Search for the Production of a Long-Lived Neutral Particle Decaying within the ATLAS Hadronic Calorimeter in Association with a Z Boson from pp Collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV

M. Aaboud et al.*
(ATLAS Collaboration)

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This Letter presents a search for the production of a long-lived neutral particle ($Z_d$) decaying within the ATLAS hadronic calorimeter, in association with a standard model (SM) Z boson produced via an intermediate scalar boson, where $Z \rightarrow \ell^+ \ell^-$ ($\ell = e, \mu$). The data used were collected by the ATLAS detector during 2015 and 2016 pp collisions with a center-of-mass energy of $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV at the Large Hadron Collider and correspond to an integrated luminosity of $36.1 \pm 0.8$ fb$^{-1}$. No significant excess of events is observed above the expected background. Limits on the production cross section of the scalar boson times its decay branching fraction into the long-lived neutral particle are derived as a function of the mass of the intermediate scalar boson, the mass of the long-lived neutral particle, and its $cT$ from a few centimeters to one hundred meters. In the case that the intermediate scalar boson is the SM Higgs boson, its decay branching fraction to a long-lived neutral particle with a $cT$ approximately between 0.1 and 7 m is excluded with a 95% confidence level up to 10% for $m_{Z_d}$ between 5 and 15 GeV.

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Many extensions to the standard model (SM) such as supersymmetry [1,2], inelastic dark matter [3], and hidden valley scenarios [4,5] predict the existence of long-lived neutral particles that can decay hadronically. Search for long-lived neutral particles is an emerging field of research that has attracted significant theoretical and experimental interests. So far, only searches for the pair production of such particles have been carried out by the ATLAS [6–9], CMS [10,11], and LHCb [12,13] experiments at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), and the CDF [14], and D0 [15] experiments at the Tevatron.

This Letter reports a new way to look for new physics (NP) beyond the SM in a collider using singly produced long-lived neutral particle, which is one potential scenario that NP can manifest itself but had never been considered in theories or experiments. Among many possible single production final states, this Letter focuses on search for a hadronically decaying long-lived neutral particle, denoted by $Z_d$ hereafter, produced in association with a SM Z boson through an intermediate scalar $\Phi$ or Higgs boson, $pp \rightarrow \Phi/H \rightarrow ZZ_d$, where $Z \rightarrow \ell^+ \ell^-$ ($\ell = e, \mu$). Production of a new particle in association with a Z boson is a popular scenario in hidden- or dark-sector models with an additional $U(1)_d$ dark gauge symmetry [16,17]. One such model has been tested by the ATLAS experiment in a search for a new particle that is mediated by the Higgs boson and decays promptly to a lepton pair [18,19]. This analysis expands the search to a more general case to include a possible new scalar ($\Phi$) that couples to $Z$ and $Z_d$, instead of only the Higgs boson, and considers the scenario in which the $Z_d$ decays hadronically with a $cT$ between a few centimeters and 100 meters, where $c$ is the speed of light and $r$ is the $Z_d$ proper lifetime.

The analysis uses data from $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV proton-proton (pp) collisions at the LHC that were recorded by the ATLAS detector in 2015 and 2016 with single-electron and single-muon triggers [20], corresponding to an integrated luminosity of $36.1 \pm 0.8$ fb$^{-1}$. The ATLAS detector [21] is a multipurpose particle detector with a cylindrical geometry [22]. The distance between two objects in the $\eta-\phi$ space is $\Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta \eta)^2 + (\Delta \phi)^2}$. Transverse momentum is defined by $p_T = p \sin \theta$. It consists of an inner detector (ID) [23] surrounded by a solenoid that produces a 2 T magnetic field, electromagnetic and hadronic calorimeters, and a muon spectrometer in a magnetic field produced by a system of toroid magnets. The ID measures the trajectories of charged particles over the full azimuthal angle and in a pseudorapidity range of $|\eta| < 2.5$ using silicon pixel, silicon microstrip, and straw-tube transition-radiation tracker detectors. Liquid-argon electromagnetic calorimeters (LArCal) extend from 1.5 to 2.0 m in radius in the barrel and from 3.6 to 4.25 m in $|z|$ in the end caps. A scintillator-tile calorimeter (TileCal) provides hadronic calorimetry and covers the region $2.25 < r < 4.25$ m.
The experimental signature searched for is the $Z_d$ decaying within the TileCal, thus producing a jet that has little or no energy deposited in the LArCal, and no charged tracks that point to the reconstructed location of the collision of interest (hereafter called the primary vertex).

Monte Carlo (MC) simulated events are used to optimize the event selection and to help validate the analysis. Signal samples were generated using the PYTHIA 8.210 [24] generator with the NNPDF23LO parton distribution functions (PDFs) [25] and the A14 set of tuned parameters (A14 tune) [26], with an assumption that the $Z_d$ decays only to the highest-mass heavy quark pair ($bb$ or $c\bar{c}$) that is kinematically allowed. Nine samples were produced with three different $Z_d$ masses for each of three $\Phi$ masses ($m_{Z_d} = \{5, 10, 15\}, \{10, 50, 100\}, \{20, 100, 200\}$ for $m_{\Phi} = 125, 250, 500$ GeV, respectively), where $m_{\Phi} = 125$ GeV corresponds to the SM Higgs boson. The $c\tau$ of the $Z_d$ is a free parameter in this model. For each mass hypothesis of $Z_d$ and $\Phi$, its $c\tau$ is chosen to maximize the probability for $Z_d$ to decay inside the TileCal, which is found to be around 20% for all samples, as shown in Fig. 1(a). The events were reweighted to produce samples with different $c\tau(Z_d)$ [8] between 0.01 and 100 m. The dominant SM background arises from events with a $Z$ boson produced in association with jets ($Z + \text{jets}$), where a jet mimics the experimental signature of $Z_d$ decay inside the TileCal due to the presence of long-lived SM particles ($K_L^0$, $\Lambda$, etc), out-of-time pileup (additional $pp$ collisions occurring in bunch-crossings just before and after the collision of interest), noise, detector inefficiencies, and beam-induced background. Additional SM background processes include the production of top quarks and $W + \text{jets}$. The SM background MC samples are generated with the configurations described in Ref. [27] for $W + \text{jets}$ and $Z + \text{jets}$ production, and Ref. [28] for $t\bar{t}$ and single top production. The effect of multiple $pp$ interactions in the same and neighboring bunch crossings (pileup) is included by overlaying minimum-bias events simulated with PYTHIA8.186 on each generated event in all samples. The generated samples were processed through a GEANT4-based detector simulation [29,30] and the standard ATLAS reconstruction software.

The selected events have a pair of oppositely charged and isolated electrons [31] or muons [32] to form a $Z$ boson candidate. Electrons and muons are required to have $|\eta| < 2.47$ and $|\eta| < 2.4$, respectively, and $p_T > 25$ GeV (27 GeV) in data collected in 2015 (2016). The invariant mass of the $Z$ candidate ($m_{l\ell}$) is required to be between 66 and 116 GeV. Selected jets must have transverse energy $E_T > 40$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.0$ to ensure the jets are completely within the ID. They are reconstructed using the anti-$k_t$ algorithm [33,34] with a radius parameter $R = 0.4$ and calibrated to particle level [35]. Standard ATLAS jet-quality criteria [36] are applied, except the one for the ratio of the energy deposited in the hadronic calorimeter to the total energy since it removes signal jets. A jet is considered as a $Z_d$ candidate, referred to as a calorimeter-ratio jet (CR jet) hereafter, if it satisfies $\log_{10}(E_{\text{Tile}}/E_{\text{LAr}})$ > 1.2 with no associated tracks [37] of $p_T > 1$ GeV originating from the primary vertex, where $E_{\text{Tile}}$ and $E_{\text{LAr}}$ are the jet energy deposited in the TileCal and LArCal, respectively [6], as shown in Fig. 1(b). Jets with $E_T < 60$ GeV in the transition region between the barrel and end cap cryostats ($1.0 < |\eta| < 1.3$) are not considered as CR-jet candidates due to noise in the gap scintillator of the TileCal [38]. In addition, the timing of the CR jet is required to be between $-3$ and $15$ ns in order to suppress jets arising from out-of-time pileup and beam-induced backgrounds [6]. The timing of a jet is obtained from its constituent calorimeter cells by calculating an average time over cells weighted by cell energy squared where the cell time is measured.

**FIG. 1.** (a) The probability of a $Z_d$ boson to decay within the TileCal as a function of the $c\tau$ for each choice of $m_{\Phi}$ and $m_{Z_d}$. As $m_{Z_d}$ increases (for a fixed $m_{\Phi}$) the $Z_d$ becomes less boosted and therefore travels less distance into the detector before decaying. (b) The distributions of $\log_{10}(E_{\text{Tile}}/E_{\text{LAr}})$ for jets in background and signal MC simulations [see legend of Fig. 1(a) for signal labels] and $W + \text{jets}$ data (prior to any requirements on the track multiplicity of jets or jet timing). The threshold for this variable is shown as a solid black line. (c) The distributions of the track multiplicity for jets prior to the selection of CR jets in the $W + \text{jets}$ and $Z + \text{jets}$ data samples.
according to the bunch crossing clock, relative to the expected time of flight from the bunch crossing to the cell [39]. After this selection, the number of selected events containing a CR jet with an $E_T$ above a chosen threshold is compared with the predicted total number of background events. The minimum $E_T$ requirement of the selected CR jets is further optimized to achieve the highest experimental sensitivity for each mass hypothesis [40]. It is set to be 40 GeV for $m_{b}$ = 125 GeV samples, 60 GeV for $m_{b}$ = 250 GeV samples, and 80 GeV for $m_{b}$ = 500 GeV samples.

The signal efficiency times acceptance ($\epsilon \times A$) is defined as the ratio of the number of selected signal events in MC simulations to the number of generated signal events. It is a function of $m_{b}$, $m_{Z_d}$, and the $c\tau(Z_d)$. The maximum values vary between approximately 1% for lowest $m_{b}$ samples to 5–7% for samples with larger $\Phi$ mass. The main loss is due to the low probability that $Z_d$ decays inside the TileCal, as shown in Fig. 1(a). The samples for $m_{b}$ = 125 GeV suffer further efficiency loss due to the jet $E_T$ requirement.

MC simulations are not reliable enough to estimate the backgrounds of this analysis, as illustrated by the right-hand side of Fig. 1(b). A data-driven approach is thus used for its estimation. A control data sample of SM $W$ + jets events, with the same event selection criteria of $W \rightarrow \ell\nu (\ell = e, \mu)$ in Ref. [41], is used to derive the probability for a jet to pass the selection of the CR jet, assuming that the $Z_d$ cannot be produced in association with a $W$ boson. The probability is calculated as $f_{CR} = N_{CR,jet}/N_{jet}$ in bins of the jet $E_T$ and $\eta$, where $N_{CR,jet}$ is the number of jets that satisfy the CR-jet selection criteria and $N_{jet}$ is the total number of jets from the $W$ + jets sample in each bin, as summarized in Table I. For a selected event in data containing a $Z \rightarrow \ell\ell$ candidate and $N$ jets, the corresponding probability for it to be identified as a signal event is therefore $P = 1 - \prod_{i=1}^{N_{jet}}[1 - f_{CR}(E_T, \eta)]$, where $f_{CR}(E_T, \eta)$ is the probability of the $i$th jet in the event to satisfy the CR-jet selection criteria. The sum of the probabilities $P$ for all the selected events is therefore the expected number of background events. Potential signal contamination of this control region was estimated using MC and found to have a <1% impact on the background estimate.

### Table I. The numbers of jets satisfying different requirements on minimum jet $E_T$ and their corresponding averaged CR-jet selection probabilities in the $W \rightarrow \ell\nu$ samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum jet $E_T$</th>
<th>40 GeV</th>
<th>60 GeV</th>
<th>80 GeV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$N_{CR,jet}(W \rightarrow e\nu)$</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N_{CR,jet}(W \rightarrow \mu\nu)$</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N_{jet}(W \rightarrow e\nu)$</td>
<td>$3.3 \times 10^7$</td>
<td>$1.5 \times 10^7$</td>
<td>$0.8 \times 10^7$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N_{jet}(W \rightarrow \mu\nu)$</td>
<td>$3.1 \times 10^7$</td>
<td>$1.3 \times 10^7$</td>
<td>$0.7 \times 10^7$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$f_{CR}(W \rightarrow e\nu)$</td>
<td>$3.0 \times 10^{-5}$</td>
<td>$1.3 \times 10^{-5}$</td>
<td>$7.9 \times 10^{-6}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$f_{CR}(W \rightarrow \mu\nu)$</td>
<td>$3.3 \times 10^{-5}$</td>
<td>$1.4 \times 10^{-5}$</td>
<td>$9.7 \times 10^{-6}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Studies [6] have shown that jets originating from quarks and gluons may have different probabilities of satisfying the selection criteria for CR jets. MC simulations predict that jets from $W$ + jets and $Z$ + jets production are mostly initiated by quarks with a similar fraction (~73%). However, $W$ + jets data samples are contaminated with a significant fraction of SM multijet events with a misidentified lepton, which is estimated to be approximately 2% in the muon final state and 17% in the electron final state using background-enriched control samples [41]. SM multijets originate primarily from gluons and thus introduce a difference between the $W$ + jets and $Z$ + jets samples. The distributions of the track multiplicity of a jet in the $W$ + jets and $Z$ + jets samples, which are sensitive to the quark/gluon jet fraction [42], show a significant difference for track multiplicities of 0 and 1 in Fig. 1(c). As a result, the $f_{CR}$ values measured in the muon final state are used for the central value of the background estimate, while the $f_{CR}$ values measured in the electron final state are used as a cross-check to assign a systematic uncertainty due to different quark or gluon jet fractions in the $W$ + jets and $Z$ + jets samples. The measured probabilities, $f_{CR}$, are found to be dependent on the jet multiplicity in the event. Studies show that this is caused by the presence of jets from pileup interactions which deposit additional energy in the LArCal, suppressing the signature of CR jets. The jet multiplicity and pileup distributions of events in the $W$ + jets sample are the same as those from the $Z$ + jets sample, and therefore the parametrization of the measured $f_{CR}$ as a function of jet multiplicity or pileup is not necessary.

Several studies were performed to validate the background estimation procedure. A $Z$ + jets sideband is formed from events satisfying all signal selection criteria except the invariant-mass requirement for the $Z$ candidate. The mass is required to be 30 < $m_{\ell\ell}$ < 55 GeV. The events in the higher mass sideband $m_{\ell\ell}$ > 116 GeV are not used as they are still dominated by $Z$ + jets production, as indicated by background MC simulations [43]. Based on the measured CR-jet probability in $W$ + jets, the expected numbers of background events with $E_T$ of CR-jets greater than 40, 60, and 80 GeV are estimated to be 2.2 ± 0.2, 0.7 ± 0.1, and 0.3 ± 0.1, where the uncertainties are statistical only. They are consistent with the corresponding observations in data, which have 1, 1, and 0 events, respectively.

The background estimation method relies on an assumption that jets in the $W$ + jets sample have the same characteristics as jets in the $Z$ + jets sample. This assumption is tested using validation jets that are defined to satisfy the selection criteria of the CR jets except the zero-ghost-track requirement. Validation jets must have more than two associated tracks to avoid signal contamination, as MC-simulated signal events show that less than 1% of jets from $Z_d$ decays inside the TileCal have more than two tracks. The probability for a jet to be identified as
a validation jet is measured in the $W + \text{jets}$ sample as a function of jet $E_T$ and $\eta$ and subsequently used to predict the number of events containing a $Z \rightarrow \ell\ell$ candidate and at least one validation jet. As a result, a global scale factor of 1.24, which is defined as the observed number of events with validation jets divided by the predicted value, is applied to the measured probabilities $f_{CR}$. A 50% relative correction of the scale factor ($\pm 0.12$) is assigned as a systematic uncertainty due to potential bias of the background estimation procedure.

The systematic uncertainties of the background estimation include the statistical uncertainty from the $W + \text{jets}$ sample (2–8%), potential difference in the quark or gluon jet fractions between the $W + \text{jets}$ and $Z + \text{jets}$ samples (7–20%), and the scale factor uncertainty ($\sim 10\%$) measured using the validation jets. The uncertainty of the integrated luminosity is 2.1% [44,45]. Uncertainties resulting from detector effects such as the trigger efficiencies, the energy scale and resolution of jets [35], lepton identification, reconstruction and isolation efficiencies, lepton momentum scales, and resolutions [31,32,46] only affect the calculation of the selection efficiencies of $Z_d$ signal events, since the background is estimated from the data. They are typically small ($\sim 1–5\%$). Pileup adds extra tracks and electromagnetic energy to jets. The systematic uncertainties associated with reweighting the pileup distribution from the generated MC simulations to the data are typically small ($\langle 5\%\rangle$ except for the samples with $m_\Phi = 125$ GeV ($\sim 13\%$), in which case the $Z_d$ have small energies and additional energy deposition in the LArCal from pileup can significantly affect their selection efficiencies. Since the CR jets in this analysis have a very small fraction of their energies inside the LArCal, the in situ jet energy intercalibration [6,35] is repeated using the $p_T$ balance method in dijets events, and the observed difference between the data and MC simulation is used to derive an additional systematic uncertainty of the jet energy scale. The corresponding effect on the signal efficiencies is approximately 5–9% for samples with $m_\Phi = 125$ GeV, and negligible for samples with higher $m_\Phi$ values. The effects on the signal efficiency and acceptance due to theoretical uncertainties, such as a PDF choice and initial- and final-state radiation modeling, are found to be very small (<1%).

Table II shows the predicted numbers of background events and the observed data events with different minimum $E_T$ requirements for the selected CR jets. The data are well described by the background estimate. In the absence of any significant data excess, upper limits (ULs) on the signal yield are derived using the C.L. method [40] taking into account both the statistical and systematic uncertainties. The results are listed in Table II.

The results are further interpreted as the UL on the production cross section of $\Phi$ times the decay branching fraction $B(\Phi \rightarrow ZZ_d)$, as a function of $m_\Phi$, $m_{Z_d}$, and $c\tau$ of the $Z_d$. In the case of the SM Higgs boson, where $m_H = 125$ GeV, the UL on $B(H \rightarrow ZZ_d)$ are evaluated using the SM Higgs boson cross section $\sigma_{SM} = 48.5^{+4.6}_{-6.7}$ pb [47] of the gluon-gluon fusion process; other production modes are ignored. The results, reweighted to other $c\tau$ [8], are shown in Fig. 2.

In conclusion, this Letter reports a novel search for a singly produced long-lived neutral particle $Z_d$, in association with an SM $Z$ boson via coupling to an intermediate
scalar boson. The analysis is based on 36.1 ± 0.8 fb⁻¹ of \( pp \) collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 13 \) TeV collected in 2015 and 2016 with the ATLAS detector at the LHC. No excess over the expected background was observed. Upper limits on the production cross section of the scalar boson times its branching fraction to the long-lived neutral particle at 95% C.L. are derived as a function of the particle proper lifetimes for different masses of the scalar boson and the \( Z_d \). In the case that the intermediate scalar boson is the SM Higgs boson, its decay branching fraction to a long-lived neutral particle with a \( c\tau \) approximately between 0.1 and 7 m is excluded with a 95% C.L. up to 10% for \( m_{Z_d} \) between 5 and 15 GeV.

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[15] D0 Collaboration, Search for Resonant Pair Production of Neutral Long-Lived Particles Decaying to \( b\bar{b} \) in \( pp \) Collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 1.96 \) TeV, Phys. Rev. Lett. 103, 071801 (2009).


[22] 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 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 $z$ axis. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle $\theta$ as $\eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)$.


1Department of Physics, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia
2Physics Department, SUNY Albany, Albany, New York, USA
3Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 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, Université Grenoble Alpes, Université Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS/IN2P3, Annecy, France
6High Energy Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois, USA
7Department of Physics, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA
8Department of Physics, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA
9Physics Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
10Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou, Greece
11Department of Physics, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA
12 Bahcesehir University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey
12aDepartment of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
12bIstanbul Bilgi University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey
12cDepartment of Physics, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey
12dDepartment of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Turkey
13Institut de Physique des Hautes Énergies (IPHE), University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland
14Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan
15Institut de Física d’Altes Energies (IFAE), Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Barcelona, Spain
16Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley, California, USA
17Department for Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
18School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom
19Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Antonio Nariño, Bogota, Colombia
20Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
21Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
22Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA
23Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania
24Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
25Institut für Physik, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany
26National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Physics Department, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
27West University in Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania
28aFaculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
28bInstitute of Subnuclear Physics, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Kosice, Slovak Republic
29Department of Physics, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York, USA
30Departmento de Física, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina
31Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom
32Department of Physics, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
32bDepartment of Physics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
32cSchool of Physics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
33Department of Physics, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
34aFaculté des Sciences Ain Chock, Réseau Universitaire de Physique des Hautes Énergies—Université Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco
34bCentre National de l’Energie des Sciences Techniques Nucléaires (CNESN), Rabat, Morocco
34cFaculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, LPHEA-Marrakech, Morocco
34dFaculté des Sciences, Université Mohamed Premier and LPPTM, Oujda, Morocco
34eFaculté des sciences, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, Morocco
35CERN, Geneva, Switzerland
36Enrico Fermi Institute, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA
LPC, Université Clermont Auvergne, CNRS/IN2P3, Clermont-Ferrand, France
3 Nevis Laboratory, Columbia University, Irvington, New York, USA
4 Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
5 Dipartimento di Fisica, Università della Calabria, Rende, Italy
6 INFN Gruppo Collegato di Cosenza, Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Italy
7 Physics Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, USA
8 Physics Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas, USA
9 Dipartimento di Fisica, Stockholm University, Sweden
10 Oskar Klein Centre, Stockholm, Sweden
11 Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron DESY, Hamburg and Zeuthen, Germany
12 Lehrstuhl für Experimentelle Physik IV, Technische Universität Dortmund, Dortmund, Germany
13 Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden, Germany
14 Department of Physics, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA
15 SUPA—School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
16 INFN e Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
17 II. Physikalisches Institut, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany
18 Département de Physique Nucléaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Genève, Switzerland
19 Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova, Italy
20 INFN Sezione di Genova, Italy
21 II. Physikalisches Institut, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Gießen, Germany
22 SUPA—School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom
23 LPSC, Université Grenoble Alpes, CNRS/IN2P3, Grenoble INP, Grenoble, France
24 Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
25 Department of Modern Physics and State Key Laboratory of Particle Detection and Electronics, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China
26 Institute of Frontier and Interdisciplinary Science and Key Laboratory of Particle Physics and Particle Irradiation (MOE), Shandong University, Qingdao, China
27 School of Physics and Astronomy, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, KLPPAC-MoE, SKLPPC, Shanghai, China
28 Tsung-Dao Lee Institute, Shanghai, China
29 Kirchhoff-Institut für Physik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
30 Physikalisches Institut, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
31 Faculty of Applied Information Science, Hiroshima Institute of Technology, Hiroshima, Japan
32 Department of Physics, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong, China
33 Department of Physics, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
34 Department of Physics and Institute for Advanced Study, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China
35 Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan
36 Department of Physics, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA
37 INFN Gruppo Collegato di Udine, Sezione di Trieste, Udine, Italy
38 ICTP, Trieste, Italy
39 Dipartimento di Chimica, Fisica e Ambiente, Università di Udine, Udine, Italy
40 INFN Sezione di Lecce, Italy
41 Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università del Sannio, Benevento, Italy
42 INFN Sezione di Lecce, Lecce, Italy
43 INFN Sezione di Milano, Italy
44 INFN Sezione di Napoli, Italy
45 Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
46 INFN Sezione di Pisa, Italy
47 Dipartimento di Fisica E. Fermi, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
48 INFN Sezione di Roma, Italy
49 INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, Italy
50 Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma, Italy
51 INFN Sezione di Roma Tre, Italy
52 Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università Roma Tre, Roma, Italy
53 INFN-TIFPA, Italy
54 Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, Italy
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74 Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, Austria
75 University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
76 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, USA
77 Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia
78 Departamento de Engenharia Elétrica, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora, Brazil
79 Universidade Federal do Rio De Janeiro COPPE/EE/IF, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
80 Universidade Federal de São João del Rei (UFSJ), São João del Rei, Brazil
81 Instituto de Física, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
82 KEK, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, Tsukuba, Japan
83 Graduate School of Science, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan

84 AGH University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, Krakow, Poland
85 Marian Smoluchowski Institute of Physics, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland
86 Institute of Nuclear Physics Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow, Poland
87 Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
88 Kyoto University of Education, Kyoto, Japan

89 Research Center for Advanced Particle Physics and Department of Physics, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan
90 Instituto de Física La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET, La Plata, Argentina
91 Physics Department, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom
92 Department of Experimental Particle Physics, Jožef Stefan Institute and Department of Physics, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
93 School of Physics and Astronomy, Queen Mary University of London, London, United Kingdom
94 Department of Physics, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, United Kingdom
95 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University College London, London, United Kingdom
96 Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana, USA
97 Fysiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund, Sweden

98 Center de Calcul de l’Institut National de Physique Nucléaire et de Physique des Particules (IN2P3), Villeurbanne, France
99 Departamento de Física Teorica C-15 and CIAFF, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
100 Institut für Physik, Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany
101 School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom
102 CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France
103 Department of Physics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA
104 Department of Physics, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
105 Department of Physics, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
106 Department of Physics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
107 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA
108 B.I. Stepanov Institute of Physics, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Minsk, Belarus
109 Research Institute for Nuclear Problems of Byelorussian State University, Minsk, Belarus
110 Group of Particle Physics, University of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
111 P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia
112 Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP), Moscow, Russia
113 National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia

114 D.V. Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
115 Fakultät für Physik, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, München, Germany
116 Max-Planck-Institut für Physik (Werner-Heisenberg-Institut), München, Germany
117 Nagasaki Institute of Applied Science, Nagasaki, Japan
118 Graduate School of Science and Kobayashi-Maskawa Institute, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan
119 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA
120 Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University Nijmegen/Nikhef, Nijmegen, Netherlands
121 Nikhef National Institute for Subatomic Physics and University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
122 Department of Physics, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA
123 Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics and NSU, SB RAS, Novosibirsk, Russia
124 Novosibirsk State University Novosibirsk, Russia

125 Institute for High Energy Physics of the National Research Centre Kurchatov Institute, Protvino, Russia
126 Department of Physics, New York University, New York, New York, USA
127 Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
128 Faculty of Science, Okayama University, Okayama, Japan

129 Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, USA
130 Department of Physics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA
131 Palacký University, RCPTM, Joint Laboratory of Optics, Olomouc, Czech Republic

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Department of Physics, Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, USA
Department of Physics, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

Department of Physics, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
Department of Physics, Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Department of Physics, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, USA
Department of Physics, Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA

Department of Physics, Riken Nishina Center for Accelerator-Based Science, Wako, Saitama, Japan
Department of Physics, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan

Department of Physics, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, United Kingdom

Department of Physics, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Department of Physics, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut, USA

Department of Physics, Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

Department of Physics, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Department of Physics,State University of New York, Stony Brook, New York, USA

Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA

Department of Physics, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey, USA

Department of Physics, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York, USA

Department of Physics, Technische Universität München, München, Germany

Department of Physics, Technion, Haifa, Israel

Department of Physics, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA

Department of Physics, Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi, Texas, USA

Department of Physics, Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas, USA

Department of Physics, TIFR, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Department of Physics, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan

Department of Physics, Tongji University, Shanghai, China

Department of Physics, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

Department of Physics, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia, Canada

Department of Physics, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, USA

Department of Physics, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Department of Physics, University College London, London, United Kingdom

Department of Physics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Department of Physics, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, California, USA

Department of Physics, University of California Davis, Davis, California, USA

Department of Physics, University of California Irvine, Irvine, California, USA

Department of Physics, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA

Department of Physics, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA

Department of Physics, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Department of Physics, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, USA

Department of Physics, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Department of Physics, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA

Department of Physics, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Department of Physics, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA

Department of Physics, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

Department of Physics, University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany
Deceased.

Also at Department of Physics, King’s College London, London, United Kingdom.

Also at Istanbul University, Department of Physics, Istanbul, Turkey.

Also at Instituto de Física Teórica de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain.

Also at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan.

Also at TRIUMF, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Also at Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Fresno, California, USA.

Also at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland.

Also at Department de Física de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

Also at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, and Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia.

Also at The Collaborative Innovation Center of Quantum Matter (CICQM), Beijing, China.

Also at Departamento de Física, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal.

Also at Universita di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli, Italy.

Also at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP), Canada.

Also at II. Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany.

Also at Horia Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest, Romania.

Also at CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France.

Also at Department of Physics, St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Also at Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, New York, USA.

Also at Department of Financial and Management Engineering, University of the Aegean, Chios, Greece.

Also at Centre for High Performance Computing, CSIR Campus, Rosebank, Cape Town, South Africa.

Also at Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana, USA.

Also at California State University, East Bay, USA.

Also at Institucio Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona, Spain.

Also at Department of Physics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Also at LAL, Université Paris-Sud, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, Orsay, France.

Also at Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan.

Also at Physikalisches Institut, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany.

Also at Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University Nijmegen/Nikhef, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

Also at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Also at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland.

Also at Department of Physics, Stanford University, USA.

Also at Manhattan College, New York, New York, USA.

Also at Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia.

Also at Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece.

Also at LPNHE, Sorbonne Université, Paris Diderot Sorbonne Paris Cité, CNRS/IN2P3, Paris, France.

Also at The City College of New York, New York, New York, USA.

Also at Departamento de Física Teorica y del Cosmos, Universidad de Granada, Granada (Spain), Spain.

Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Sacramento, California, USA.

Also at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia.

Also at Département de Physique Nucléaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Genève, Switzerland.

Also at Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Also at School of Physics, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

Also at Department of Applied Physics and Astronomy, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

Also at Institut für Experimentalphysik, Universität Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany.

Also at National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia.

Also at Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary.

Also at Giresun University, Faculty of Engineering, Giresun, Turkey.

Also at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.