Measurement of the Inelastic Proton-Proton Cross Section at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV with the ATLAS Detector at the LHC

M. Aaboud et al.*

(ATLAS Collaboration)

(Received 9 June 2016; published 26 October 2016)

This Letter presents a measurement of the inelastic proton-proton cross section using 60 $\mu$b$^{-1}$ of $p p$ collisions at a center-of-mass energy $\sqrt{s}$ of 13 TeV with the ATLAS detector at the LHC. Inelastic interactions are selected using rings of plastic scintillators in the forward region ($2.07 < |\eta| < 3.86$) of the detector. A cross section of $68.1 \pm 1.4$ mb is measured in the fiducial region $\xi = M_X^2/\sqrt{s} > 10^{-6}$, where $M_X$ is the larger invariant mass of the two hadronic systems separated by the largest rapidity gap in the event. In this $\xi$ range the scintillators are highly efficient. For diffractive events this corresponds to cases where at least one proton dissociates to a system with $M_X > 13$ GeV. The measured cross section is compared with a range of theoretical predictions. When extrapolated to the full phase space, a cross section of $78.1 \pm 2.9$ mb is measured, consistent with the inelastic cross section increasing with center-of-mass energy.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.117.182002

The rise of the total proton-proton ($p p$) cross section with center-of-mass energy $\sqrt{s}$, predicted by Heisenberg [1] and observed at the CERN Intersecting Storage Rings [2], probes the nonperturbative regime of quantum chromodynamics (QCD). Arguments based on unitarity, analyticity, and factorization imply an upper bound on the chromodynamics (QCD). Arguments based on unitarity, Rings [2], probes the nonperturbative regime of quantum [1] and observed at the CERN Intersecting Storage Rings [2], probes the nonperturbative regime of quantum

$\sigma = \sigma_L$ with $r = 68.1 \pm 1.4$ mb is measured in the fiducial region $\xi = M_X^2/\sqrt{s} > 10^{-6}$, where $M_X$ is the larger invariant mass of the two hadronic systems separated by the largest rapidity gap in the event. In this $\xi$ range the scintillators are highly efficient. For diffractive events this corresponds to cases where at least one proton dissociates to a system with $M_X > 13$ GeV. The measured cross section is compared with a range of theoretical predictions. When extrapolated to the full phase space, a cross section of $78.1 \pm 2.9$ mb is measured, consistent with the inelastic cross section increasing with center-of-mass energy.

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0031-9007/16/117(18)/182002(19) 182002-1 © 2016 CERN, for the ATLAS Collaboration
beam”) was passing through the center of ATLAS. All of these triggers require at least one MBTS hit above threshold. Two additional triggers were used to collect data to determine the MBTS trigger efficiency, requiring either hits in a forward (5.6 < |η| < 5.9) Cherenkov detector (LUCID) or a far forward (|η| > 8.4) tungsten-scintillator calorimeter detector (LHCf) located at z = ±17 m and ±140 m, respectively. The LHCf detector is an independent detector, but for the runs considered in this analysis, its trigger signals were incorporated into the ATLAS readout.

Monte Carlo (MC) simulation samples were produced to correct the fiducial measurement and to compare to the data. The detector response is modeled using a simulation based on GEANT4 [20–22]. The data and MC simulated events are passed through the same reconstruction and analysis software.

The primary MC samples are based on the PYTHIA8 generator [23,24] either with the A2 [25] set of tuned underlying-event parameters and the MSTW 2008 LO PDF set [26] or with the Monash [27] set of tuned parameters and the NNPDF 2.3 LO PDF set [28]. The samples are divided into four components: single-dissociation (SD, pp → pX), double-dissociation (DD, pp → X), central-dissociation (CD, pp → pXp), and nondissociative (ND) events, all involving colorless exchange, and nondissociative dissociation (ND) wherein color flow is present between the two colliding protons. For all dissociation event types, the Monash tune is used.

PYTHIA8 uses a pomeron-based dissociation model [29] to describe colorless exchange with a default pomeron flux model by Schuler and Sjostrand (SS) [30,31]. Alternative MC samples are generated with the pomeron flux model of Donnachie and Landshoff (DL) [32] and with the minimum-bias Rockefeller (MBR) model [33]. In the DL model, the pomeron Regge trajectory is given by α(t) = 1 + e + α′ t, where e and α′ are free parameters. In most samples used for this analysis, the value of α′ is 0.25, the PYTHIA8 default. The parameter e is varied from 0.06 to 0.10 (the PYTHIA8 default is 0.085). An additional sample produced with α′ = 0.35 is found to be statistically consistent with the α′ = 0.25 default samples in each aspect of this analysis. The ranges of e and α′ considered are motivated by previous total, inelastic, elastic, and diffractive cross-section measurements, including measurements of low-mass diffraction by the ATLAS and CMS collaborations [34,35]. For the DL and SS models the CD component is neglected. The MBR model is tuned to data as described in Ref. [33] and includes a small CD component.

The EPOS LHC and QGSJET-II event generators are also used to simulate pp collisions. EPOS LHC [36] uses a “cut pomeron” model for diffraction and differs significantly from PYTHIA8 in its modeling of hadronization and the underlying event. QGSJET-II [37,38] uses Reggeon field theory to describe pomeron-pomeron interactions. Both EPOS LHC and QGSJET-II have been developed primarily to model cosmic-ray showering in the atmosphere.

The fiducial region of the measurement is determined using MC simulation. In each generated event, the largest rapidity gap between any two final-state hadrons is used to define the boundary between two collections of hadrons. These definitions include the dissociation systems in an event-generator-independent manner. The invariant mass of each collection is calculated, and the larger of the two masses, denoted $M_X$, is used to define $\xi = M_X^2/\sqrt{s}$. The variable $\xi$ is constrained to be $>6 \times 10^{-6}$ by the elastic limit of $m_p^2/\sqrt{s}$ where $m_p$ is the proton mass. This measurement is restricted to $\xi > 10^{-6}$, the region in which the event selection efficiency exceeds 50%.

Two samples of data events passing the MBTS trigger requirements are selected: an inclusive sample and a single-sided sample. The inclusive selection requires at least two MBTS counters with a charge above 0.15 pC ($n_{MBTS} \geq 2$). This threshold is chosen to be well above the electronic noise level of the counters. Requiring two hits rather than one substantially reduces background due to collision-induced radiation and activation. To constrain the diffractive component of the cross section and reduce the uncertainty in extrapolation to $σ_{inel}$, an additional single-sided selection is defined, requiring hits in at least two counters on one side of the detector and no hits on the other. In the data, 4,159,074 events pass the inclusive selection and 442,192 events pass the single-sided selection.

The fiducial cross section is determined by

$$
σ_{fid}^{inel}(\xi > 10^{-6}) = \frac{N - N_{BG}}{\epsilon_{trig} \times L} \times \frac{1 - f_{\xi < 10^{-6}}}{\epsilon_{sel}},
$$

where $N$ is the number of observed events passing the inclusive selection, $N_{BG}$ is the number of background events, $\epsilon_{trig}$ and $\epsilon_{sel}$ are factors accounting for the trigger and event selection efficiencies, $1 - f_{\xi < 10^{-6}}$ accounts for the migration of events with $\xi < 10^{-6}$ into the fiducial region, and $L$ is the integrated luminosity of the sample.

Sources of background include interactions between the beam and residual gas in the beam pipe; interactions between the beam and collimators upstream of the detector, which can send charged particles through the detector parallel to the beam; collision-induced radiation; and activation backgrounds. Backgrounds from cosmic rays and instrumental noise are negligible. The mean number of pp collisions in the same LHC bunch crossing was $2.3 \times 10^{-3}$ for the recorded data set. Thus, the contribution from multiple collisions is also negligible. The beam-related background components are extracted from single-beam events and dominate the total background. They are normalized by scaling the number of selected single-beam events by a factor of 37/4 × 2, accounting for the 37 colliding pairs of bunches and 4 bunches producing the single-beam data in this run. The factor of 2 accounts for the presence of two colliding bunches. The number of protons per bunch producing these single-beam events
agrees with that in the colliding bunches to within 10%. The radiation and activation-induced backgrounds are implicitly part of this background estimate. Double-counting of these components is removed using estimates from empty events. The total background contributions to the inclusive and single-sided data samples are determined to be 1.2% and 5.8%, respectively. The classification of single-sided events as double-sided due to noise or other backgrounds is estimated to be below 0.1%. A systematic uncertainty of 50% is assigned to the background based on studies of the background composition and the relative contributions of the background components. This uncertainty is treated as fully correlated between the single-sided and inclusive selections.

The trigger efficiency for events passing the inclusive selection, ε_{trig}, is measured with respect to events selected with the LUCID detector after subtracting the background. A trigger efficiency of 99.7% (97.4%) is measured for the inclusive (single-sided) event sample. In both cases the statistical uncertainty is below 0.1%. The efficiency is also measured with events selected by the LHCf detector and agrees within ±0.3% with the LUCID determination. This difference is taken as a systematic uncertainty.

The ratio of the number of events passing the single-sided event selection to the number passing the inclusive selection (R_{SS}) is used to adjust, for each model, the fractional contribution of the single- and double-diffractive dissociative cross section (σ_SD + σ_DD) to the inelastic cross section, f_D = (σ_SD + σ_DD)/σ_{inel} [12]. The measured value is R_{SS} = 10.4% with a total uncertainty of ±0.4%. The dominant systematic uncertainty arises from the background subtraction in the single-sided sample. For each MC model, f_D is varied until it matches the observed R_{SS} value in data. The data uncertainty is used to set the error in the constrained f_D for each model. An additional uncertainty in the ratio of single- to double-diffractive events is determined by taking the diffractive events to be entirely SD or to be evenly divided between SD and DD.

Using this method, the fitted f_D in the PYTHIA8 samples is between 25% and 31%, depending on the model (the default value is 28%). For the QGSJET-II (EPOS LHC) model the fitted f_D is 35% (37%), differing significantly from the default value of 21% (28%). The observed R_{SS} and the MC predictions of its dependence on f_D are shown in Fig. 1. The fitted f_D is used when determining the acceptance corrections ε_{sel} and f_{<10^-6} for each model.

In Fig. 2 the n_{MBTS} distributions in data are compared to the ones from MC simulated samples utilizing the fitted f_D values for both the inclusive and single-sided selections. The estimated background is subtracted from the measured distribution, and the trigger efficiency measured in data is applied to the simulation. The data distributions and MC simulation are peaked at high multiplicity values. In the single-sided case, n_{MBTS} = 12 corresponds to hits in all counters on one side of the detector. The data agree best with the DL models, particularly in the low-n_{MBTS} range. The MBR-based distribution provides a slightly worse description of the data. The PYTHIA8 sample using the SS model does not describe data well in the low-multiplicity region. EPOS LHC and QGSJET-II also do not describe the data well, particularly in the single-sided hit multiplicity distribution. Therefore, the PYTHIA8 DL model with ε = 0.085 is chosen as the nominal MC model for the ε_{sel} and f_{<10^-6} corrections, and only the DL and MBR models are considered for systematic uncertainties related to the MC corrections.

The event selection efficiency, ε_{sel}, depends upon the MBTS counter sensitivity. This sensitivity is tested using isolated charged particles, reconstructed as ID tracks in the region 2.07 < |γ| < 2.5 where the coverages of the MBTS and ID overlap. Over the full coverage of the MBTS counters, the calorimeter is used to measure the counter efficiency with respect to particles that deposit sufficient energy in the calorimeter to seed a topological energy cluster [39]. Differences between the efficiencies in data and MC simulation are accounted for by adjusting the MBTS charge threshold in MC simulation until the simulated efficiencies match those observed in the data. The residual uncertainty in the counter efficiency after these corrections is ±0.5% for the outer and ±1.0% for the inner counters. Additionally, an uncertainty arising from the knowledge of the material in front of the MBTS detector is estimated using MC samples with an increased amount of material in front of the MBTS. Based on the MC samples, the uncertainty in the efficiency measurement due to modeling of hadronization and the underlying event is estimated to be negligible.

After adjusting the counter charge threshold, ε_{sel} is determined from the nominal PYTHIA8 DL MC simulations, using the fitted f_D corresponding to this model, to be 99.34% with a statistical uncertainty of ±0.03%. The uncertainty in the MBTS counter efficiencies results in...
only a $\pm 0.1\%$ uncertainty in the overall event selection efficiency, because many counters are hit in typical events. In addition, an uncertainty of $\pm 0.2\%$ in $\epsilon_{\text{sel}}$ arises from the knowledge of the material in front of the MBTS.

The fraction of events passing the inclusive selection with $\xi < 10^{-6}$ represents an additional background component in the fiducial cross-section measurement. It is determined using the same PYTHIA8 DL MC to be $f_{\xi<10^{-6}} = (1.37 \pm 0.05)\%$, where the uncertainty is statistical.

Because the efficiency and migration corrections are correlated, they are combined in a single correction factor, 

$$C_{\text{MC}} = \frac{1 - f_{\xi<10^{-6}}}{\epsilon_{\text{sel}}}$$

for which systematic uncertainties are assessed. The systematic uncertainties include the counter efficiency variations, the impact of the material uncertainty, the uncertainty in the fitted value of $f_D$, and the variation in $C_{\text{MC}}$ found by comparing the PYTHIA8 DL and MBR models. Of these sources of uncertainty, the last is most important at $\pm 0.5\%$. The value of $C_{\text{MC}}$ is $(99.3 \pm 0.5)\%$. The uncertainty also implicitly contains an uncertainty due to the CD contribution, since this is included in only some of the models.

The uncertainty in the integrated luminosity is $\pm 1.9\%$. It is derived, following a methodology similar to that detailed in Refs. [40,41], from a calibration of the luminosity scale using $x$-$y$ beam-separation scans performed in August 2015. This calibration uncertainty is slightly smaller than what has been reported in Ref. [42] because the low-luminosity data set used in this Letter is not affected by the uncertainties related to high-luminosity runs.

The components of the fiducial cross-section calculation [Eq. (1)] are shown in Table I with their systematic uncertainties. The statistical uncertainties are negligible. The measured fiducial cross section is determined to be

$$\sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{fid}} = 68.1 \pm 0.6(\text{exp}) \pm 1.3(\text{lum}) \text{ mb},$$

where the first uncertainty refers to all experimental uncertainties apart from the luminosity and the second refers to the luminosity only.

The PYTHIA8 DL model predicts values of 71.0 mb, 69.1 mb, and 68.1 mb for $\xi = 0.06, 0.085,$ and 0.10, respectively, all of which are compatible with the measurement. The PYTHIA8 MBR model predicts 70.1 mb, also in agreement with the measurement. The Epos LHC (71.2 mb) and QGSJET-II (72.7 mb) predictions exceed the data by $2 \sim 3\sigma$. The PYTHIA8 SS model predicts 74.4 mb, and thus exceeds the measured value by $\sim 4\sigma$.

The extrapolation to $\sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{fid}}$ uses constraints from previous ATLAS measurements to minimize the model dependence of the component that falls outside the fiducial region. $\sigma_{\text{inel}}$ can be written as

$$\sigma_{\text{inel}} = \sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{fid}} + \sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}}(\xi < 5 \times 10^{-6})$$

$$\times \sigma_{\text{MC}}(\xi < 10^{-5}) \times \sigma_{\text{MC}}(\xi > 5 \times 10^{-6}).$$

The term $\sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}}(\xi < 5 \times 10^{-6}) = \sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}} - \sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}}(\xi > 5 \times 10^{-6}) = 9.9 \pm 2.4$ mb is the difference between $\sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}}$ and $\sigma_{\text{inel}}^{\text{TeV}}(\xi > 5 \times 10^{-6})$.
FIG. 3. The inelastic proton-proton cross section versus \( \sqrt{s} \).

Measurements from other hadron collider experiments [6,7,9,14,15] and the Pierre Auger experiment [16] are also shown. Some LHC data points have been slightly shifted in the horizontal position for display purposes. The data are compared to the PYTHIA8, EPOS LHC and QGSJet-II MC generator predictions. The uncertainty in the ATLAS ALFA measurement is smaller than the marker size.

measured at 7 TeV using the ALFA detector [8], \( \sigma_{\text{inel}}^{7 \text{ TeV}} \), and \( \sigma_{\text{inel}} \) measured at 7 TeV for \( \xi > 5 \times 10^{-6} \) using the MBTS [12] (The 7 TeV result is corrected upward by 1.9% following an improved luminosity calibration [40]). The uncertainties of the two measurements are uncorrelated.

The PYTHIA8 DL and PYTHIA8 MBR MC samples are used to assess the systematic uncertainty in the MC-derived ratio of cross sections in Eq. (2), which is determined to be 1.015 \( \pm \) 0.081. (The value of the ratio arises from an approximately 20% increase in cross section from increasing \( \sqrt{s} \) which is largely compensated by a 15% decrease due to the change in the \( \xi \) distribution.) These models also agree with the measurement of \( \sigma^{7 \text{ TeV}}(\xi < 5 \times 10^{-6}) \) to within 2\( \sigma \).

The measured value for \( \sigma_{\text{inel}} \) is

\[
\sigma_{\text{inel}} = 78.1 \pm 0.6(\text{exp}) \pm 1.3(\text{lum}) \pm 2.6(\text{extrap}) \text{ mb}.
\]

This and other inelastic cross-section measurements are compared to several Monte Carlo models in Fig. 3. Additional predictions range between 76.6 and 81.6 mb [43-47]. Compared to the measurement with the ALFA detector at \( \sqrt{s} = 7 \text{ TeV} \) the cross section is higher by (9 \( \pm \) 4)%.

In summary, a measurement of the inelastic cross section in 60 \( \mu \text{b}^{-1} \) of proton-proton collision data at \( \sqrt{s} = 13 \text{ TeV} \) collected with the ATLAS detector at the LHC is presented. The measurement is performed in a fiducial region \( \xi > 10^{-6} \), and the result is extrapolated to the inelastic cross section using measurements at \( \sqrt{s} = 7 \text{ TeV} \). The measured cross section agrees well with a variety of theoretical predictions and is consistent with the inelastic cross section increasing with center-of-mass energy, as observed at lower energies.

We thank CERN for the very successful operation of the LHC, as well as the support staff from our institutions without whom ATLAS could not be operated efficiently. We acknowledge the support of ANPCyT, Argentina; YerPhI, Armenia; ARC, Australia; BMWFW and FWF, Austria; ANAS, Azerbaijan; SSTC, Belarus; CNPq and FAPESP, Brazil; NSERC, NRC and CFI, Canada; CERN; CONICYT, Chile; CAS, MOST and NSFC, China; COLCIENCIAS, Colombia; MSMT CR, MPO CR and VSC CR, Czech Republic; DNRF and DNSRC, Denmark; IN2P3-CNRS, CEA-DSM/IRFU, France; GNSF, Georgia; BMBF, HGF, and MPG, Germany; GSRT, Greece; RGC, Hong Kong SAR, China; ISF, I-CORE and Benoziyo Center, Israel; INFN, Italy; MEXT and JSPS, Japan; CNRST, Morocco; FOM and NWO, Netherlands; RCN, Norway; MNiSW and NCN, Poland; FCT, Portugal; MNE/IFA, Romania; MES of Russia and NRC KI, Russian Federation; JINR; MESTD, Serbia; MSSR, Slovakia; ARRS and MIZŠ, Slovenia; DST/ NRF, South Africa; MINECO, Spain; SRC and Wallenberg Foundation, Sweden; SERI, SNSF and Cantons of Bern and Geneva, Switzerland; MOST, Taiwan; TAEK, Turkey; STFC, United Kingdom; DOE and NSF, United States of America. In addition, individual groups and members have received support from BCKDF, the Canada Council, CANARIE, CRC, Compute Canada, FQRNT, and the Ontario Innovation Trust, Canada; EPLANET, ERC, FP7, Horizon 2020 and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, European Union; Investissements d’Avenir Labex and Idex, ANR, Région Auvergne and Fondation Partager le Savoir, France; DFG and AvH Foundation, Germany; Herakleitos, Thales and Aristeia programmes co-financed by EU-ESF and the Greek NSRF; BSF, GIF and Minerva, Israel; BRF, Norway; Generalitat de Catalunya, Generalitat Valenciana, Spain; the Royal Society and Leverhulme Trust, United Kingdom. The crucial computing support from all WLCG partners is acknowledged gratefully, in particular from CERN, the ATLAS Tier-1 facilities at TRIUMF (Canada), NDGF (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), CC-IN2P3 (France), KIT/GridKA (Germany), INFN-CNAF (Italy), NL-T1 (Netherlands), PIC (Spain), ASGC (Taiwan), RAL (UK) and BNL (USA), the Tier-2 facilities worldwide and large non-WLCG resource providers. Major contributors of computing resources are listed in Ref. [48].

Swiss National Science Foundation


[18] ATLAS uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the center of the detector and the z axis along the beam pipe. The x axis points from the IP to the center of the LHC ring, and the y axis points upward. Cylindrical coordinates $(r, \phi)$ are used in the transverse plane, $\phi$ being the azimuthal angle around the beam pipe. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle $\theta$ as $\eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)$.


(ATLAS Collaboration)

1Department of Physics, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia
2Physics Department, SUNY Albany, Albany, New York, USA
3Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada
4aDepartment of Physics, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey
4bIstanbul Aydin University, Istanbul, Turkey
4cDivision of Physics, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, Turkey
5LAPP, CNRS/IN2P3 and Université Savoie Mont Blanc, Annecy-le-Vieux, France
6High Energy Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois, USA
7Department of Physics, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA
8Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA
9Physics Department, University of Athens, Athens, Greece
10Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou, Greece
11Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA
12Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan
13Institut de Física d’Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Barcelona, Spain, Spain
14Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
15Department for Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
16Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley, California, USA
17Department of Physics, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
18Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
19School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom
20aDepartment of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
20bDepartment of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Turkey
20cIstanbul Bilgi University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey, Turkey
20dBahcesehir University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey, Turkey
21Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Antonio Narino, Bogota, Colombia
22aINFN Sezione di Bologna, Italy
22bDipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy
23Physikalisches Institut, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
24Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
25Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA
26Universidade Federal do Rio De Janeiro COPPE/EE/IF, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
26bElectrical Circuits Department, Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora, Brazil
27Federal University of Sao Joao del Rei (UFSJ), Sao Joao del Rei, Brazil
28aInstituto de Fisica, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
28bPhysics Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York, USA
28cTransilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania, Romania
28dNational Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest, Romania
28eNational Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Physics Department, Cluj Napoca, Romania
29Department of Physics, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile
30Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaiso, Chile
31Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
32Department of Modern Physics, University of Science and Technology of China, Anhui, China
33Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Jiangsu, China


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182002-15
82\textsuperscript{Fysiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund, Sweden
83\textsuperscript{Departamento de Física Teorica C-15, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
84\textsuperscript{Institut für Physik, Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany
85\textsuperscript{School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom
86\textsuperscript{CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France
87\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA
88\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada
89\textsuperscript{School of Physics, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
90\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
91\textsuperscript{Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA
92\textsuperscript{INFN Sezione di Milano, Italy
93\textsuperscript{Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Milano, Milano, Italy
94\textsuperscript{B.I. Stepanov Institute of Physics, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Minsk, Republic of Belarus
95\textsuperscript{National Scientific and Educational Centre for Particle and High Energy Physics, Minsk, Republic of Belarus
96\textsuperscript{Group of Particle Physics, University of Montreal, Montreal, QC, Canada
97\textsuperscript{P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia
98\textsuperscript{Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP), Moscow, Russia
99\textsuperscript{National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia
100\textsuperscript{D.V. Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
101\textsuperscript{Fakultät für Physik, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, München, Germany
102\textsuperscript{Max-Planck-Institut für Physik (Werner-Heisenberg-Institut), München, Germany
103\textsuperscript{Nagasaki Institute of Applied Science, Nagasaki, Japan
104\textsuperscript{INFN Sezione di Napoli, Italy
105\textsuperscript{Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Napoli, Napoli, Italy
106\textsuperscript{Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA
107\textsuperscript{Nikhef National Institute for Subatomic Physics and University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
108\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA
109\textsuperscript{Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, SB RAS, Novosibirsk, Russia
110\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, New York University, New York, New York, USA
111\textsuperscript{Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
112\textsuperscript{Faculty of Science, Okayama University, Okayama, Japan
113\textsuperscript{Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, USA
114\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA
115\textsuperscript{Palacký University, RCPTM, Olomouc, Czech Republic
116\textsuperscript{Center for High Energy Physics, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA
117\textsuperscript{LAL, Univ. Paris-Sud, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, Orsay, France
118\textsuperscript{Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan
119\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
120\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom
121\textsuperscript{INFN Sezione di Pavia, Italy
122\textsuperscript{Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
123\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
124\textsuperscript{National Research Centre "Kurchatov Institute" B.P. Konstantinov Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, St. Petersburg, Russia
125\textsuperscript{INFN Sezione di Pisa, Italy
126\textsuperscript{Dipartimento di Fisica E. Fermi, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
127\textsuperscript{Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
128\textsuperscript{Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas—LIP, Lisboa, Portugal
129\textsuperscript{Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal
130\textsuperscript{Department of Physics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal
131\textsuperscript{Centro de Física Nuclear da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal
132\textsuperscript{Departamento de Física, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
133\textsuperscript{Departamento de Física Teorica y del Cosmos and CAFPE, Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain
134\textsuperscript{Dep Física and CEFITEC de Faculdade de Ciencias e Tecnologia, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Caparica, Portugal
135\textsuperscript{Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic
136\textsuperscript{Czech Technical University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
137\textsuperscript{Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
138\textsuperscript{State Research Center Institute for High Energy Physics (Protvino), NRC KI, Russia
139\textsuperscript{Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
Fakultät für Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften, Fachgruppe Physik, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany

Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA

Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia

Centre de Calcul de l’Institut National de Physique Nucléaire et de Physique des Particules (IN2P3), Villeurbanne, France

\^aDeceased.
\^bAlso at Department of Physics, King’s College London, London, United Kingdom.
\^cAlso at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan.
\^dAlso at Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia.
\^eAlso at TRIUMF, Vancouver BC, Canada.
\^fAlso at Department of Physics & Astronomy, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.
\^gAlso at Department of Physics, California State University, Fresno, CA, USA.
\^hAlso at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland.
\^iAlso at Departamento de Fisica e Astronomia, Faculdade de Ciencias, Universidade do Porto, Portugal.
\^jAlso at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia.
\^kAlso at Universita di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli, Italy.
\^lAlso at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP), Canada.
\^mAlso at National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest, Romania.
\^nAlso at Department of Physics, St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia.
\^oAlso at Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.
\^pAlso at Centre for High Performance Computing, CSIR Campus, Rosebank, Cape Town, South Africa.
\^qAlso at Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA, USA.
\^rAlso at Instituto Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona, Spain.
\^sAlso at Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan.
\^tAlso at Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.
\^uAlso at Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University Nijmegen/Nikhef, Nijmegen, Netherlands.
\^vAlso at Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA.
\^wAlso at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
\^xAlso at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland.
\^yAlso at Georgian Technical University (GTU), Tbilisi, Georgia.
\^zAlso at Ochadai Academic Production, Ochanomizu University, Tokyo, Japan.
\^aaAlso at Manhattan College, New York, NY, USA.
\^abAlso at Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece.
\^acAlso at Academia Sinica Grid Computing, Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.
\^adAlso at School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China.
\^aeAlso at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia.
\^afAlso at Section de Physique, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland.
\^agAlso at Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary.
\^ahAlso at Departments of Physics & Astronomy and Chemistry, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY, USA.
\^aiAlso at International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA), Trieste, Italy.
\^ajAlso at Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA.
\^akAlso at School of Physics and Engineering, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.
\^alAlso at Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy (INRNE) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria.
\^amAlso at Faculty of Physics, M.V.Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.
\^anAlso at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.
\^aoAlso at National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia.
\^apAlso at Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA.
\^aqAlso at Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary.
\^arAlso at Flensburg University of Applied Sciences, Flensburg, Germany.
\^asAlso at University of Malaya, Department of Physics, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
\^atAlso at CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France.