



Letter

Search for CP violation in events with top quarks and Z bosons at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ and 13.6 TeVThe CMS Collaboration¹

CERN, Geneva, Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

A search for the violation of the charge-parity (CP) symmetry in the production of top quarks in association with Z bosons is presented, using events with at least three charged leptons and additional jets. The search is performed in a sample of proton-proton collision data collected by the CMS experiment at the CERN LHC in 2016–2018 at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV and in 2022 at 13.6 TeV, corresponding to a total integrated luminosity of 173 fb⁻¹. For the first time in this final state, observables that are odd under the CP transformation are employed. Also for the first time, physics-informed machine-learning techniques are used to construct these observables. While for standard model (SM) processes the distributions of these observables are predicted to be symmetric around zero, CP -violating modifications of the SM would introduce asymmetries. Two CP -odd operators $\mathcal{O}_{tW}^I$ and $\mathcal{O}_{tZ}^I$ in the SM effective field theory are considered that may modify the interactions between top quarks and electroweak bosons. The obtained results are consistent with the SM prediction within two standard deviations, and exclusion limits on the associated Wilson coefficients of $-2.7 < c_{tW}^I < 2.5$ and $-0.2 < c_{tZ}^I < 2.0$ are set at 95 % confidence level. The largest discrepancy is observed in c_{tZ}^I where data is consistent with positive values, with an observed local significance with respect to the SM hypothesis of 2.5 standard deviations, when only linear terms are considered.

1. Introduction

The violation of the charge-parity (CP) symmetry is one of the necessary conditions to explain the baryon asymmetry (BAU) observed in the universe [1]. In the standard model (SM), CP violation occurs thanks to the imaginary phases in quark and neutrino flavor mixing matrices of the weak interaction. The magnitude associated to these SM sources is however insufficient to account for the BAU, motivating the search for additional sources of CP violation introduced by interactions beyond the SM (BSM). In cases where the BSM scale is above the accessible energy in an experiment, its effect can still influence the results. Phenomenologically, these effects introduced can be parameterized by an effective field theory (EFT). The SM EFT [2] introduces a number of operators that are odd under CP transformations and that could give rise to CP violating phenomena.

In this letter, we explore the presence of CP violation in the associated production of a Z boson with a top quark pair ($t\bar{t}Z$) or with a single top quark (tZq), with example Feynman diagrams shown in Fig. 1. The highlighted couplings could be modified by the $\mathcal{O}_{tW}^I$ and $\mathcal{O}_{tZ}^I$ dimension-6 operators, as defined in Ref. [3], that correspond to the imaginary part of the electroweak dipole operators. The strength of the operators' contribution is modulated by its associated Wilson coefficients, c_{tW}^I

and c_{tZ}^I . The inclusive and differential production cross sections for these two processes have been measured by the ATLAS and CMS Collaborations [4–8], reporting results consistent with the SM expectations in observables that are invariant under CP transformations. References [6,8] report mild excesses in the $t\bar{t}Z$ production rate, within two standard deviations of the SM prediction. The $\mathcal{O}_{tG}^I$ operator may also introduce CP -violating effects in these processes, however it was checked that the sensitivity to this operator is smaller than the one obtained in top quark pair production [9].

We exploit observables whose sign flips when evaluated on the CP transform of any given event, i.e., they are odd under CP transformations. To construct such observables, we employ physics-informed machine-learning techniques [10], which allow us to train algorithms to solve supervised learning tasks, while respecting any given laws of physics. In particular, we consider neural networks that are equivariant under the CP symmetry [11]. The SM prediction follows an even distribution under our CP -odd observables, whereas CP -violating effects in the signal processes would result in an asymmetry. Although the decay channels considered do not allow for a complete reconstruction of all final-state objects, the observables are marginalized over the unresolved degrees of freedom, maintaining the aforementioned symmetry properties. This analysis presents the first search in top quark production in

¹ cms-publication-committee-chair@cern.ch

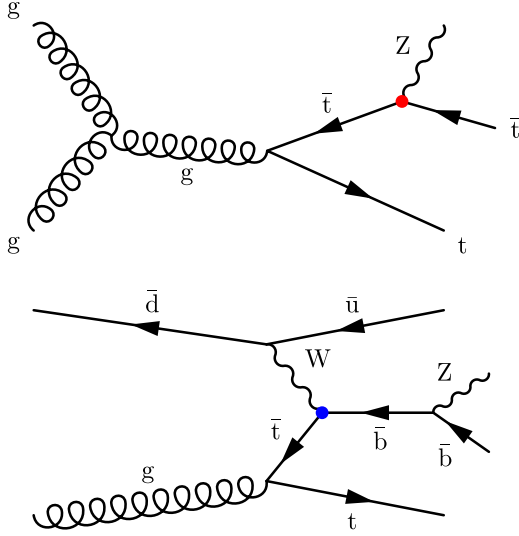


Fig. 1. Example Feynman diagrams for $t\bar{t}Z$ (upper) and tZq (lower) production with vertices that can be modified by c_{tZ}^I (c_{tW}^I) highlighted in red (blue) circle. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

association with gauge bosons that exploits CP -odd observables and is therefore sensitive to new physics effects that do not modify the total cross section of the studied processes. It is also the first search for CP violation where physics-informed machine learning is applied. Physics-informed machine learning allows us to incorporate our knowledge on the expected signature from the CP -violating signal, which enhances the robustness and sensitivity of the search. The training of these algorithms converges to the optimal observables, exploiting the modification of the signal kinematic features in the signal introduced by the BSM interaction as well as features discriminating signal from the main backgrounds.

The distribution of CP -odd observables in $t\bar{t}Z$ and tZq production is measured with proton-proton (pp) collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ (13.6) TeV collected in 2016–2018 (2022) with the CMS experiment at the CERN LHC. The 2016–2018 (2022) data correspond to an integrated luminosity of 138 (34.7) fb $^{-1}$. We analyze a sample of events with at least three charged leptons (electrons and/or muons) with additional jets, targeting leptonic decays of the Z boson and at least one of the W bosons from the top quark decays. We obtain confidence intervals for c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I using the observed yields in the distribution of the CP -odd observables, reaching comparable sensitivity to other searches exploring these operators using CP -even observables [4,12–14] and to a search for CP violation in t -channel single top quark production performed by ATLAS [15]. This search sets for the first time limits on the interference between the c_{tZ}^I and SM contributions. Tabulated results are provided in the HEPData record for this analysis [16].

2. The CMS detector and object reconstruction

The CMS apparatus [17,18] is a multipurpose, nearly hermetic detector, designed to trigger on [19–21] and identify electrons, muons, photons, and (charged and neutral) hadrons [22–24]. A “particle-flow” (PF) algorithm [25] aims to reconstruct all individual particles in an event, combining information provided by the all-silicon inner tracker and by the crystal electromagnetic (ECAL) and brass-scintillator hadron calorimeters, operating inside a 3.8 T superconducting solenoid, with data from the gas-ionization muon detectors embedded in the flux-return yoke outside the solenoid. The reconstructed particles are used to build τ leptons, jets, and missing transverse momentum [26–28].

Electrons (muons) are reconstructed with absolute pseudorapidity $|\eta| < 2.5$ (2.4), corresponding to the geometrical acceptance of the silicon strip tracker (muon system). The algorithms described in Refs.

[22,29,30] are used to efficiently select electrons and muons with transverse momentum $p_T > 15$ GeV produced in the prompt decays of W and Z bosons, or prompt τ leptons, while rejecting those that are coming from other sources.

Jets are clustered using the anti- k_T algorithm [31,32] with a distance parameter of 0.4 and their momentum is determined as the vectorial sum of all particle momenta in the jet, and is found from simulation to be, on average, within 5 to 10 % of the true particle-level jet momentum over the entire p_T spectrum and detector acceptance. Additional pp interactions within the same or nearby bunch crossings (pileup) can contribute additional tracks and calorimetric energy depositions, increasing the apparent jet momentum. To mitigate this effect, tracks identified to be originating from pileup vertices are discarded. For events recorded at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV, an offset correction is applied to correct for remaining contributions [33], while for events at $\sqrt{s} = 13.6$ TeV the pileup-per-particle identification algorithm [33,34] is used. Jet energy corrections are derived from simulation studies so that the average measured energy of jets becomes identical to that of particle level jets. In situ measurements of the momentum balance in dijet, photon+jet, Z+jet, and multijet events are used to determine any residual differences between the jet energy scale (JES) in data and in simulation, and appropriate corrections are made [27]. The missing transverse momentum vector $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ is computed as the negative vector sum of the transverse momenta of all the PF candidates in an event, and its magnitude is denoted as p_T^{miss} [28]. The $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ is modified to account for corrections to the energy scale of the reconstructed jets in the event.

Jets in the event are required to have $p_T > 25$ GeV and $|\eta| < 5$ (2.4) for events at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ (13.6) TeV. The reason for the more restrictive $|\eta|$ selection in $\sqrt{s} = 13.6$ TeV data stems from the mismodeling of detector noise during this run period, which is more challenging for PF candidates with $|\eta| > 2.5$ as their reconstruction relies exclusively on calorimeter information. Jets with $|\eta| < 2.4$ originating from the hadronization of bottom quarks (b jets) are identified by the DEEPJET algorithm [35–37]. Two working points are considered, corresponding to selection efficiencies of 84 % (“loose”) and 70 % (“tight”) for b jets, 11 % and 1 % for light-quark or gluon jets, and 50 % and 15 % for charm quark jets, respectively.

Events of interest are selected using a two-tiered trigger system. The first level, composed of custom hardware processors, uses information from the calorimeters and muon detectors to select events at a rate of around 100 kHz within a fixed latency of about 4 μ s [19]. The second level, known as the high-level trigger, consists of a farm of processors running a version of the full event reconstruction software optimized for fast processing, and reduces the event rate to a few kHz before data storage [20,21].

3. Data and simulated samples

This analysis uses data collected with a combination of single-, double-, and triple-lepton triggers, which have an efficiency larger than 98 % for events containing at least three leptons passing the requirements described in Section 4.

We employ different Monte Carlo event generators to produce samples of simulated events, which are used to determine the SM expectation of the different observables used in the analysis. The MADGRAPH5_AMC@NLO v2.6.5 or v2.9.18 [38–41] generator is used for the production of simulated samples of tZq , $t\bar{t}Z$, the production of a top quark-antiquark pair in association with a W or a Higgs boson, or with a photon ($t\bar{t}W$, $t\bar{t}H$, $t\bar{t}\gamma$), of a single top quark with a W and a Z boson, and the production of four top quarks at next-to-leading order (NLO) accuracy. The $t\bar{t}W$, $t\bar{t}H$, and $t\bar{t}\gamma$ samples are generated with one additional parton in the matrix element calculations. We simulate events involving the production of a pair of massive gauge bosons, WZ and ZZ, using POWHEG v2 [42–44] at NLO accuracy. Other minor backgrounds, such as the triple boson production or the production of top quarks in association with two gauge bosons are simulated at leading order (LO) using the

same version of MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO described above. All samples are normalized to the most accurate theoretical calculations available, namely approximate next-to-next-to-NLO for $t\bar{t}Z$ from Ref. [45] and NLO for tZq , obtained using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO.

The contribution from the $\mathcal{O}_{tW}^I$ and $\mathcal{O}_{tZ}^I$ operators is estimated using simulated samples of the $t\bar{t}Z$ and tZq processes, produced with the MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO v2.9.18 generator at LO accuracy, using the DIM6TOP model [3] to incorporate the EFT effects. We consider scenarios where only c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I take values different from zero. The decay of the top quarks into Wb and the subsequent decay of the W bosons, as well as that of the Z bosons, is simulated using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO to properly account for spin correlations of the final-state particles. The EFT effects in the production are incorporated through per-event weights, using the approach described in Refs. [46,47]. The EFT effects in the decay of the top quarks into Wb were found to be negligible in this analysis. In this way, each simulated event receives a parametric weight w given by

$$w = w_{\text{SM}} + \sum_i c_{tW}^I l_i + \sum_{ij} c_{tZ}^I c_{ij}^I q_{ij}, \quad (1)$$

where w_{SM} is the SM contribution and the sums run over tW and tZ . The terms involving l_i (q_{ij}) represent the linear (quadratic) contributions of the c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I operators to the event weight. They represent the contribution from the interference between SM and BSM diagrams (from purely BSM contributions). We refer to the former contributions as the “linear” contributions and the latter as the “quadratic” contributions.

All simulations use the NNPDF3.1 [48] set of parton distribution functions (PDFs). The generators are then interfaced with PYTHIA v8.240 [49] (2016–2018 data) or v8.306 [50] (2022 data) for showering, decay, hadronization, and underlying event simulation, using the CP5 tune [51]. To avoid double-counting between the matrix element generation in MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO and the parton shower, the FxFx [41] (MLM [39]) matching scheme is used for processes simulated at NLO (LO) accuracy with additional partons in the matrix element calculations. The CMS detector response is simulated using GEANT4 [52]. The effect of pileup interactions is taken into account by adding simulated minimum-bias interactions to the simulated hard-scattering event.

4. Event selection and background estimation

We select events with at least three reconstructed leptons passing the selection mentioned in Section 2 and with p_T larger than 25, 15, and 15 GeV, respectively, in order for the leptons to be well above the threshold of the trigger selection. Events are also required to have a pair of opposite-sign same-flavor leptons whose invariant mass is less than 15 GeV away from the Z boson mass $m_Z = 91.2$ GeV [53]. In addition, only events with at least two reconstructed jets of which at least one passes the tight b tagging requirement are selected.

Events passing this selection are dominated by the signal processes, $t\bar{t}Z$ and tZq production, but have a subdominant contribution from WZ and ZZ production, which we refer to collectively as “diboson”. Events with nonprompt leptons passing our selection and with photons undergoing conversions to electrons in their interaction with the detector material [54] also have a sizable contribution to the events passing this selection. Residual contributions from other processes listed in Section 3 remain, which we refer collectively as “rares”.

The contribution from each process, with the exception of events containing nonprompt leptons, is estimated using samples of simulated events. Simulated events are corrected to account for small discrepancies observed between data and simulations in the lepton and jet selection efficiency, b tagging efficiency, JES and jet energy resolution (JER), using dedicated calibration methods [27,36,37,55,56], implemented through scale factors (SFs) used to weight event samples or by varying the relevant quantities.

The contribution from processes with nonprompt leptons is estimated using the misidentification probability method described in

Ref. [29]. The method relies on events satisfying the nominal selection criteria, except that at least one of the leptons is required to pass looser selection criteria and fail the lepton nominal selection criteria. This sample of events is enriched in processes with nonprompt leptons and is weighted with a suitable transfer factor to estimate the contribution from this process to the nominal selection. We determine the transfer factor from data in a dedicated sample of events with a single lepton, which is enriched in multijet events containing a nonprompt lepton.

The accuracy of the SM background prediction was checked in dedicated validation regions that are defined by inverting the selection criteria applied to the number of b -tagged jets and/or the requirement of an opposite-sign same-flavor lepton pair consistent with the Z boson decay. The number of observed events in these regions agrees well with the SM predictions within the associated uncertainties.

5. Construction of CP -odd observables

Operators in the SM EFT give rise to two kinds of phenomena, corresponding to the last two terms in Eq. (1), which are linked to the Feynman amplitudes contributing to the signal processes. These terms correspond to the interference between SM and BSM Feynman amplitudes (“linear”) and to purely BSM amplitudes (“quadratic”), which are proportional to $1/\Lambda^2$ and $1/\Lambda^4$, respectively. Here Λ represents the new physics energy scale and is set in the following to 1 TeV, as a convention. We note that, in the EFT framework, we are not simultaneously sensitive to the Wilson coefficients and Λ . Linear terms are the leading contribution in powers of $1/\Lambda$, whereas quadratic terms correspond to higher-order corrections. When considering only dimension-6 operators, this construction is only consistent up to the linear term, as the pure BSM contribution is at the same order as the dimension-8 operators, which are not considered in this analysis. The linear term gives rise to CP -odd contributions, whereas both the SM and the quadratic term give rise to CP -even contributions, making searches based on the linear contributions more robust to theoretical and experimental unknowns. Since quadratic contributions may still give effects observable with our current experimental sensitivity, we consider separately the case where only the linear contribution is present and the case where both the linear and quadratic contributions are present.

Several interesting processes are present when studying the effect of CP -odd operators and final states that are CP eigenstates, such as $t\bar{t}Z$ production. Linear effects cancel out when considering CP -even observables. This is due to the fact that the CP transformation changes the sign of the linear contribution. Since each event and its CP -transform contribute to the same bin of a CP -even observable, this results in a net linear contribution equal to zero. As a consequence, for instance, linear contributions do not affect the total cross section of the studied processes. Instead, linear effects modify the distribution of CP -odd observables, introducing a characteristic asymmetry. In addition, CP -conserving processes are distributed symmetrically under CP -odd observables. Although the premise that we are considering a CP eigenstate does not always hold at the LHC (for instance, it is not the case for tZq production, which is dominated by the qg partonic initial state), these properties are still present in studies considering other states that are not CP eigenstates, as it often happens in similar observables described in the literature [57–59]. We have verified that these symmetry properties are also present in the observables we construct, as shown in Section 6.

We build CP -odd observables making use of two CP -equivariant neural networks [11], aiming to be sensitive to c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I , respectively. Each of these models, g , has the property that, for a given set of input observables x , $g(CP(x)) = -g(x)$, where $CP(x)$ is the CP transformation acting on these observables.

To build the input variables to the models, out of the three leading leptons, we consider the opposite-sign same-flavor pair whose invariant mass is closest to m_Z and denote the positive (negative) one as ℓ^{Z+} (ℓ^{Z-}). We refer to the third one as ℓ^W . As input variables to the network, we consider the 3-momenta of ℓ^{Z+} , ℓ^{Z-} , ℓ^W , and that of the five leading

jets. For each of the five leading jets, we also consider a score that takes values $\{0, 1, 2\}$ for jets that fail the loose, pass the loose but fail the tight, and pass the tight b tagging working point, respectively. For events with less than five jets, the variables associated to the missing jets are assigned to zero. We also consider the two components of $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$, the charge sign of ℓ^W , and an integer variable that takes integer values 0–5 for each of the data-taking periods, allowing the model to account for small differences in detector conditions and $\sqrt{s}$. The data-taking periods in 2016 and 2022 are each divided into two eras to account for changing detector conditions.

As described in Ref. [11], one can build our equivariant models, g_i , with $i \in \{c_{iW}^I, c_{iZ}^I\}$ by the functions $g_i(x) = f_i(x) - f_i(CP(x))$, where f_i are parametrized using fully connected multilayer perceptrons with 4 hidden layers with between 160 and 20 neurons per layer and a leaky ReLU activation function, implemented in the PYTORCH package [60]. Each of the models g_i is trained to minimize the loss functions L_i , which are similar to those used in the SALLY method [61], given by

$$L_i = \sum w_{\text{SM}} \left(\frac{l_i}{w_{\text{SM}}} - g_i(x) \right)^2, \quad (2)$$

where the definitions of w_{SM} and l_i are discussed in Eq. (1). The loss function is computed using $t\bar{t}Z$, $t\bar{t}Zq$, and WZ simulated events, over which the sum runs.

The likelihood scores as a function of c_{iW}^I and c_{iZ}^I , respectively, minimize the aforementioned loss function. These functions are sufficient summary statistics to probe small values of c_{iW}^I and c_{iZ}^I , the regime where the linear contribution dominates. As a consequence, the training of g_i converges to optimal observables [62,63] for these operators. We include both signal and WZ events in the training, which allows us to obtain observables sensitive to the EFT effects present in the $t\bar{t}Z$ and $t\bar{t}Zq$ signal processes, while also discriminating between them and WZ production, which is the leading source of backgrounds. To be robust against a potential overtraining of the discriminator, we split the sample of simulated events in three parts with 50 %, 25 %, and 25 % of the simulated events. We use the first part for the training of the networks, the second for the selection of hyperparameters and validation of the training. Only the third part, which is not used in the training, is used to estimate the event yields in the signal region.

In order to quantify the improvement of the chosen method with respect to other approaches, we consider triple products involving the three-momenta of the objects used as inputs to the neural networks, inspired by the observables proposed in Ref. [64]. This approach does not give rise to a sizable sensitivity to either of the two operators considered.

6. Statistical model, systematic uncertainties, and results

It has been checked that large values of $g_{c_{iW}^I}$ or $g_{c_{iZ}^I}$ correspond to different sets of events, showing that the discriminators exploit different features in our signals. To exploit that, events are classified in two categories according to their $|g_{c_{iW}^I}|$ and $|g_{c_{iZ}^I}|$ values as c_{iW}^I -like (c_{iZ}^I -like) if $|g_{c_{iW}^I}| > |g_{c_{iZ}^I}|$ ($|g_{c_{iW}^I}| < |g_{c_{iZ}^I}|$). In addition, events in the c_{iW}^I -like (c_{iZ}^I -like) categories are classified in bins of $g_{c_{iW}^I}$ ($g_{c_{iZ}^I}$), whose edges are symmetrically distributed around zero. In this analysis, we do not categorize events according to the data-taking era or $\sqrt{s}$. For the purpose of visualization, we define the discretized $g_{c_{iW}^I}$ ($g_{c_{iZ}^I}$) by mapping the bin edges to integer numbers between -5 and 5 . Fig. 2 shows the discretized $g_{c_{iW}^I}$ ($g_{c_{iZ}^I}$) for events in the c_{iW}^I -like and c_{iZ}^I -like categories in $t\bar{t}Zq$ and $t\bar{t}Z$ events, respectively, illustrating the symmetry properties described in Section 5.

To perform inference on c_{iW}^I and c_{iZ}^I , we consider the likelihood function

$$\mathcal{L}(c_{iW}^I, c_{iZ}^I, \theta) = \prod_i P(n_i; c_{iW}^I, c_{iZ}^I, \theta) \prod_k P(\tilde{\theta}_k; \theta_k), \quad (3)$$

where n_i is the number of observed events in each bin of the distribution and P is the probability mass function of the associated Poisson

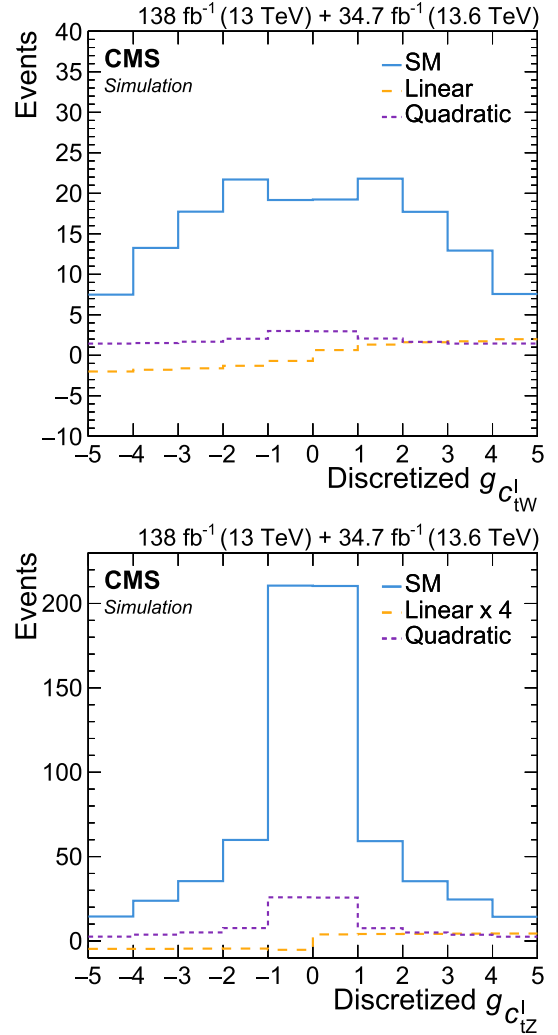


Fig. 2. Upper (lower): Distribution of the discretized $g_{c_{iW}^I}$ ($g_{c_{iZ}^I}$) for events in the c_{iW}^I -like (c_{iZ}^I -like) category in $t\bar{t}Zq$ ($t\bar{t}Z$) events. The contributions from the SM, linear, and quadratic terms when each Wilson coefficient is set to unity are plotted separately. For better visibility the interference contribution in the c_{iZ}^I -like category has been scaled by a factor of 4.

distribution. The mean of the Poisson distribution depends on c_{iW}^I , c_{iZ}^I , and θ . The vector θ comprises a set of nuisance parameters used to model the effect of systematic uncertainties, which have a prior given by the function p . We consider the following uncertainty sources by means of weights or by varying the relevant quantities in the simulated samples used to estimate the predicted yields.

- The uncertainty in the integrated luminosity is estimated to be 1.6 (1.4)% for the 2016–2018 (2022) data set [65–68].
- Uncertainties in the JES and JER are obtained by varying these quantities in simulated events by one standard deviation. A total of 24 nuisance parameters are used to model the JES uncertainty, introducing different dependencies of the JES as a function of the jet kinematics and the data-taking period. The JER is modeled with 30 nuisance parameters, representing different detector regions and data-taking periods.
- The uncertainties in the b tagging efficiency and mistagging rate calibrations are assessed by varying the dedicated SFs within their uncertainties. These variations are applied separately for heavy-flavor (b and c quark) jets and light (gluons, u, d, and s quark) jets.
- The lepton triggering and identification efficiencies are assessed by varying their associated SFs by their uncertainties, separately for

electrons and muons. An additional correction and its associated uncertainty are applied to model the so-called *Level-1 trigger prefire*, i.e., a time jitter of the trigger signal in the ECAL [19] and muon [69] systems, which led to a loss of events at the level of 0.5 % or less.

- The effects due to the uncertainty in the distribution of the number of pileup interactions is estimated by varying the total inelastic pp cross section used to calculate the number of pileup interactions by 4.6 %.
- The uncertainty in the nonprompt-lepton contribution is accounted for by variations in the associated transfer factor. This uncertainty includes sources stemming from the measurement of this factor, related to the limited amount of events and the subtraction of the prompt lepton contribution to the measurement. They also include small phase space dependencies of the transfer factor that are not taken into account in its parametrization, mostly dominated by the flavor of the jet producing the nonprompt lepton [29].
- The uncertainty in the inclusive $\bar{t}tZ$ and tZq production cross section stems from the accuracy of their theoretical calculations, where we assign a 10 % uncertainty [8,70]. The inclusive diboson production cross section is known and has been measured at a much better precision [71,72], but in phase spaces differing from the one in which this search is performed. As a consequence, we take a 20 % normalization uncertainty accounting for this phase space dependence. The normalization uncertainty of the “rare” processes and conversions are 50 and 30 %, respectively [29].
- Theoretical uncertainties in the kinematic distributions predicted by the simulations stem from three sources: matrix element calculations, PDFs, and parton shower uncertainties. The uncertainties in the matrix element calculations are obtained by shifting independently the renormalization and factorization scales up (down) by a factor of 2 (0.5), respectively. The uncertainty in the PDFs is obtained by using 100 orthogonal eigenvectors of the PDF set, which are used as independent nuisance parameters in the fit. The impact of the parton shower uncertainty is estimated by varying the initial-state and final-state radiation scales up (down) by a factor of 2 (0.5).
- The number of additional jets generated by the parton shower simulation in diboson samples underestimates the observed distribution in data. This is known from previous measurements [29] and was confirmed in data control samples for both 13 and 13.6 TeV data. We consider an uncertainty whose effects modifies the jet multiplicity distribution by 10–50 % to account for that mismodeling.
- The uncertainty due to the limited number of simulated events as well as the limited number of data events in the sideband used to estimate the nonprompt-lepton contribution is estimated using the Barlow–Beeston lite method [73].
- The LO tZq samples used to estimate EFT effects predict up to a 30 % smaller acceptance than the NLO ones when weighted to the SM point in the analysis bin where this discrepancy is the largest. The difference between the two samples is used as an additional source of uncertainty in the BSM contribution.

In addition, we have evaluated the effect of potential experimental biases in the symmetry of the $g_{c_{tW}^I}$ and $g_{c_{tZ}^I}$ distributions. We considered different scenarios in which the lepton efficiency and energy scale decrease or increase by up to 10 % as a function of the lepton charge and/or η . We did not observe any asymmetry in the SM predictions when smearing the simulations under these scenarios, within the statistical uncertainty of these predictions. While these scenarios represent unreasonably biased experimental conditions, this check gives us confidence that potential experimental biases not taken into account would not introduce a sizable asymmetry.

The distribution of observed events is shown in Fig. 3, classified in the categories we use as inputs to the likelihood fit. The number of observed events is compared with the prediction obtained by setting to

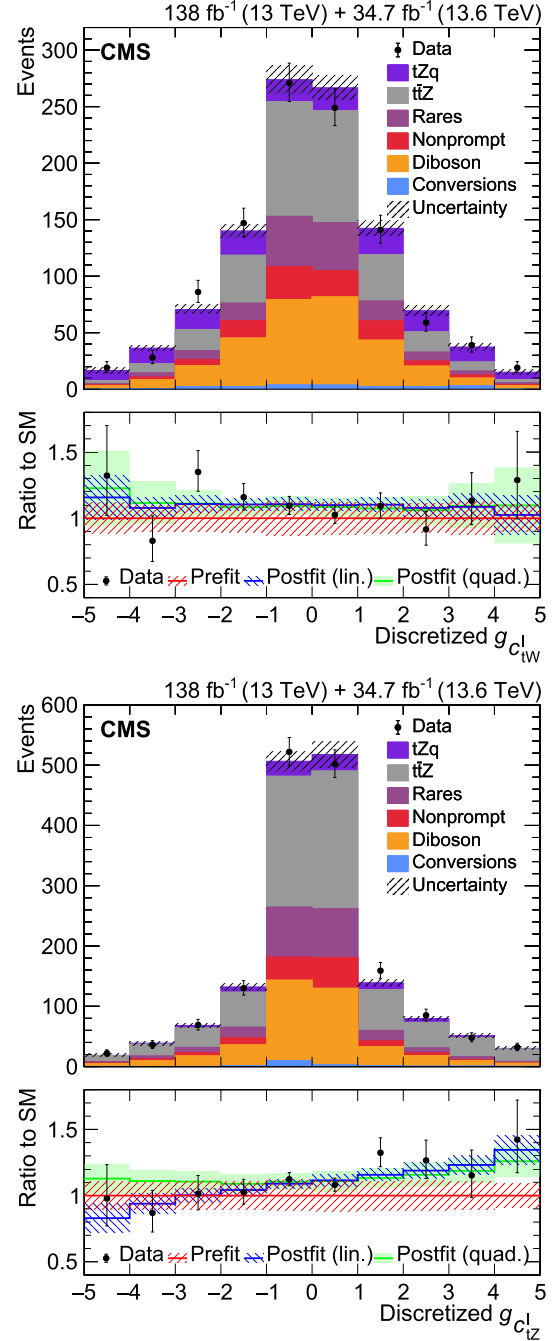


Fig. 3. Upper (lower): Distribution of the discretized $g_{c_{tW}^I}$ ($g_{c_{tZ}^I}$) for events in the c_{tW}^I -like (c_{tZ}^I -like) category, compared with the predictions obtained when all fit parameters are set to their maximum likelihood value in the linear fit, where c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I are determined simultaneously. The lower panels show the ratio between data (black dots), the prediction of the linear (blue line), and quadratic (green line) fits, over the prefit value. The red, blue, and green bands show the prefit uncertainty and the postfit uncertainties of the linear and quadratic fits, respectively. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

zero the Wilson coefficient and nuisance parameter values (prefit), as well as to the values obtained from the maximum likelihood fits described below (postfit). Small differences between the prefit and postfit predictions are observed due to a slight asymmetry observed in the $g_{c_{tZ}^I}$ distribution, and to a slight excess on the total number of observed events, consistent with previous measurements of $\bar{t}tZ$ production [6,8].

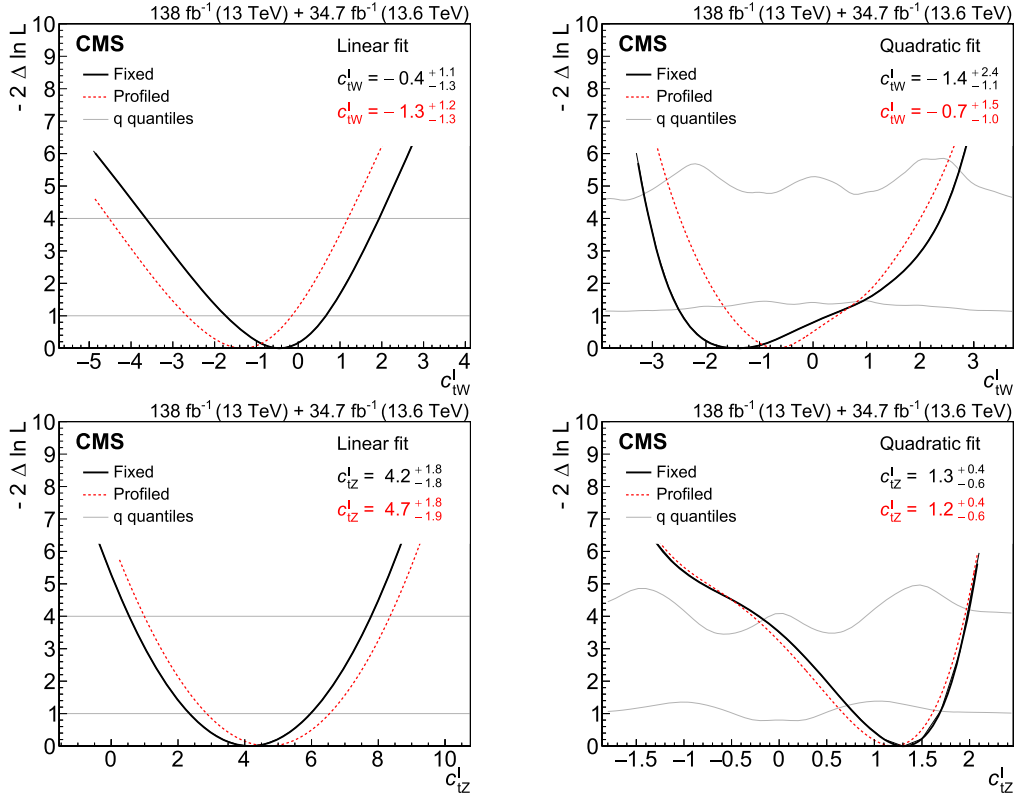


Fig. 4. Likelihood scans as a function of c_{tW}^I (upper row) and c_{tZ}^I (lower row), separately for cases in which the other coefficient is set to zero (dark black solid line) or profiled (red dashed line). Plots in the left (right) column represent the linear (quadratic) fit. Light gray lines represent the quantiles of the test statistics. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

In order to perform inference on c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I , we compute the profile likelihood ratio test statistic

$$q(c_{tW}^I, c_{tZ}^I) = -2 \ln \frac{\mathcal{L}(c_{tW}^I, c_{tZ}^I, \hat{\theta}(c_{tW}^I, c_{tZ}^I))}{\mathcal{L}(\hat{c}_{tW}^I, \hat{c}_{tZ}^I, \hat{\theta})} \quad (4)$$

using the COMBINE package [74] for different values of c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I , as shown in Figs. 4 and 5. Here, $\hat{c}_{tW}^I$, $\hat{c}_{tZ}^I$ and $\hat{\theta}$ represent the maximum likelihood estimate of the parameters, and $\hat{\theta}(c_{tW}^I, c_{tZ}^I)$ represents the maximum likelihood estimation of θ for given values of c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I .

We consider separately the case in which only the linear contribution in Eq. (1) is present (linear fit) and the case in which the linear and quadratic terms contribute together (quadratic fit). In the linear fit, the analysis is only sensitive to asymmetries in the observables, because the linear contributions do not modify the total event yield or introduce effects that are symmetric on the observables. As a consequence, such analysis is robust to the modeling of the signal and background processes, including their assumed cross sections. In the quadratic fits, the sensitivity comes, in addition, from effects in the total number of events and symmetric shape variations introduced by the quadratic contributions, as shown in Fig. 2. Quadratic fits are more sensitive to the assumed $t\bar{t}Z$ and $t\bar{t}Zq$ total cross section, as well as the rest of the theoretical and experimental systematic uncertainties, that have a negligible contribution to the result of the linear fit. We also consider separately the case in which only one coefficient is allowed to take values different from zero and the case where both coefficients are allowed to take nonzero values.

We use the scans in Figs. 4 and 5 to determine 68 and 95% confidence level (CL) intervals for individual and simultaneous coefficient measurements, respectively. We employ the asymptotic approximation [75] in the linear case. In the quadratic fits, the asymptotic approxima-

tion does not hold [76], because the signal model cannot account for arbitrarily large downward fluctuations in the number of observed events with respect to the SM predictions. As a consequence, there is an effective boundary in the statistical model on which the best-fit point may lie and which contradicts the hypotheses required by the asymptotic approximation. To set limits in a rigorous way, we derive the distribution of $q(c_{tW}^I, c_{tZ}^I)$ using pseudoexperiments for a range of c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I values, whose quantiles are shown in Fig. 4. We note that the asymptotic approximation would lead to slightly tighter constraints on c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I than our results.

The results show an overall good agreement between the measured c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I values and the SM prediction. We use these results to set observed limits on c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I , and compare with the expected results obtained assuming an observation equal to the SM hypothesis. We set observed (expected) limits of $-2.7 < c_{tW}^I < 2.5$ and $-0.2 < c_{tZ}^I < 2.0$ ($-2.0 < c_{tW}^I < 2.0$ and $-1.5 < c_{tZ}^I < 1.5$) at 95% CL, when considering the effect of both linear and quadratic terms, and the other coefficient is profiled. When considering only linear terms and profiling the other coefficient, we set observed (expected) limits of $-4.5 < c_{tW}^I < 1.2$ and $1.0 < c_{tZ}^I < 8.3$ ($-2.7 < c_{tW}^I < 2.7$ and $-3.6 < c_{tZ}^I < 3.6$). Simultaneous measurements of the two coefficients are compatible with the SM prediction within two standard deviations in both the linear and quadratic cases.

When considering individual measurements of the two coefficients, the largest deviation is observed in c_{tZ}^I , in which data is consistent with positive values of c_{tZ}^I . The significance of the discrepancy ranges between 1.9 and 2.5 standard deviations, depending on whether quadratic contributions are considered and whether c_{tW}^I is profiled or fixed to its SM value. The deviation is associated with the asymmetry in the g_{tZ}^I distribution and the slight excess of observed events discussed earlier, both seen in Fig. 3. As an additional check of the robustness of the result, we performed a likelihood fit categorizing events in the different

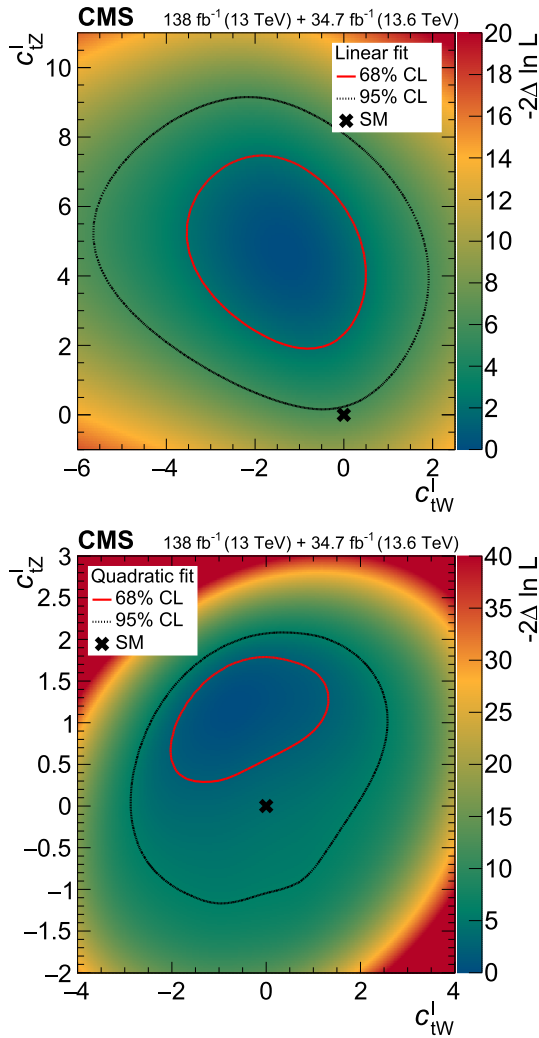


Fig. 5. Likelihood scans as functions of c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I , including linear contributions only (upper) and both linear and quadratic contributions (lower).

data-taking eras and allowing c_{tZ}^I to take a different value in each era. We found that the c_{tZ}^I values obtained in the different eras were consistent within the uncertainties of the model.

The above results set limits for the first time on the interference between c_{tZ}^I and the SM contribution and have competitive sensitivity to the interference between c_{tW}^I and the SM contribution with respect to Ref. [15], which studies this operator in t -channel single top quark production. When considering also quadratic contributions, our measurement reaches a comparable sensitivity to other searches studying these operators using the distribution of CP -even observables in $t\bar{t}Z$ and $t\bar{t}\gamma$ events [6,12], and adds sensitivity to the sign of c_{tZ}^I that can only be probed with CP -sensitive observables.

7. Summary

We have presented a search for additional sources of the charge-parity (CP) symmetry violation in the associated production of top quarks and a Z boson, in particular, for $t\bar{t}Z$ and tZq production in final states with at least three leptons. The search is performed in a sample of proton-proton collision data at center-of-mass energies of 13 and 13.6 TeV corresponding to a total integrated luminosity of 173 fb⁻¹. The measurement uses, for the first time in this topology, CP -odd observables which are constructed using physics-informed machine-learning techniques. These observables are predicted by the standard model (SM) to be symmetrically distributed whereas asymmetries could arise

from CP -violating effects. The results are generally consistent with the SM prediction. We set limits on the Wilson coefficients c_{tW}^I and c_{tZ}^I of $-2.7 < c_{tW}^I < 2.5$ and $-0.2 < c_{tZ}^I < 2.0$, respectively, at 95% confidence level, considering the effect of both linear and quadratic terms, and profiling the other coefficient. The largest discrepancy is observed in c_{tZ}^I , for which data is consistent with positive values. When considering only linear terms, the observed local significance with respect to the SM hypothesis corresponds to 2.5 standard deviations.

Data availability

Release and preservation of data used by the CMS Collaboration as the basis for publications is guided by the [CMS data preservation, re-use and open access policy](#).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Supplementary material

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Appendix: The CMS Collaboration

A. Hayrapetyan, V. Makarenko, A. Tumasyan¹, Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
 W. Adam, J.W. Andrejkovic, L. Benato, T. Bergauer, M. Dragicevic, C. Giordano, P.S. Hussain, M. Jeitler², N. Krammer, A. Li, D. Liko, M. Matthewman, I. Mikulec, J. Schieck², R. Schöfbeck², D. Schwarz, M. Shoshitari, M. Sonawane, W. Waltenberger, C.-E. Wulz², Institut für Hochenergiephysik, Vienna, Austria
 T. Janssen, H. Kwon, D. Ocampo Henao, T. Van Laer, P. Van Mechelen, Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium
 J. Bierkens, N. Breugelmans, J. D'Hondt, S. Dansana, A. De Moor, M. Delcourt, F. Heyen, Y. Hong, P. Kashko, S. Lowette, I. Makarenko, D. Müller, J. Song, S. Tavernier, M. Tytgat³, G.P. Van Onsem, S. Van Putte, D. Vannerom, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium
 B. Bilin, B. Clerbaux, A.K. Das, I. De Bruyn, G. De Lentdecker, H. Evard, L. Favart, P. Gianneios, A. Khalilzadeh, F.A. Khan, A. Malara, M.A. Shahzad, L. Thomas, M. Vanden Bemden, C. Van der Velde, P. Vanlaer, F. Zhang, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
 M. De Coen, D. Dobur, G. Gokbulut, J. Knolle, L. Lambrecht, D. Marckx, K. Skovpen, N. Van Den Bossche, J. van der Linden, J. Vandenbroeck, L. Wezenbeek, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
 S. Bein, A. Benecke, A. Bethani, G. Bruno, A. Cappati, J. De Favereau De Jeneret, C. Delaere, A. Giammanco, A.O. Guzel, V. Lemaitre, J. Lidrych, P. Malek, P. Mastrapasqua, S. Turkcapar, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
 G.A. Alves, M. Barroso Ferreira Filho, E. Coelho, C. Hensel, T. Menezes De Oliveira, C. Mora Herrera⁴, P. Rebello Teles, M. Soeiro, E.J. Tonelli Manganote⁵, A. Vilela Pereira⁴, Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
 W.L. Aldá Júnior, H. Brandao Malbouisson, W. Carvalho, J. Chinellato⁶, M. Costa Reis, E.M. Da Costa, G.G. Da Silva⁷, D. De Jesus Damiao, S. Fonseca De Souza, R. Gomes De Souza,

S. S. Jesus, T. Laux Kuhn⁷, M. Macedo, K. Mota Amarilo, L. Mundim, H. Nogima, J.P. Pinheiro, A. Santoro, A. Sznajder, M. Thiel, F. Torres Da Silva De Araujo⁸, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
 C.A. Bernardes⁷, T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei, E.M. Gregores, B. Lopes Da Costa, I. Maieto Silverio, P.G. Mercadante, S.F. Novaes, B. Orzari, Sandra S. Padula, V. Scheurer, Universidade Estadual Paulista, Universidade Federal do ABC, São Paulo, Brazil
 A. Aleksandrov, G. Antchev, P. Danev, R. Hadjiiska, P. Iaydjiev, M. Misheva, M. Shopova, G. Sultanov, Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
 A. Dimitrov, L. Litov, B. Pavlov, P. Petkov, A. Petrov, University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria
 S. Keshri, D. Laroze, S. Thakur, Instituto De Alta Investigación, Universidad de Tarapacá, Casilla 7 D, Arica, Chile
 W. Brooks, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile, Valparaíso, Chile
 T. Cheng, T. Javai, L. Wang, L. Yuan, Beihang University, Beijing, China
 Z. Hu, Z. Liang, J. Liu, X. Wang, Department of Physics, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
 G.M. Chen⁹, H.S. Chen⁹, M. Chen⁹, Y. Chen, Q. Hou, X. Hou, F. Iemmi, C.H. Jiang, A. Kapoor¹⁰, H. Liao, G. Liu, Z.-A. Liu¹¹, J.N. Song¹¹, S. Song, J. Tao, C. Wang⁹, J. Wang, H. Zhang, J. Zhao, Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China
 A. Agapitos, Y. Ban, A. Carvalho Antunes De Oliveira, S. Deng, B. Guo, Q. Guo, C. Jiang, A. Levin, C. Li, Q. Li, Y. Mao, S. Qian, S.J. Qian, X. Qin, X. Sun, D. Wang, J. Wang, H. Yang, M. Zhang, Y. Zhao, C. Zhou, State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China
 S. Yang, Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Nuclear Science and Guangdong-Hong Kong Joint Laboratory of Quantum Matter, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China
 Z. You, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China
 K. Jaffel, N. Lu, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China
 G. Bauer¹², B. Li¹³, H. Wang, K. Yi¹⁴, J. Zhang, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
 Y. Li, Institute of Modern Physics and Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Ion-beam Application (MOE) - Fudan University, Shanghai, China
 Z. Lin, C. Lu, M. Xiao¹⁵, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China
 C. Avila, D.A. Barbosa Trujillo, A. Cabrera, C. Florez, J. Fraga, J.A. Reyes Vega, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia
 C. Rendón, M. Rodriguez, A.A. Ruales Barbosa, J.D. Ruiz Alvarez, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia
 N. Godinovic, D. Lelas, A. Sculac, University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Split, Croatia
 M. Kovac, A. Petkovic, T. Sculac, University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia
 P. Bargassa, V. Brigljevic, B.K. Chitroda, D. Ferencek, K. Jakovic, A. Starodumov, T. Susa, Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia
 A. Attikis, K. Christoforou, A. Hadjiagapiou, C. Leonidou, C. Nicolaou, L. Paizanos, F. Ptochos, P.A. Razis, H. Rykaczewski, H. Saka, A. Stepenov, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus
 M. Finger[†], M. Finger Jr., Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
 E. Ayala, Escuela Politécnica Nacional, Quito, Ecuador
 E. Carrera Jarrin, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Quito, Ecuador
 Y. Assran^{16,17}, B. El-mahdy¹⁸, Academy of Scientific Research and

Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Egyptian Network of High Energy Physics, Cairo, Egypt
M. Abdullah Al-Mashad, A. Hussein, H. Mohammed, Center for High Energy Physics (CHEP-FU), Fayoum University, El-Fayoum, Egypt
K. Ehataht, M. Kadastik, T. Lange, C. Nielsen, J. Pata, M. Raidal, N. Seeba, L. Tani, National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia
A. Milieva, K. Osterberg, M. Voutilainen, Department of Physics, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
N. Bin Norjoharuddeen, E. Brücken, F. Garcia, P. Inkaew, K.T.S. Kallonen, R. Kumar Verma, T. Lampén, K. Lassila-Perini, B. Lehtela, S. Lehti, T. Lindén, N.R. Mancilla Xinto, M. Myllymäki, M.m. Rantanen, S. Saariokari, N.T. Toikka, J. Tuominiemi, Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland
H. Kirschenmann, P. Luukka, H. Petrow, Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland
M. Besancon, F. Couderc, M. DeJardin, D. Denegri, P. Devouge, J.L. Faure, F. Ferri, S. Ganjour, P. Gras, G. Hamel de Monchenault, M. Kumar, V. Lohezic, J. Malcles, F. Orlandi, L. Portales, S. Ronchi, M.Ö. Sahin, A. Savoy-Navarro¹⁹, P. Simkina, M. Titov, M. Tornago, IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
F. Beaudette, G. Boldrini, P. Busson, C. Charlot, M. Chiusi, T.D. Cuisset, F. Damas, O. Davignon, A. De Wit, T. Debnath, I.T. Ehle, B.A. Fontana Santos Alves, S. Ghosh, A. Gilbert, R. Granier de Cassagnac, L. Kalipoliti, M. Manoni, M. Nguyen, S. Obraztsov, C. Ochando, R. Salerno, J.B. Sauvan, Y. Sirois, G. Sokmen, L. Urda Gómez, A. Zabi, A. Zghiche, Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, Ecole Polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Palaiseau, France
J.-L. Agram²⁰, J. Andrea, D. Bloch, J.-M. Brom, E.C. Chabert, C. Collard, G. Coulon, S. Falke, U. Goerlach, R. Haeberle, A.-C. Le Bihan, M. Meena, O. Poncet, G. Saha, P. Vaucelle, Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, Strasbourg, France
A. Di Florio, Centre de Calcul de l'Institut National de Physique Nucleaire et de Physique des Particules, CNRS/IN2P3, Villeurbanne, France
D. Amram, S. Beauceron, B. Blancon, G. Boudoul, N. Chanon, D. Contardo, P. Depasse, C. Dozen²¹, H. El Mamouni, J. Fay, S. Gascon, M. Gouzevitch, C. Greenberg, G. Grenier, B. Ille, E. Jourdhuy, I.B. Laktineh, M. Lethuillier, B. Massoteau, L. Mirabito, A. Purohit, M. Vander Donckt, J. Xiao, Institut de Physique des 2 Infinis de Lyon (IP2I), Villeurbanne, France
I. Lomidze, T. Toriashvili²², Z. Tsamalaidze²³, Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia
V. Botta, S. Consuegra Rodríguez, L. Feld, K. Klein, M. Lipinski, D. Meuser, P. Nattland, V. Oppenländer, A. Pauls, D. Pérez Adán, N. Röwert, M. Teroerde, RWTH Aachen University, I. Physikalisches Institut, Aachen, Germany
C. Daumann, S. Diekmann, A. Dodonova, N. Eich, D. Eliseev, F. Engelke, J. Erdmann, M. Erdmann, B. Fischer, T. Hebbeker, K. Hoepfner, F. Ivone, A. Jung, N. Kumar, M.y. Lee, F. Mausolf, M. Merschmeyer, A. Meyer, F. Nowotny, A. Pozdnyakov, W. Redjeb, H. Reithler, U. Sarkar, V. Sarkisovi, A. Schmidt, C. Seth, A. Sharma, J.L. Spah, V. Vaulin, S. Zaleski, RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
M.R. Beckers, C. Dziwok, G. Flügge, N. Hoeflich, T. Kress, A. Nowack, O. Pooth, A. Stahl, A. Zotz, RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany
H. Aarup Petersen, A. Abel, M. Aldaya Martin, J. Alimena, S. Amoroso, Y. An, I. Andreev, J. Bach, S. Baxter, M. Bayatmakou, H. Becerril Gonzalez, O. Behnke, A. Belvedere, F. Blekman²⁴, K. Borras²⁵, A. Campbell, S. Chatterjee, L.X. Coll Saravia, G. Eckerlin, D. Eckstein, E. Gallo²⁴, A. Geiser, V. Guglielmi, M. Guthoff, A. Hinzmann, L. Jeppe, M. Kase-

mann, C. Kleinwort, R. Kogler, M. Komm, D. Krücker, W. Lange, D. Leyva Pernia, K.-Y. Lin, K. Lipka²⁶, W. Lohmann²⁷, J. Malvaso, R. Mankel, I.-A. Melzer-Pellmann, M. Mendizabal Morentin, A.B. Meyer, G. Milella, K. Moral Figueroa, A. Mussgiller, L.P. Nair, J. Niedziela, A. Nürnberg, J. Park, E. Ranken, A. Raspereza, D. Rastorguev, L. Rygaard, M. Scham^{28,25}, S. Schnake²⁵, P. Schütze, C. Schwanenberger²⁴, D. Selivanova, K. Shako, M. Shchedrolosiev, D. Stafford, M. Torkian, F. Vazzoler, A. Ventura Barroso, R. Walsh, D. Wang, Q. Wang, K. Wichmann, L. Wiens²⁵, C. Wissing, Y. Yang, S. Zakharov, A. Zimmermann Castro Santos, Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
A. Albrecht, A.R. Alves Andrade, M. Antonello, S. Bollweg, M. Bonanomi, K. El Morabit, Y. Fischer, M. Frahm, E. Garutti, A. Grohsjean, A.A. Guvenli, J. Haller, D. Hundhausen, H.R. Jabusch, G. Kasieczka, P. Keicher, R. Klanner, W. Korcar, T. Kramer, C.c. Kuo, V. Kutzner, F. Labe, J. Lange, A. Lobanov, L. Moureaux, M. Mrowietz, A. Nigamova, K. Nikolopoulos, Y. Nisan, A. Paasch, K.J. Pena Rodriguez, N. Prouvost, T. Quadfasel, B. Raciti, M. Rieger, D. Savoie, J. Schindler, P. Schleper, M. Schröder, J. Schwandt, M. Sommerhalder, H. Stadie, G. Steinbrück, A. Tews, R. Ward, B. Wiederspan, M. Wolf, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
S. Brommer, E. Butz, Y.M. Chen, T. Chwalek, A. Dierlamm, G.G. Dincer, U. Elcibak, N. Faltermann, M. Giffels, A. Gottmann, F. Hartmann²⁹, R. Hofsaess, M. Horzela, U. Husemann, J. Kieseler, M. Klute, R. Kunnilan Muhammed Rafeek, O. Lavoryk, J.M. Lawhorn, A. Lintuluoto, S. Maier, M. Mormile, Th. Müller, E. Pfeffer, M. Presilla, G. Quast, K. Rabbertz, B. Regnery, R. Schmieder, N. Shadskiy, I. Shvetsov, H.J. Simonis, L. Sowa, L. Stockmeier, K. Tauqeer, M. Toms, B. Topko, N. Trevisani, C. Verstege, T. Voigtländer, R.F. Von Cube, J. Von Den Driesch, M. Wassmer, R. Wolf, W.D. Zeuner, X. Zuo, Karlsruher Institut fuer Technologie, Karlsruhe, Germany
G. Anagnostou, G. Daskalakis, A. Kyriakis, A. Papadopoulos²⁹, A. Stakia, Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece
G. Melachroinos, Z. Painesis, I. Paraskevas, N. Saoulidou, K. Theofilatos, E. Tziaferi, K. Vellidis, I. Zisopoulos, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
T. Chatzistavrou, G. Karapostoli, K. Kousouris, E. Siamarkou, G. Tsiolipiti, National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece
I. Bestintzanos, I. Evangelou, C. Foudas, P. Katsoulis, P. Kokkas, P.G. Kosmoglou Kioseoglou, N. Manthos, I. Papadopoulos, J. Strolgas, University of Ioánnina, Ioánnina, Greece
D. Druzhkin, C. Hajdu, D. Horvath^{30,31}, K. Márton, A.J. Rád³², F. Sikler, V. Veszpremi, HUN-REN Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
M. Csanád, K. Farkas, A. Fehérkuti³³, M.M.A. Gadallah³⁴, Á. Kadlecik, M. León Coello, G. Pásztor, G.I. Veres, MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
B. Ujvari, G. Zilizi, Faculty of Informatics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
G. Bencze, S. Czellar, J. Molnar, Z. Szillasi, HUN-REN ATOMKI - Institute of Nuclear Research, Debrecen, Hungary
T. Csorgo³³, F. Nemes³³, T. Novak, I. Szanyi³⁵, Karoly Robert Campus, MATE Institute of Technology, Gyongyos, Hungary
S. Bansal, S.B. Beri, V. Bhatnagar, G. Chaudhary, S. Chauhan, N. Dhirga³⁶, A. Kaur, A. Kaur, H. Kaur, M. Kaur, S. Kumar, T. Sheokand, J.B. Singh, A. Singla, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
A. Bhardwaj, A. Chhetri, B.C. Choudhary, A. Kumar, A. Kumar, M. Naimuddin, S. Phor, K. Ranjan, M.K. Saini, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

S. Acharya³⁷, B. Gomber³⁷, B. Sahu³⁷, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India
 S. Mukherjee, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, Kanpur, India
 S. Baradia, S. Bhattacharya, S. Das Gupta, S. Dutta, S. Dutta, S. Sarkar
 Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, HBNI, Kolkata, India
 M.M. Ameen, P.K. Behera, S. Chatterjee, G. Dash, A. Dattamunsi, P. Jana, P. Kalbhor, S. Kamble, J.R. Komaragiri³⁸, T. Mishra, P.R. Pujahari, N.R. Saha, A.K. Sikdar, R.K. Singh, P. Verma, S. Verma, A. Vijay, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Madras, India
 B.K. Sirasva
 IISER Mohali, India, Mohali, India
 L. Bhatt, S. Dugad, G.B. Mohanty, M. Shelake, P. Suryadevara
 Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-A, Mumbai, India
 A. Bala, S. Banerjee, S. Barman³⁹, R.M. Chatterjee, M. Guchait, Sh. Jain, A. Jaiswal, B.M. Joshi, S. Kumar, M. Maity³⁹, G. Majumder, K. Mazumdar, S. Parolia, R. Saxena, A. Thachayath, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-B, Mumbai, India
 S. Bahinipati⁴⁰, D. Maity⁴¹, P. Mal, K. Naskar⁴¹, A. Nayak⁴¹, S. Nayak, K. Pal, R. Raturi, P. Sadangi, S.K. Swain, S. Varghese⁴¹, D. Vats⁴¹, National Institute of Science Education and Research, An OCC of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India
 A. Alpina, S. Dube, P. Hazarika, B. Kansal, A. Laha, R. Sharma, S. Sharma, K.Y. Vaish, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, India
 S. Ghosh, Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad, Telangana, India
 H. Bakhshiansohi⁴², A. Jafari⁴³, V. Sedighzadeh Dalavi, M. Zeinali⁴⁴, Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
 S. Bashiri, S. Chenarani⁴⁵, S.M. Etesami, Y. Hosseini, M. Khakzad, E. Khazaie, M. Mohammadi Najafabadi, S. Tizchang⁴⁶, Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), Tehran, Iran
 M. Felcini, M. Grunewald, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
 M. Abbrescia^{a,b}, M. Barbieri^{a,b}, M. Buonsante^{a,b}, A. Colaleo^{a,b}, D. Creanza^{a,c}, B. D'Anzi^{a,b}, N. De Filippis^{a,c}, M. De Palma^{a,b}, W. Elmetenawee^{a,b,47}, N. Ferrara^{a,c}, L. Fiore^a, L. Longo^a, M. Louka^{a,b}, G. Maggi^{a,c}, M. Maggi^a, I. Margjeka^a, V. Mastrapasqua^{a,b}, S. My^{a,b}, F. Nenna^{a,b}, S. Nuzzo^{a,b}, A. Pellecchia^{a,b}, A. Pompili^{a,b}, G. Pugliese^{a,c}, R. Radogna^{a,b}, D. Ramos^a, A. Ranieri^a, L. Silvestris^a, F.M. Simone^{a,c}, Ü. Sözbilir^a, A. Stamerra^{a,b}, D. Troiano^{a,b}, R. Venditti^{a,b}, P. Verwilligen^a, A. Zaza^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Bari^a, Università di Bari^b, Politecnico di Bari^c, Bari, Italy
 G. Abbiendi^a, D. Bonacorsi^{a,b}, P. Capiluppi^{a,b}, F.R. Cavallo^a, M. Cuffiani^{a,b}, G.M. Dallavalle^a, T. Diotallevi^{a,b}, F. Fabbri^a, A. Fanfani^{a,b}, D. Fasanella^a, P. Giacomelli^a, C. Grandi^a, L. Guiducci^{a,b}, S. Lo Meo^{a,48}, M. Lorusso^{a,b}, L. Lunerti^a, S. Marcellini^a, G. Masetti^a, F.L. Navarria^{a,b}, G. Paggi^{a,b}, A. Perrotta^a, F. Primavera^{a,b}, A.M. Rossi^{a,b}, S. Rossi Tisbeni^{a,b}, T. Rovelli^{a,b}, G.P. Siroli^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Bologna^a, Università di Bologna^b, Bologna, Italy
 S. Costa^{a,b,49}, A. Di Mattia^a, A. Lapertosa^a, R. Potenza^{a,b}, A. Tricomi^{a,b,49}, INFN Sezione di Catania^a, Università di Catania^b, Catania, Italy
 J. Altkork^{a,b}, P. Assiouras^a, G. Barbagli^a, G. Bardelli^a, M. Bartolini^{a,b}, A. Calandri^{a,b}, B. Camaiani^{a,b}, A. Cassese^a, R. Ceccarelli^a, V. Ciulli^{a,b}, C. Civinini^a, R. D'Alessandro^{a,b}, L. Damenti^{a,b}, E. Focardi^{a,b}, T. Kello^a, G. Latino^{a,b}, P. Lenzi^{a,b}, M. Lizzo^a, M. Meschini^a, S. Paoletti^a, A. Papanastassiou^{a,b}, G. Sguazzoni^a, L. Viliani^a, INFN Sezione di Firenze^a, Università di Firenze^b, Firenze, Italy
 L. Benussi, S. Colafranceschi, S. Meola⁵⁰, D. Piccolo, INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy

M. Alves Gallo Pereira^a, F. Ferro^a, E. Robutti^a, S. Tosi^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Genova^a, Università di Genova^b, Genova, Italy
 A. Benaglia^a, F. Brivio^a, V. Camagni^{a,b}, F. Cetorelli^{a,b}, F. De Guio^{a,b}, M.E. Dinardo^{a,b}, P. Dini^a, S. Gennai^a, R. Gerosa^{a,b}, A. Ghezzi^{a,b}, P. Govoni^{a,b}, L. Guzzi^a, M.R. Kim^a, G. Lavizzari^{a,b}, M.T. Lucchini^{a,b}, M. Malberti^a, S. Malvezzi^a, A. Massironi^a, D. Menasce^a, L. Moroni^a, M. Paganoni^{a,b}, S. Palluotto^{a,b}, D. Pedrini^a, A. Perego^{a,b}, B.S. Pinolini^a, G. Pizzati^{a,b}, S. Ragazzi^{a,b}, T. Tabarelli de Fatis^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Milano-Bicocca^a, Università di Milano-Bicocca^b, Milano, Italy
 S. Buontempo^a, A. Cagnotta^{a,b}, C. Di Fraia^{a,b}, F. Fabozzi^{a,c}, L. Favilla^{a,d}, A.O.M. Iorio^{a,b}, L. Lista^{a,b,51}, P. Paolucci^{a,29}, B. Rossi^a, INFN Sezione di Napoli^a, Università di Napoli 'Federico II'^b, Napoli, Italy; Università della Basilicata^c, Potenza, Italy; Scuola Superiore Meridionale (SSM)^d, Napoli, Italy
 P. Azzi^a, N. Bacchetta^{a,52}, P. Bortignon^a, G. Bortolato^{a,b}, A.C.M. Bulla^a, R. Carlin^{a,b}, P. Checchia^a, T. Dorigo^{a,53}, F. Gasparini^{a,b}, U. Gasparini^{a,b}, S. Giorgetti^a, M. Gulmini^{a,54}, E. Lusiani^a, M. Margoni^{a,b}, A.T. Meneguzzo^{a,b}, J. Pazzini^{a,b}, P. Ronchese^{a,b}, R. Rossin^{a,b}, M. Tosi^{a,b}, A. Triossi^{a,b}, S. Ventura^a, M. Zanetti^{a,b}, P. Zotto^{a,b}, A. Zucchetta^{a,b}, G. Zumerle^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Padova^a, Università di Padova^b, Padova, Italy; Università degli Studi di Cagliari^c, Cagliari, Italy
 A. Braghieri^a, S. Calzaferri^a, P. Montagna^{a,b}, M. Pelliccioni^a, V. Re^a, C. Riccardi^{a,b}, P. Salvini^a, I. Vai^{a,b}, P. Vitulo^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Pavia^a, Università di Pavia^b, Pavia, Italy
 S. Ajmal^{a,b}, M.E. Ascioti^{a,b}, G.M. Bilei^a, C. Carrivale^{a,b}, D. Ciangottini^{a,b}, L. Della Penna^{a,b}, L. Fano^{a,b}, V. Mariani^{a,b}, M. Menichelli^a, F. Moscatelli^{a,55}, A. Rossi^{a,b}, A. Santocchia^{a,b}, D. Spiga^a, T. Tedeschi^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Perugia^a, Università di Perugia^b, Perugia, Italy
 C. Aimè^{a,b}, C.A. Alexe^{a,c}, P. Asenov^{a,b}, P. Azzurri^a, G. Bagliesi^a, R. Bhattacharya^a, L. Bianchini^{a,b}, T. Boccali^a, E. Bossini^a, D. Bruschini^{a,c}, L. Calligaris^{a,b}, R. Castaldi^a, F. Cattafesta^{a,c}, M.A. Ciocci^{a,d}, M. Cipriani^{a,b}, V. D'Amante^{a,d}, R. Dell'Orso^a, S. Donato^{a,b}, R. Forti^{a,b}, A. Giassi^a, F. Ligabue^{a,c}, A.C. Marini^{a,b}, D. Matos Figueiredo^a, A. Messineo^{a,b}, S. Mishra^a, V.K. Muraleedharan Nair Bindhu^{a,b}, S. Nandan^a, F. Palla^a, M. Riggirello^{a,c}, A. Rizzi^{a,b}, G. Rolandi^{a,c}, S. Roy Chowdhury^{a,56}, T. Sarkar^a, A. Scribano^a, P. Solanki^{a,b}, P. Spagnolo^{a,b}, F. Tenchini^{a,b}, R. Tenchini^a, G. Tonelli^{a,b}, N. Turini^{a,d}, F. Vaselli^{a,c}, A. Venturi^a, P.G. Verdini^a, INFN Sezione di Pisa^a, Università di Pisa^b, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa^c, Pisa, Italy; Università di Siena^d, Siena, Italy
 P. Akrap^{a,b}, C. Basile^{a,b}, S.C. Behera^a, F. Cavallari^a, L. Cunqueiro Mendez^{a,b}, F. De Ruggi^{a,b}, D. Del Re^{a,b}, E. Di Marco^a, M. Diemoz^a, F. Errico^a, L. Frosina^{a,b}, R. Gargiulo^{a,b}, B. Harikrishnan^{a,b}, F. Lombardi^{a,b}, E. Longo^{a,b}, L. Martikainen^{a,b}, J. Mijuskovic^{a,b}, G. Organtini^{a,b}, N. Palmeri^{a,b}, R. Paramatti^{a,b}, C. Quaranta^{a,b}, S. Rahatlou^{a,b}, C. Rovelli^a, F. Santanastasio^{a,b}, L. Soffi^a, V. Vladimirov^{a,b}
 INFN Sezione di Roma^a, Sapienza Università di Roma^b, Roma, Italy
 N. Amapane^{a,b}, R. Arcidiacono^{a,c}, S. Argiro^{a,b}, M. Arneodo^{a,c}, N. Bartosik^{a,c}, R. Bellan^{a,b}, A. Bellora^{a,b}, C. Biino^a, C. Borca^{a,b}, N. Cartiglia^a, M. Costa^{a,b}, R. Covarelli^{a,b}, N. Demaria^a, M. Ferrero^a, L. Finco^a, M. Grippo^{a,b}, B. Kiani^{a,b}, F. Legger^a, F. Luongo^{a,b}, C. Mariotti^a, S. Maselli^a, A. Mecca^{a,b}, L. Menzio^{a,b}, P. Meridiani^a, E. Migliore^{a,b}, M. Monteno^a, M.M. Obertino^{a,b}, G. Ortona^a, L. Pacher^{a,b}, N. Pastrone^a, M. Ruspa^{a,c}, F. Siviero^{a,b}, V. Sola^{a,b}, A. Solano^{a,b}, C. Tarricone^{a,b}, D. Trocino^a, G. Umoret^{a,b}, E. Vlasov^{a,b}, R. White^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Torino^a, Università di Torino^b, Torino, Italy; Università del Piemonte Orientale^c, Novara, Italy

- J. Babbar^{a,b}, S. Belforte^a, V. Candelise^{a,b}, M. Casarsa^a, F. Cossutti^a, K. De Leo^a, G. Della Ricca^{a,b}, R. Delli Gatti^{a,b}, INFN Sezione di Trieste^a, Università di Trieste^b, Trieste, Italy
- S. Dogra, J. Hong, J. Kim, T. Kim, D. Lee, H. Lee, J. Lee, S.W. Lee, C.S. Moon, Y.D. Oh, S. Sekmen, B. Tae, Y.C. Yang, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea
- M.S. Kim, Department of Mathematics and Physics - GWNu, Gangneung, Korea
- G. Bak, P. Gwak, H. Kim, D.H. Moon, J. Seo Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Korea
- E. Asilar, F. Carnevali, J. Choi⁵⁷, T.J. Kim, Y. Ryoo Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea
- S. Ha, S. Han, B. Hong, K. Lee, K.S. Lee, S. Lee, J. Yoo, Korea University, Seoul, Korea
- J. Goh, J. Shin, S. Yang, Kyung Hee University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea
- Y. Kang, H. S. Kim, Y. Kim, S. Lee Sejong University, Seoul, Korea
- J. Almond, J.H. Bhyun, J. Choi, J. Choi, W. Jun, H. Kim, J. Kim, T. Kim, Y. Kim, Y.W. Kim, S. Ko, H. Lee, J. Lee, J. Lee, B.H. Oh, S.B. Oh, J. Shin, U.K. Yang, I. Yoon, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
- W. Jang, D.Y. Kang, D. Kim, S. Kim, B. Ko, J.S.H. Lee, Y. Lee, J.A. Merlin, I.C. Park, Y. Roh, I.J. Watson, University of Seoul, Seoul, Korea
- G. Cho, K. Hwang, B. Kim, S. Kim, K. Lee, H.D. Yoo, Yonsei University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea
- M. Choi, Y. Lee, I. Yu, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Korea
- T. Beyrouthy, Y. Gharbia, College of Engineering and Technology, American University of the Middle East (AUM), Dasman, Kuwait
- F. Alazemi, Kuwait University - College of Science - Department of Physics, Safat, Kuwait
- K. Dreimanis, O.M. Eberlins, A. Gaile, C. Munoz Diaz, D. Osite, G. Pikurs, R. Plese, A. Potrebko, M. Seidel, D. Sidiropoulos Kontos, Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia
- N.R. Strautnieks, University of Latvia (LU), Riga, Latvia
- M. Ambrozis, A. Juodagalvis, S. Nargelas, A. Rinkevicius, G. Tamulaitis, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania
- I. Yusuff⁵⁸, Z. Zolkapli National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- J.F. Benitez, A. Castaneda Hernandez, A. Cota Rodriguez, L.E. Cuevas Picos, H.A. Encinas Acosta, L.G. Gallegos Maríñez, J.A. Murillo Quijada, A. Sehrawat, L. Valencia Palomo, Universidad de Sonora (UNISON), Hermosillo, Mexico
- G. Ayala, H. Castilla-Valdez, H. Crotte Ledesma, R. Lopez-Fernandez, J. Mejia Guisao, R. Reyes-Almanza, A. Sánchez Hernández, Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del IPN, Mexico City, Mexico
- C. Oropeza Barrera, D.L. Ramirez Guadarrama, M. Ramírez García, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico
- I. Bautista, F.E. Neri Huerta, I. Pedraza, H.A. Salazar Ibarguen, C. Uribe Estrada, Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico
- I. Bubanja, N. Raicevic, University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro
- P.H. Butler, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
- A. Ahmad, M.I. Asghar, A. Awais, M.I.M. Awan, W.A. Khan, National Centre for Physics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan
- V. Avati, L. Forthomme, L. Grzanka, M. Malawski, K. Piotrkowski AGH University of Krakow, Krakow, Poland
- M. Bluj, M. Górski, M. Kazana, M. Szeleper, P. Zalewski, National Centre for Nuclear Research, Swierk, Poland
- K. Bunkowski, K. Doroba, A. Kalinowski, M. Konecki, J. Krolikowski, A. Muhammad, Institute of Experimental Physics, Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
- P. Fokow, K. Pozniak, W. Zabolotny, Warsaw University of Technology, Warsaw, Poland
- M. Araujo, D. Bastos, C. Beirão Da Cruz E Silva, A. Boletti, M. Bozzo, T. Camporesi, G. Da Molin, P. Faccioli, M. Gallinaro, J. Hollar, N. Leonardo, G.B. Marozzo, A. Petrilli, M. Pisano, J. Seixas, J. Varela, J.W. Wulff, Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas, Lisboa, Portugal
- P. Adzic, L. Markovic, P. Milenovic, V. Milosevic, Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
- D. Devetak, M. Dordevic, J. Milosevic, L. Nadderd, V. Rekovic, M. Stojanovic, VINCA Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
- M. Alcalde Martinez, J. Alcaraz Maestre, Cristina F. Bedoya, J.A. Brochero Cifuentes, Oliver M. Carretero, M. Cepeda, M. Cerrada, N. Colino, J. Cuchillo Ortega, B. De La Cruz, A. Delgado Peris, A. Escalante Del Valle, D. Fernández Del Val, J.P. Fernández Ramos, J. Flix, M.C. Fouz, M. Gonzalez Hernandez, O. Gonzalez Lopez, S. Goy Lopez, J.M. Hernandez, M.I. Josa, J. Llorente Merino, C. Martin Perez, E. Martin Viscasillas, D. Moran, C. M. Morcillo Perez, R. Paz Herrera, C. Perez Dengra, A. Pérez-Calero Yzquierdo, J. Puerta Pelayo, I. Redondo, J. Vazquez Escobar, Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain
- J.F. de Trocóniz, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
- B. Alvarez Gonzalez, J. Ayllon Torresano, A. Cardini, J. Cuevas, J. Del Riego Badas, D. Estrada Acevedo, J. Fernandez Menendez, S. Folgueras, I. Gonzalez Caballero, P. Leguina, M. Obeso Menendez, E. Palencia Cortezon, J. Prado Pico, A. Soto Rodríguez, C. Vico Villalba, P. Vischia, Universidad de Oviedo, Instituto Universitario de Ciencias y Tecnologías Espaciales de Asturias (ICTEA), Oviedo, Spain
- S. Blanco Fernández, I.J. Cabrillo, A. Calderon, J. Duarte Camperros, M. Fernandez, G. Gomez, C. Lasasoa García, R. Lopez Ruiz, C. Martinez Rivero, P. Martinez Ruiz del Arbol, F. Matorras, P. Matorras Cuevas, E. Navarrete Ramos, J. Piedra Gomez, C. Quintana San Emeterio, L. Scodellaro, I. Vila, R. Vilar Cortabitarte, J.M. Vizan Garcia, Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC-Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain
- B. Kailasapathy⁵⁹, D.D.C. Wickramaratna, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- W.G.D. Dharmaratna⁶⁰, K. Liyanage, N. Perera, University of Ruhuna, Department of Physics, Matara, Sri Lanka
- D. Abbaneo, C. Amendola, R. Ardino, E. Auffray, J. Baechler, D. Barney, M. Bianco, A. Bocci, L. Borgonovi, C. Botta, A. Bragagnolo, C.E. Brown, C. Caillol, G. Cerminara, P. Connor, D. d'Enterria, A. Dabrowski, A. David, A. De Roeck, M.M. Defranchis, M. Deile, M. Dobson, W. Funk, A. Gaddi, S. Giani, D. Gigi, K. Gill, F. Glege, M. Glowacki, A. Gruber, J. Hegeman, J.K. Heikkilä, B. Huber, V. Innocente, T. James, P. Janot, O. Kaluzinska, O. Karacheban²⁷, G. Karathanasis, L. Lanteri, S. Laurila, P. Lecoq, C. Lourenço, A.-M. Lyon, M. Magherini, L. Malgeri, M. Mannelli, A. Mehta, F. Meijers, S. Mersi, E. Meschi, M. Migliorini, F. Monti, F. Moortgat, M. Mulders, M. Musich, I. Neutelings, S. Orfanelli, F. Pantaleo, M. Pari, G. Petrucciani, A. Pfeiffer, M. Pierini, M. Pitt, H. Qu, D. Rabady, B. Ribeiro Lopes, F. Riti, P. Rosado, M. Rovere, H. Sakulin, R. Salvatico, S. Sanchez Cruz, S. Scarfi, C. Schwick, M. Selvaggi, A. Sharma, K. Shchelina, P. Silva, P. Sphicas⁶¹, A.G. Stahl Leiton, A. Steen, S. Summers, D. Treille, P. Tropea, E. Vernazza, J. Wanczyk⁶², J. Wang, S. Wuchterl, M. Zarucki, P. Zehetner, P. Zejdl, G. Zevi Della Porta, CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland

- T. Bevilacqua⁶³, L. Caminada⁶³, W. Erdmann, R. Horisberger, Q. Ingram, H.C. Kaestli, D. Kotlinski, C. Lange, U. Langenegger, M. Missiroli⁶³, L. Nohte⁶³, T. Rohe, A. Samalan
PSI Center for Neutron and Muon Sciences, Villigen, Switzerland
- T.K. Aarrestad, M. Backhaus, G. Bonomelli, C. Cazzaniga, K. Datta, P. De Bryas, D. D'archiacchiac⁶², A. De Cosa, G. Dissertori, M. Dittmar, M. Donegà, F. Eble, K. Gedia, F. Glessgen, C. Grab, N. Häringer, T.G. Harte, W. Lustermann, M. Malucchi, R.A. Manzoni, M. Marchegiani, L. Marchese, A. Mascellani⁶², F. Nessi-Tedaldi, F. Pauss, V. Perovic, B. Ristic, R. Seidita, J. Steggemann⁶², A. Tarabini, D. Valsecchi, R. Wallny, ETH Zurich - Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics (IPA), Zurich, Switzerland
- C. Amsler⁶⁴, P. Bärttschi, F. Bilandzija, M.F. Canelli, G. Celotto, K. Cormier, M. Huwiler, W. Jin, A. Jofrehei, B. Kilminster, T.H. Kwok, S. Leontsinis, V. Lukashenko, A. Macchiolo, F. Meng, J. Motta, A. Reimers, P. Robmann, M. Senger, E. Shokr, F. Stäger, R. Tramontano, Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
- D. Bhowmik, C.M. Kuo, P.K. Rout, S. Taj, P.C. Tiwari³⁸, National Central University, Chung-Li, Taiwan
- L. Ceard, K.F. Chen, Z.g. Chen, A. De Iorio, W.-S. Hou, T.h. Hsu, Y.w. Kao, S. Karmakar, G. Kole, Y.y. Li, R.-S. Lu, E. Paganis, X.f. Su, J. Thomas-Wilsker, L.s. Tsai, D. Tsionou, H.y. Wu, E. Yazgan, National Taiwan University (NTU), Taipei, Taiwan
- C. Asawatangkuldee, N. Srimanobhas, High Energy Physics Research Unit, Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
- Y. Maghrbi, Tunis El Manar University, Tunis, Tunisia
- D. Agyel, F. Dolek, I. Dumanoglu⁶⁵, Y. Guler⁶⁶, E. Gurpinar, C. Isik, O. Kara, A. Kayis, Y. Komurcu, G. Onengut, K. Ozdemir⁶⁷, B. Tali⁶⁸, U.G. Tok, E. Uslan, I.S. Zorbakir, Çukurova University, Physics Department, Science and Art Faculty, Adana, Turkey
- M. Yalvac⁶⁹, Middle East Technical University, Physics Department, Ankara, Turkey
- B. Akgun, I.O. Atakisi⁷⁰, E. Gülmez, M. Kaya⁷¹, O. Kaya⁷², M.A. Sarkisla⁷³, S. Tekten⁷⁴, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
- A. Cakir, K. Cankocak^{65,75}, S. Sen⁷⁶, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
- O. Aydilek⁷⁷, B. Hacisahinoglu, I. Hos⁷⁸, B. Kaynak, S. Ozkorucuklu, O. Potok, H. Sert, C. Simsek, C. Zorbilmez, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey
- S. Cerci, B. Isildak⁷⁹, D. Sunar Cerci, T. Yetkin²¹, Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
- A. Boyaryntsev, O. Dadazhanova, B. Grynov, Institute for Scintillation Materials of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine
- L. Levchuk, National Science Centre, Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, Kharkiv, Ukraine
- J.J. Brooke, A. Bundock, F. Bury, E. Clement, D. Cussans, D. Dharmender, H. Flacher, J. Goldstein, H.F. Heath, M.-L. Holmberg, L. Kreczko, S. Paramesvaran, L. Robertshaw, M.S. Sanjrani, J. Segal, V.J. Smith, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
- A.H. Ball, K.W. Bell, A. Belyaev⁸⁰, C. Brew, R.M. Brown, D.J.A. Cockerill, C. Cooke, A. Elliot, K.V. Ellis, J. Gajownik, K. Harder, S. Harper, J. Linacre, K. Manolopoulos, M. Moallemi, D.M. Newbold, E. Olaiya, D. Petyt, T. Reis, A.R. Sahasransu, G. Salvi, T. Schuh, C.H. Shepherd-Themistocleous, I.R. Tomalin, K.C. Whalen, T. Williams, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
- I. Andreou, R. Bainbridge, P. Bloch, O. Buchmuller, C.A. Carrillo Montoya, D. Colling, J.S. Dancu, I. Das, P. Dauncey, G. Davies, M. Della Negra, S. Fayer, G. Fedi, G. Hall, H.R. Hoorani, A. Howard, G. Iles, C.R. Knight, P. Krueper, J. Langford, K.H. Law, J. León Holgado, E. Leutgeb, L. Lyons, A.-M. Magnan, B. Maier, S. Mallios, A. Mastronikolis, M. Miesko-
- lainen, J. Nash⁸¹, M. Pesaresi, P.B. Pradeep, B.C. Radburn-Smith, A. Richards, A. Rose, L. Russell, K. Savva, C. Seez, R. Shukla, A. Tapper, K. Uchida, G.P. Uttley, T. Virdee²⁹, M. Vojinovic, N. Wardle, D. Winterbottom, Imperial College, London, United Kingdom
- J.E. Cole, A. Khan, P. Kyberd, I.D. Reid, Brunel University, Uxbridge, United Kingdom
- S. Abdullin, A. Brinkerhoff, E. Collins, M.R. Darwish, J. Dittmann, K. Hatakeyama, V. Hegde, J. Hiltbrand, B. McMaster, J. Samudio, S. Sawant, C. Sutantawibul, J. Wilson, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA
- J.M. Hogan⁸², Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
- R. Bartek, A. Dominguez, S. Raj, A.E. Simsek, S.S. Yu, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA
- B. Bam, A. Buchot Perraguin, S. Campbell, R. Chudasama, S.I. Cooper, C. Crovella, G. Fidalgo, S.V. Gleyzer, A. Khukhunaishvili, K. Matchev, E. Pearson, C.U. Perez, P. Rumerio⁸³, E. Usai, R. Yi, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA
- S. Cholak, G. De Castro, Z. Demiragli, C. Erice, C. Fangmeier, C. Fernandez Madrazo, E. Fontanesi, J. Fulcher, F. Golf, S. Jeon, J. O'Cain, I. Reed, J. Rohlf, K. Salyer, D. Sperka, D. Spitzbart, I. Suarez, A. Tsatsos, E. Wurtz, A.G. Zecchinelli, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- G. Barone, G. Benelli, D. Cutts, S. Ellis, L. Gouskos, M. Hadley, U. Heintz, K.W. Ho, T. Kwon, G. Landsberg, K.T. Lau, J. Luo, S. Mondal, J. Roloff, T. Russell, S. Sagir⁸⁴, X. Shen, M. Stamenkovic, N. Venkatasubramanian, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA
- S. Abbott, B. Barton, R. Breedon, H. Cai, M. Calderon De La Barca Sanchez, M. Chertok, M. Citron, J. Conway, P.T. Cox, R. Erbacher, O. Kukral, G. Mocellin, S. Ostrom, W. Wei, S. Yoo, University of California, Davis, Davis, California, USA
- K. Adamidis, M. Bachtis, D. Campos, R. Cousins, A. Datta, G. Flores Avila, J. Hauser, M. Ignatenko, M.A. Iqbal, T. Lam, Y.f. Lo, E. Manca, A. Nunez Del Prado, D. Saltzberg, V. Valuev, University of California, Los Angeles, California, USA
- R. Clare, J.W. Gary, G. Hanson, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, California, USA
- A. Aportela, A. Arora, J.G. Branson, S. Cittolin, S. Cooperstein, D. Diaz, J. Duarte, L. Giannini, Y. Gu, J. Guiang, V. Krutelyov, R. Lee, J. Letts, H. Li, M. Masciovecchio, F. Mokhtar, S. Mukherjee, M. Pieri, D. Primosch, M. Quinlan, V. Sharma, M. Tadel, E. Vourliotis, F. Würthwein, A. Yagil, Z. Zhao, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA
- A. Barzdukas, L. Brennan, C. Campagnari, S. Carron Montero⁸⁵, K. Downham, C. Grieco, M.M. Hussain, J. Incandela, J. Kim, M.W.K. Lai, A.J. Li, P. Masterson, J. Richman, S.N. Santpur, U. Sarica, R. Schmitz, A.R. Setti, J. Sheplock, D. Stuart, T.Á. Vami, X. Yan, D. Zhang, University of California, Santa Barbara - Department of Physics, Santa Barbara, California, USA
- A. Albert, S. Bhattacharya, A. Bornheim, O. Cerri, R. Kansal, J. Mao, H.B. Newman, G. Reales Gutiérrez, T. Sievert, M. Spiropulu, J.R. Vlimant, R.A. Wynne, S. Xie, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA
- J. Alison, S. An, M. Cremonesi, V. Dutta, E.Y. Ertorer, T. Ferguson, T.A. Gómez Espinosa, A. Harilal, A. Kallil Tharayil, M. Kanemura, C. Liu, P. Meiring, T. Mudholkar, S. Murthy, P. Palit, K. Park, M. Paulini, A. Roberts, A. Sanchez, W. Terrill, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
- J.P. Cumalat, W.T. Ford, A. Hart, A. Hassani, S. Kwan, J. Pearkes, C. Savard, N. Schonbeck, K. Stenson, K.A. Ulmer, S.R. Wagner, N. Zipper, D. Zuolo, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, USA

- J. Alexander, X. Chen, D.J. Cranshaw, J. Dickinson, J. Fan, X. Fan, J. Grassi, S. Hogan, P. Kotamnives, J. Monroy, G. Nien-dorf, M. Oshiro, J.R. Patterson, M. Reid, A. Ryd, J. Thom, P. Wittich, R. Zou, L. Zygala, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA
- M. Albrow, M. Alyari, O. Amram, G. Apollinari, A. Apresyan, L.A.T. Bauerdick, D. Berry, J. Berryhill, P.C. Bhat, K. Burkett, J.N. Butler, A. Canepa, G.B. Cerati, H.W.K. Cheung, F. Chle-bana, C. Cosby, G. Cummings, I. Dutta, V.D. Elvira, J. Free-man, A. Gandrakota, Z. Gecse, L. Gray, D. Green, A. Grummer, S. Grünendahl, D. Guerrero, O. Gutsche, R.M. Harris, T.C. Her-wig, J. Hirschauer, B. Jayatilaka, S. Jindariani, M. Johnson, U. Joshi, T. Klijnsma, B. Klima, K.H.M. Kwok, S. Lammel, C. Lee, D. Lincoln, R. Lipton, T. Liu, K. Maeshima, D. Mason, P. McBride, P. Merkel, S. Mrenna, S. Nahn, J. Ngadiuba, D. Noonan, S. Norberg, V. Papadimitriou, N. Pastika, K. Pedro, C. Pena⁸⁶, C.E. Perez Lara, F. Ravera, A. Reinsvold Hall⁸⁷, L. Ristori, M. Safdari, E. Sexton-Kennedy, N. Smith, A. Soha, L. Spiegel, S. Stoynev, J. Strait, L. Taylor, S. Tkaczyk, N.V. Tran, L. Uplegger, E.W. Vaandering, C. Wang, I. Zoi, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA
- C. Aruta, P. Avery, D. Bourilkov, P. Chang, V. Cherepanov, R.D. Field, C. Huh, E. Koenig, M. Kolosova, J. Konigsberg, A. Korytov, N. Menendez, G. Mitselmakher, K. Mohrman, A. Muthirakalayil Madhu, N. Rawal, S. Rosenzweig, V. Sulimov, Y. Takahashi, J. Wang, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA
- T. Adams, A. Al Kadhimi, A. Askew, S. Bower, R. Hashmi, R.S. Kim, T. Kolberg, G. Martinez, M. Mazza, H. Prosper, P.R. Prova, M. Wulansatiti, R. Yohay, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA
- B. Alsufyani, S. Butalla, S. Das, M. Hohmann, M. Lavinsky, E. Yanes
Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, USA
- M.R. Adams, N. Barnett, A. Baty, C. Bennett, R. Cavanaugh, R. Escobar Franco, O. Evdokimov, C.E. Gerber, H. Gupta, M. Hawksworth, A. Hingrajiya, D.J. Hofman, J.h. Lee, D. S. Lemos, C. Mills, S. Nanda, G. Nigmatkulov, B. Ozek, T. Phan, D. Pilipovic, R. Pradhan, E. Prifti, P. Roy, T. Roy, N. Singh, M.B. Tonjes, N. Varelas, M.A. Wadud, J. Yoo, University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA
- M. Alhusseini, D. Blend, K. Dilsiz⁸⁸, O.K. Köseyan, A. Mestvirishvili⁸⁹, O. Neogi, H. Ogul⁹⁰, Y. Onel, A. Penzo, C. Snyder, E. Tiras⁹¹, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
- B. Blumenfeld, J. Davis, A.V. Gritsan, L. Kang, S. Kyriacou, P. Maksimovic, M. Roguljic, S. Sekhar, M.V. Srivastav, M. Swartz, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- A. Abreu, L.F. Alcerro Alcerro, J. Anguiano, S. Arteaga Escatel, P. Baringer, A. Bean, Z. Flowers, D. Grove, J. King, G. Krin-tiras, M. Lazarovits, C. Le Mahieu, J. Marquez, M. Murray, M. Nickel, S. Popescu⁹², C. Rogan, C. Royon, S. Rudrabhatla, S. Sanders, C. Smith, G. Wilson, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA
- B. Allmond, R. Gujju Gurunadha, N. Islam, A. Ivanov, K. Kaadze, Y. Maravin, J. Natoli, D. Roy, G. Sorrentino, Kansas State Uni-versity, Manhattan, Kansas, USA
- A. Baden, A. Belloni, J. Bistany-riebman, S.C. Eno, N.J. Hadley, S. Jabeen, R.G. Kellogg, T. Koeth, B. Kronheim, S. Lascio, P. Ma-jor, A.C. Mignerey, C. Palmer, C. Papageorgakis, M.M. Paranjpe, E. Popova⁹³, A. Shevelev, L. Zhang, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA
- C. Baldenegro Barrera, J. Bendavid, H. Bossi, S. Bright-Thonney, I.A. Cali, Y.c. Chen, P.c. Chou, M. D'Alfonso, J. Eysermans, C. Freer, G. Gomez-Ceballos, M. Goncharov, G. Grosso, P. Harris, D. Hoang, G.M. Innocenti, D. Kovalskyi, J. Krupa, L. Lavezzo, Y.-J. Lee, K. Long, C. McGinn, A. Novak, M.I. Park, C. Paus, C. Reissel, C. Roland, G. Roland, S. Rothman, T.a. Sheng, G.S.F. Stephens, D. Walter, Z. Wang, B. Wyslouch, T. J. Yang, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
- B. Crossman, W.J. Jackson, C. Kapsiak, M. Krohn, D. Mahon, J. Mans, B. Marzocchi, R. Rusack, O. Sancar, R. Saradhy, N. Strobbe, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
- K. Bloom, D.R. Claes, G. Haza, J. Hossain, C. Joo, I. Kravchenko, A. Rohilla, J.E. Siado, W. Tabb, A. Vagnerini, A. Wightman, F. Yan, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
- H. Bandyopadhyay, L. Hay, H.w. Hsia, I. Iashvili, A. Kalogeropoulos, A. Kharchilava, A. Mandal, M. Morris, D. Nguyen, S. Rappoccio, H. Rejeb Sfar, A. Williams, P. Young, D. Yu, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, USA
- G. Alverson, E. Barberis, J. Bonilla, B. Bylsma, M. Cam-pana, J. Dervan, Y. Haddad, Y. Han, I. Israr, A. Krishna, M. Lu, N. Manganelli, R. McCarthy, D.M. Morse, T. Orimoto, A. Parker, L. Skinnari, C.S. Thoreson, E. Tsai, D. Wood, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- S. Dittmer, K.A. Hahn, Y. Liu, M. McGinnis, Y. Miao, D.G. Monk, M.H. Schmitt, A. Taliencio, M. Velasco, J. Wang, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA
- G. Agarwal, R. Band, R. Bucci, S. Castells, A. Das, A. Ehnis, R. Goldouzian, M. Hildreth, K. Hurtado Anampa, T. Ivanov, C. Jessop, A. Karneyeu, K. Lannon, J. Lawrence, N. Loukas, L. Lutton, J. Mariano, N. Marinelli, I. Mcalister, T. McCauley, C. Mcgrady, C. Moore, Y. Musienko²³, H. Nelson, M. Osher-son, A. Piccinelli, R. Ruchti, A. Townsend, Y. Wan, M. Wayne, H. Yockey
University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA
- A. Basnet, M. Carrigan, R. De Los Santos, L.S. Durkin, C. Hill, M. Joyce, M. Nunez Ornelas, D.A. Wenzl, B.L. Winer, B. R. Yates, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- H. Bouchamaoui, K. Coldham, P. Das, G. Dezoort, P. Elmer, A. Frankenthal, M. Galli, B. Greenberg, N. Haubrich, K. Kennedy, G. Kopp, Y. Lai, D. Lange, A. Loeliger, D. Marlow, I. Ojalvo, J. Olsen, F. Simpson, D. Stickland, C. Tully, Princeton Uni-versity, Princeton, New Jersey, USA
- S. Malik, R. Sharma
University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, USA
- A.S. Bakshi, S. Chandra, R. Chawla, A. Gu, L. Gutay, M. Jones, A.W. Jung, D. Kondratyev, M. Liu, G. Negro, N. Neumeister, G. Paspalaki, S. Piperov, J.F. Schulte, F. Wang, A. Wildridge, W. Xie, Y. Yao, Y. Zhong, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
- N. Parashar, A. Pathak, E. Shumka, Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, Indiana, USA
- D. Acosta, A. Agrawal, C. Arbour, T. Carnahan, K.M. Ecklund, P.J. Fernández Manteca, S. Freed, P. Gardner, F.J.M. Geurts, T. Huang, I. Krommydas, N. Lewis, W. Li, J. Lin, O. Miguel Colin, B.P. Padley, R. Redjimi, J. Rotter, E. Yigit-basi, Y. Zhang, Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA
- O. Bessidskaia Bylund, A. Bodek, P. de Barbaro[†], R. Demina, J.L. Dulemba, A. Garcia-Bellido, H.S. Hare, O. Hindrichs, N. Par-mar, P. Parygin⁹³, H. Seo, R. Taus, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, USA
- B. Chiarito, J.P. Chou, S.V. Clark, S. Donnelly, D. Gadkari, Y. Gershtein, E. Halkiadakis, M. Heindl, C. Houghton, D. Jaroslawski, S. Konstantinou, I. Laflotte, A. Lath, J. Mar-tins, B. Rand, J. Reichert, P. Saha, S. Salur, S. Schnetzer, S. Somalwar, R. Stone, S.A. Thayil, S. Thomas, J. Vora, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

D. Ally , A.G. Delannoy , S. Fiorendi , J. Harris, S. Higginbotham , T. Holmes , A.R. Kanuganti , N. Karunaratna , J. Lawless, L. Lee , E. Nibigira , B. Skipworth, S. Spanier , University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA

D. Aebi , M. Ahmad , T. Akhter , K. Androsoy , A. Bolshov, O. Bouhali⁹⁴ , R. Eusebi , P. Flanagan , J. Gilmore , Y. Guo, T. Kamon , S. Luo , R. Mueller , A. Safonov , Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA

N. Akchurin , J. Damgov , Y. Feng , N. Gogate , Y. Kazhykarim, K. Lamichhane , S.W. Lee , C. Madrid , A. Mankel , T. Peltola , I. Volobouev , Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, USA

E. Appelt , Y. Chen , S. Greene, A. Gurrola , W. Johns , R. Kunawalkam Elayavalli , A. Melo , D. Rathjens , F. Romeo , P. Sheldon , S. Tuo , J. Velkovska , J. Viinikainen , J. Zhang

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

B. Cardwell , H. Chung, B. Cox , J. Hakala , R. Hirosky , M. Jose, A. Ledovskoy , C. Mantilla , C. Neu , C. Ramón Álvarez , University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

S. Bhattacharya , P.E. Karchin , Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

A. Aravind , S. Banerjee , K. Black , T. Bose , E. Chavez , S. Dasu , P. Everaerts , C. Galloni, H. He , M. Herndon , A. Herve , C.K. Koraka , S. Lomte, R. Loveless , A. Mallampalli , A. Mohammadi , S. Mondal, T. Nelson, G. Parida , L. Pétré , D. Pinna, A. Savin, V. Shang , V. Sharma , W.H. Smith , D. Teague, H.F. Tsoi , W. Vetens , A. Warden , University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

S. Afanasiev , V. Alexakhin , Yu. Andreev , T. Aushev , D. Budkouski , R. Chistov⁹⁵ , M. Danilov⁹⁵ , T. Dimova⁹⁵ , A. Ershov⁹⁵ , S. Gninenko , I. Gorbunov , A. Gribushin⁹⁵ , A. Kamenev , V. Karjavine , M. Kirsanov , V. Klyukhin⁹⁵ , O. Kodolova^{96,93} , V. Korenkov , A. Kozyrev⁹⁵ , N. Krasnikov , A. Lanev , A. Malakhov , V. Matveev⁹⁵ , A. Nikitenko^{97,96} , V. Palichik , V. Perelygin , S. Petrushanko⁹⁵ , S. Polikarpov⁹⁵ , O. Radchenko⁹⁵ , M. Savina , V. Shalaev , S. Shmatov , S. Shulha , Y. Skovpen⁹⁵ , V. Smirnov , O. Teryaev , I. Tlisova⁹⁵ , A. Toropin , N. Voytishin , B.S. Yuldashev^{†98} , A. Zarubin , I. Zhizhin , Authors affiliated with an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

E. Boos , V. Bunichev , M. Dubinin⁸⁶ , V. Savrin , A. Snigirev , L. Dudko , K. Ivanov , V. Kim²³ , V. Murzin , V. Oreshkin , D. Sosnov , Authors affiliated with an institute formerly covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

Deceased

- ¹Also at Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia
- ²Also at TU Wien, Vienna, Austria
- ³Also at Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
- ⁴Also at Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- ⁵Also at FACAMP - Faculdades de Campinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- ⁶Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil
- ⁷Also at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
- ⁸Also at The University of the State of Amazonas, Manaus, Brazil
- ⁹Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
- ¹⁰Also at China Center of Advanced Science and Technology, Beijing, China
- ¹¹Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
- ¹²Now at Henan Normal University, Xinxiang, China
- ¹³Also at University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China
- ¹⁴Now at The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
- ¹⁵Also at Center for High Energy Physics, Peking University, Beijing, China
- ¹⁶Also at Suez University, Suez, Egypt
- ¹⁷Now at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
- ¹⁸Also at Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt

- ¹⁹Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
- ²⁰Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France
- ²¹Also at Istinye University, Istanbul, Turkey
- ²²Also at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
- ²³Also at an institute formerly covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
- ²⁴Also at University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
- ²⁵Also at RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
- ²⁶Also at Bergische University Wuppertal (BUW), Wuppertal, Germany
- ²⁷Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany
- ²⁸Also at Forschungszentrum Jülich, Juelich, Germany
- ²⁹Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
- ³⁰Also at HUN-REN ATOMKI - Institute of Nuclear Research, Debrecen, Hungary
- ³¹Now at Universitatea Babes-Bolyai - Facultatea de Fizica, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- ³²Also at MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
- ³³Also at HUN-REN Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
- ³⁴Also at Physics Department, Faculty of Science, Assiut University, Assiut, Egypt
- ³⁵Also at The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA
- ³⁶Also at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India
- ³⁷Also at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India
- ³⁸Also at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, India
- ³⁹Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India
- ⁴⁰Also at IIT Bhubaneswar, Bhubaneswar, India
- ⁴¹Also at Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, India
- ⁴²Also at Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
- ⁴³Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
- ⁴⁴Also at Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran
- ⁴⁵Also at Department of Physics, University of Science and Technology of Mazandaran, Behshahr, Iran
- ⁴⁶Also at Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Arak University, ARAK, Iran
- ⁴⁷Also at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt
- ⁴⁸Also at Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, Bologna, Italy
- ⁴⁹Also at Centro Siciliano di Fisica Nucleare e di Struttura Della Materia, Catania, Italy
- ⁵⁰Also at Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Roma, Italy
- ⁵¹Also at Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Napoli 'Federico II', Napoli, Italy
- ⁵²Also at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA
- ⁵³Also at Lulea University of Technology, Lulea, Sweden
- ⁵⁴Also at Laboratori Nazionali di Legnaro dell'INFN, Legnaro, Italy
- ⁵⁵Also at Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - Istituto Officina dei Materiali, Perugia, Italy
- ⁵⁶Also at UPES - University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun, India
- ⁵⁷Also at Institut de Physique des 2 Infinis de Lyon (IP2I), Villeurbanne, France
- ⁵⁸Also at Department of Applied Physics, Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia
- ⁵⁹Also at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, Nilaveli, Sri Lanka
- ⁶⁰Also at Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka
- ⁶¹Also at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
- ⁶²Also at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland
- ⁶³Also at Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
- ⁶⁴Also at Stefan Meyer Institute for Subatomic Physics, Vienna, Austria
- ⁶⁵Also at Near East University, Research Center of Experimental Health Science, Mersin, Turkey

- ⁶⁶Also at Konya Technical University, Konya, Turkey
⁶⁷Also at Izmir Bakircay University, Izmir, Turkey
⁶⁸Also at Adiyaman University, Adiyaman, Turkey
⁶⁹Also at Bozok Universitetesi Rektörlüğü, Yozgat, Turkey
⁷⁰Also at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Istanbul, Turkey
⁷¹Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey
⁷²Also at Milli Savunma University, Istanbul, Turkey
⁷³Also at Informatics and Information Security Research Center, Gebze/Kocaeli, Turkey
⁷⁴Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey
⁷⁵Now at Istanbul Okan University, Istanbul, Turkey
⁷⁶Also at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey
⁷⁷Also at Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Erzincan, Turkey
⁷⁸Also at Istanbul University - Cerrahpasa, Faculty of Engineering, Istanbul, Turkey
⁷⁹Also at Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
⁸⁰Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom
⁸¹Also at Monash University, Faculty of Science, Clayton, Australia
⁸²Also at Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
⁸³Also at Università di Torino, Torino, Italy
⁸⁴Also at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey
⁸⁵Also at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California, USA
⁸⁶Also at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA
⁸⁷Also at United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, USA
⁸⁸Also at Bingöl University, Bingöl, Turkey
⁸⁹Also at Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia
⁹⁰Also at Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey
⁹¹Also at Erciyes University, Kayseri, Turkey
⁹²Also at Horia Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering (IFIN-HH), Bucharest, Romania
⁹³Now at another institute formerly covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
⁹⁴Also at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Doha, Qatar
⁹⁵Also at another institute formerly covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
⁹⁶Also at Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
⁹⁷Also at Imperial College, London, United Kingdom
⁹⁸Also at Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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