\]

Here, \(q_1\) and \(q_2\) represent the respective fractions of proton and antiproton momentum carried by the initial state partons, \(f_{PDF}\) represents the parton distribution functions, \(s\) is the square of the \(p^2\) center-of-mass energy, and \(y\) refers to partonic final state four-momenta of the particles. The detector transfer functions, \(W(x, y)\), correspond to the probability to reconstruct four-momenta \(x\) and \(y\) from the expected, mainly due to an excess in the \(\ell\ell\) channel. The expected and observed number of events is normalized to \(\mathcal{H} = \text{null}\). Table I shows the number of expected events for each background source and the number of selected events in data. The number of the expected \(\bar{t}t\) events is normalized to the NLO cross section of 7.45 ± 0.48 pb \([19]\). The observed number of events in the \(\ell\ell\) channel is higher than the expected, mainly due to an excess in the \(\mu + \text{jets}\) channel. The expected and observed number of events are consistent when the systematic uncertainties, partially correlated between the \(\ell\ell\) and \(\ell+\text{jets}\) channels, are taken into account. These uncertainties are of the order of 10%. The most important contributions are the integrated luminosity, \(b\)-quark jet modeling, uncertainties on the \(\bar{t}t\) modeling and uncertainty in the heavy flavor NLO \(K\)-factors of the \(W+jets\) background in the \(\ell+\text{jets}\) channel.

### III. MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUE AND RESULTS

Our measurement uses the same matrix element (ME) approach as Refs. [16, 50], adapted to the spin correlation measurement. This method consists of calculating the spin correlation discriminant

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R(x) = \frac{P_{\bar{t}t}(x, SM)}{P_{\bar{t}t}(x, SM) + P_{\bar{t}t}(x, \text{null})},
\]

where \(P_{\bar{t}t}(x, \mathcal{H})\) is a per-event probability for hypothesis \(\mathcal{H}\) for the vector of the reconstructed object parameters \(x\). Hypothesis \(\mathcal{H} = SM\) assumes the \(\bar{t}t\) spin correlation strength predicted by the SM, and \(\mathcal{H} = \text{null}\) assumes uncorrelated spins. These probabilities are calculated from the integral

\[
P_{\bar{t}t}(x, \mathcal{H}) = \frac{1}{\sigma_{obs}} \int f_{PDF}(q_1) f_{PDF}(q_2) \times (2\pi)^4 |\mathcal{M}(y, \mathcal{H}|y, y)|^2 W(x, y) d\Phi^6 dq_1 dq_2.
\]

Here, \(q_1\) and \(q_2\) represent the respective fractions of proton and antiproton momentum carried by the initial state partons, \(f_{PDF}\) represents the parton distribution functions, \(s\) is the square of the \(p^2\) center-of-mass energy, and \(y\) refers to partonic final state four-momenta of the particles. The detector transfer functions, \(W(x, y)\), correspond to the probability to reconstruct four-momenta \(x\) and \(y\) from the expected, mainly due to an excess in the \(\ell\ell\) channel. The expected and observed number of events is normalized to \(\mathcal{H} = \text{null}\). Table I shows the number of expected events for each background source and the number of selected events in data. The number of the expected \(\bar{t}t\) events is normalized to the NLO cross section of 7.45 ± 0.48 pb \([19]\). The observed number of events in the \(\ell\ell\) channel is higher than the expected, mainly due to an excess in the \(\mu + \text{jets}\) channel. The expected and observed number of events are consistent when the systematic uncertainties, partially correlated between the \(\ell\ell\) and \(\ell+\text{jets}\) channels, are taken into account. These uncertainties are of the order of 10%. The most important contributions are the integrated luminosity, \(b\)-quark jet modeling, uncertainties on the \(\bar{t}t\) modeling and uncertainty in the heavy flavor NLO \(K\)-factors of the \(W+jets\) background in the \(\ell+\text{jets}\) channel.
The error bars correspond to statistical uncertainties. The lower plot represents the difference between data and simulation with SM spin correlation and without spin correlation. The error bars correspond to statistical uncertainties.

The estimated systematic uncertainties are summarized in Table II. These are obtained by replacing the nominal $t\bar{t}$ and background results with modified templates, refitting the data and determining the new fraction $f_\Delta$.

We consider several sources of uncertainties in the modeling of the signal. These include initial-state and final-state radiation, the simulation of hadronization and underlying events, the effects of higher-order corrections, color-reconnection and uncertainty on the top quark mass. The details of the corresponding samples and parameters are discussed in Refs. [1, 2].

For the PDF uncertainty, we change the 20 CTEQ6 eigenvectors independently and add the resulting uncertainties in quadrature. In modeling both the estimated signal and PDF uncertainties, the event samples have different fractional contributions from $gg$ fusion and $W$ and $Z$ boson production.
$q\bar{q}$ annihilation, and therefore different spin-correlation strengths. We take this into account by normalizing the measured fraction to the spin-correlation strength of the sample $O_{\text{off}}^\Delta$, in a way similar to that used for the nominal measurement $O_{\text{off}}^\Delta = f_\Delta \cdot O_{\text{off}}^{\text{MC}}$.

The statistical uncertainty in MC templates is estimated using the ensemble testing technique. The new ensembles are created through a random generation of a new number of events in each bin of the MC template assuming a Gaussian distribution in the number of events in the bin. The same distribution in data is fitted with the modified templates and the dispersion in the fit results over 1000 ensembles is used as an estimation of the statistical uncertainty in the MC templates.

The uncertainty on identification and reconstruction effects includes uncertainties on lepton, jet and $b$ tagging identification efficiencies, jet energy resolution and scale corrections, trigger efficiencies, and the luminosity. The uncertainty in the background contributions includes all uncertainties that affect the signal-to-background ratio that are not contained in the previous categories. These uncertainties include uncertainties in theoretical cross sections for backgrounds, uncertainty in $Z$ boson $p_T$ distribution, and uncertainties in instrumental background contributions.

The total absolute systematic uncertainty on the spin correlation observable $O_{\text{off}}^{\text{meas}}$, calculated as a quadratic sum over all individual sources, is 0.15, as shown in Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Uncertainty in $O_{\text{off}}^{\text{meas}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeling of signal</td>
<td>±0.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>±0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical fluctuations in MC</td>
<td>±0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and reconstruction</td>
<td>±0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background contribution</td>
<td>±0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>±0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE II: Systematic uncertainties (absolute values) on the spin correlation strength $O_{\text{off}}^{\text{meas}}$.

V. SPIN CORRELATION AND THE $t\bar{t}$ PRODUCTION MECHANISM

The strength of the $t\bar{t}$ spin correlation in the SM is strongly dependent on the $t\bar{t}$ production mechanism. The spin correlation measurement thus provides a way of measuring the fraction of events produced via $gg$ fusion, $f_{gg}$ \cite{13}. The $f_{gg}$ fraction is not well defined at orders higher than LO QCD. The difficulty arises from the fact that the cross sections for the $gg \to t\bar{t}q$ and $gq \to t\bar{t}q$ processes at LO, as well as $gg$ and $q\bar{q}$ production at NLO, contain a singularity when the final state quark is collinear with the quark in the initial state. This makes the integration over the phase space divergent \cite{13,54,55}.

In practice, this singularity is absorbed into the definition of the PDF, but the final results depend on the scheme used for regularization. For the NLO PDF, the MS scheme is usually preferred. The $gg$ and $q\bar{q}$ contribution at NLO is of the order of a few percent \cite{10,14,13}, and considering that the overall spin correlation strength is \approx 80%, we neglect these smaller contributions, and determine $f_{gg}$ from the relation

$$O = (1 - f_{gg})O_{q\bar{q}} + f_{gg}O_{gg}.$$ 

Assuming $O_{q\bar{q}} \approx 1$, the gluon fraction becomes

$$f_{gg} \approx \frac{1 - O}{1 - O_{gg}},$$ 

where $O$ is the measured value of the total spin correlation strength, and $O_{gg}$ is the SM value of the spin correlation strength for $gg$ events.

The NLO calculation in the off-diagonal basis using the CT10 PDF yields $O_{gg} = -0.36 \pm 0.02$ \cite{10,14,13}. The systematic uncertainty on the observable $O$ can be translated to the uncertainty on the gluon fraction that includes an additional contribution from the theoretical uncertainty on $O_{gg}$. In the absence of non-SM contributions, the fraction of $t\bar{t}$ events produced through gluon fusion becomes

$$f_{gg} = 0.08 \pm 0.12(\text{stat}) \pm 0.11(\text{syst}) = 0.08 \pm 0.16(\text{stat+syst}),$$

in agreement with the NLO prediction of $f_{gg} = 0.135$ \cite{10,14,13}.

VI. SUMMARY

We have presented an updated measurement of $t\bar{t}$ spin correlations with the D0 detector for an integrated luminosity of 9.7 $fb^{-1}$. The result of the measurement of the strength of the $t\bar{t}$ spin correlation in the off-diagonal basis is

$$O_{\text{off}} = 0.89 \pm 0.16 \ (\text{stat}) \pm 0.15 \ (\text{syst}) = 0.89 \pm 0.22 \ (\text{stat+syst}).$$

This result is in agreement with the NLO QCD calculation $O_{\text{off}} = 0.80^{+0.031}_{-0.02}$ \cite{11} and supersedes that reported in Ref. 16. Using the Feldman and Cousins approach for interval setting \cite{52}, and assuming uncorrelated $t\bar{t}$ spins, we estimate a probability (p-value) of $2.5 \times 10^{-5}$ for obtaining a spin correlation larger than the observed value. This corresponds to evidence for spin correlation in $t\bar{t}$ events at a significance of 4.2 standard deviations.

In the absence of non-SM contributions, we use the spin correlation strength measurement to constrain the fraction of events produced through gluon fusion at NLO QCD and obtain

$$f_{gg} = 0.08 \pm 0.16(\text{stat+syst}) .$$

in good agreement with SM prediction.
Acknowledgment

We thank the staff at Fermilab and collaborating institutions, and acknowledge support from the Department of Energy and National Science Foundation (United States of America); Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission and National Institute for Scientific Research/National Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (France); Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, National Research Center “Kurchatov Institute” of the Russian Federation, and Russian Foundation for Basic Research (Russia); National Council for the Development of Science and Technology and Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for the Support of Research in the State of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Science and Technology (India); Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colombia); National Council of Science and Technology (Mexico); National Research Foundation of Korea (Korea); Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (The Netherlands); Science and Technology Facilities Council and The Royal Society (United Kingdom); Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Czech Republic); Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Federal Ministry of Education and Research) and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) (Germany); Science Foundation Ireland (Ireland); Swedish Research Council (Sweden); China Academy of Sciences and National Natural Science Foundation of China (China); and Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Ukraine).

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