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Non-Gaussian elliptic-flow fluctuations in PbPb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{_{\mathrm{NN}}}} = 5.02\,\mathrm{TeV}$

The CMS Collaboration*

Abstract

Event-by-event fluctuations in the elliptic-flow coefficient v_2 are studied in PbPb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{_{\mathrm{NN}}}} = 5.02\,\mathrm{TeV}$ using the CMS detector at the CERN LHC. Elliptic-flow probability distributions $p(v_2)$ for charged particles with transverse momentum $0.3 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 3.0\,\mathrm{GeV}/c$ and pseudorapidity $|\eta| < 1.0$ are determined for different collision centrality classes. The moments of the $p(v_2)$ distributions are used to calculate the v_2 coefficients based on cumulant orders 2, 4, 6, and 8. A rank ordering of the higher-order cumulant results and nonzero standardized skewness values obtained for the $p(v_2)$ distributions indicate non-Gaussian initial-state fluctuation behavior. Bessel–Gaussian and elliptic power fits to the flow distributions are studied to characterize the initial-state spatial anisotropy.

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*See Appendix A for the list of collaboration members

1 Introduction

Ultrarelativistic heavy ion collisions at both the BNL RHIC and the CERN LHC create a hot and dense state of matter that consists of strongly interacting quarks and gluons, the so-called "quark-gluon plasma" (QGP) [1–6]. Measurement of azimuthal particle correlations indicate that this plasma has a collective behavior that is described well by hydrodynamic models [7], with a shear viscosity to entropy density ratio η/s that is of the order of the lowest possible value for a quantum fluid [8, 9]. Fluctuations in the initial-state transverse energy density affect the azimuthal correlations. Properties of the created medium can be deduced by studying these fluctuation effects. In particular, precision studies of the small differences that can occur in the moments of the Fourier components of the azimuthal behavior, as found in measurements of multiparticle correlations of different numbers of particles, can help constrain the geometry and origin of the fluctuation behavior and disentangle the initial-state effects from the subsequent evolution of the medium [10, 11]. Previous studies have suggested a two-dimensional Gaussian fluctuation behavior, leading to little dependence of the flow harmonics on the number of particles used for their determination [12–14]. Here, an event-by-event analysis is performed where it is possible to reduce the sensitivity of the results to nonflow correlations [15] and to clearly establish non-Gaussian components in the fluctuation behavior, thus developing a new window into this behavior.

The anisotropies associated with the initial-state energy density are transformed by the hydrodynamic evolution into anisotropies in the final-state momentum space for the emitted particles [16, 17]. These, in turn, are reflected in an azimuthally anisotropic distribution of the final-state particles that can be characterized by a Fourier expansion in the azimuthal angle of the measured charged particles,

$$\frac{\mathrm{d}N_{\mathrm{ch}}}{\mathrm{d}\phi} \propto 1 + 2\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} v_n \cos\left(n\phi - \Phi_n\right). \tag{1}$$

Here, the nth-order flow vector $\vec{v}_n \equiv (v_n \cos\Phi_n, v_n \sin\Phi_n)$ is determined with a phase angle Φ_n with respect to the intrinsic nth-order flow symmetry plane, as determined by the geometry of the participant nucleons. The experimentally accessible "event plane" angle is based on the direction of maximum outgoing particle density. The event plane angle is, on average, in the same direction as Φ_n, but fluctuates about Φ_n because of resolution effects due to finite particle multiplicities.

While the final-state particle distribution is characterized by the $\vec{v}_n$ coefficients, the initial-state spatial anisotropy can be characterized by an harmonic expansion in terms of vectors $\vec{\varepsilon}_n$ [18]. Fluctuations in the initial-state transverse energy density lead to event-by-event differences in the orientation and magnitude of the $\vec{\varepsilon}_n$ vectors with respect to the "reaction plane," defined by the collision impact parameter and beam directions. The presence of a nonzero viscosity will degrade the correspondence between initial- and final-state anisotropies [7, 19]. Still, a near-linear dependence is expected for the lowest order $n = 2$ (elliptic) and $n = 3$ (triangular) harmonics, with $v_n = k_n\, \varepsilon_n$ [20]. Here, $v_n \equiv |\vec{v}_n|$, $\varepsilon_n \equiv |\vec{\varepsilon_n}|$, and k_n is the flow response coefficient. In this linear-response case, it is possible to directly relate the probability distribution of the magnitudes of the $\vec{\varepsilon}_n$ vectors, $p(\varepsilon_n)$, to the corresponding $p(v_n)$ distribution:

$$p(v_n) = \frac{\mathrm{d}\varepsilon_n}{\mathrm{d}v_n}\, p(\varepsilon_n) = \frac{1}{k_n}\, p\left(\frac{v_n}{k_n}\right), \tag{2}$$

where the k_n term is expected to depend on the hydrodynamic evolution of the medium [21, 22].

The $p(v_n)$ distributions can be characterized using the experimentally determined multiparticle cumulant flow harmonics $v_n\{m\}$ [23, 24], where m is the cumulant order. Alternatively, flow distributions can be determined directly, as shown by the ATLAS Collaboration [15] and as done here, by removing finite-multiplicity resolution effects in the measured $p(v_2^{\text{obs}})$ distributions through an unfolding technique. The cumulant harmonics are expressed in terms of the moments of the $p(v_n)$ distributions [25, 26]:

$$\begin{aligned}
v_n\{2\}^2 &\equiv \mathrm{E}(v_n^2), \\
v_n\{4\}^4 &\equiv -\mathrm{E}(v_n^4) + 2\mathrm{E}(v_n^2)^2, \\
v_n\{6\}^6 &\equiv \left(\mathrm{E}(v_n^6) - 9\mathrm{E}(v_n^4)\mathrm{E}(v_n^2) + 12\mathrm{E}(v_n^2)^3\right)/4, \\
v_n\{8\}^8 &\equiv -(\mathrm{E}(v_n^8) - 16\mathrm{E}(v_n^6)\mathrm{E}(v_n^2) - 18\mathrm{E}(v_n^4)^2 \\
&\quad + 144\mathrm{E}(v_n^4)\mathrm{E}(v_n^2)^2 - 144\mathrm{E}(v_n^2)^4)/33,
\end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where $\mathrm{E}(v_n^k) \equiv \int v_n^k p(v_n)\mathrm{d}v_n$. The unitless standardized skewness of a probability distribution is a measure of the asymmetry about its mean. For elliptic flow, the standardized skewness with respect to the reaction plane can be estimated using the cumulant flow harmonics as [27]:

$$\gamma_1^{\text{exp}} \equiv -6\sqrt{2}v_2\{4\}^2 \frac{v_2\{4\} - v_2\{6\}}{\left(v_2\{2\}^2 - v_2\{4\}^2\right)^{3/2}}. \tag{4}$$

Hydrodynamic calculations find this estimate to be in good agreement with the actual skewness except for the most peripheral events [27].

The standardized skewness estimate vanishes for fluctuations that arise from an isotropic Gaussian transverse initial-state energy density profile. In this case, the $p(v_n)$ distribution is found by taking an integral over the azimuthal dependence of the two-dimensional Gaussian function [25, 28], leading to

$$p(v_n) = \frac{v_n}{\delta_{v_n}^2} \exp\left[-\frac{v_n^2 + \langle v_n^{\text{RP}}\rangle^2}{2\delta_{v_n}^2}\right] I_0\left(\frac{v_n\langle v_n^{\text{RP}}\rangle}{\delta_{v_n}^2}\right), \tag{5}$$

where $\langle v_n^{\text{RP}}\rangle$ is the average v_n value with respect to the experimentally inaccessible reaction plane angle, δ_{v_n} is the width of the distribution, and I_0 is the modified Bessel function of the first kind. For Gaussian fluctuations, the higher order, even cumulant coefficients $v_n\{m\}$ with $m \geq 4$ are degenerate and are equal to $\langle v_n^{\text{RP}}\rangle$ [25]. The observation for PbPb collisions that $v_2\{4\} \approx v_2\{6\} \approx v_2\{8\}$ [12–14] suggests that the $\vec{v}_2$ fluctuations can be approximately described by a two-dimensional Gaussian function [25].

Still, non-Gaussian fluctuations are expected in the initial-state energy density [27], which should lead to differences in the higher order cumulant coefficients. Such differences have been detected in the peripheral PbPb elliptic flow by the ATLAS Collaboration [14]. The precision of the LHC measurements allows for these differences to be explored in detail, giving a new method to investigate the initial-state behavior. The elliptic power function has been suggested as a formalism that can describe the asymmetric behavior of the $p(\varepsilon_n)$ distributions [10, 11]. This function is based on the assumption that the initial energy density profile of the collision is a superposition of N point-like, independent sources. In terms of the harmonic-flow coefficients and assuming a linear response,

$$p(v_n) = \frac{2\alpha v_n}{\pi k_n^2}(1-\varepsilon_0^2)^{\alpha+1/2} \int_0^{\pi} \frac{(1 - v_n^2/k_n^2)^{\alpha-1}\mathrm{d}\phi}{(1 - \varepsilon_0 v_n \cos\phi/k_n)^{2\alpha+1}}, \tag{6}$$

where ε_0 is approximately equal to the mean eccentricity in the reaction plane and α, which is approximately proportional to N, describes the size of the eccentricity fluctuations.

In this Letter, the $p(v_2)$ distributions for charged particles in the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 1.0$ and with transverse momenta $0.3 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 3.0\,\mathrm{GeV}/c$ are presented for PbPb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{_{\mathrm{NN}}}} = 5.02\,\mathrm{TeV}$ collected with the CMS detector at the LHC. The results are shown in bins of centrality, defined as fractions of the total inelastic hadronic cross section, where 0% corresponds to the events with the greatest hadronic activity in the forward direction ($|\eta| > 3.0$). The elliptic-flow harmonic values for different cumulant orders are determined based on the moments of the $p(v_2)$ distributions, with these results used to estimate the standardized skewness of the flow distribution. Elliptic power and Bessel–Gaussian fits to the flow distributions are presented to gain further insight into the initial-state fluctuation behavior.

2 The CMS detector

The central feature of the CMS apparatus is a superconducting solenoid of 6 m internal diameter, providing a magnetic field of 3.8 T. Within the solenoid volume are a silicon pixel and strip tracker, a lead tungstate crystal electromagnetic calorimeter, and a brass and scintillator hadron calorimeter, each composed of a barrel and two endcap sections. Hadron forward calorimeters (HF) extend the pseudorapidity coverage provided by the barrel and endcap detectors to $3.0 < |\eta| < 5.2$ and are used to both select events for analysis and determine centrality. The HF calorimeters are azimuthally subdivided into 20° modular wedges and further segmented to form $0.175 \times 10°$ ($\Delta\eta \times \Delta\phi$) towers. Muons are detected in gas-ionization chambers embedded in the steel flux-return yoke outside the solenoid. The silicon tracker measures charged particles within the range $|\eta| < 2.5$. It consists of 1440 silicon pixel and 15 148 silicon strip detector modules. For nonisolated particles of $1 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 10\,\mathrm{GeV}/c$ and $|\eta| < 1.4$, the track resolutions are typically 1.5% in p_{T} and 25–90 (45–150) μm in the transverse (longitudinal) distance of closest approach [29]. A more detailed description of the CMS detector, together with a definition of the coordinate system used and the relevant kinematic variables, can be found in Ref. [30].

3 Event and track selection

This analysis is based on a PbPb minimum bias data set corresponding to an integrated luminosity of $26\,\mu\mathrm{b}^{-1}$, collected in 2015 . The minimum-bias trigger used requires coincident signals in the HF calorimeters at both ends of the CMS detector with energy deposits above a predefined energy threshold of approximately 1 GeV and the presence of both colliding bunches at the interaction point as determined using beam pickup timing monitors. By requiring colliding bunches, events due to noise (e.g., cosmic rays and beam backgrounds) are largely suppressed. Events are further selected offline by requiring at least three towers with an energy above 3 GeV in each of the two HF calorimeters. The primary vertex for each event is chosen as the reconstructed vertex with the largest number of associated tracks. Primary vertices are required to have at least two associated tracks and to be located within 15 (0.2) cm of the nominal collision point along the longitudinal (transverse) direction. To suppress contamination from events with multiple collisions (pileup), the procedure outlined in Ref. [6] is followed. Here, compatibility scores based on the number of pixel clusters with widths compatible with particles originating from each primary vertex are determined and events with primary vertices with compatibility scores below a predefined threshold are rejected as pileup. The mean number of collisions per bunch crossing for the events used in this analysis was $\approx$0.001.

Track reconstruction [29, 31] is performed in two iterations to ease the computational load for high-multiplicity central PbPb collisions. The first iteration reconstructs tracks from signals ("hits") in the silicon pixel and strip detectors compatible with a trajectory of $p_T > 0.9\,\text{GeV}/c$. These tracks are required to be consistent with the primary vertex, having a longitudinal association significance (d_z/σ_{d_z}) and a distance of closest approach significance (d_0/σ_{d_0}) each less than 3. In addition, the p_T resolution [29, 31] for each track, σ_{p_T}/p_T, is required to be less than 10% and tracks are required to have at least 11 out of 14 hits along their trajectory in the pixel and strip trackers. To reduce the number of misidentified tracks, the chi-squared per degree of freedom, χ^2/dof, associated with fitting the track trajectory through the different pixel and strip layers must be less than 0.15 times the total number of layers with hits along the trajectory of the track. The second iteration reconstructs tracks compatible with a trajectory of $p_T > 0.2\,\text{GeV}/c$ using solely the pixel detector. These tracks are required to have longitudinal association significance $d_z/\sigma_{d_z} < 8$ and a fit χ^2/dof value less than 12 times the number of layers with hits along the trajectory of the track. In the final analysis, first iteration tracks with $p_T > 1.0\,\text{GeV}/c$ are combined with pixel-detector-only tracks with $p_T < 2.4\,\text{GeV}/c$ after removing duplicates. Track reconstruction for the merged iterations has a combined geometric acceptance and efficiency exceeding 60% for $p_T \approx 1.0\,\text{GeV}/c$ and $|\eta| < 1.0$. When the track p_T is below $1\,\text{GeV}/c$, the acceptance and efficiency steadily drops, reaching approximately 40% at $p_T \approx 0.3\,\text{GeV}/c$.

4 Analysis technique

The event-by-event v_2 coefficients and phases in Eq. (1) can be estimated with

$$\begin{aligned}
v_{2,x}^{\text{obs}} &= |\vec{v}_2^{\,\text{obs}}| \cos\left(2\Psi_2^{\text{obs}}\right) = \langle \cos(2\phi) \rangle = \frac{\sum_i w_i \cos(2\phi_i)}{\sum_i w_i}, \\
v_{2,y}^{\text{obs}} &= |\vec{v}_2^{\,\text{obs}}| \sin\left(2\Psi_2^{\text{obs}}\right) = \langle \sin(2\phi) \rangle = \frac{\sum_i w_i \sin(2\phi_i)}{\sum_i w_i}, \\
|\vec{v}_2^{\,\text{obs}}| &= \sqrt{\left(v_{2,x}^{\text{obs}}\right)^2 + \left(v_{2,y}^{\text{obs}}\right)^2},
\end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

where ϕ_i is the azimuthal angle of the track, Ψ_2^{obs} is the event plane angle defined by the direction of maximum particle density in the transverse plane, the angular brackets denote an efficiency weighted average over all particles in a given range of phase space for an event, and $w_i = 1/\varepsilon_i$ is the inverse of the tracking efficiency $\varepsilon_i\,(p_T, \eta)$ of the i^{th} track. The analysis does not require the explicit calculation of the event plane angle for each event. In the absence of particle correlations unrelated to the hydrodynamic flow behavior ("nonflow"), the observed event-by-event flow vectors of Eq. (7) will approach the true underlying flow vectors as the particle multiplicity becomes large. In addition to the efficiency weighting, a standard recentering procedure [32], where the event average x- and y-components of the flow vector are required to equal zero, is applied to further suppress acceptance biases.

Events are sorted into different centrality classes, as determined by the transverse energy deposited in the HF calorimeters [6], and the magnitudes of the estimated flow vectors are used to construct the "observed" $p(v_2^{\text{obs}})$ distributions for each class. Finite particle multiplicities result in a statistical fluctuation of the v_2^{obs} estimate for a given event about the true underlying v_2 value by a response function $p(v_2^{\text{obs}}|v_2)$. This, in turn, results in a $p(v_2^{\text{obs}})$ distribution that is broader than the underlying $p(v_2)$ behavior. The observed distribution can be expressed as a convolution of the underlying flow behavior and the response function

$$p(v_2^{\text{obs}}) = p(v_2^{\text{obs}}|v_2) * p(v_2). \tag{8}$$

A data-based technique, first introduced by the ATLAS Collaboration [15], was used to build the response function in Eq. (8). This technique divides the full event sample into two symmetric subevents (a and b) based on pseudorapidity. Given that $v_2(\eta)$ is symmetric about $\eta = 0$ on average for the symmetric PbPb system, the physical flow signal cancels in the distribution of flow vector differences from each subevent $p(\vec{v}_n^a - \vec{v}_n^b)$. The resulting distribution contains residual effects from multiplicity-related fluctuations and nonflow effects [33] and provides a basis for building the response function.

To unfold the effects of multiplicity-related fluctuations, the D'Agostini iterative method with early stopping (regularization) [34–36] was used to obtain a maximum likelihood estimate of the underlying $p(v_2)$ behavior. The analysis was done using the ROOUNFOLD [37] package of the ROOT data analysis framework [38]. The unfolding procedure becomes increasingly sensitive to statistical fluctuations when the number of iterations is allowed to run to large values, resulting in unphysical oscillations in the low event count tails of the unfolded distribution. The regularization criterion used to suppress these oscillations is to apply the response function to each unfolding iteration ("refolding") and compare the resulting distribution to the observed distribution. Iterations are stopped when the χ^2/dof between the refolded and observed distribution is approximately equal to one. After this final unfolding iteration is reached, the resulting distribution is truncated above $\langle v_2 \rangle + 4\sigma_{v_2}$ to further suppress any residual artifacts in the tails that result from the unfolding procedure. Representative final unfolded distributions are shown in Fig. 1. In addition, $p(v_2^{\mathrm{obs}})$ distributions are plotted for each centrality to illustrate the statistical resolution effects present prior to unfolding. The fits shown in Fig. 1 are discussed in Section 6.

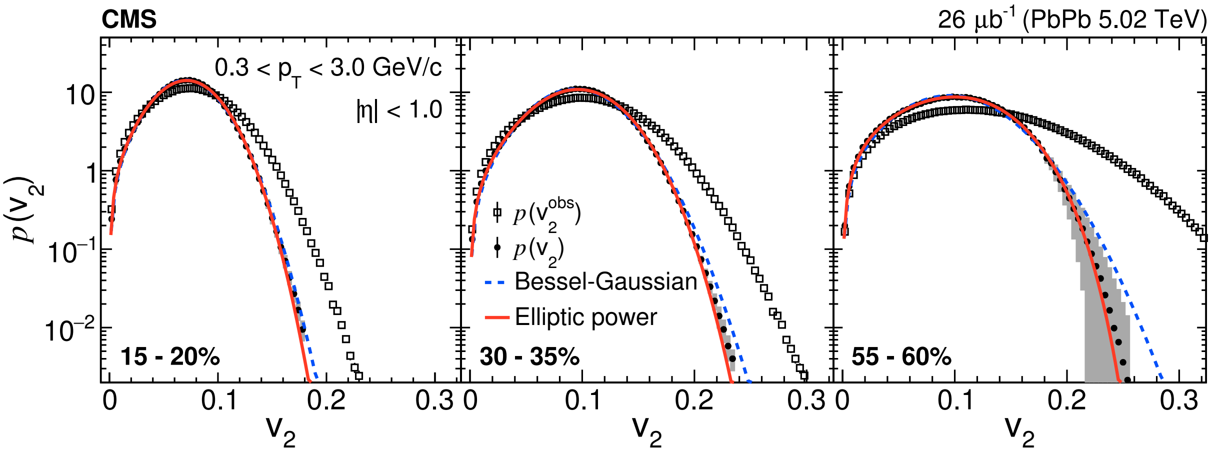

Figure 1: Representative final unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions (closed black circles) in three centrality bins (15–20%, 30–35%, and 55–60%) obtained using D'Agostini iteration unfolding. Respective observed $p(v_2^{\mathrm{obs}})$ distributions (open black squares) are shown to illustrate the statistical resolution present in each centrality bin prior to unfolding. Systematic uncertainties from the unfolding procedure are presented as shaded bands. Distributions are fitted with Bessel–Gaussian (dashed blue lines) and elliptic power (solid red lines) functions to infer information on the underlying $p(\varepsilon_2)$ distributions.

5 Systematic uncertainties

There are five primary sources of systematic uncertainties for the quantities extracted from the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions: the vertex position dependence, the response function uncertainty, the pileup contamination, the unfolding regularization, and the effect of misidentified tracks. Separate studies were done for each cumulant order, the ratios of the elliptic flow harmonic found for different cumulant orders, the standardized skewness γ_1^{exp}, and the elliptic power fit parameters. The systematic uncertainties that arise from the vertex z position are investigated by splitting the default vertex range into two windows of $|z_{\text{vtx}}| < 3.0\,\text{cm}$ and $3.0 < |z_{\text{vtx}}| < 15.0\,\text{cm}$ and comparing the results from the two ranges. To estimate the systematic uncertainty in the choice of response function, unfolding is repeated using an analytic response function obtained from a Gaussian fit to the data-driven statistical resolution distribution [15]. To assess the potential bias from residual pileup events, the threshold for determining pileup events is raised to decrease the probability of including events with multiple collisions in the analysis. The bias from unfolding regularization is studied by modifying the χ^2/dof goodness-of-fit regularization criteria and comparing the cases when the refolding χ^2/dof cutoff is 2.0 relative to when it is 1.0. To test the potential bias that might result from the 4σ truncation of the final unfolded distributions, the truncation point was varied between 3.5σ and 4.5σ. No significant bias was found in varying the truncation point. To estimate the bias from misidentified tracks, the track quality criteria described in Section 3 are varied in two scenarios that will increase and decrease the probability of misidentifying a track, respectively. The dominant uncertainties arise from the track quality criteria that affect the misidentified track contribution. Total systematic uncertainties are obtained by adding the contribution from each source in quadrature. The v_2 values calculated for the different cumulant orders have a total systematic uncertainty of the order of 5% for central collisions, which decreases to 1% in mid-central collisions. Systematic uncertainties that are correlated between different cumulant orders cancel in their ratios, leading to a total systematic uncertainty of the order of 1% for the ratios for central collisions, which decreases to 0.1% in mid-central collisions. The standardized skewness is very sensitive to small fluctuations in the cumulant flow harmonics, resulting in a systematic uncertainty of the order of 100% for central collisions that reduces to 20% for mid-central collisions.

6 Results

The cumulant elliptic-flow harmonics obtained from the moments of the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions using Eq. (3) are shown in Fig. 2 for cumulant orders 2, 4, 6, and 8. It was not possible to obtain reliable results for the 0–5% centrality range because of the smallness of the flow signal. The cumulant results exhibit the previously observed $v_2\{2\} > v_2\{4\} \approx v_2\{6\} \approx v_2\{8\}$ behavior. The centrality-dependent ratios for the elliptic-flow coefficients obtained for different cumulant orders are shown in Fig. 3. For most centrality ranges, the ratios indicate a rank ordering of the cumulants, with differences on the order of a few percent and with $v_2\{4\} > v_2\{6\} > v_2\{8\}$, that is qualitatively inconsistent with a pure Gaussian fluctuation model of flow harmonics. The calculated $v_2\{6\}/v_2\{4\}$ ratio based on an event-by-event hydrodynamic calculation using Monte Carlo Glauber initial conditions [39] and an η/s value of 0.08 is shown by the shaded band. This simulation is for pions with $0.2 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 3.0\,\text{GeV}/c$ in PbPb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{_{\text{NN}}}} = 2.76\,\text{TeV}$ [27]. Also shown are results from the ATLAS Collaboration [14] for PbPb collisions at 2.76 TeV and for charged particles with $0.5 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 20.0\,\text{GeV}/c$ and $|\eta| < 2.5$. The calculation is consistent with the experimental results found at both beam energies. The similarity between experimental results with 2.76 and 5.02 TeV is consistent with the small changes in the initial state eccentricities expected between these energies [40].

Figure 4 shows the centrality dependence of the standardized skewness γ_1^{exp}. Nonzero values are found for the standardized skewness for centrality bins that that show unequal higher order cumulants. The hydrodynamic predictions for the γ_1^{exp} values for PbPb collisions at 2.76 TeV from Ref. [27] are also shown and found to be consistent with the current measurements.

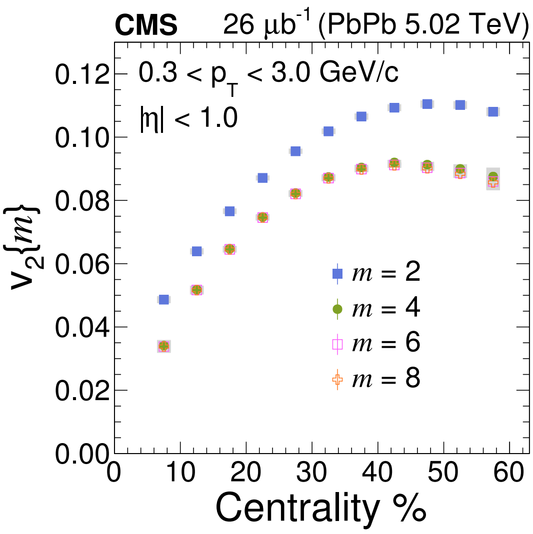

Figure 2: Elliptic-flow cumulant harmonics with values obtained from the moments of the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions. Statistical uncertainties are smaller than the symbol size. Systematic uncertainties are shown as gray bands.

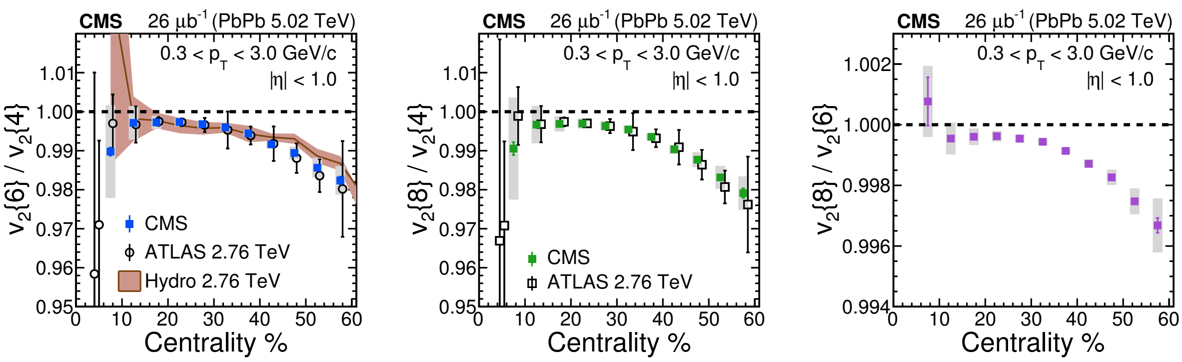

Figure 3: Ratios of higher order cumulant elliptic-flow harmonics with values obtained from the moments of the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions. Both statistical (lines) and systematic (gray bands) uncertainties are shown. Hydrodynamic predictions for 2.76 TeV collisions from Ref. [27] are presented as a dark color band and are compared to the measured $v_2\{6\}/v_2\{4\}$ ratio. In addition, higher order cumulant ratios reported by the ATLAS Collaboration for 2.76 TeV collisions [14] with $0.5 < p_{\mathrm{T}} < 20.0\,\mathrm{GeV}/c$ and $|\eta| < 2.5$ are compared to the 5.02 TeV measurement. The error bars on the ATLAS measurement represent the quadratic sum of statistical and systematic uncertainties and points are offset horizontally for clarity.

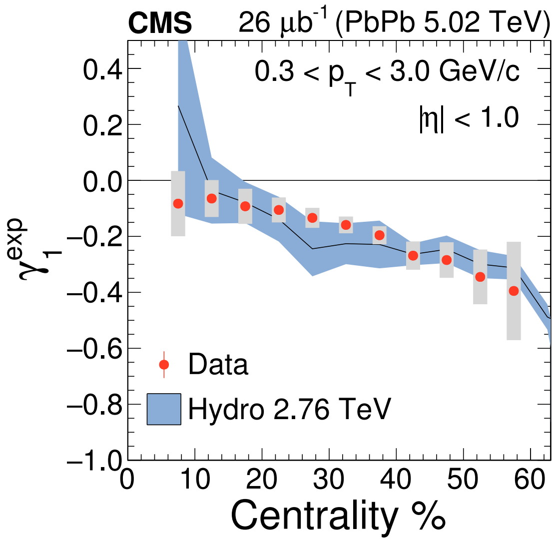

Figure 4: The skewness estimate with respect to the reaction plane determined using the elliptic-flow harmonic based on different cumulant orders. Both statistical and systematic uncertainties are shown, where statistical uncertainties are smaller than the data points. Hydrodynamic model predictions for 2.76 TeV PbPb collisions from Ref. [27] are shown as a colored band.

Both elliptic power and Bessel–Gaussian parametrizations used for fits such as shown in Fig. 1 assume a linear response between eccentricity and flow, but only the elliptic power law allows for a finite skewness. This flexibility results in the elliptic power function being in better agreement with the observed fluctuation behavior than the Bessel–Gaussian parametrization, yielding χ^2/dof goodness of fit values on the order of unity. Point-by-point systematic uncertainties on the unfolded distributions are correlated and are thus not considered in the fits. The fit parameters for the elliptic power function are shown in Fig. 5 for the different centrality bins. Here, fits do not converge for central collisions and parameters are shown for centralities greater than ≈15%. Viscous hydrodynamics calculations indicate that deviations from thermal equilibrium will result in a reduced correspondence between the initial-state geometry and the flow signal in peripheral collisions [21, 22], which is consistent with the data.

Theoretical predictions at 2.76 TeV from Ref. [11] are compared to the current analysis in Fig. 5. A viscous hydrodynamic calculation with Glauber initial conditions and an η/s value of 0.19 is in agreement with the experimental k_2 values. Predictions obtained using Glauber and IP-Glasma [41, 42] initial conditions, where the IP-Glasma model includes gluon saturation effects, are shown for the ε_0 and α parameters. These latter two calculations qualitatively capture the observed behavior for the α-parameter, but a significant difference is found in comparing the theoretical ε_0 values with experiment. This difference might reflect a nonlinear response term, which will alter the magnitude of the flow response coefficient and consequently the ε_0 and α parameters, as suggested in Ref. [11].

7 Summary

In summary, a non-Gaussian behavior is observed in the event-by-event fluctuations of the elliptic flow v_2 coefficients in PbPb collisions recorded by the CMS detector at $\sqrt{s_{\mathrm{NN}}} = 5.02\,\mathrm{TeV}$. The probability distributions $p(v_2)$ for 5%-centrality bins between 5% and 60% centrality are

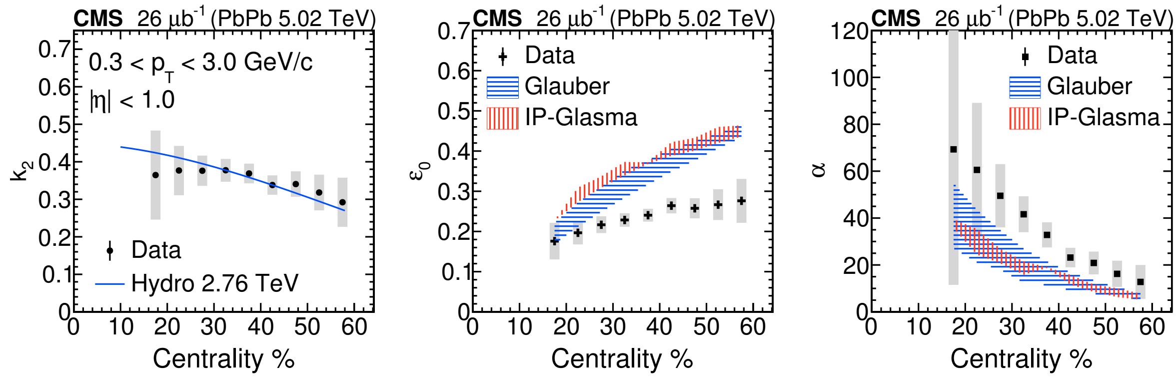

Figure 5: Centrality dependence of the parameters extracted from elliptic power function fits to the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions. Both statistical (error bars) and systematic (shaded boxes) uncertainties are shown. The solid lines represent theoretical calculations from Ref. [11] using viscous hydrodynamics with Glauber initial conditions and an η/s value of 0.19 to determine the response coefficient k_2. Glauber (blue shaded band) and IP-Glasma (red shaded band) model calculations from Ref. [11] are shown for the α and ε_0 parameters.

found by unfolding statistical resolution effects from measured flow distributions. The v_2 coefficients corresponding to different cumulant orders are calculated from the moments of the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions. A rank ordering of $v_2\{4\} > v_2\{6\} > v_2\{8\}$, with differences on the order of a few percent, is observed for noncentral events with centralities greater than $\approx$15%. The standardized skewness of each $p(v_2)$ distribution is calculated using the cumulant results. In cases where there is a splitting of the cumulant values, the standardized skewness is found to be negative with an increasing magnitude as collisions become less central. Bessel–Gaussian and elliptic power functions are fitted to the unfolded $p(v_2)$ distributions. The two distributions are similar for central collisions, though the elliptic power function provides a better description for noncentral collisions.

Based on the elliptic power function fits, the centrality dependence of the flow response coefficient, which relates the final state geometry to the initial state energy density distribution, is found to be consistent with model calculations. However, the observed eccentricities are smaller than predictions based on either the Glauber model or the IP-Glasma model initial conditions with an assumed linear flow response. The current results illustrate that LHC experiments now have the precision to explore the details of the initial-state fluctuation behavior.

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A The CMS Collaboration

Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
A.M. Sirunyan, A. Tumasyan

Institut für Hochenergiephysik, Wien, Austria
W. Adam, F. Ambrogi, E. Asilar, T. Bergauer, J. Brandstetter, E. Brondolin, M. Dragicevic, J. Erö, M. Flechl, M. Friedl, R. Frühwirth[1], V.M. Ghete, J. Grossmann, J. Hrubec, M. Jeitler[1], A. König, N. Krammer, I. Krätschmer, D. Liko, T. Madlener, I. Mikulec, E. Pree, N. Rad, H. Rohringer, J. Schieck[1], R. Schöfbeck, M. Spanring, D. Spitzbart, W. Waltenberger, J. Wittmann, C.-E. Wulz[1], M. Zarucki

Institute for Nuclear Problems, Minsk, Belarus
V. Chekhovsky, V. Mossolov, J. Suarez Gonzalez

Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium
E.A. De Wolf, D. Di Croce, X. Janssen, J. Lauwers, M. Van De Klundert, H. Van Haevermaet, P. Van Mechelen, N. Van Remortel

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium
S. Abu Zeid, F. Blekman, J. D'Hondt, I. De Bruyn, J. De Clercq, K. Deroover, G. Flouris, D. Lontkovskyi, S. Lowette, I. Marchesini, S. Moortgat, L. Moreels, Q. Python, K. Skovpen, S. Tavernier, W. Van Doninck, P. Van Mulders, I. Van Parijs

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
D. Beghin, H. Brun, B. Clerbaux, G. De Lentdecker, H. Delannoy, B. Dorney, G. Fasanella, L. Favart, R. Goldouzian, A. Grebenyuk, T. Lenzi, J. Luetic, T. Maerschalk, A. Marinov, T. Seva, E. Starling, C. Vander Velde, P. Vanlaer, D. Vannerom, R. Yonamine, F. Zenoni, F. Zhang[2]

Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
A. Cimmino, T. Cornelis, D. Dobur, A. Fagot, M. Gul, I. Khvastunov[3], D. Poyraz, C. Roskas, S. Salva, M. Tytgat, W. Verbeke, N. Zaganidis

Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
H. Bakhshiansohi, O. Bondu, S. Brochet, G. Bruno, C. Caputo, A. Caudron, P. David, S. De Visscher, C. Delaere, M. Delcourt, B. Francois, A. Giammanco, M. Komm, G. Krintiras, V. Lemaitre, A. Magitteri, A. Mertens, M. Musich, K. Piotrzkowski, L. Quertenmont, A. Saggio, M. Vidal Marono, S. Wertz, J. Zobec

Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Fisicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
W.L. Aldá Júnior, F.L. Alves, G.A. Alves, L. Brito, M. Correa Martins Junior, C. Hensel, A. Moraes, M.E. Pol, P. Rebello Teles

Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
E. Belchior Batista Das Chagas, W. Carvalho, J. Chinellato[4], E. Coelho, E.M. Da Costa, G.G. Da Silveira[5], D. De Jesus Damiao, S. Fonseca De Souza, L.M. Huertas Guativa, H. Malbouisson, M. Melo De Almeida, C. Mora Herrera, L. Mundim, H. Nogima, L.J. Sanchez Rosas, A. Santoro, A. Sznajder, M. Thiel, E.J. Tonelli Manganote[4], F. Torres Da Silva De Araujo, A. Vilela Pereira

Universidade Estadual Paulista [a], Universidade Federal do ABC [b], São Paulo, Brazil
S. Ahuja[a], C.A. Bernardes[a], T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei[a], E.M. Gregores[b], P.G. Mercadante[b], S.F. Novaes[a], Sandra S. Padula[a], D. Romero Abad[b], J.C. Ruiz Vargas[a]

Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
A. Aleksandrov, R. Hadjiiska, P. Iaydjiev, M. Misheva, M. Rodozov, M. Shopova, G. Sultanov

University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria
A. Dimitrov, L. Litov, B. Pavlov, P. Petkov

Beihang University, Beijing, China
W. Fang[6], X. Gao[6], L. Yuan

Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China
M. Ahmad, J.G. Bian, G.M. Chen, H.S. Chen, M. Chen, Y. Chen, C.H. Jiang, D. Leggat, H. Liao, Z. Liu, F. Romeo, S.M. Shaheen, A. Spiezia, J. Tao, C. Wang, Z. Wang, E. Yazgan, H. Zhang, S. Zhang, J. Zhao

State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China
Y. Ban, G. Chen, J. Li, Q. Li, S. Liu, Y. Mao, S.J. Qian, D. Wang, Z. Xu

Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia
C. Avila, A. Cabrera, L.F. Chaparro Sierra, C. Florez, C.F. González Hernández, J.D. Ruiz Alvarez, M.A. Segura Delgado

University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Split, Croatia
B. Courbon, N. Godinovic, D. Lelas, I. Puljak, P.M. Ribeiro Cipriano, T. Sculac

University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia
Z. Antunovic, M. Kovac

Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia
V. Brigljevic, D. Ferencek, K. Kadija, B. Mesic, A. Starodumov[7], T. Susa

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus
M.W. Ather, A. Attikis, G. Mavromanolakis, J. Mousa, C. Nicolaou, F. Ptochos, P.A. Razis, H. Rykaczewski

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
M. Finger[8], M. Finger Jr.[8]

Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Quito, Ecuador
E. Carrera Jarrin

Academy of Scientific Research and Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Egyptian Network of High Energy Physics, Cairo, Egypt
A.A. Abdelalim[9,10], Y. Mohammed[11], E. Salama[12,13]

National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia
R.K. Dewanjee, M. Kadastik, L. Perrini, M. Raidal, A. Tiko, C. Veelken

Department of Physics, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
P. Eerola, H. Kirschenmann, J. Pekkanen, M. Voutilainen

Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland
J. Havukainen, J.K. Heikkilä, T. Järvinen, V. Karimäki, R. Kinnunen, T. Lampén, K. Lassila-Perini, S. Laurila, S. Lehti, T. Lindén, P. Luukka, H. Siikonen, E. Tuominen, J. Tuominiemi

Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland
T. Tuuva

IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
M. Besancon, F. Couderc, M. Dejardin, D. Denegri, J.L. Faure, F. Ferri, S. Ganjour, S. Ghosh, P. Gras, G. Hamel de Monchenault, P. Jarry, I. Kucher, C. Leloup, E. Locci, M. Machet, J. Malcles, G. Negro, J. Rander, A. Rosowsky, M.Ö. Sahin, M. Titov

Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, Ecole polytechnique, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, Palaiseau, France
A. Abdulsalam, C. Amendola, I. Antropov, S. Baffioni, F. Beaudette, P. Busson, L. Cadamuro, C. Charlot, R. Granier de Cassagnac, M. Jo, S. Lisniak, A. Lobanov, J. Martin Blanco, M. Nguyen, C. Ochando, G. Ortona, P. Paganini, P. Pigard, R. Salerno, J.B. Sauvan, Y. Sirois, A.G. Stahl Leiton, T. Strebler, Y. Yilmaz, A. Zabi, A. Zghiche

Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, F-67000 Strasbourg, France
J.-L. Agram[14], J. Andrea, D. Bloch, J.-M. Brom, M. Buttignol, E.C. Chabert, N. Chanon, C. Collard, E. Conte[14], X. Coubez, J.-C. Fontaine[14], D. Gelé, U. Goerlach, M. Jansová, A.-C. Le Bihan, N. Tonon, P. Van Hove

Centre de Calcul de l'Institut National de Physique Nucleaire et de Physique des Particules, CNRS/IN2P3, Villeurbanne, France
S. Gadrat

Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, CNRS-IN2P3, Institut de Physique Nucléaire de Lyon, Villeurbanne, France
S. Beauceron, C. Bernet, G. Boudoul, R. Chierici, D. Contardo, P. Depasse, H. El Mamouni, J. Fay, L. Finco, S. Gascon, M. Gouzevitch, G. Grenier, B. Ille, F. Lagarde, I.B. Laktineh, M. Lethuillier, L. Mirabito, A.L. Pequegnot, S. Perries, A. Popov[15], V. Sordini, M. Vander Donckt, S. Viret

Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia
T. Toriashvili[16]

Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
Z. Tsamalaidze[8]

RWTH Aachen University, I. Physikalisches Institut, Aachen, Germany
C. Autermann, L. Feld, M.K. Kiesel, K. Klein, M. Lipinski, M. Preuten, C. Schomakers, J. Schulz, V. Zhukov[15]

RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
A. Albert, E. Dietz-Laursonn, D. Duchardt, M. Endres, M. Erdmann, S. Erdweg, T. Esch, R. Fischer, A. Güth, M. Hamer, T. Hebbeker, C. Heidemann, K. Hoepfner, S. Knutzen, M. Merschmeyer, A. Meyer, P. Millet, S. Mukherjee, T. Pook, M. Radziej, H. Reithler, M. Rieger, F. Scheuch, D. Teyssier, S. Thüer

RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany
G. Flügge, B. Kargoll, T. Kress, A. Künsken, T. Müller, A. Nehrkorn, A. Nowack, C. Pistone, O. Pooth, A. Stahl[17]

Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
M. Aldaya Martin, T. Arndt, C. Asawatangtrakuldee, K. Beernaert, O. Behnke, U. Behrens, A. Bermúdez Martínez, A.A. Bin Anuar, K. Borras[18], V. Botta, A. Campbell, P. Connor, C. Contreras-Campana, F. Costanza, C. Diez Pardos, G. Eckerlin, D. Eckstein, T. Eichhorn,

E. Eren, E. Gallo[19], J. Garay Garcia, A. Geiser, J.M. Grados Luyando, A. Grohsjean, P. Gunnellini, M. Guthoff, A. Harb, J. Hauk, M. Hempel[20], H. Jung, M. Kasemann, J. Keaveney, C. Kleinwort, I. Korol, D. Krücker, W. Lange, A. Lelek, T. Lenz, J. Leonard, K. Lipka, W. Lohmann[20], R. Mankel, I.-A. Melzer-Pellmann, A.B. Meyer, G. Mittag, J. Mnich, A. Mussgiller, E. Ntomari, D. Pitzl, A. Raspereza, M. Savitskyi, P. Saxena, R. Shevchenko, S. Spannagel, N. Stefaniuk, G.P. Van Onsem, R. Walsh, Y. Wen, K. Wichmann, C. Wissing, O. Zenaiev

University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
R. Aggleton, S. Bein, V. Blobel, M. Centis Vignali, T. Dreyer, E. Garutti, D. Gonzalez, J. Haller, A. Hinzmann, M. Hoffmann, A. Karavdina, R. Klanner, R. Kogler, N. Kovalchuk, S. Kurz, T. Lapsien, D. Marconi, M. Meyer, M. Niedziela, D. Nowatschin, F. Pantaleo[17], T. Peiffer, A. Perieanu, C. Scharf, P. Schleper, A. Schmidt, S. Schumann, J. Schwandt, J. Sonneveld, H. Stadie, G. Steinbrück, F.M. Stober, M. Stöver, H. Tholen, D. Troendle, E. Usai, A. Vanhoefer, B. Vormwald

Institut für Experimentelle Kernphysik, Karlsruhe, Germany
M. Akbiyik, C. Barth, M. Baselga, S. Baur, E. Butz, R. Caspart, T. Chwalek, F. Colombo, W. De Boer, A. Dierlamm, N. Faltermann, B. Freund, R. Friese, M. Giffels, M.A. Harrendorf, F. Hartmann[17], S.M. Heindl, U. Husemann, F. Kassel[17], S. Kudella, H. Mildner, M.U. Mozer, Th. Müller, M. Plagge, G. Quast, K. Rabbertz, M. Schröder, I. Shvetsov, G. Sieber, H.J. Simonis, R. Ulrich, S. Wayand, M. Weber, T. Weiler, S. Williamson, C. Wöhrmann, R. Wolf

Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece
G. Anagnostou, G. Daskalakis, T. Geralis, A. Kyriakis, D. Loukas, I. Topsis-Giotis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
G. Karathanasis, S. Kesisoglou, A. Panagiotou, N. Saoulidou

National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece
K. Kousouris

University of Ioánnina, Ioánnina, Greece
I. Evangelou, C. Foudas, P. Gianneios, P. Katsoulis, P. Kokkas, S. Mallios, N. Manthos, I. Papadopoulos, E. Paradas, J. Strologas, F.A. Triantis, D. Tsitsonis

MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
M. Csanad, N. Filipovic, G. Pasztor, O. Surányi, G.I. Veres[21]

Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
G. Bencze, C. Hajdu, D. Horvath[22], Á. Hunyadi, F. Sikler, V. Veszpremi

Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
N. Beni, S. Czellar, J. Karancsi[23], A. Makovec, J. Molnar, Z. Szillasi

Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
M. Bartók[21], P. Raics, Z.L. Trocsanyi, B. Ujvari

Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, India
S. Choudhury, J.R. Komaragiri

National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar, India
S. Bahinipati[24], S. Bhowmik, P. Mal, K. Mandal, A. Nayak[25], D.K. Sahoo[24], N. Sahoo, S.K. Swain

Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
S. Bansal, S.B. Beri, V. Bhatnagar, R. Chawla, N. Dhingra, A.K. Kalsi, A. Kaur, M. Kaur, S. Kaur, R. Kumar, P. Kumari, A. Mehta, J.B. Singh, G. Walia

University of Delhi, Delhi, India
Ashok Kumar, Aashaq Shah, A. Bhardwaj, S. Chauhan, B.C. Choudhary, R.B. Garg, S. Keshri, A. Kumar, S. Malhotra, M. Naimuddin, K. Ranjan, R. Sharma

Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, HBNI, Kolkata, India
R. Bhardwaj, R. Bhattacharya, S. Bhattacharya, U. Bhawandeep, S. Dey, S. Dutt, S. Dutta, S. Ghosh, N. Majumdar, A. Modak, K. Mondal, S. Mukhopadhyay, S. Nandan, A. Purohit, A. Roy, S. Roy Chowdhury, S. Sarkar, M. Sharan, S. Thakur

Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Madras, India
P.K. Behera

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, India
R. Chudasama, D. Dutta, V. Jha, V. Kumar, A.K. Mohanty[17], P.K. Netrakanti, L.M. Pant, P. Shukla, A. Topkar

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-A, Mumbai, India
T. Aziz, S. Dugad, B. Mahakud, S. Mitra, G.B. Mohanty, N. Sur, B. Sutar

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-B, Mumbai, India
S. Banerjee, S. Bhattacharya, S. Chatterjee, P. Das, M. Guchait, Sa. Jain, S. Kumar, M. Maity[26], G. Majumder, K. Mazumdar, T. Sarkar[26], N. Wickramage[27]

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, India
S. Chauhan, S. Dube, V. Hegde, A. Kapoor, K. Kothekar, S. Pandey, A. Rane, S. Sharma

Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), Tehran, Iran
S. Chenarani[28], E. Eskandari Tadavani, S.M. Etesami[28], M. Khakzad, M. Mohammadi Najafabadi, M. Naseri, S. Paktinat Mehdiabadi[29], F. Rezaei Hosseinabadi, B. Safarzadeh[30], M. Zeinali

University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
M. Felcini, M. Grunewald

INFN Sezione di Bari [a], Università di Bari [b], Politecnico di Bari [c], Bari, Italy
M. Abbrescia[a,b], C. Calabria[a,b], A. Colaleo[a], D. Creanza[a,c], L. Cristella[a,b], N. De Filippis[a,c], M. De Palma[a,b], F. Errico[a,b], L. Fiore[a], G. Iaselli[a,c], S. Lezki[a,b], G. Maggi[a,c], M. Maggi[a], G. Miniello[a,b], S. My[a,b], S. Nuzzo[a,b], A. Pompili[a,b], G. Pugliese[a,c], R. Radogna[a], A. Ranieri[a], G. Selvaggi[a,b], A. Sharma[a], L. Silvestris[a,17], R. Venditti[a], P. Verwilligen[a]

INFN Sezione di Bologna [a], Università di Bologna [b], Bologna, Italy
G. Abbiendi[a], C. Battilana[a,b], D. Bonacorsi[a,b], L. Borgonovi[a,b], S. Braibant-Giacomelli[a,b], R. Campanini[a,b], P. Capiluppi[a,b], A. Castro[a,b], F.R. Cavallo[a], S.S. Chhibra[a], G. Codispoti[a,b], M. Cuffiani[a,b], G.M. Dallavalle[a], F. Fabbri[a], A. Fanfani[a,b], D. Fasanella[a,b], P. Giacomelli[a], C. Grandi[a], L. Guiducci[a,b], S. Marcellini[a], G. Masetti[a], A. Montanari[a], F.L. Navarria[a,b], A. Perrotta[a], A.M. Rossi[a,b], T. Rovelli[a,b], G.P. Siroli[a,b], N. Tosi[a]

INFN Sezione di Catania [a], Università di Catania [b], Catania, Italy
S. Albergo[a,b], S. Costa[a,b], A. Di Mattia[a], F. Giordano[a,b], R. Potenza[a,b], A. Tricomi[a,b], C. Tuve[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Firenze [a], Università di Firenze [b], Firenze, Italy
G. Barbagli[a], K. Chatterjee[a,b], V. Ciulli[a,b], C. Civinini[a], R. D'Alessandro[a,b], E. Focardi[a,b], P. Lenzi[a,b], M. Meschini[a], S. Paoletti[a], L. Russo[a,31], G. Sguazzoni[a], D. Strom[a], L. Viliani[a,b,17]

INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
L. Benussi, S. Bianco, F. Fabbri, D. Piccolo, F. Primavera[17]

INFN Sezione di Genova [a], Università di Genova [b], Genova, Italy
V. Calvelli[a,b], F. Ferro[a], E. Robutti[a], S. Tosi[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Milano-Bicocca [a], Università di Milano-Bicocca [b], Milano, Italy
A. Benaglia[a], A. Beschi[b], L. Brianza[a,b], F. Brivio[a,b], V. Ciriolo[a,b,17], M.E. Dinardo[a,b], S. Fiorendi[a,b], S. Gennai[a], A. Ghezzi[a,b], P. Govoni[a,b], M. Malberti[a,b], S. Malvezzi[a], R.A. Manzoni[a,b], D. Menasce[a], L. Moroni[a], M. Paganoni[a,b], K. Pauwels[a,b], D. Pedrini[a], S. Pigazzini[a,b,32], S. Ragazzi[a,b], T. Tabarelli de Fatis[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Napoli [a], Università di Napoli 'Federico II' [b], Napoli, Italy, Università della Basilicata [c], Potenza, Italy, Università G. Marconi [d], Roma, Italy
S. Buontempo[a], N. Cavallo[a,c], S. Di Guida[a,d,17], F. Fabozzi[a,c], F. Fienga[a,b], A.O.M. Iorio[a,b], W.A. Khan[a], L. Lista[a], S. Meola[a,d,17], P. Paolucci[a,17], C. Sciacca[a,b], F. Thyssen[a]

INFN Sezione di Padova [a], Università di Padova [b], Padova, Italy, Università di Trento [c], Trento, Italy
P. Azzi[a], N. Bacchetta[a], L. Benato[a,b], D. Bisello[a,b], A. Boletti[a,b], R. Carlin[a,b], A. Carvalho Antunes De Oliveira[a,b], P. Checchia[a], M. Dall'Osso[a,b], P. De Castro Manzano[a], T. Dorigo[a], F. Gasparini[a,b], U. Gasparini[a,b], A. Gozzelino[a], M. Gulmini[a,33], S. Lacaprara[a], P. Lujan, M. Margoni[a,b], A.T. Meneguzzo[a,b], N. Pozzobon[a,b], P. Ronchese[a,b], R. Rossin[a,b], E. Torassa[a], S. Ventura[a], M. Zanetti[a,b], G. Zumerle[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Pavia [a], Università di Pavia [b], Pavia, Italy
A. Braghieri[a], A. Magnani[a], P. Montagna[a,b], S.P. Ratti[a,b], V. Re[a], M. Ressegotti[a,b], C. Riccardi[a,b], P. Salvini[a], I. Vai[a,b], P. Vitulo[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Perugia [a], Università di Perugia [b], Perugia, Italy
L. Alunni Solestizi[a,b], M. Biasini[a,b], G.M. Bilei[a], C. Cecchi[a,b], D. Ciangottini[a,b], L. Fanò[a,b], R. Leonardi[a,b], E. Manoni[a], G. Mantovani[a,b], V. Mariani[a,b], M. Menichelli[a], A. Rossi[a,b], A. Santocchia[a,b], D. Spiga[a]

INFN Sezione di Pisa [a], Università di Pisa [b], Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa [c], Pisa, Italy
K. Androsov[a], P. Azzurri[a,17], G. Bagliesi[a], T. Boccali[a], L. Borrello, R. Castaldi[a], M.A. Ciocci[a,b], R. Dell'Orso[a], G. Fedi[a], L. Giannini[a,c], A. Giassi[a], M.T. Grippo[a,31], F. Ligabue[a,c], T. Lomtadze[a], E. Manca[a,c], G. Mandorli[a,c], A. Messineo[a,b], F. Palla[a], A. Rizzi[a,b], A. Savoy-Navarro[a,34], P. Spagnolo[a], R. Tenchini[a], G. Tonelli[a,b], A. Venturi[a], P.G. Verdini[a]

INFN Sezione di Roma [a], Sapienza Università di Roma [b], Rome, Italy
L. Barone[a,b], F. Cavallari[a], M. Cipriani[a,b], N. Daci[a], D. Del Re[a,b,17], E. Di Marco[a,b], M. Diemoz[a], S. Gelli[a,b], E. Longo[a,b], F. Margaroli[a,b], B. Marzocchi[a,b], P. Meridiani[a], G. Organtini[a,b], R. Paramatti[a,b], F. Preiato[a,b], S. Rahatlou[a,b], C. Rovelli[a], F. Santanastasio[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Torino [a], Università di Torino [b], Torino, Italy, Università del Piemonte Orientale [c], Novara, Italy
N. Amapane[a,b], R. Arcidiacono[a,c], S. Argiro[a,b], M. Arneodo[a,c], N. Bartosik[a], R. Bellan[a,b], C. Biino[a], N. Cartiglia[a], F. Cenna[a,b], M. Costa[a,b], R. Covarelli[a,b], A. Degano[a,b], N. Demaria[a], B. Kiani[a,b], C. Mariotti[a], S. Maselli[a], E. Migliore[a,b], V. Monaco[a,b], E. Monteil[a,b], M. Monteno[a],

M.M. Obertino[a,b], L. Pacher[a,b], N. Pastrone[a], M. Pelliccioni[a], G.L. Pinna Angioni[a,b], F. Ravera[a,b], A. Romero[a,b], M. Ruspa[a,c], R. Sacchi[a,b], K. Shchelina[a,b], V. Sola[a], A. Solano[a,b], A. Staiano[a], P. Traczyk[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Trieste [a], Università di Trieste [b], Trieste, Italy
S. Belforte[a], M. Casarsa[a], F. Cossutti[a], G. Della Ricca[a,b], A. Zanetti[a]

Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea
D.H. Kim, G.N. Kim, M.S. Kim, J. Lee, S. Lee, S.W. Lee, C.S. Moon, Y.D. Oh, S. Sekmen, D.C. Son, Y.C. Yang

Chonbuk National University, Jeonju, Korea
A. Lee

Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Korea
H. Kim, D.H. Moon, G. Oh

Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea
J.A. Brochero Cifuentes, J. Goh, T.J. Kim

Korea University, Seoul, Korea
S. Cho, S. Choi, Y. Go, D. Gyun, S. Ha, B. Hong, Y. Jo, Y. Kim, K. Lee, K.S. Lee, S. Lee, J. Lim, S.K. Park, Y. Roh

Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
J. Almond, J. Kim, J.S. Kim, H. Lee, K. Lee, K. Nam, S.B. Oh, B.C. Radburn-Smith, S.h. Seo, U.K. Yang, H.D. Yoo, G.B. Yu

University of Seoul, Seoul, Korea
H. Kim, J.H. Kim, J.S.H. Lee, I.C. Park

Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Korea
Y. Choi, C. Hwang, J. Lee, I. Yu

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania
V. Dudenas, A. Juodagalvis, J. Vaitkus

National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
I. Ahmed, Z.A. Ibrahim, M.A.B. Md Ali[35], F. Mohamad Idris[36], W.A.T. Wan Abdullah, M.N. Yusli, Z. Zolkapli

Centro de Investigacion y de Estudios Avanzados del IPN, Mexico City, Mexico
Reyes-Almanza, R, Ramirez-Sanchez, G., Duran-Osuna, M. C., H. Castilla-Valdez, E. De La Cruz-Burelo, I. Heredia-De La Cruz[37], Rabadan-Trejo, R. I., R. Lopez-Fernandez, J. Mejia Guisao, A. Sanchez-Hernandez

Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico
S. Carrillo Moreno, C. Oropeza Barrera, F. Vazquez Valencia

Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico
J. Eysermans, I. Pedraza, H.A. Salazar Ibarguen, C. Uribe Estrada

Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí, Mexico
A. Morelos Pineda

University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
D. Krofcheck

University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
P.H. Butler

National Centre for Physics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan
A. Ahmad, M. Ahmad, Q. Hassan, H.R. Hoorani, A. Saddique, M.A. Shah, M. Shoaib, M. Waqas

National Centre for Nuclear Research, Swierk, Poland
H. Bialkowska, M. Bluj, B. Boimska, T. Frueboes, M. Górski, M. Kazana, K. Nawrocki, M. Szleper, P. Zalewski

Institute of Experimental Physics, Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
K. Bunkowski, A. Byszuk[38], K. Doroba, A. Kalinowski, M. Konecki, J. Krolikowski, M. Misiura, M. Olszewski, A. Pyskir, M. Walczak

Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas, Lisboa, Portugal
P. Bargassa, C. Beirão Da Cruz E Silva, A. Di Francesco, P. Faccioli, B. Galinhas, M. Gallinaro, J. Hollar, N. Leonardo, L. Lloret Iglesias, M.V. Nemallapudi, J. Seixas, G. Strong, O. Toldaiev, D. Vadruccio, J. Varela

Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia
A. Baginyan, A. Golunov, I. Golutvin, V. Karjavin, V. Korenkov, G. Kozlov, A. Lanev, A. Malakhov, V. Matveev[39,40], V.V. Mitsyn, V. Palichik, V. Perelygin, S. Shmatov, N. Skatchkov, V. Smirnov, B.S. Yuldashev[41], A. Zarubin, V. Zhiltsov

Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, Gatchina (St. Petersburg), Russia
Y. Ivanov, V. Kim[42], E. Kuznetsova[43], P. Levchenko, V. Murzin, V. Oreshkin, I. Smirnov, D. Sosnov, V. Sulimov, L. Uvarov, S. Vavilov, A. Vorobyev

Institute for Nuclear Research, Moscow, Russia
Yu. Andreev, A. Dermenev, S. Gninenko, N. Golubev, A. Karneyeu, M. Kirsanov, N. Krasnikov, A. Pashenkov, D. Tlisov, A. Toropin

Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, Russia
V. Epshteyn, V. Gavrilov, N. Lychkovskaya, V. Popov, I. Pozdnyakov, G. Safronov, A. Spiridonov, A. Stepennov, M. Toms, E. Vlasov, A. Zhokin

Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Moscow, Russia
T. Aushev, A. Bylinkin[40]

National Research Nuclear University 'Moscow Engineering Physics Institute' (MEPhI), Moscow, Russia
R. Chistov[44], M. Danilov[44], P. Parygin, D. Philippov, S. Polikarpov, E. Tarkovskii, E. Zhemchugov

P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute, Moscow, Russia
V. Andreev, M. Azarkin[40], I. Dremin[40], M. Kirakosyan[40], A. Terkulov

Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
A. Baskakov, A. Belyaev, E. Boos, A. Ershov, A. Gribushin, A. Kaminskiy[45], O. Kodolova, V. Korotkikh, I. Lokhtin, I. Miagkov, E. Nazarova, S. Obraztsov, S. Petrushanko, V. Savrin, A. Snigirev, I. Vardanyan

Novosibirsk State University (NSU), Novosibirsk, Russia
V. Blinov[46], Y.Skovpen[46], D. Shtol[46]

State Research Center of Russian Federation, Institute for High Energy Physics, Protvino, Russia
I. Azhgirey, I. Bayshev, S. Bitioukov, D. Elumakhov, A. Godizov, V. Kachanov, A. Kalinin, D. Konstantinov, P. Mandrik, V. Petrov, R. Ryutin, A. Sobol, S. Troshin, N. Tyurin, A. Uzunian, A. Volkov

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Physics and Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia
P. Adzic[47], P. Cirkovic, D. Devetak, M. Dordevic, J. Milosevic, V. Rekovic

Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain
J. Alcaraz Maestre, I. Bachiller, M. Barrio Luna, M. Cerrada, N. Colino, B. De La Cruz, A. Delgado Peris, A. Escalante Del Valle, C. Fernandez Bedoya, J.P. Fernández Ramos, J. Flix, M.C. Fouz, O. Gonzalez Lopez, S. Goy Lopez, J.M. Hernandez, M.I. Josa, D. Moran, A. Pérez-Calero Yzquierdo, J. Puerta Pelayo, A. Quintario Olmeda, I. Redondo, L. Romero, M.S. Soares, A. Álvarez Fernández

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
C. Albajar, J.F. de Trocóniz, M. Missiroli

Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain
J. Cuevas, C. Erice, J. Fernandez Menendez, I. Gonzalez Caballero, J.R. González Fernández, E. Palencia Cortezon, S. Sanchez Cruz, P. Vischia, J.M. Vizan Garcia

Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC-Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain
I.J. Cabrillo, A. Calderon, B. Chazin Quero, E. Curras, J. Duarte Campderros, M. Fernandez, J. Garcia-Ferrero, G. Gomez, A. Lopez Virto, J. Marco, C. Martinez Rivero, P. Martinez Ruiz del Arbol, F. Matorras, J. Piedra Gomez, T. Rodrigo, A. Ruiz-Jimeno, L. Scodellaro, N. Trevisani, I. Vila, R. Vilar Cortabitarte

CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
D. Abbaneo, B. Akgun, E. Auffray, P. Baillon, A.H. Ball, D. Barney, J. Bendavid, M. Bianco, P. Bloch, A. Bocci, C. Botta, T. Camporesi, R. Castello, M. Cepeda, G. Cerminara, E. Chapon, Y. Chen, D. d'Enterria, A. Dabrowski, V. Daponte, A. David, M. De Gruttola, A. De Roeck, N. Deelen, M. Dobson, T. du Pree, M. Dünser, N. Dupont, A. Elliott-Peisert, P. Everaerts, F. Fallavollita, G. Franzoni, J. Fulcher, W. Funk, D. Gigi, A. Gilbert, K. Gill, F. Glege, D. Gulhan, P. Harris, J. Hegeman, V. Innocente, A. Jafari, P. Janot, O. Karacheban[20], J. Kieseler, V. Knünz, A. Kornmayer, M.J. Kortelainen, M. Krammer[1], C. Lange, P. Lecoq, C. Lourenço, M.T. Lucchini, L. Malgeri, M. Mannelli, A. Martelli, F. Meijers, J.A. Merlin, S. Mersi, E. Meschi, P. Milenovic[48], F. Moortgat, M. Mulders, H. Neugebauer, J. Ngadiuba, S. Orfanelli, L. Orsini, L. Pape, E. Perez, M. Peruzzi, A. Petrilli, G. Petrucciani, A. Pfeiffer, M. Pierini, D. Rabady, A. Racz, T. Reis, G. Rolandi[49], M. Rovere, H. Sakulin, C. Schäfer, C. Schwick, M. Seidel, M. Selvaggi, A. Sharma, P. Silva, P. Sphicas[50], A. Stakia, J. Steggemann, M. Stoye, M. Tosi, D. Treille, A. Triossi, A. Tsirou, V. Veckalns[51], M. Verweij, W.D. Zeuner

Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland
W. Bertl[†], L. Caminada[52], K. Deiters, W. Erdmann, R. Horisberger, Q. Ingram, H.C. Kaestli, D. Kotlinski, U. Langenegger, T. Rohe, S.A. Wiederkehr

ETH Zurich - Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics (IPA), Zurich, Switzerland
M. Backhaus, L. Bäni, P. Berger, L. Bianchini, B. Casal, G. Dissertori, M. Dittmar, M. Donegà, C. Dorfer, C. Grab, C. Heidegger, D. Hits, J. Hoss, G. Kasieczka, T. Klijnsma, W. Lustermann, B. Mangano, M. Marionneau, M.T. Meinhard, D. Meister, F. Micheli, P. Musella, F. Nessi-Tedaldi, F. Pandolfi, J. Pata, F. Pauss, G. Perrin, L. Perrozzi, M. Quittnat, M. Reichmann, D.A. Sanz Becerra, M. Schönenberger, L. Shchutska, V.R. Tavolaro, K. Theofilatos, M.L. Vesterbacka Olsson, R. Wallny, D.H. Zhu

Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
T.K. Aarrestad, C. Amsler[53], M.F. Canelli, A. De Cosa, R. Del Burgo, S. Donato, C. Galloni, T. Hreus, B. Kilminster, D. Pinna, G. Rauco, P. Robmann, D. Salerno, K. Schweiger, C. Seitz, Y. Takahashi, A. Zucchetta

National Central University, Chung-Li, Taiwan
V. Candelise, Y.H. Chang, K.y. Cheng, T.H. Doan, Sh. Jain, R. Khurana, C.M. Kuo, W. Lin, A. Pozdnyakov, S.S. Yu

National Taiwan University (NTU), Taipei, Taiwan
Arun Kumar, P. Chang, Y. Chao, K.F. Chen, P.H. Chen, F. Fiori, W.-S. Hou, Y. Hsiung, Y.F. Liu, R.-S. Lu, E. Paganis, A. Psallidas, A. Steen, J.f. Tsai

Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Science, Department of Physics, Bangkok, Thailand
B. Asavapibhop, K. Kovitanggoon, G. Singh, N. Srimanobhas

Çukurova University, Physics Department, Science and Art Faculty, Adana, Turkey
M.N. Bakirci[54], A. Bat, F. Boran, S. Damarseckin, Z.S. Demiroglu, C. Dozen, E. Eskut, S. Girgis, G. Gokbulut, Y. Guler, I. Hos[55], E.E. Kangal[56], O. Kara, A. Kayis Topaksu, U. Kiminsu, M. Oglakci, G. Onengut[57], K. Ozdemir[58], A. Polatoz, U.G. Tok, H. Topakli[54], S. Turkcapar, I.S. Zorbakir, C. Zorbilmez

Middle East Technical University, Physics Department, Ankara, Turkey
B. Bilin, G. Karapinar[59], K. Ocalan[60], M. Yalvac, M. Zeyrek

Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
E. Gülmez, M. Kaya[61], O. Kaya[62], S. Tekten, E.A. Yetkin[63]

Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
M.N. Agaras, S. Atay, A. Cakir, K. Cankocak, I. Köseoglu

Institute for Scintillation Materials of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kharkov, Ukraine
B. Grynyov

National Scientific Center, Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology, Kharkov, Ukraine
L. Levchuk

University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
F. Ball, L. Beck, J.J. Brooke, D. Burns, E. Clement, D. Cussans, O. Davignon, H. Flacher, J. Goldstein, G.P. Heath, H.F. Heath, L. Kreczko, D.M. Newbold[64], S. Paramesvaran, T. Sakuma, S. Seif El Nasr-storey, D. Smith, V.J. Smith

Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
A. Belyaev[65], C. Brew, R.M. Brown, L. Calligaris, D. Cieri, D.J.A. Cockerill, J.A. Coughlan, K. Harder, S. Harper, J. Linacre, E. Olaiya, D. Petyt, C.H. Shepherd-Themistocleous, A. Thea, I.R. Tomalin, T. Williams

Imperial College, London, United Kingdom
G. Auzinger, R. Bainbridge, J. Borg, S. Breeze, O. Buchmuller, A. Bundock, S. Casasso, M. Citron, D. Colling, L. Corpe, P. Dauncey, G. Davies, A. De Wit, M. Della Negra, R. Di Maria, A. Elwood, Y. Haddad, G. Hall, G. Iles, T. James, R. Lane, C. Laner, L. Lyons, A.-M. Magnan, S. Malik, L. Mastrolorenzo, T. Matsushita, J. Nash, A. Nikitenko[7], V. Palladino, M. Pesaresi, D.M. Raymond, A. Richards, A. Rose, E. Scott, C. Seez, A. Shtipliyski, S. Summers, A. Tapper, K. Uchida, M. Vazquez Acosta[66], T. Virdee[17], N. Wardle, D. Winterbottom, J. Wright, S.C. Zenz

Brunel University, Uxbridge, United Kingdom
J.E. Cole, P.R. Hobson, A. Khan, P. Kyberd, I.D. Reid, L. Teodorescu, S. Zahid

Baylor University, Waco, USA
A. Borzou, K. Call, J. Dittmann, K. Hatakeyama, H. Liu, N. Pastika, C. Smith

Catholic University of America, Washington DC, USA
R. Bartek, A. Dominguez

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA
A. Buccilli, S.I. Cooper, C. Henderson, P. Rumerio, C. West

Boston University, Boston, USA
D. Arcaro, A. Avetisyan, T. Bose, D. Gastler, D. Rankin, C. Richardson, J. Rohlf, L. Sulak, D. Zou

Brown University, Providence, USA
G. Benelli, D. Cutts, A. Garabedian, M. Hadley, J. Hakala, U. Heintz, J.M. Hogan, K.H.M. Kwok, E. Laird, G. Landsberg, J. Lee, Z. Mao, M. Narain, J. Pazzini, S. Piperov, S. Sagir, R. Syarif, D. Yu

University of California, Davis, Davis, USA
R. Band, C. Brainerd, R. Breedon, D. Burns, M. Calderon De La Barca Sanchez, M. Chertok, J. Conway, R. Conway, P.T. Cox, R. Erbacher, C. Flores, G. Funk, W. Ko, R. Lander, C. Mclean, M. Mulhearn, D. Pellett, J. Pilot, S. Shalhout, M. Shi, J. Smith, D. Stolp, K. Tos, M. Tripathi, Z. Wang

University of California, Los Angeles, USA
M. Bachtis, C. Bravo, R. Cousins, A. Dasgupta, A. Florent, J. Hauser, M. Ignatenko, N. Mccoll, S. Regnard, D. Saltzberg, C. Schnaible, V. Valuev

University of California, Riverside, Riverside, USA
E. Bouvier, K. Burt, R. Clare, J. Ellison, J.W. Gary, S.M.A. Ghiasi Shirazi, G. Hanson, J. Heilman, G. Karapostoli, E. Kennedy, F. Lacroix, O.R. Long, M. Olmedo Negrete, M.I. Paneva, W. Si, L. Wang, H. Wei, S. Wimpenny, B. R. Yates

University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, USA
J.G. Branson, S. Cittolin, M. Derdzinski, R. Gerosa, D. Gilbert, B. Hashemi, A. Holzner, D. Klein, G. Kole, V. Krutelyov, J. Letts, I. Macneill, M. Masciovecchio, D. Olivito, S. Padhi, M. Pieri, M. Sani, V. Sharma, S. Simon, M. Tadel, A. Vartak, S. Wasserbaech[67], J. Wood, F. Würthwein, A. Yagil, G. Zevi Della Porta

University of California, Santa Barbara - Department of Physics, Santa Barbara, USA
N. Amin, R. Bhandari, J. Bradmiller-Feld, C. Campagnari, A. Dishaw, V. Dutta, M. Franco Sevilla, F. Golf, L. Gouskos, R. Heller, J. Incandela, A. Ovcharova, H. Qu, J. Richman, D. Stuart, I. Suarez, J. Yoo

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, USA
D. Anderson, A. Bornheim, J.M. Lawhorn, H.B. Newman, T. Nguyen, C. Pena, M. Spiropulu, J.R. Vlimant, S. Xie, Z. Zhang, R.Y. Zhu

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA
M.B. Andrews, T. Ferguson, T. Mudholkar, M. Paulini, J. Russ, M. Sun, H. Vogel, I. Vorobiev, M. Weinberg

University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, USA
J.P. Cumalat, W.T. Ford, F. Jensen, A. Johnson, M. Krohn, S. Leontsinis, T. Mulholland, K. Stenson, S.R. Wagner

Cornell University, Ithaca, USA
J. Alexander, J. Chaves, J. Chu, S. Dittmer, K. Mcdermott, N. Mirman, J.R. Patterson, D. Quach, A. Rinkevicius, A. Ryd, L. Skinnari, L. Soffi, S.M. Tan, Z. Tao, J. Thom, J. Tucker, P. Wittich, M. Zientek

Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, USA
S. Abdullin, M. Albrow, M. Alyari, G. Apollinari, A. Apresyan, A. Apyan, S. Banerjee, L.A.T. Bauerdick, A. Beretvas, J. Berryhill, P.C. Bhat, G. Bolla[†], K. Burkett, J.N. Butler, A. Canepa, G.B. Cerati, H.W.K. Cheung, F. Chlebana, M. Cremonesi, J. Duarte, V.D. Elvira, J. Freeman, Z. Gecse, E. Gottschalk, L. Gray, D. Green, S. Grünendahl, O. Gutsche, R.M. Harris, S. Hasegawa, J. Hirschauer, Z. Hu, B. Jayatilaka, S. Jindariani, M. Johnson, U. Joshi, B. Klima, B. Kreis, S. Lammel, D. Lincoln, R. Lipton, M. Liu, T. Liu, R. Lopes De Sá, J. Lykken, K. Maeshima, N. Magini, J.M. Marraffino, D. Mason, P. McBride, P. Merkel, S. Mrenna, S. Nahn, V. O'Dell, K. Pedro, O. Prokofyev, G. Rakness, L. Ristori, B. Schneider, E. Sexton-Kennedy, A. Soha, W.J. Spalding, L. Spiegel, S. Stoynev, J. Strait, N. Strobbe, L. Taylor, S. Tkaczyk, N.V. Tran, L. Uplegger, E.W. Vaandering, C. Vernieri, M. Verzocchi, R. Vidal, M. Wang, H.A. Weber, A. Whitbeck

University of Florida, Gainesville, USA
D. Acosta, P. Avery, P. Bortignon, D. Bourilkov, A. Brinkerhoff, A. Carnes, M. Carver, D. Curry, R.D. Field, I.K. Furic, S.V. Gleyzer, B.M. Joshi, J. Konigsberg, A. Korytov, K. Kotov, P. Ma, K. Matchev, H. Mei, G. Mitselmakher, K. Shi, D. Sperka, N. Terentyev, L. Thomas, J. Wang, S. Wang, J. Yelton

Florida International University, Miami, USA
Y.R. Joshi, S. Linn, P. Markowitz, J.L. Rodriguez

Florida State University, Tallahassee, USA
A. Ackert, T. Adams, A. Askew, S. Hagopian, V. Hagopian, K.F. Johnson, T. Kolberg, G. Martinez, T. Perry, H. Prosper, A. Saha, A. Santra, V. Sharma, R. Yohay

Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, USA
M.M. Baarmand, V. Bhopatkar, S. Colafranceschi, M. Hohlmann, D. Noonan, T. Roy, F. Yumiceva

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Chicago, USA
M.R. Adams, L. Apanasevich, D. Berry, R.R. Betts, R. Cavanaugh, X. Chen, O. Evdokimov, C.E. Gerber, D.A. Hangal, D.J. Hofman, K. Jung, J. Kamin, I.D. Sandoval Gonzalez, M.B. Tonjes, H. Trauger, N. Varelas, H. Wang, Z. Wu, J. Zhang

The University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA
B. Bilki[68], W. Clarida, K. Dilsiz[69], S. Durgut, R.P. Gandrajula, M. Haytmyradov, V. Khristenko,

J.-P. Merlo, H. Mermerkaya[70], A. Mestvirishvili, A. Moeller, J. Nachtman, H. Ogul[71], Y. Onel, F. Ozok[72], A. Penzo, C. Snyder, E. Tiras, J. Wetzel, K. Yi

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA
B. Blumenfeld, A. Cocoros, N. Eminizer, D. Fehling, L. Feng, A.V. Gritsan, P. Maksimovic, J. Roskes, U. Sarica, M. Swartz, M. Xiao, C. You

The University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA
A. Al-bataineh, P. Baringer, A. Bean, S. Boren, J. Bowen, J. Castle, S. Khalil, A. Kropivnitskaya, D. Majumder, W. Mcbrayer, M. Murray, C. Royon, S. Sanders, E. Schmitz, J.D. Tapia Takaki, Q. Wang

Kansas State University, Manhattan, USA
A. Ivanov, K. Kaadze, Y. Maravin, A. Mohammadi, L.K. Saini, N. Skhirtladze, S. Toda

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, USA
F. Rebassoo, D. Wright

University of Maryland, College Park, USA
C. Anelli, A. Baden, O. Baron, A. Belloni, S.C. Eno, Y. Feng, C. Ferraioli, N.J. Hadley, S. Jabeen, G.Y. Jeng, R.G. Kellogg, J. Kunkle, A.C. Mignerey, F. Ricci-Tam, Y.H. Shin, A. Skuja, S.C. Tonwar

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA
D. Abercrombie, B. Allen, V. Azzolini, R. Barbieri, A. Baty, R. Bi, S. Brandt, W. Busza, I.A. Cali, M. D'Alfonso, Z. Demiragli, G. Gomez Ceballos, M. Goncharov, D. Hsu, M. Hu, Y. Iiyama, G.M. Innocenti, M. Klute, D. Kovalskyi, Y.S. Lai, Y.-J. Lee, A. Levin, P.D. Luckey, B. Maier, A.C. Marini, C. Mcginn, C. Mironov, S. Narayanan, X. Niu, C. Paus, C. Roland, G. Roland, J. Salfeld-Nebgen, G.S.F. Stephans, K. Tatar, D. Velicanu, J. Wang, T.W. Wang, B. Wyslouch

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA
A.C. Benvenuti, R.M. Chatterjee, A. Evans, P. Hansen, J. Hiltbrand, S. Kalafut, Y. Kubota, Z. Lesko, J. Mans, S. Nourbakhsh, N. Ruckstuhl, R. Rusack, J. Turkewitz, M.A. Wadud

University of Mississippi, Oxford, USA
J.G. Acosta, S. Oliveros

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, USA
E. Avdeeva, K. Bloom, D.R. Claes, C. Fangmeier, R. Gonzalez Suarez, R. Kamalieddin, I. Kravchenko, J. Monroy, J.E. Siado, G.R. Snow, B. Stieger

State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, USA
J. Dolen, A. Godshalk, C. Harrington, I. Iashvili, D. Nguyen, A. Parker, S. Rappoccio, B. Roozbahani

Northeastern University, Boston, USA
G. Alverson, E. Barberis, C. Freer, A. Hortiangtham, A. Massironi, D.M. Morse, T. Orimoto, R. Teixeira De Lima, D. Trocino, T. Wamorkar, B. Wang, A. Wisecarver, D. Wood

Northwestern University, Evanston, USA
S. Bhattacharya, O. Charaf, K.A. Hahn, N. Mucia, N. Odell, M.H. Schmitt, K. Sung, M. Trovato, M. Velasco

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, USA
R. Bucci, N. Dev, M. Hildreth, K. Hurtado Anampa, C. Jessop, D.J. Karmgard, N. Kellams, K. Lannon, W. Li, N. Loukas, N. Marinelli, F. Meng, C. Mueller, Y. Musienko[39], M. Planer,

A. Reinsvold, R. Ruchti, P. Siddireddy, G. Smith, S. Taroni, M. Wayne, A. Wightman, M. Wolf, A. Woodard

The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA
J. Alimena, L. Antonelli, B. Bylsma, L.S. Durkin, S. Flowers, B. Francis, A. Hart, C. Hill, W. Ji, B. Liu, W. Luo, B.L. Winer, H.W. Wulsin

Princeton University, Princeton, USA
S. Cooperstein, O. Driga, P. Elmer, J. Hardenbrook, P. Hebda, S. Higginbotham, A. Kalogeropoulos, D. Lange, J. Luo, D. Marlow, K. Mei, I. Ojalvo, J. Olsen, C. Palmer, P. Piroué, D. Stickland, C. Tully

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, USA
S. Malik, S. Norberg

Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA
A. Barker, V.E. Barnes, S. Das, S. Folgueras, L. Gutay, M.K. Jha, M. Jones, A.W. Jung, A. Khatiwada, D.H. Miller, N. Neumeister, C.C. Peng, H. Qiu, J.F. Schulte, J. Sun, F. Wang, R. Xiao, W. Xie

Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, USA
T. Cheng, N. Parashar, J. Stupak

Rice University, Houston, USA
Z. Chen, K.M. Ecklund, S. Freed, F.J.M. Geurts, M. Guilbaud, M. Kilpatrick, W. Li, B. Michlin, B.P. Padley, J. Roberts, J. Rorie, W. Shi, Z. Tu, J. Zabel, A. Zhang

University of Rochester, Rochester, USA
A. Bodek, P. de Barbaro, R. Demina, Y.t. Duh, T. Ferbel, M. Galanti, A. Garcia-Bellido, J. Han, O. Hindrichs, A. Khukhunaishvili, K.H. Lo, P. Tan, M. Verzetti

The Rockefeller University, New York, USA
R. Ciesielski, K. Goulianos, C. Mesropian

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, USA
A. Agapitos, J.P. Chou, Y. Gershtein, T.A. Gómez Espinosa, E. Halkiadakis, M. Heindl, E. Hughes, S. Kaplan, R. Kunnawalkam Elayavalli, S. Kyriacou, A. Lath, R. Montalvo, K. Nash, M. Osherson, H. Saka, S. Salur, S. Schnetzer, D. Sheffield, S. Somalwar, R. Stone, S. Thomas, P. Thomassen, M. Walker

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA
A.G. Delannoy, M. Foerster, J. Heideman, G. Riley, K. Rose, S. Spanier, K. Thapa

Texas A&M University, College Station, USA
O. Bouhali[73], A. Castaneda Hernandez[73], A. Celik, M. Dalchenko, M. De Mattia, A. Delgado, S. Dildick, R. Eusebi, J. Gilmore, T. Huang, T. Kamon[74], R. Mueller, Y. Pakhotin, R. Patel, A. Perloff, L. Perniè, D. Rathjens, A. Safonov, A. Tatarinov, K.A. Ulmer

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA
N. Akchurin, J. Damgov, F. De Guio, P.R. Dudero, J. Faulkner, E. Gurpinar, S. Kunori, K. Lamichhane, S.W. Lee, T. Libeiro, T. Mengke, S. Muthumuni, T. Peltola, S. Undleeb, I. Volobouev, Z. Wang

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA
S. Greene, A. Gurrola, R. Janjam, W. Johns, C. Maguire, A. Melo, H. Ni, K. Padeken, P. Sheldon, S. Tuo, J. Velkovska, Q. Xu

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA
M.W. Arenton, P. Barria, B. Cox, R. Hirosky, M. Joyce, A. Ledovskoy, H. Li, C. Neu, T. Sinthuprasith, Y. Wang, E. Wolfe, F. Xia

Wayne State University, Detroit, USA
R. Harr, P.E. Karchin, N. Poudyal, J. Sturdy, P. Thapa, S. Zaleski

University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, WI, USA
M. Brodski, J. Buchanan, C. Caillol, S. Dasu, L. Dodd, S. Duric, B. Gomber, M. Grothe, M. Herndon, A. Hervé, U. Hussain, P. Klabbers, A. Lanaro, A. Levine, K. Long, R. Loveless, T. Ruggles, A. Savin, N. Smith, W.H. Smith, D. Taylor, N. Woods

†: Deceased
1: Also at Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, Austria
2: Also at State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China
3: Also at IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
4: Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil
5: Also at Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Pelotas, Brazil
6: Also at Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
7: Also at Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, Russia
8: Also at Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia
9: Also at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt
10: Now at Zewail City of Science and Technology, Zewail, Egypt
11: Now at Fayoum University, El-Fayoum, Egypt
12: Also at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
13: Now at Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt
14: Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France
15: Also at Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
16: Also at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
17: Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
18: Also at RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
19: Also at University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
20: Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany
21: Also at MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
22: Also at Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
23: Also at Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
24: Also at Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, Bhubaneswar, India
25: Also at Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, India
26: Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India
27: Also at University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka
28: Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
29: Also at Yazd University, Yazd, Iran
30: Also at Plasma Physics Research Center, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
31: Also at Università degli Studi di Siena, Siena, Italy
32: Also at INFN Sezione di Milano-Bicocca; Università di Milano-Bicocca, Milano, Italy
33: Also at Laboratori Nazionali di Legnaro dell'INFN, Legnaro, Italy
34: Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA

35: Also at International Islamic University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
36: Also at Malaysian Nuclear Agency, MOSTI, Kajang, Malaysia
37: Also at Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, Mexico city, Mexico
38: Also at Warsaw University of Technology, Institute of Electronic Systems, Warsaw, Poland
39: Also at Institute for Nuclear Research, Moscow, Russia
40: Now at National Research Nuclear University 'Moscow Engineering Physics Institute' (MEPhI), Moscow, Russia
41: Also at Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
42: Also at St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia
43: Also at University of Florida, Gainesville, USA
44: Also at P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute, Moscow, Russia
45: Also at INFN Sezione di Padova; Università di Padova; Università di Trento (Trento), Padova, Italy
46: Also at Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, Novosibirsk, Russia
47: Also at Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
48: Also at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Physics and Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia
49: Also at Scuola Normale e Sezione dell'INFN, Pisa, Italy
50: Also at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
51: Also at Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia
52: Also at Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
53: Also at Stefan Meyer Institute for Subatomic Physics (SMI), Vienna, Austria
54: Also at Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey
55: Also at Istanbul Aydin University, Istanbul, Turkey
56: Also at Mersin University, Mersin, Turkey
57: Also at Cag University, Mersin, Turkey
58: Also at Piri Reis University, Istanbul, Turkey
59: Also at Izmir Institute of Technology, Izmir, Turkey
60: Also at Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya, Turkey
61: Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey
62: Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey
63: Also at Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey
64: Also at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
65: Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom
66: Also at Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias, La Laguna, Spain
67: Also at Utah Valley University, Orem, USA
68: Also at Beykent University, Istanbul, Turkey
69: Also at Bingol University, Bingol, Turkey
70: Also at Erzincan University, Erzincan, Turkey
71: Also at Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey
72: Also at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey
73: Also at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar
74: Also at Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea