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Search for the standard model Higgs boson produced in association with a vector boson and decaying into a tau pair in pp collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV with the ATLAS detector

The ATLAS Collaboration

Abstract

A search for the standard model Higgs boson produced in association with a vector boson with the decay $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$ is presented. The data correspond to 20.3 fb^{-1} of integrated luminosity from proton-proton collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV recorded by the ATLAS experiment at the LHC during 2012. The data agree with the background expectation, and 95% confidence-level upper limits are placed on the cross section of this process. The observed (expected) limit, expressed in terms of the signal strength $\mu = \sigma/\sigma_{\text{SM}}$ for $m_{\text{H}} = 125$ GeV, is $\mu < 5.6$ (3.7). The measured value of the signal strength is $\mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6$.

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1 Introduction

The investigation of the origin of electroweak symmetry breaking and the experimental confirmation of the Brout–Englert–Higgs mechanism [1–6] is one of the primary goals of the physics program at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) [7]. With the discovery of a Higgs boson with a mass of 125 GeV by the ATLAS [8] and CMS [9] collaborations, an important milestone has been reached. To date, measurements of the couplings of the discovered particle [10–13] as well as tests of the spin–parity quantum numbers [14–16] are consistent with the predictions for the standard model (SM) Higgs boson.

In this paper, a search for the associated production of the Higgs boson with a vector boson, where the Higgs boson decays to a pair of tau leptons, is presented. This production mechanism is referred to in the following as VH , where V is either a W or Z boson. The analysis is part of a comprehensive program by the ATLAS Collaboration at the LHC to measure the Higgs boson production mechanisms, its couplings, and other characteristics. Similar studies have been performed with the VH production mechanism and subsequent decays of the Higgs boson to WW^* [17, 18] and $b\bar{b}$ [19, 20] by the ATLAS and CMS Collaborations and to tau lepton pairs [21] by the CMS Collaboration. The associated production is particularly useful in the decays of the Higgs boson to tau lepton pairs when both tau leptons decay hadronically, where the trigger can be a challenge. For VH production and leptonic decays of the W or Z boson, the W and Z boson decay products satisfy the trigger requirements with high efficiency.

$VH \rightarrow W/Z\tau\tau$ production results in several different final-state signatures, which are exploited by an event categorization designed to achieve both a good signal-to-background ratio and good resolution for the reconstructed $H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^-$ invariant mass. Signatures consistent with ZH and WH production are exploited, where only the $W \rightarrow \ell\nu$ and the $Z \rightarrow \ell\ell$ decays are considered, with $\ell = e, \mu$. The $H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^-$ decay signal is reconstructed in the following two possible final states: both tau leptons decay to hadrons and a neutrino ($\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$), or one tau lepton decays leptonically ($\tau \rightarrow \ell\nu$) and one to hadron(s) and a neutrino ($\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$).

2 ATLAS detector and object reconstruction

The ATLAS detector [22] is a multipurpose detector with a cylindrical geometry.¹ It consists of three subsystems: an inner detector (ID) surrounded by a thin superconducting solenoid, a calorimeter system, and a muon spectrometer in a toroidal magnetic field.

The ID tracking system reconstructs the trajectory of charged particles in the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 2.5$. It enables the accurate determination of charged-particle momentum and the position of b -hadron decay vertices. The inner detector is built from three concentric detector systems surrounded by a solenoid providing a uniform axial 2 T field. The three detector systems are the pixel detector, the silicon microstrip detector, and the transition radiation tracker.

The ID tracking system is surrounded by high-granularity lead/liquid-argon (LAr) sampling electromagnetic calorimeters covering the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 3.2$. A steel/scintillator tile calorimeter provides

¹ The ATLAS experiment uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the center of the detector and the z -axis along the beam direction. The x -axis points from the IP to the center of the LHC ring, and the y -axis points upward. Cylindrical coordinates (r, ϕ) are used in the transverse (x, y) plane, ϕ being the azimuthal angle around the beam direction. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle θ as $\eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)$. The angular distance ΔR in the η - ϕ space is defined as $\Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta\eta)^2 + (\Delta\phi)^2}$.

hadronic energy measurements in the pseudorapidity region $|\eta| < 1.7$. In the regions $1.5 < |\eta| < 4.9$, the hadronic energy measurements are provided by two endcap LAr calorimeters using copper or tungsten as absorbers.

The muon spectrometer surrounds the calorimeters. It extends tracking beyond the calorimeter, which enables the identification of muons and a precision measurement of their properties. It consists of three large superconducting eight-coil toroids, a system of tracking chambers, and detectors for triggering. Muon tracking is performed with monitored drift tubes covering $|\eta| < 2.7$ and cathode strip chambers covering $|\eta| > 2.0$, while trigger information is collected in the resistive plate chambers in the barrel ($|\eta| < 1.05$) and thin-gap chambers in the endcap regions ($1.05 < |\eta| < 2.4$).

A three-level trigger system [23] is used to select events. A hardware-based level-1 trigger uses a subset of detector information to reduce the event rate to a value of 75 kHz or less. The rate of accepted events is then reduced to about 400 Hz by two software-based trigger levels, level-2 and the event filter.

A primary vertex is identified for each event. The reconstructed primary vertex position [24] is required to be consistent with the interaction region and to have at least five associated tracks with transverse momentum $p_T > 400$ MeV; when more than one such vertex is found, the vertex with the largest summed p_T^2 of the associated tracks is chosen.

The tau leptons that decay to hadron(s) and a neutrino, or τ_{had} , are reconstructed using clusters of energy deposited in the electromagnetic and hadronic calorimeters that are matched to tracks in the inner detector. The identification algorithm separates τ_{had} candidates from jets using τ_{had} decay characteristics, namely the number of tracks, the collimation of energy deposits in the calorimeter, and the mass of the τ_{had} candidate. The analysis presented here utilizes τ_{had} candidates seeded by an anti- k_t jet algorithm with radius parameter $R=0.4$ [25, 26], with jet $p_T > 20$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.5$. The τ_{had} candidates must have only one or three associated tracks in a cone of size $\Delta R = 0.2$. All τ_{had} candidates are required to have charge ± 1 , calculated by summing the charges of the associated tracks. The τ_{had} decay products are identified by a boosted decision tree (BDT) [27], which returns a number between zero and one depending on how jet-like or tau-like the reconstructed object is. The BDT selects taus with a 55–60% efficiency (medium τ_{had} identification) depending on the τ_{had} number of tracks, η , and p_T . Dedicated algorithms reject candidates originating from electrons and muons.

Electron candidates are reconstructed from clusters of energy deposited in the electromagnetic calorimeter that are matched to tracks in the inner detector. They are required to be within the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 2.47$ and must have shower shape and track measurements that fulfill the set of medium quality criteria [28], which provides electron identification efficiencies of 80-90% depending on the transverse energy E_T , and η of the electron candidate. Electrons are considered isolated based on tracking and calorimeter information. The calorimeter isolation requires the sum of the transverse energy in the calorimeter in a cone of size $\Delta R = 0.4$ around the electron cluster, divided by the E_T of the electron cluster, to be less than 8% of the electron cluster E_T . The track-based isolation requires the sum of the transverse momenta of tracks within a cone of $\Delta R = 0.2$ around the electron, divided by the E_T of the electron cluster, to be less than 8% of the electron cluster E_T .

Muon candidates are reconstructed from tracks in the inner detector matched to tracks in the muon spectrometer. A requirement on the distance between the primary vertex and the point where the muon candidate track crosses the beamline reduces the background from cosmic rays and beam-induced backgrounds. Muon candidates are required to be within the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 2.5$ and must satisfy a

set of quality criteria [29], which provides muon identification efficiencies above 95%. Muons are considered isolated based on tracking and calorimeter information with similar requirements as are used for electrons, with the muon track p_T in place of the electron cluster E_T .

Jets are reconstructed from clusters in the calorimeter using the anti- k_r $R = 0.4$ jet algorithm. Corrections for the detector response are applied [30, 31]. To reduce the contamination of jets by additional interactions in the same or neighboring bunch crossings (pileup), tracks originating from the primary vertex must contribute at least 50% of the total scalar sum of track p_T within the jets. This requirement is only applied to jets with $p_T < 50$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.4$.

A b -tagging algorithm that relies on tracking information and b -hadron characteristics, such as the presence of a decay that can be separated from the primary vertex, is used to identify b -jets [32]. The operating point for b -tagging chosen for this analysis has a 70% efficiency for b -jets in simulated $t\bar{t}$ events with a corresponding misidentification probability for light-quark jets of 1%.

Missing transverse momentum, with magnitude E_T^{miss} , is reconstructed using the energy deposits in calorimeter cells calibrated according to the reconstructed physics objects (e , μ , τ_{had} , jets) with which they are associated. Energy deposits not associated with a physics object tend to have low p_T and are scaled by a dedicated algorithm tuned to improve the resolution in high-pileup conditions [33].

3 Data and simulation samples

The analysis uses those data collected when the detector systems were certified as functioning properly. The resulting data sample corresponds to an integrated luminosity of 20.3 fb^{-1} of pp collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV. Samples of signal and background events are simulated using a number of Monte Carlo (MC) generators, listed in Table 1. The cross-section values to which the simulation is normalized and the perturbative order in quantum chromodynamics (QCD) for each calculation are also provided. For the signal samples, the central value of the factorization scale equals the sum of the Higgs boson mass and the vector boson mass.

The generated events are combined with minimum-bias events simulated using the AU2 [34] parameter tuning of PYTHIA8 [35] to take into account multiple interactions. All simulated events undergo full simulation of the ATLAS detector response [36] using the GEANT4 [37] simulation program before being processed through the same reconstruction algorithms as the data. The signal samples use the CTEQ6L1 [38] PDF set.

4 Event categorization and selection

A characteristic of VH production is the presence of a W or Z boson in each signal event. The analysis categories are optimized to exploit the leptonic decays of the vector bosons that provide a candidate for the electron or muon triggers and to reduce the backgrounds from multijet processes. The presence of additional leptonic and/or hadronic tau decays from the Higgs boson allows for the event selection to include a requirement on three or four objects, depending on the channel, to define the final state.

Table 1: Monte Carlo generators used to model the signal and the background processes at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV. The cross sections times branching fractions ($\sigma \times \mathcal{B}$) used for the normalization of some processes are included in the last column together with the perturbative order of the QCD calculation. For the signal process only the $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$ SM branching fraction is included. For the W and Z/γ^* background processes the branching ratios for leptonic decays ($l = e, \mu, \tau$) are included. For all other background processes, inclusive cross sections are quoted (marked with a †).

Signal (Higgs boson mass $m_H = 125$ GeV)	MC generator	$\sigma \times \mathcal{B}$ [pb] at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV		
$WH, H \rightarrow \tau\tau$	PYTHIA8	0.0445	NNLO	[39, 40]
$ZH, H \rightarrow \tau\tau$	PYTHIA8	0.0262	NNLO	[39, 40]
Background				
$W(\rightarrow l\nu), (l = e, \mu, \tau)$	ALPGEN [41]+PYTHIA8	36800	NNLO	[42, 43]
$Z/\gamma^*(\rightarrow ll),$ $60 \text{ GeV} < m_{ll} < 2 \text{ TeV}$	ALPGEN+PYTHIA8	3910	NNLO	[42, 43]
$Z/\gamma^*(\rightarrow ll),$ $10 \text{ GeV} < m_{ll} < 60 \text{ GeV}$	ALPGEN+HERWIG [44]	13000	NNLO	[42, 43]
$t\bar{t}$	MC@NLO [45] + JIMMY [46]	238 [†]	NLO	[45]
$q\bar{q} \rightarrow WW$	ALPGEN+HERWIG	54 [†]	NLO	[47]
$gg \rightarrow WW$	GG2WW [48]+HERWIG	1.4 [†]	NLO	[48]
WZ, ZZ	HERWIG	30 [†]	NLO	[47]

The single-lepton and dilepton triggers used to select the events in this analysis are listed in Table 2. The p_T requirements on the particle candidates in the analysis are 2 GeV higher than the trigger thresholds, to ensure that the trigger is maximally efficient.

Table 2: Summary of the triggers used to select events for the various channels. The transverse momentum thresholds applied at trigger level are listed.

Trigger	Trigger threshold(s) [GeV]	
Single electron	$p_T^e > 24$	
Single muon	$p_T^\mu > 24$	
Combined electron and muon	$p_T^e > 12$	$p_T^\mu > 8$
Symmetric dielectron	$p_T^{e_1} > 12$	$p_T^{e_2} > 12$
Asymmetric dielectron	$p_T^{e_1} > 24$	$p_T^{e_2} > 7$
Symmetric dimuon	$p_T^{\mu_1} > 13$	$p_T^{\mu_2} > 13$
Asymmetric dimuon	$p_T^{\mu_1} > 18$	$p_T^{\mu_2} > 8$

The four analysis event categories are determined by the type of associated vector boson and the topology of the $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$ decay. These are summarized in Table 3 and described below.

The $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel: These events are required to have one isolated electron, one isolated muon, and one τ_{had} candidate. The electron and muon candidates are required to have an electric charge of the same sign to reduce the backgrounds from $Z/\gamma^* \rightarrow \tau\tau$ +jets events, WW events, and $t\bar{t}$ events where both W bosons decay leptonically. The electron or muon candidate with the higher p_T is assumed to arise from the W boson decay, which is correct 75% of the time in the MC simulation. The τ_{had} candidate is required to have $p_T > 25$ GeV and to have opposite electric charge to the leptons.

Table 3: Summary of the selection criteria for each of the four analysis channels.

Channel	Selections
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	Exactly one isolated electron and one isolated muon Exactly one τ_{had} passing medium BDT ID $p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) > 25 \text{ GeV}$ Same-charge e and μ , oppositely charged τ_{had} Events containing b -tagged jets with $p_{\text{T}} > 30 \text{ GeV}$ are vetoed $ p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) + p_{\text{T}}(\mu) + p_{\text{T}}(e) > 80 \text{ GeV}$ $\Delta R(\tau_{\text{had}}, \tau_{\text{lep}}) < 3.2$
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	Exactly one isolated electron or one isolated muon Exactly two τ_{had} passing medium BDT ID of opposite charge $p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) > 20 \text{ GeV}$ $ p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}^1) + p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}^2) > 100 \text{ GeV}$ $m_{\text{T}}(\ell, E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}) > 20 \text{ GeV}$ $0.8 < \Delta R(\tau_{\text{had}}^1, \tau_{\text{had}}^2) < 2.8$ Events containing b -tagged jets with $p_{\text{T}} > 30 \text{ GeV}$ are vetoed
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	Exactly three electrons or muons, One opposite-charge and same-flavor lepton pair with invariant mass $80 < m_{\ell\ell} < 100 \text{ GeV}$ Exactly one τ_{had} passing medium BDT ID, with opposite charge to the lepton assigned to the Higgs boson $p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) > 20 \text{ GeV}$ $ p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) + p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{lep}}) > 60 \text{ GeV}$
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	Exactly two electrons or two muons of opposite charge Exactly two τ_{had} passing medium BDT ID of opposite charge $p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}) > 20 \text{ GeV}$ $60 < m_{\ell\ell} < 120 \text{ GeV}$ $ p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}^1) + p_{\text{T}}(\tau_{\text{had}}^2) > 88 \text{ GeV}$

Events containing b -tagged jets with $p_{\text{T}} > 30 \text{ GeV}$ are vetoed to further reduce the background from $t\bar{t}$ events. The scalar sum of the p_{T} of the electron, muon, and τ_{had} candidates must be greater than 80 GeV to reduce the backgrounds from multijet and Z/γ^* +jets events. To reduce backgrounds from quark- or gluon-initiated jets misidentified as τ_{had} when these jets are produced back-to-back, the angle between the τ_{had} and τ_{lep} candidates associated with the Higgs boson is required to satisfy $\Delta R(\tau_{\text{had}}, \tau_{\text{lep}}) < 3.2$.

The $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel: These events are required to have one isolated electron or muon candidate and two τ_{had} candidates. The two τ_{had} candidates are required to have $p_{\text{T}} > 20 \text{ GeV}$ and to have opposite charge. The lepton is assumed to come from the W boson. Events containing b -tagged jets with $p_{\text{T}} > 30 \text{ GeV}$ are vetoed to reduce the background from $t\bar{t}$ events. The scalar sum of the p_{T} of the lepton and two τ_{had} candidates must be greater than 100 GeV in order to reduce the background from multijet events. The transverse mass² of the lepton and $E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$ must be greater than 20 GeV. To reduce the background from events with jets misidentified as τ_{had} candidates, $0.8 < \Delta R(\tau_{\text{had}}^1, \tau_{\text{had}}^2) < 2.8$ is required, which results in a reduction of the background from misidentified jets by almost a factor of two while

² The transverse mass, $m_{\text{T}} = \sqrt{2p_{\text{T}}^{\ell} E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}} \cdot (1 - \cos \Delta\phi)}$ where $\Delta\phi$ is the azimuthal separation between the directions of the lepton and the missing transverse momentum.

losing less than a third of the signal events.

The $Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel: Events containing one τ_{had} candidate and three light lepton candidates are in this category. The two light lepton candidates with invariant mass closest to 91 GeV, opposite electric charge, and the same flavor are assumed to be the Z boson decay products. The invariant mass of the leptons assumed to come from the Z must be between 80 and 100 GeV. The remaining light lepton and the τ_{had} candidate are assumed to originate from the Higgs boson decay. They are thus required to have opposite charge and the scalar sum of their p_T values must be greater than 60 GeV.

The $Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel: Signal candidates are selected by requiring exactly two electron (muon) candidates and two τ_{had} candidates. The two light leptons are assigned to the Z boson decay, are required to have the same flavor, and are required to have opposite electric charge. The invariant mass of the two lepton candidates assigned to the Z boson must be between 60 and 120 GeV. The two τ_{had} candidates are assumed to originate from the Higgs boson decay and are required to have opposite electric charge. A minimum requirement of 88 GeV is placed on the scalar sum of the transverse momenta of the τ_{had} pair to reduce the $Z/\gamma^* + \text{jets}$ background.

After all the analysis selection criteria are applied, the number of events migrating from other Higgs boson channels, in particular from VH production where the Higgs boson decays into WW , is found to be negligible. This analysis selection has an acceptance of 1.9% for the combined WH channels, where the denominator requires a light lepton from the W boson decay ($W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu/\tau_e/\mu\nu$) and for the Higgs boson to decay through the considered tau decay chains ($H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$), and the numerator includes all analysis cuts. The acceptance for the combined ZH channels is 5.3%, where the denominator requires a light lepton pair from the Z boson decay ($Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee/\tau\tau_{\mu\mu/ee}$) and for the Higgs boson to decay through the considered tau decay chains ($H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$), and the numerator includes all analysis cuts.

5 Background estimation

The number of expected background events and the associated kinematic distributions are derived using data-driven methods as well as simulation. There are two classes of backgrounds for this analysis: processes in which all three or four final-state lepton and τ_{had} candidates are actually produced, and those in which some lepton or τ_{had} candidates are actually misidentified jets. Jets are most likely to be misidentified as τ_{had} objects, although the rate at which jets mimic electrons is, in some instances, not negligible.

Backgrounds containing real electrons, muons, and τ_{had} leptons primarily arise from diboson, $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$, and $t\bar{t}$ events. These backgrounds are determined from Monte Carlo simulation. The background arising from jets misidentified as electron or τ_{had} candidates is estimated using a data-driven method, the so-called fake-factor method. The τ_{had} fake factor is defined as the ratio of the number of τ_{had} candidates identified with medium τ_{had} criteria to the number satisfying the loosened but not the medium identification criteria. The electron fake factor is defined as the number of electrons satisfying the identification criteria divided by the number of those that do not. The fake-factor measurements are described below. For the $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel both the τ_{had} and electron fake factors are used, while for the other three channels the τ_{had} fake-factor method alone performs well enough for modeling the background from misidentified jets. The background from misidentified jets is the dominant background, or comparable to the background from diboson production, in all channels of the analysis.

Since the fake rates are sensitive to the underlying physics of the event, the fake factors are measured in a region with similar kinematics and composition of misidentified objects to the signal region. Applying the analysis selection to MC simulation reveals that Z/γ^* +jets events are the primary source of the background from misidentified jets in the analysis. The rate of jets mimicking the τ_{had} selection is therefore measured using a tag-and-probe method from jets in well-reconstructed $Z/\gamma^* \rightarrow \mu\mu$ +jets events. The tag here is the di-muon system and the probe is the additional jet(s) that may be suitably tau-like (pass medium τ_{had} identification) or suitably jet-like (pass a loosened τ_{had} identification but fail the medium one). The fake factor is measured as a function of the jet p_T , η , and number of associated tracks. The fake rate for electrons is calculated separately, using well-reconstructed $Z \rightarrow \mu\mu$ events containing additional jets or photons, using the same procedure as described above.

To estimate the background from misidentified jets for the WH and ZH signal regions, these factors are then applied to the event combinations that have all selections the same as the signal selection with the exception that at least one τ_{had} candidate has passed the loosened but failed the medium τ_{had} identification. For the $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel, a contribution from jets misidentified as the electron candidate is also taken into account using objects that have failed electron identification. Since many background events contain multiple jets that could potentially pass the τ_{had} or electron identification, more than one possible combination of passing and failing objects is allowed to contribute per event. In these cases, the multiple copies of the events contribute with the various weights calculated for each combination of objects considered.

The fake-factor method is validated independently in each of the four analysis channels. In each case a comparison between the data and the background prediction is made with a loosened signal selection, which provides a test of the method with a large number of events in a dataset that is dominated by the background from misidentified jets. In addition, a series of orthogonal regions are formed to validate the method for each of the analysis channels. The definition of the loosened signal selection and validation regions are given for each channel in Table 4.

Example distributions of the p_T of τ_{had} candidates for the loosened signal selection and validation regions are shown in Figure 1 for the $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel. MC simulation studies show that this $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$ validation region is dominated by $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$ events where an additional jet in the event is misidentified as a τ_{had} candidate. Likewise, MC simulation studies show that this $t\bar{t}$ validation region is dominated by $t\bar{t}$ events where at least one W boson decays leptonically and where a jet is misidentified as a τ_{had} candidate. The number of expected signal events and estimated total number of background events for each channel in the signal region are given in Table 5.

6 Mass reconstruction

The result is extracted using a fit to the reconstructed invariant mass or transverse mass spectrum of the $\tau_{\text{lep}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $\tau_{\text{had}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ pair. The mass is reconstructed using one of two methods, depending on the signal category. The Higgs boson mass in ZH events is calculated using the missing mass calculator (MMC) method described in Ref. [49]. This method takes the x - and y -components of the event missing transverse momentum as an input as well as the visible mass of the $\tau_{\text{lep}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $\tau_{\text{had}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ pair. Because the neutrinos from the tau decays have unknown x -, y - and z -components and there are multiple neutrinos (two for the $\tau_{\text{had}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ case and three for the $\tau_{\text{lep}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ case), the system is underconstrained. A scan is therefore performed over possible momenta for the neutrinos, and a most-likely di- τ mass is found.

Table 4: The loosened signal selection and the list of validation regions used to validate the fake-factor method are given for each of the four analysis channels. MMC and M_{2T} are mass reconstruction techniques defined in Section 6.

Channel	Loosened signal selection	Validation regions
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	one isolated electron one isolated muon $p_T(\tau_{\text{had}}) > 25$ GeV	$Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$: Z mass selection (60–120 GeV) $t\bar{t}$: require b -tagged jet
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	one isolated electron or muon two (opposite charge) τ_{had} candidates	$Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$: Z mass selection (>60 GeV) $t\bar{t}$: require b -tagged jet W + jets: $m_T(\ell, E_T^{\text{miss}}) > 60$ GeV same-sign τ_{had} candidates mass sideband: $M_{2T} < 60$ GeV or $M_{2T} > 120$ GeV
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	three isolated electrons or muons opposite-charge, same-flavor lepton pair τ_{had} with opposite charge to the unpaired lepton	same-sign $\tau_{\text{lep}}, \tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates mass sideband: $M_{\text{MMC}} < 80$ GeV or $M_{\text{MMC}} > 120$ GeV
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	two opposite-charge, same-flavor leptons two opposite-charge τ_{had} candidates	same-sign τ_{had} candidates mass sideband: $M_{\text{MMC}} < 80$ GeV or $M_{\text{MMC}} > 120$ GeV

Table 5: The yields for the observed and expected background and signal for a 125 GeV Higgs boson in the signal region for each individual channel. The "other" column consists primarily of background from $t\bar{t}$ events. The uncertainties quoted are statistical only.

Channel	Obs.	Signal	Σ Background	Fake Factor	Diboson	Other
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	35	1.95 ± 0.05	32.4 ± 1.9	13.1 ± 1.3	13.54 ± 0.35	5.7 ± 1.4
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	33	1.84 ± 0.04	35.5 ± 2.7	28.1 ± 2.4	7.4 ± 1.2	-
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	24	1.14 ± 0.03	24.6 ± 1.5	17.1 ± 1.5	7.28 ± 0.16	0.20 ± 0.01
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	7	0.64 ± 0.02	6.8 ± 1.2	4.7 ± 1.2	2.09 ± 0.09	0.012 ± 0.003

In the WH category, the presence of an additional neutrino from the W decay makes the MMC mass reconstruction not optimal. In this case the M_{2T} variable defined in Ref.[50] is used, which calculates an event-by-event lower bound (within the detector resolution) of the transverse mass of the $\tau_{\text{had}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $\tau_{\text{lep}}\text{-}\tau_{\text{had}}$ pair by performing a minimization over the allowed phase-space of possible momenta of assumed neutrinos in the event. In the general case described in Ref. [50] the only constraint on the phase-space is that the sum of the transverse momenta of all neutrinos equals the observed E_T^{miss} . For this analysis, the additional constraint that the invariant mass of the lepton and neutrino assigned to the W boson be equal to, or as close as possible to, the mass of the W boson is imposed. The mass distributions after all the selection criteria are applied are shown in Figure 2.

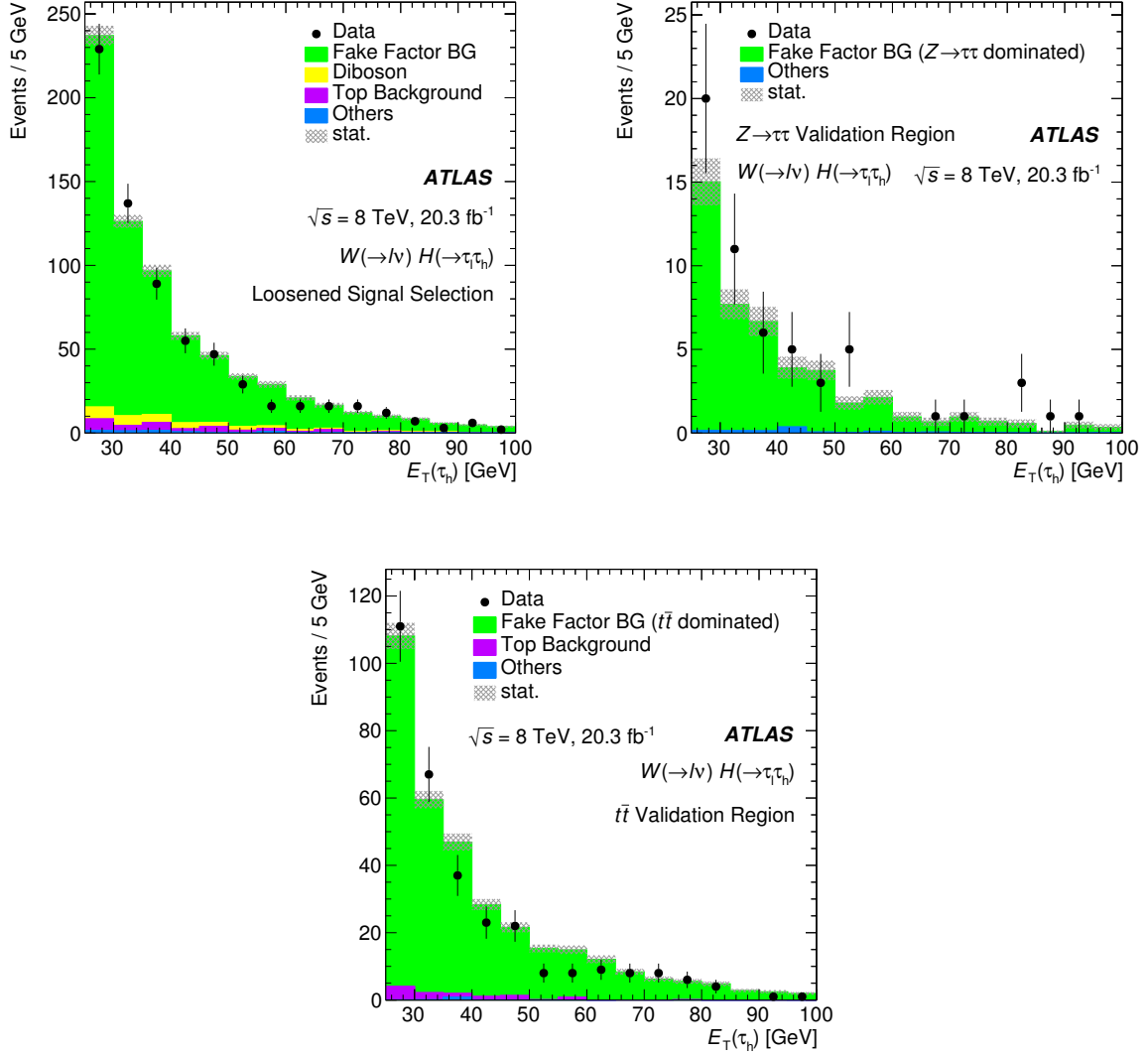


Figure 1: Distributions of the transverse energy of the τ_{had} candidate, as validation for the fake factor method for the $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/e\nu$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel. The category labeled "Fake Factor BG" consists of events where at least one τ_{had} or electron candidate does not result from a simulated τ_{had} or electron.

7 Systematic uncertainties

The numbers of expected signal and background events, and the distributions of the discriminating variables M_{MMC} and M_{2T} , are affected by systematic uncertainties. These uncertainties are discussed below and are grouped into three categories: experimental uncertainties, background modeling uncertainties, and theoretical uncertainties. For all uncertainties, the effects on both the total signal and background yields and on the shape of the mass distributions, M_{MMC} or M_{2T} respectively, are evaluated. Table 6 shows the systematic uncertainties, their impact on the number of expected events for the signal and the relevant background, and their impact on the post-fit signal strength, μ , where $\mu = \sigma/\sigma_{\text{SM}}$ and the value $\mathcal{B}(H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^-)$ corresponds to the standard model prediction for $m_H = 125 \text{ GeV}$.

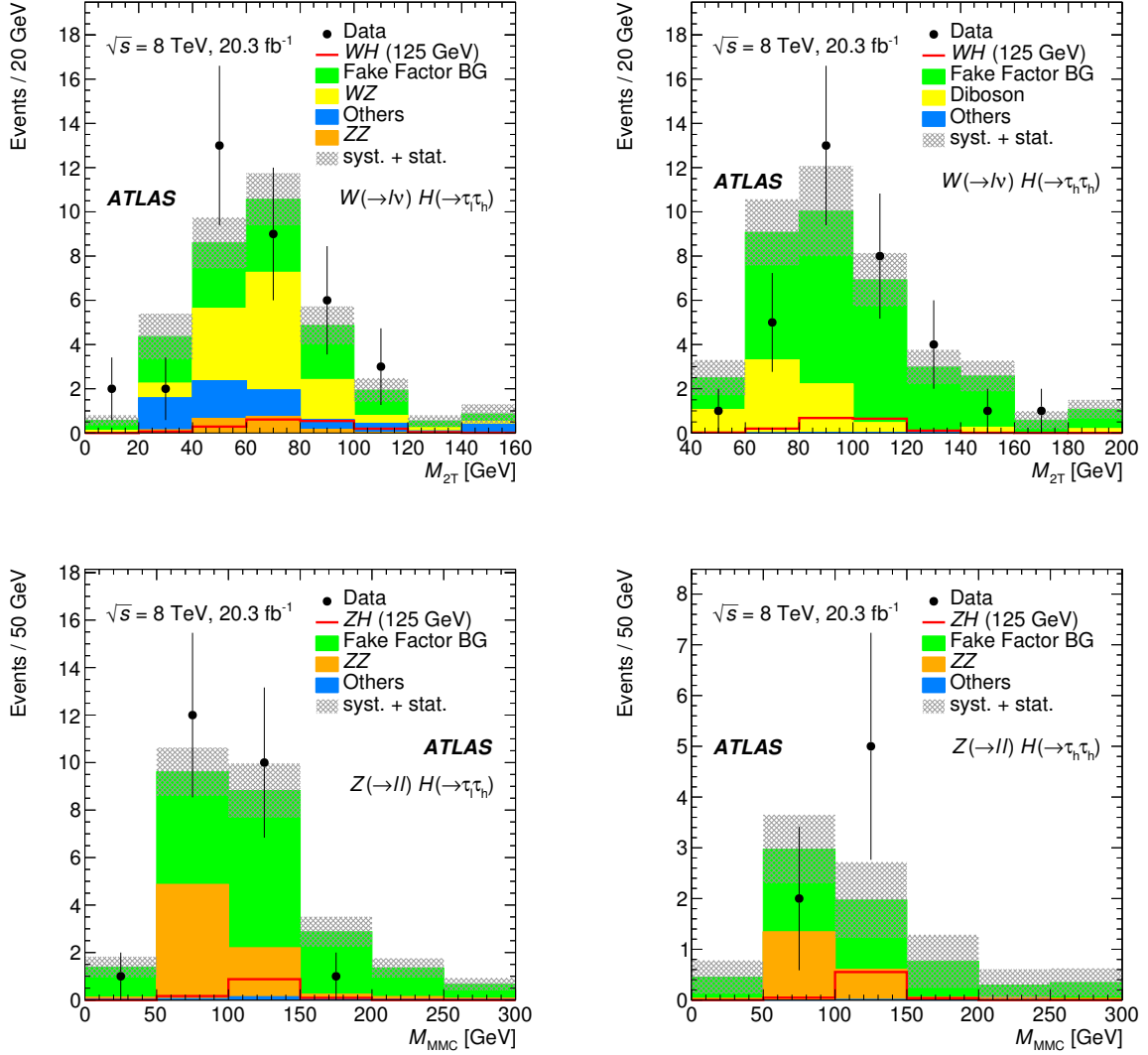


Figure 2: Mass distributions used to determine the strength of signal in each channel. Upper left: M_{2T} distribution for the $WH \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel. Upper right: M_{2T} distribution for the $WH \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel. Lower left: M_{MMC} distribution for the $ZH \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel. Lower right: M_{MMC} distribution for the $ZH \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ channel.

Experimental systematic uncertainties arise from uncertainties on trigger efficiencies, particle reconstruction and identification, uncertainties on the energy scale and resolution of jets, leptons, and τ_{had} candidates. The efficiency-related uncertainties are estimated in data using tag-and-probe techniques. The MC samples used are corrected for differences in these efficiencies between data and simulation and the associated uncertainties are propagated through the analysis. The lepton energy scale uncertainties are measured in data. For τ_{had} candidates, where the uncertainty is dominated by calorimeter response, this is done by fitting the visible $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$ mass [27]. The systematic uncertainties due to energy resolution have a negligible impact on the result. Systematic effects from electron- and muon-related uncertainties are smaller in general than those from jets and τ_{had} candidates. The soft-scale $E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$ resolution accounts for low- p_{T} energy deposits that do not contribute to the clustered energy of physics objects (e, μ, τ, jet). The

b -jet tagging efficiency is measured in data with $t\bar{t}$ events and has an uncertainty of a few percent, which in turn has a small impact on the prediction of the $t\bar{t}$ background in the signal region.

The systematic uncertainty on the background from jets misidentified as leptons is estimated for each type of lepton separately. It is assumed to be uncorrelated with all other uncertainties. The uncertainty on the contribution to the background from jets misidentified as τ_{had} is dominated by uncertainty in the fraction of quark- and gluon-initiated jets. This accounts for the potential difference between the fraction of quark-initiated jets in the fake-factor measurement region and the analysis signal region, where the fake factor is applied. Because quark- and gluon-initiated jets can fake τ_{had} candidates at different rates, a difference in their ratio between the fake-factor measurement and signal region would bias the fake factors themselves. The systematic uncertainty is evaluated by varying the ratio of quark- to gluon-initiated jets from half to two times the nominal value, as determined in MC simulation. The systematic uncertainty for the electron fake factor is determined in a way similar to the τ_{had} fake factor, although the compositions of misidentified candidates from jets and photons are varied as opposed to the relative fractions of quark- and gluon-initiated jets.

The uncertainty on the luminosity ($\pm 2.8\%$) derived from beam-separation scans performed in 2012 using the method described in Ref. [51] affects the number of signal and simulated background events.

Theoretical uncertainties are estimated for the signal and for all background contributions derived using MC simulation. Uncertainties relating to higher order QCD corrections and MC modeling choices are estimated by varying the renormalization and factorization scales, PDF parameterization and underlying-event model as described in Ref. [52]. The signal samples, generated in QCD LO with PYTHIA8, are normalized using cross sections computed in NNLO in QCD and NLO in electroweak, but kinematic distributions, such as the Higgs boson p_T , are not re-weighted. The HAWK MC program [53], which calculates NLO QCD and NLO electroweak corrections for all the VH processes, is used to evaluate the resulting systematic uncertainties due to kinematic differences. The impact of the QCD scale choice on the signal acceptance is evaluated in MC simulation before the ATLAS detector simulation is performed, separately for the four analysis channels, by varying the QCD scales in POWHEG + PYTHIA8.

Table 6: Impact of systematic uncertainties on the expected yields of the signal and/or relevant background(s) as well as the impact on the signal strength μ . The experimental uncertainties affect the signal prediction and all backgrounds that are determined with MC simulation. The background model uncertainties affect the prediction of the backgrounds from fake-factor methods. The theoretical uncertainties affect the signal prediction. Where ranges are given they indicate the variation of the impact on different channels or differences between one-track and multi-track τ_{had} candidates. All values are given before the global fit.

Source	Impact on event yeild [%]	Impact on μ
Experimental		
Luminosity	± 2.8	± 0.30
Tau identification	$\pm 2-6$	± 0.41
Lepton identification and trigger	$\pm 1-1.8$	± 0.15
b -tagging	± 2	± 0.16
τ energy scale	$\pm 0-2.9$	± 0.57
Jet energy scale and resolution	± 4	-
$E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$ soft scale & resolution	$\pm 0.1-0.5$	-
Background Model		
Modeling of BG from misidentified jets	$\pm 15 - 38$	± 0.72
Theoretical		
Higher-order QCD corrections	$\pm 2-8$	± 0.26
Underlying event/parton shower modeling	$\pm 1-4$	± 0.07
Generator modeling	± 1.4	± 0.05
EW corrections	± 2	± 0.06
PDF	$\pm 3-4$	± 0.18
$\mathcal{B}(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$	$\pm 3-7$	± 0.17

8 Results

The observed signal strength μ , is determined from a binned global maximum-likelihood fit to the reconstructed Higgs boson candidate mass distributions, with nuisance parameters $\vec{\theta}$, corresponding to the systematic uncertainties. The $M_{2\text{T}}$ distribution is used for the WH topologies and the M_{MMC} distribution for the ZH categories. For each signal and background process, each nuisance parameter is separately tested to determine whether it affects the $M_{2\text{T}}$ or M_{MMC} distributions. For background processes only, the effect of a nuisance parameter on the shape of the distributions is neglected if the difference between the up and down variations of the yield in all bins of the distribution is less than 10% of the total background statistical error. Overall systematic uncertainties that differ from the nominal by less than 0.5% are not considered. The only exception is the treatment of systematic uncertainties due to theoretical aspects, which are fully considered even though they have a small overall impact on the fit.

The expected numbers of signal and background events in each bin are functions of $\vec{\theta}$. The test statistic q_μ is then constructed according to the profile likelihood ratio: $q_\mu = -2 \ln[\mathcal{L}(\mu, \hat{\vec{\theta}}) / \mathcal{L}(\hat{\mu}, \hat{\vec{\theta}})]$, where the numerator $\mathcal{L}(\mu, \hat{\vec{\theta}})$ is the conditional maximum likelihood with $\hat{\vec{\theta}}$ the value of the nuisance parameters that maximize \mathcal{L} for a given μ and the denominator $\mathcal{L}(\hat{\mu}, \hat{\vec{\theta}})$ is the unconditional maximum likelihood. This test statistic is used to measure the compatibility of the background-only hypothesis with the observed data and for setting limits derived with the CL_s method [54, 55]. To quantify this compatibility, a significance is calculated, giving the probability of obtaining q_μ if $\mu = 1$ is the true signal strength.

The measured signal strength, normalized to the SM expectation, is $\mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6$ for $m_H = 125$ GeV. The

95% confidence-level (CL) upper limits for each of the four channels and their associated signal strengths are shown in Figure 3. The expected and observed significances for each of the four channels are shown in Table 7.

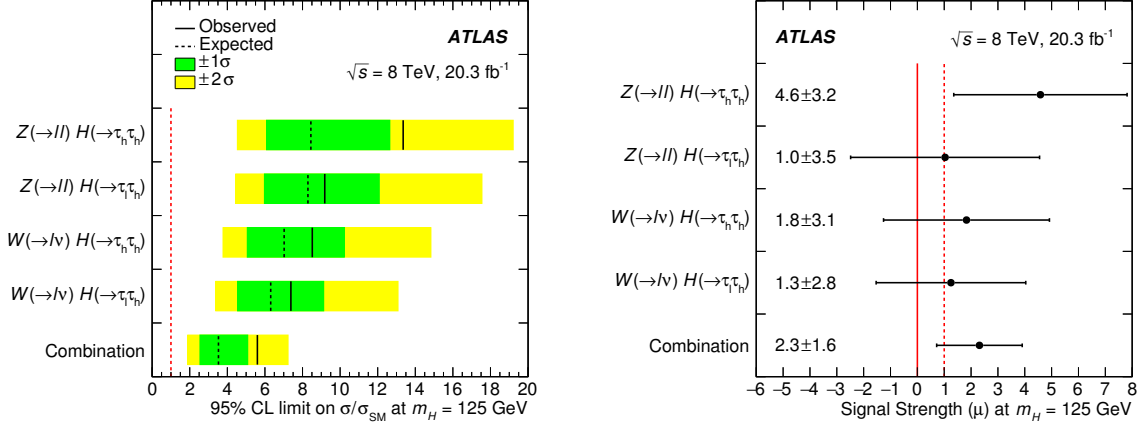


Figure 3: The combined result for the VH channels. The 95% CL cross section limit is shown for each individual channel on the left. The right figure shows the signal strength in each individual channel, along with the combination.

Table 7: The expected and observed significances for the four channels.

Channel	Expected significance	Observed significance
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	0.36σ	0.44σ
$W \rightarrow \mu\nu/ev, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	0.32σ	0.60σ
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	0.28σ	0.29σ
$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu/ee, H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$	0.32σ	1.38σ

The overall 95% CL limit on the observed ratio of the cross section to the SM prediction is 5.6 at $m_H = 125$ GeV, which is above the expected values of 3.5 if no signal is assumed and 3.7 if signal is included, but is consistent within the uncertainties of the expected limit. The weaker limit in the data comes mostly from the slight excesses seen in the two channels with $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$.

9 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper, a search for the associated production of the SM Higgs boson with a vector boson where the Higgs boson decays to a pair of tau leptons, is based on 20.3 fb^{-1} of LHC proton–proton collisions recorded by the ATLAS experiment at the center-of-mass energy $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV. The overall 95% CL upper limit on the ratio of the observed cross section to the SM predicted cross section, at 5.6, is higher than the expected values of 3.5 if no signal is assumed and 3.7 if signal is included, but is consistent within the statistics and uncertainties of the analysis. The measured signal strength, normalized to the standard model expectation for a Higgs boson of $m_H = 125$ GeV, is $\mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6$.

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The ATLAS Collaboration

G. Aad⁸⁵, B. Abbott¹¹³, J. Abdallah¹⁵¹, O. Abdinov¹¹, R. Aben¹⁰⁷, M. Abolins⁹⁰, O.S. AbouZeid¹⁵⁸, H. Abramowicz¹⁵³, H. Abreu¹⁵², R. Abreu¹¹⁶, Y. Abulaiti^{146a,146b}, B.S. Acharya^{164a,164b,a}, L. Adamczyk^{38a}, D.L. Adams²⁵, J. Adelman¹⁰⁸, S. Adomeit¹⁰⁰, T. Adye¹³¹, A.A. Affolder⁷⁴, T. Agatonovic-Jovin¹³, J. Agricola⁵⁴, J.A. Aguilar-Saavedra^{126a,126f}, S.P. Ahlen²², F. Ahmadov^{65,b}, G. Aielli^{133a,133b}, H. Akerstedt^{146a,146b}, T.P.A. Åkesson⁸¹, A.V. Akimov⁹⁶, G.L. Alberghi^{20a,20b}, J. Albert¹⁶⁹, S. Albrand⁵⁵, M.J. Alconada Verzini⁷¹, M. Aleksa³⁰, I.N. Aleksandrov⁶⁵, C. Alexa^{26b}, G. Alexander¹⁵³, T. Alexopoulos¹⁰, M. Alhroob¹¹³, G. Alimonti^{91a}, L. Alio⁸⁵, J. Alison³¹, S.P. Alkire³⁵, B.M.M. Allbrooke¹⁴⁹, P.P. Allport¹⁸, A. Aloisio^{104a,104b}, A. Alonso³⁶, F. Alonso⁷¹, C. Alpigiani⁷⁶, A. Altheimer³⁵, B. Alvarez Gonzalez³⁰, D. Álvarez Piqueras¹⁶⁷, M.G. Alviggi^{104a,104b}, B.T. Amadio¹⁵, K. Amako⁶⁶, Y. Amaral Coutinho^{24a}, C. Amelung²³, D. Amidei⁸⁹, S.P. Amor Dos Santos^{126a,126c}, A. Amorim^{126a,126b}, S. Amoroso⁴⁸, N. Amram¹⁵³, G. Amundsen²³, C. Anastopoulos¹³⁹, L.S. Ancu⁴⁹, N. Andari¹⁰⁸, T. Andeen³⁵, C.F. Anders^{58b}, G. Anders³⁰, J.K. Anders⁷⁴, K.J. Anderson³¹, A. Andreazza^{91a,91b}, V. Andrei^{58a}, S. Angelidakis⁹, I. Angelozzi¹⁰⁷, P. Anger⁴⁴, A. Angerami³⁵, F. Anghinolfi³⁰, A.V. Anisenkov^{109,c}, N. Anjos¹², A. Annovi^{124a,124b}, M. Antonelli⁴⁷, A. Antonov⁹⁸, J. Antos^{144b}, F. Anulli^{132a}, M. Aoki⁶⁶, L. Aperio Bella¹⁸, G. Arabidze⁹⁰, Y. Arai⁶⁶, J.P. Araque^{126a}, A.T.H. Arce⁴⁵, F.A. Arduh⁷¹, J-F. Arguin⁹⁵, S. Argyropoulos⁶³, M. Arik^{19a}, A.J. Armbruster³⁰, O. Arnaez³⁰, V. Arnal⁸², H. Arnold⁴⁸, M. Arratia²⁸, O. Arslan²¹, A. Artamonov⁹⁷, G. Artoni²³, S. Asai¹⁵⁵, N. Asbah⁴², A. Ashkenazi¹⁵³, B. Åsman^{146a,146b}, L. Asquith¹⁴⁹, K. Assamagan²⁵, R. Astalos^{144a}, M. Atkinson¹⁶⁵, N.B. Atlay¹⁴¹, K. Augsten¹²⁸, M. Aurousseau^{145b}, G. Avolio³⁰, B. Axen¹⁵, M.K. Ayoub¹¹⁷, G. Azuelos^{95,d}, M.A. Baak³⁰, A.E. Baas^{58a}, M.J. Baca¹⁸, C. Bacci^{134a,134b}, H. Bachacou¹³⁶, K. Bachas¹⁵⁴, M. Backes³⁰, M. Backhaus³⁰, P. Bagiachi^{132a,132b}, P. Bagnaia^{132a,132b}, Y. Bai^{33a}, T. Bain³⁵, J.T. Baines¹³¹, O.K. Baker¹⁷⁶, E.M. Baldin^{109,c}, P. Balek¹²⁹, T. Balestri¹⁴⁸, F. Balli⁸⁴, W.K. Balunas¹²², E. Banas³⁹, Sw. Banerjee¹⁷³, A.A.E. Bannoura¹⁷⁵, H.S. Bansil¹⁸, L. Barak³⁰, E.L. Barberio⁸⁸, D. Barberis^{50a,50b}, M. Barbero⁸⁵, T. Barillari¹⁰¹, M. Barisonzi^{164a,164b}, T. Barklow¹⁴³, N. Barlow²⁸, S.L. Barnes⁸⁴, B.M. Barnett¹³¹, R.M. Barnett¹⁵, Z. Barnovska⁵, A. Baroncelli^{134a}, G. Barone²³, A.J. Barr¹²⁰, F. Barreiro⁸², J. Barreiro Guimarães da Costa⁵⁷, R. Bartoldus¹⁴³, A.E. Barton⁷², P. Bartos^{144a}, A. Basalae¹²³, A. Bassalat¹¹⁷, A. Basye¹⁶⁵, R.L. Bates⁵³, S.J. Batista¹⁵⁸, J.R. Batley²⁸, M. Battaglia¹³⁷, M. Bauc^{132a,132b}, F. Bauer¹³⁶, H.S. Bawa^{143,e}, J.B. Beacham¹¹¹, M.D. Beattie⁷², T. Beau⁸⁰, P.H. Beauchemin¹⁶¹, R. Beccherle^{124a,124b}, P. Bechtel²¹, H.P. Beck^{17,f}, K. Becker¹²⁰, M. Becker⁸³, M. Beckingham¹⁷⁰, C. Becot¹¹⁷, A.J. Beddall^{19b}, A. Beddall^{19b}, V.A. Bednyakov⁶⁵, C.P. Bee¹⁴⁸, L.J. Beamster¹⁰⁷, T.A. Beermann³⁰, M. Begel²⁵, J.K. Behr¹²⁰, C. Belanger-Champagne⁸⁷, W.H. Bell⁴⁹, G. Bella¹⁵³, L. Bellagamba^{20a}, A. Bellerive²⁹, M. Bellomo⁸⁶, K. Belotskiy⁹⁸, O. Beltramello³⁰, O. Benary¹⁵³, D. Benchekroun^{135a}, M. Bender¹⁰⁰, K. Bendtz^{146a,146b}, N. Benekos¹⁰, Y. Benhammou¹⁵³, E. Benhar Noccioli⁴⁹, J.A. Benitez Garcia^{159b}, D.P. Benjamin⁴⁵, J.R. Bensinger²³, S. Bentvelsen¹⁰⁷, L. Beresford¹²⁰, M. Beretta⁴⁷, D. Berge¹⁰⁷, E. Bergeaas Kuutmann¹⁶⁶, N. Berger⁵, F. Berghaus¹⁶⁹, J. Beringer¹⁵, C. Bernard²², N.R. Bernard⁸⁶, C. Bernius¹¹⁰, F.U. Bernlochner²¹, T. Berry⁷⁷, P. Berta¹²⁹, C. Bertella⁸³, G. Bertoli^{146a,146b}, F. Bertolucci^{124a,124b}, C. Bertsche¹¹³, D. Bertsche¹¹³, M.I. Besana^{91a}, G.J. Besjes³⁶, O. Bessidskaia Bylund^{146a,146b}, M. Bessner⁴², N. Besson¹³⁶, C. Betancourt⁴⁸, S. Bethke¹⁰¹, A.J. Bevan⁷⁶, W. Bhimji¹⁵, R.M. Bianchi¹²⁵, L. Bianchini²³, M. Bianco³⁰, O. Biebel¹⁰⁰, D. Biedermann¹⁶, S.P. Bieniek⁷⁸, M. Biglietti^{134a}, J. Bilbao De Mendizabal⁴⁹, H. Bilokon⁴⁷, M. Bindi⁵⁴, S. Binet¹¹⁷, A. Bingul^{19b}, C. Bini^{132a,132b}, S. Biondi^{20a,20b}, D.M. Bjergaard⁴⁵, C.W. Black¹⁵⁰, J.E. Black¹⁴³, K.M. Black²², D. Blackburn¹³⁸, R.E. Blair⁶, J.-B. Blanchard¹³⁶, J.E. Blanco⁷⁷, T. Blazek^{144a}, I. Bloch⁴², C. Blocker²³, W. Blum^{83,*}, U. Blumenschein⁵⁴, G.J. Bobbink¹⁰⁷,

V.S. Bobrovnikov^{109,c}, S.S. Bocchetta⁸¹, A. Bocci⁴⁵, C. Bock¹⁰⁰, M. Boehler⁴⁸, J.A. Bogaerts³⁰, D. Bogavac¹³, A.G. Bogdanchikov¹⁰⁹, C. Bohm^{146a}, V. Boisvert⁷⁷, T. Bold^{38a}, V. Boldea^{26b}, A.S. Boldyrev⁹⁹, M. Bomben⁸⁰, M. Bona⁷⁶, M. Boonekamp¹³⁶, A. Borisov¹³⁰, G. Borisso⁷², S. Borroni⁴², J. Bortfeldt¹⁰⁰, V. Bortolotto^{60a,60b,60c}, K. Bos¹⁰⁷, D. Boscherini^{20a}, M. Bosman¹², J. Boudreau¹²⁵, J. Bouffard², E.V. Bouhova-Thacker⁷², D. Boumediene³⁴, C. Bourdarios¹¹⁷, N. Bousson¹¹⁴, S.K. Boutle⁵³, A. Boveia³⁰, J. Boyd³⁰, I.R. Boyko⁶⁵, I. Bozic¹³, J. Bracinek¹⁸, A. Brandt⁸, G. Brandt⁵⁴, O. Brandt^{58a}, U. Bratzler¹⁵⁶, B. Brau⁸⁶, J.E. Brau¹¹⁶, H.M. Braun^{175,*}, S.F. Brazzale^{164a,164c}, W.D. Breaden Madden⁵³, K. Brendlinger¹²², A.J. Brennan⁸⁸, L. Brenner¹⁰⁷, R. Brenner¹⁶⁶, S. Bressler¹⁷², K. Bristow^{145c}, T.M. Bristow⁴⁶, D. Britton⁵³, D. Britzger⁴², F.M. Brochu²⁸, I. Brock²¹, R. Brock⁹⁰, J. Bronner¹⁰¹, G. Brooijmans³⁵, T. Brooks⁷⁷, W.K. Brooks^{32b}, J. Brosamer¹⁵, E. Brost¹¹⁶, J. Brown⁵⁵, P.A. Bruckman de Renstrom³⁹, D. Bruncko^{144b}, R. Bruneliere⁴⁸, A. Bruni^{20a}, G. Bruni^{20a}, M. Bruschi^{20a}, N. Brusino²¹, L. Bryngemark⁸¹, T. Buanes¹⁴, Q. Buat¹⁴², P. Buchholz¹⁴¹, A.G. Buckley⁵³, S.I. Buda^{26b}, I.A. Budagov⁶⁵, F. Buehrer⁴⁸, L. Bugge¹¹⁹, M.K. Bugge¹¹⁹, O. Bulekov⁹⁸, D. Bullock⁸, H. Burckhart³⁰, S. Burdin⁷⁴, C.D. Burgard⁴⁸, B. Burghgrave¹⁰⁸, S. Burke¹³¹, I. Burmeister⁴³, E. Busato³⁴, D. Büscher⁴⁸, V. Büscher⁸³, P. Bussey⁵³, J.M. Butler²², A.I. Butt³, C.M. Buttar⁵³, J.M. Butterworth⁷⁸, P. Butti¹⁰⁷, W. Buttinger²⁵, A. Buzatu⁵³, A.R. Buzykaev^{109,c}, S. Cabrera Urbán¹⁶⁷, D. Caforio¹²⁸, V.M. Cairo^{37a,37b}, O. Cakir^{4a}, N. Calace⁴⁹, P. Calafiura¹⁵, A. Calandri¹³⁶, G. Calderini⁸⁰, P. Calfayan¹⁰⁰, L.P. Caloba^{24a}, D. Calvet³⁴, S. Calvet³⁴, R. Camacho Toro³¹, S. Camarda⁴², P. Camarri^{133a,133b}, D. Cameron¹¹⁹, R. Caminal Armadans¹⁶⁵, S. Campana³⁰, M. Campanelli⁷⁸, A. Campoverde¹⁴⁸, V. Canale^{104a,104b}, A. Canepa^{159a}, M. Cano Bret^{33e}, J. Cantero⁸², R. Cantrill^{126a}, T. Cao⁴⁰, M.D.M. Capeans Garrido³⁰, I. Caprini^{26b}, M. Caprini^{26b}, M. Capua^{37a,37b}, R. Caputo⁸³, R. Cardarelli^{133a}, F. Cardillo⁴⁸, T. Carli³⁰, G. Carlino^{104a}, L. Carminati^{91a,91b}, S. Caron¹⁰⁶, E. Carquin^{32a}, G.D. Carrillo-Montoya³⁰, J.R. Carter²⁸, J. Carvalho^{126a,126c}, D. Casadei⁷⁸, M.P. Casado¹², M. Casolino¹², E. Castaneda-Miranda^{145a}, A. Castelli¹⁰⁷, V. Castillo Gimenez¹⁶⁷, N.F. Castro^{126a,g}, P. Catastini⁵⁷, A. Catinaccio³⁰, J.R. Catmore¹¹⁹, A. Cattai³⁰, J. Caudron⁸³, V. Cavaliere¹⁶⁵, D. Cavalli^{91a}, M. Cavalli-Sforza¹², V. Cavasinni^{124a,124b}, F. Ceradini^{134a,134b}, B.C. Cerio⁴⁵, K. Cerny¹²⁹, A.S. Cerqueira^{24b}, A. Cerri¹⁴⁹, L. Cerrito⁷⁶, F. Cerutti¹⁵, M. Cerv³⁰, A. Cervelli¹⁷, S.A. Cetin^{19c}, A. Chafaq^{135a}, D. Chakraborty¹⁰⁸, I. Chalupkova¹²⁹, P. Chang¹⁶⁵, J.D. Chapman²⁸, D.G. Charlton¹⁸, C.C. Chau¹⁵⁸, C.A. Chavez Barajas¹⁴⁹, S. Cheatham¹⁵², A. Chegwidan⁹⁰, S. Chekanov⁶, S.V. Chekulaev^{159a}, G.A. Chelkov^{65,h}, M.A. Chelstowska⁸⁹, C. Chen⁶⁴, H. Chen²⁵, K. Chen¹⁴⁸, L. Chen^{33d,i}, S. Chen^{33c}, S. Chen¹⁵⁵, X. Chen^{33f}, Y. Chen⁶⁷, H.C. Cheng⁸⁹, Y. Cheng³¹, A. Cheplakov⁶⁵, E. Cheremushkina¹³⁰, R. Cherkaoui El Moursli^{135e}, V. Chernyatin^{25,*}, E. Cheu⁷, L. Chevalier¹³⁶, V. Chiarella⁴⁷, G. Chiarelli^{124a,124b}, G. Chiodini^{73a}, A.S. Chisholm¹⁸, R.T. Chislett⁷⁸, A. Chitan^{26b}, M.V. Chizhov⁶⁵, K. Choi⁶¹, S. Chouridou⁹, B.K.B. Chow¹⁰⁰, V. Christodoulou⁷⁸, D. Chromek-Burckhart³⁰, J. Chudoba¹²⁷, A.J. Chuinard⁸⁷, J.J. Chwastowski³⁹, L. Chytka¹¹⁵, G. Ciapetti^{132a,132b}, A.K. Ciftci^{4a}, D. Cinca⁵³, V. Cindro⁷⁵, I.A. Cioara²¹, A. Ciocio¹⁵, F. Ciotto^{104a,104b}, Z.H. Citron¹⁷², M. Ciubancan^{26b}, A. Clark⁴⁹, B.L. Clark⁵⁷, P.J. Clark⁴⁶, R.N. Clarke¹⁵, W. Cleland¹²⁵, C. Clement^{146a,146b}, Y. Coadou⁸⁵, M. Cobal^{164a,164c}, A. Coccaro⁴⁹, J. Cochran⁶⁴, L. Coffey²³, J.G. Cogan¹⁴³, L. Colasurdo¹⁰⁶, B. Cole³⁵, S. Cole¹⁰⁸, A.P. Colijn¹⁰⁷, J. Collot⁵⁵, T. Colombo^{58c}, G. Compostella¹⁰¹, P. Conde Muiño^{126a,126b}, E. Coniavitis⁴⁸, S.H. Connell^{145b}, I.A. Connelly⁷⁷, V. Consorti⁴⁸, S. Constantinescu^{26b}, C. Conta^{121a,121b}, G. Conti³⁰, F. Conventi^{104a,j}, M. Cooke¹⁵, B.D. Cooper⁷⁸, A.M. Cooper-Sarkar¹²⁰, T. Cornelissen¹⁷⁵, M. Corradi^{20a}, F. Corriveau^{87,k}, A. Corso-Radu¹⁶³, A. Cortes-Gonzalez¹², G. Cortiana¹⁰¹, G. Costa^{91a}, M.J. Costa¹⁶⁷, D. Costanzo¹³⁹, D. Côté⁸, G. Cottin²⁸, G. Cowan⁷⁷, B.E. Cox⁸⁴, K. Cranmer¹¹⁰, G. Cree²⁹, S. Crépe-Renaudin⁵⁵, F. Crescioli⁸⁰, W.A. Cribbs^{146a,146b}, M. Crispin Ortuzar¹²⁰, M. Cristinziani²¹, V. Croft¹⁰⁶, G. Crosetti^{37a,37b}, T. Cuhadar Donszelmann¹³⁹, J. Cummings¹⁷⁶, M. Curatolo⁴⁷, J. Cúth⁸³, C. Cuthbert¹⁵⁰, H. Czirr¹⁴¹, P. Czodrowski³, S. D'Auria⁵³, M. D'Onofrio⁷⁴,

M.J. Da Cunha Sargedas De Sousa^{126a,126b}, C. Da Via⁸⁴, W. Dabrowski^{38a}, A. Dafinca¹²⁰, T. Dai⁸⁹, O. Dale¹⁴, F. Dallaire⁹⁵, C. Dallapiccola⁸⁶, M. Dam³⁶, J.R. Dandoy³¹, N.P. Dang⁴⁸, A.C. Daniells¹⁸, M. Danninger¹⁶⁸, M. Dano Hoffmann¹³⁶, V. Dao⁴⁸, G. Darbo^{50a}, S. Darmora⁸, J. Dassoulas³, A. Dattagupta⁶¹, W. Davey²¹, C. David¹⁶⁹, T. Davidek¹²⁹, E. Davies^{120,l}, M. Davies¹⁵³, P. Davison⁷⁸, Y. Davygora^{58a}, E. Dawe⁸⁸, I. Dawson¹³⁹, R.K. Daya-Ishmukhametova⁸⁶, K. De⁸, R. de Asmundis^{104a}, A. De Benedetti¹¹³, S. De Castro^{20a,20b}, S. De Cecco⁸⁰, N. De Groot¹⁰⁶, P. de Jong¹⁰⁷, H. De la Torre⁸², F. De Lorenzi⁶⁴, D. De Pedis^{132a}, A. De Salvo^{132a}, U. De Sanctis¹⁴⁹, A. De Santo¹⁴⁹, J.B. De Vivie De Regie¹¹⁷, W.J. Dearnaley⁷², R. Debbe²⁵, C. Debenedetti¹³⁷, D.V. Dedovich⁶⁵, I. Deigaard¹⁰⁷, J. Del Peso⁸², T. Del Prete^{124a,124b}, D. Delgove¹¹⁷, F. Deliot¹³⁶, C.M. Delitzsch⁴⁹, M. Deliyergiyev⁷⁵, A. Dell'Acqua³⁰, L. Dell'Asta²², M. Dell'Orso^{124a,124b}, M. Della Pietra^{104a,j}, D. della Volpe⁴⁹, M. Delmastro⁵, P.A. Delsart⁵⁵, C. Deluca¹⁰⁷, D.A. DeMarco¹⁵⁸, S. Demers¹⁷⁶, M. Demichev⁶⁵, A. Demilly⁸⁰, S.P. Denisov¹³⁰, D. Derendarz³⁹, J.E. Derkaoui^{135d}, F. Derue⁸⁰, P. Dervan⁷⁴, K. Desch²¹, C. Deterre⁴², P.O. Deviveiros³⁰, A. Dewhurst¹³¹, S. Dhaliwal²³, A. Di Ciaccio^{133a,133b}, L. Di Ciaccio⁵, A. Di Domenico^{132a,132b}, C. Di Donato^{104a,104b}, A. Di Girolamo³⁰, B. Di Girolamo³⁰, A. Di Mattia¹⁵², B. Di Micco^{134a,134b}, R. Di Nardo⁴⁷, A. Di Simone⁴⁸, R. Di Sipio¹⁵⁸, D. Di Valentino²⁹, C. Diaconu⁸⁵, M. Diamond¹⁵⁸, F.A. Dias⁴⁶, M.A. Diaz^{32a}, E.B. Diehl⁸⁹, J. Dietrich¹⁶, S. Diglio⁸⁵, A. Dimitrievska¹³, J. Dingfelder²¹, P. Dita^{26b}, S. Dita^{26b}, F. Dittus³⁰, F. Djama⁸⁵, T. Djobava^{51b}, J.I. Djuvsland^{58a}, M.A.B. do Vale^{24c}, D. Dobos³⁰, M. Dobre^{26b}, C. Doglioni⁸¹, T. Dohmae¹⁵⁵, J. Dolejsi¹²⁹, Z. Dolezal¹²⁹, B.A. Dolgoshein^{98,*}, M. Donadelli^{24d}, S. Donati^{124a,124b}, P. Dondero^{121a,121b}, J. Donini³⁴, J. Dopke¹³¹, A. Doria^{104a}, M.T. Dova⁷¹, A.T. Doyle⁵³, E. Drechsler⁵⁴, M. Dris¹⁰, E. Dubreuil³⁴, E. Duchovni¹⁷², G. Duckeck¹⁰⁰, O.A. Ducu^{26b,85}, D. Duda¹⁰⁷, A. Dudarev³⁰, L. Dufflot¹¹⁷, L. Duguid⁷⁷, M. Dührssen³⁰, M. Dunford^{58a}, H. Duran Yildiz^{4a}, M. Düren⁵², A. Durglishvili^{51b}, D. Duschinger⁴⁴, M. Dyndal^{38a}, C. Eckardt⁴², K.M. Ecker¹⁰¹, R.C. Edgar⁸⁹, W. Edson², N.C. Edwards⁴⁶, W. Ehrenfeld²¹, T. Eifert³⁰, G. Eigen¹⁴, K. Einsweiler¹⁵, T. Ekelof¹⁶⁶, M. El Kacimi^{135c}, M. Ellert¹⁶⁶, S. Elles⁵, F. Ellinghaus¹⁷⁵, A.A. Elliot¹⁶⁹, N. Ellis³⁰, J. Elmsheuser¹⁰⁰, M. Elsing³⁰, D. Emelianov¹³¹, Y. Enari¹⁵⁵, O.C. Endner⁸³, M. Endo¹¹⁸, J. Erdmann⁴³, A. Ereditato¹⁷, G. Ernis¹⁷⁵, J. Ernst², M. Ernst²⁵, S. Errede¹⁶⁵, E. Ertel⁸³, M. Escalier¹¹⁷, H. Esch⁴³, C. Escobar¹²⁵, B. Esposito⁴⁷, A.I. Etienne¹³⁶, E. Etzion¹⁵³, H. Evans⁶¹, A. Ezhilov¹²³, L. Fabbri^{20a,20b}, G. Facini³¹, R.M. Fakhruddinov¹³⁰, S. Falciano^{132a}, R.J. Falla⁷⁸, J. Faltova¹²⁹, Y. Fang^{33a}, M. Fanti^{91a,91b}, A. Farbin⁸, A. Farilla^{134a}, T. Farooque¹², S. Farrell¹⁵, S.M. Farrington¹⁷⁰, P. Farthouat³⁰, F. Fassi^{135e}, P. Fassnacht³⁰, D. Fassouliotis⁹, M. Favucci Giannelli⁷⁷, A. Favareto^{50a,50b}, L. Fayard¹¹⁷, P. Federic^{144a}, O.L. Fedin^{123,m}, W. Fedorko¹⁶⁸, S. Feigl³⁰, L. Feligioni⁸⁵, C. Feng^{33d}, E.J. Feng⁶, H. Feng⁸⁹, A.B. Fenyuk¹³⁰, L. Feremenga⁸, P. Fernandez Martinez¹⁶⁷, S. Fernandez Perez³⁰, J. Ferrando⁵³, A. Ferrari¹⁶⁶, P. Ferrari¹⁰⁷, R. Ferrari^{121a}, D.E. Ferreira de Lima⁵³, A. Ferrer¹⁶⁷, D. Ferrere⁴⁹, C. Ferretti⁸⁹, A. Ferretto Parodi^{50a,50b}, M. Fiascaris³¹, F. Fiedler⁸³, A. Filipčič⁷⁵, M. Filipuzzi⁴², F. Filthaut¹⁰⁶, M. Fincke-Keeler¹⁶⁹, K.D. Finelli¹⁵⁰, M.C.N. Fiolhais^{126a,126c}, L. Fiorini¹⁶⁷, A. Firan⁴⁰, A. Fischer², C. Fischer¹², J. Fischer¹⁷⁵, W.C. Fisher⁹⁰, E.A. Fitzgerald²³, N. Flaschel⁴², I. Fleck¹⁴¹, P. Fleischmann⁸⁹, S. Fleischmann¹⁷⁵, G.T. Fletcher¹³⁹, G. Fletcher⁷⁶, R.R.M. Fletcher¹²², T. Flick¹⁷⁵, A. Floderus⁸¹, L.R. Flores Castillo^{60a}, M.J. Flowerdew¹⁰¹, A. Formica¹³⁶, A. Forti⁸⁴, D. Fournier¹¹⁷, H. Fox⁷², S. Fracchia¹², P. Francavilla⁸⁰, M. Franchini^{20a,20b}, D. Francis³⁰, L. Franconi¹¹⁹, M. Franklin⁵⁷, M. Frate¹⁶³, M. Fraternali^{121a,121b}, D. Freeborn⁷⁸, S.T. French²⁸, F. Friedrich⁴⁴, D. Froidevaux³⁰, J.A. Frost¹²⁰, C. Fukunaga¹⁵⁶, E. Fullana Torregrosa⁸³, B.G. Fulsom¹⁴³, T. Fusayasu¹⁰², J. Fuster¹⁶⁷, C. Gabaldon⁵⁵, O. Gabizon¹⁷⁵, A. Gabrielli^{20a,20b}, A. Gabrielli¹⁵, G.P. Gach¹⁸, S. Gadatsch³⁰, S. Gadomski⁴⁹, G. Gagliardi^{50a,50b}, P. Gagnon⁶¹, C. Galea¹⁰⁶, B. Galhardo^{126a,126c}, E.J. Gallas¹²⁰, B.J. Gallop¹³¹, P. Gallus¹²⁸, G. Galster³⁶, K.K. Gan¹¹¹, J. Gao^{33b,85}, Y. Gao⁴⁶, Y.S. Gao^{143,e}, F.M. Garay Walls⁴⁶, F. Garbersson¹⁷⁶, C. García¹⁶⁷, J.E. García Navarro¹⁶⁷, M. Garcia-Sciveres¹⁵, R.W. Gardner³¹, N. Garelli¹⁴³, V. Garonne¹¹⁹, C. Gatti⁴⁷, A. Gaudiello^{50a,50b}, G. Gaudio^{121a}, B. Gaur¹⁴¹,

L. Gauthier⁹⁵, P. Gauzzi^{132a,132b}, I.L. Gavrilenko⁹⁶, C. Gay¹⁶⁸, G. Gaycken²¹, E.N. Gazis¹⁰, P. Ge^{33d},
 Z. Gecse¹⁶⁸, C.N.P. Gee¹³¹, Ch. Geich-Gimbel²¹, M.P. Geisler^{58a}, C. Gemme^{50a}, M.H. Genest⁵⁵,
 S. Gentile^{132a,132b}, M. George⁵⁴, S. George⁷⁷, D. Gerbaudo¹⁶³, A. Gershon¹⁵³, S. Ghasemi¹⁴¹,
 H. Ghazlane^{135b}, B. Giacobbe^{20a}, S. Giagu^{132a,132b}, V. Giangiobbe¹², P. Giannetti^{124a,124b}, B. Gibbard²⁵,
 S.M. Gibson⁷⁷, M. Gilchriese¹⁵, T.P.S. Gillam²⁸, D. Gillberg³⁰, G. Gilles³⁴, D.M. Gingrich^{3,d},
 N. Giokaris⁹, M.P. Giordani^{164a,164c}, F.M. Giorgi^{20a}, F.M. Giorgi¹⁶, P.F. Giraud¹³⁶, P. Giromini⁴⁷,
 D. Giugni^{91a}, C. Giuliani⁴⁸, M. Giulini^{58b}, B.K. Gjelsten¹¹⁹, S. Gkaitatzis¹⁵⁴, I. Gkialas¹⁵⁴,
 E.L. Gkoukousis¹¹⁷, L.K. Gladilin⁹⁹, C. Glasman⁸², J. Glatzer³⁰, P.C.F. Glaysher⁴⁶, A. Glazov⁴²,
 M. Goblirsch-Kolb¹⁰¹, J.R. Goddard⁷⁶, J. Godlewski³⁹, S. Goldfarb⁸⁹, T. Golling⁴⁹, D. Golubkov¹³⁰,
 A. Gomes^{126a,126b,126d}, R. Gonçalo^{126a}, J. Goncalves Pinto Firmino Da Costa¹³⁶, L. Gonella²¹,
 S. González de la Hoz¹⁶⁷, G. Gonzalez Parra¹², S. Gonzalez-Sevilla⁴⁹, L. Goossens³⁰,
 P.A. Gorbounov⁹⁷, H.A. Gordon²⁵, I. Gorelov¹⁰⁵, B. Gorini³⁰, E. Gorini^{73a,73b}, A. Gorišek⁷⁵,
 E. Gornicki³⁹, A.T. Goshaw⁴⁵, C. Gössling⁴³, M.I. Gostkin⁶⁵, D. Goujdami^{135c}, A.G. Goussiou¹³⁸,
 N. Govender^{145b}, E. Gozani¹⁵², H.M.X. Grabas¹³⁷, L. Graber⁵⁴, I. Grabowska-Bold^{38a}, P.O.J. Gradin¹⁶⁶,
 P. Grafström^{20a,20b}, K.-J. Grahn⁴², J. Gramling⁴⁹, E. Gramstad¹¹⁹, S. Grancagnolo¹⁶, V. Gratchev¹²³,
 H.M. Gray³⁰, E. Graziani^{134a}, Z.D. Greenwood^{79,n}, C. Grefe²¹, K. Gregersen⁷⁸, I.M. Gregor⁴²,
 P. Grenier¹⁴³, J. Griffiths⁸, A.A. Grillo¹³⁷, K. Grimm⁷², S. Grinstein^{12,o}, Ph. Gris³⁴, J.-F. Grivaz¹¹⁷,
 J.P. Grohs⁴⁴, A. Grohsjean⁴², E. Gross¹⁷², J. Grosse-Knetter⁵⁴, G.C. Grossi⁷⁹, Z.J. GROUT¹⁴⁹, L. Guan⁸⁹,
 J. Guenther¹²⁸, F. Guescini⁴⁹, D. Guest¹⁷⁶, O. Gueta¹⁵³, E. Guido^{50a,50b}, T. Guillemain¹¹⁷, S. Guindon²,
 U. Gul⁵³, C. Gumpert⁴⁴, J. Guo^{33e}, Y. Guo^{33b,p}, S. Gupta¹²⁰, G. Gustavino^{132a,132b}, P. Gutierrez¹¹³,
 N.G. Gutierrez Ortiz⁷⁸, C. Gutschow⁴⁴, C. Guyot¹³⁶, C. Gwenlan¹²⁰, C.B. Gwilliam⁷⁴, A. Haas¹¹⁰,
 C. Haber¹⁵, H.K. Hadavand⁸, N. Haddad^{135e}, P. Haefner²¹, S. Hageböck²¹, Z. Hajduk³⁹,
 H. Hakobyan¹⁷⁷, M. Haleem⁴², J. Haley¹¹⁴, D. Hall¹²⁰, G. Halladjian⁹⁰, G.D. Hallowell⁸⁵,
 K. Hamacher¹⁷⁵, P. Hamal¹¹⁵, K. Hamano¹⁶⁹, A. Hamilton^{145a}, G.N. Hamity¹³⁹, P.G. Hamnett⁴²,
 L. Han^{33b}, K. Hanagaki^{66,q}, K. Hanawa¹⁵⁵, M. Hance¹⁵, B. Haney¹²², P. Hanke^{58a}, R. Hanna¹³⁶,
 J.B. Hansen³⁶, J.D. Hansen³⁶, M.C. Hansen²¹, P.H. Hansen³⁶, K. Hara¹⁶⁰, A.S. Hard¹⁷³,
 T. Harenberg¹⁷⁵, F. Hariri¹¹⁷, S. Harkusha⁹², R.D. Harrington⁴⁶, P.F. Harrison¹⁷⁰, F. Hartjes¹⁰⁷,
 M. Hasegawa⁶⁷, Y. Hasegawa¹⁴⁰, A. Hasib¹¹³, S. Hassani¹³⁶, S. Haug¹⁷, R. Hauser⁹⁰, L. Hauswald⁴⁴,
 M. Havranek¹²⁷, C.M. Hawkes¹⁸, R.J. Hawkings³⁰, A.D. Hawkins⁸¹, T. Hayashi¹⁶⁰, D. Hayden⁹⁰,
 C.P. Hays¹²⁰, J.M. Hays⁷⁶, H.S. Hayward⁷⁴, S.J. Haywood¹³¹, S.J. Head¹⁸, T. Heck⁸³, V. Hedberg⁸¹,
 L. Heelan⁸, S. Heim¹²², T. Heim¹⁷⁵, B. Heinemann¹⁵, L. Heinrich¹¹⁰, J. Hejbal¹²⁷, L. Helary²²,
 S. Hellman^{146a,146b}, D. Hellmich²¹, C. Hensens¹², J. Henderson¹²⁰, R.C.W. Henderson⁷², Y. Heng¹⁷³,
 C. Hengler⁴², S. Henkelmann¹⁶⁸, A. Henrichs¹⁷⁶, A.M. Henriques Correia³⁰, S. Henrot-Versille¹¹⁷,
 G.H. Herbert¹⁶, Y. Hernández Jiménez¹⁶⁷, R. Herrberg-Schubert¹⁶, G. Herten⁴⁸, R. Hertenberger¹⁰⁰,
 L. Hervas³⁰, G.G. Hesketh⁷⁸, N.P. Hessey¹⁰⁷, J.W. Hetherly⁴⁰, R. Hickling⁷⁶, E. Higón-Rodríguez¹⁶⁷,
 E. Hill¹⁶⁹, J.C. Hill²⁸, K.H. Hiller⁴², S.J. Hillier¹⁸, I. Hinchliffe¹⁵, E. Hines¹²², R.R. Hinman¹⁵,
 M. Hirose¹⁵⁷, D. Hirschbuehl¹⁷⁵, J. Hobbs¹⁴⁸, N. Hod¹⁰⁷, M.C. Hodgkinson¹³⁹, P. Hodgson¹³⁹,
 A. Hoecker³⁰, M.R. Hoferkamp¹⁰⁵, F. Hoenig¹⁰⁰, M. Hohlfield⁸³, D. Hohn²¹, T.R. Holmes¹⁵,
 M. Homann⁴³, T.M. Hong¹²⁵, W.H. Hopkins¹¹⁶, Y. Horii¹⁰³, A.J. Horton¹⁴², J.-Y. Hostachy⁵⁵, S. Hou¹⁵¹,
 A. Hoummada^{135a}, J. Howard¹²⁰, J. Howarth⁴², M. Hrabovsky¹¹⁵, I. Hristova¹⁶, J. Hrivnac¹¹⁷,
 T. Hryn'ova⁵, A. Hrynevich⁹³, C. Hsu^{145c}, P.J. Hsu^{151,r}, S.-C. Hsu¹³⁸, D. Hu³⁵, Q. Hu^{33b}, X. Hu⁸⁹,
 Y. Huang⁴², Z. Hubacek¹²⁸, F. Hubaut⁸⁵, F. Huegging²¹, T.B. Huffman¹²⁰, E.W. Hughes³⁵, G. Hughes⁷²,
 M. Huhtinen³⁰, T.A. Hülsing⁸³, N. Huseynov^{65,b}, J. Huston⁹⁰, J. Huth⁵⁷, G. Iacobucci⁴⁹, G. Iakovidis²⁵,
 I. Ibragimov¹⁴¹, L. Iconomidou-Fayard¹¹⁷, E. Ideal¹⁷⁶, Z. Idrissi^{135e}, P. Iengo³⁰, O. Igonkina¹⁰⁷,
 T. Iizawa¹⁷¹, Y. Ikegami⁶⁶, K. Ikematsu¹⁴¹, M. Ikeno⁶⁶, Y. Ilchenko^{31,s}, D. Iliadis¹⁵⁴, N. Ilic¹⁴³,
 T. Ince¹⁰¹, G. Introzzi^{121a,121b}, P. Ioannou⁹, M. Iodice^{134a}, K. Iordanidou³⁵, V. Ippolito⁵⁷,
 A. Irles Quiles¹⁶⁷, C. Isaksson¹⁶⁶, M. Ishino⁶⁸, M. Ishitsuka¹⁵⁷, R. Ishmukhametov¹¹¹, C. Issever¹²⁰,

S. Istin^{19a}, J.M. Iturbe Ponce⁸⁴, R. Iuppa^{133a,133b}, J. Ivarsson⁸¹, W. Iwanski³⁹, H. Iwasaki⁶⁶, J.M. Izen⁴¹,
 V. Izzo^{104a}, S. Jabbar³, B. Jackson¹²², M. Jackson⁷⁴, P. Jackson¹, M.R. Jaekel³⁰, V. Jain², K. Jakobs⁴⁸,
 S. Jakobsen³⁰, T. Jakoubek¹²⁷, J. Jakubek¹²⁸, D.O. Jamin¹¹⁴, D.K. Jana⁷⁹, E. Jansen⁷⁸, R. Jansky⁶²,
 J. Janssen²¹, M. Janus⁵⁴, G. Jarlskog⁸¹, N. Javadov^{65,b}, T. Javůrek⁴⁸, L. Jeanty¹⁵, J. Jejelava^{51a,t},
 G.-Y. Jeng¹⁵⁰, D. Jennens⁸⁸, P. Jenni^{48,u}, J. Jentzsch⁴³, C. Jeske¹⁷⁰, S. Jézéquel⁵, H. Ji¹⁷³, J. Jia¹⁴⁸,
 Y. Jiang^{33b}, S. Jiggins⁷⁸, J. Jimenez Pena¹⁶⁷, S. Jin^{33a}, A. Jinaru^{26b}, O. Jinnouchi¹⁵⁷, M.D. Joergensen³⁶,
 P. Johansson¹³⁹, K.A. Johns⁷, K. Jon-And^{146a,146b}, G. Jones¹⁷⁰, R.W.L. Jones⁷², T.J. Jones⁷⁴,
 J. Jongmanns^{58a}, P.M. Jorge^{126a,126b}, K.D. Joshi⁸⁴, J. Jovicevic^{159a}, X. Ju¹⁷³, C.A. Jung⁴³, P. Jussel⁶²,
 A. Juste Rozas^{12,o}, M. Kaci¹⁶⁷, A. Kaczmarek³⁹, M. Kado¹¹⁷, H. Kagan¹¹¹, M. Kagan¹⁴³, S.J. Kahn⁸⁵,
 E. Kajomovitz⁴⁵, C.W. Kalderon¹²⁰, S. Kama⁴⁰, A. Kamenshchikov¹³⁰, N. Kanaya¹⁵⁵, S. Kaneti²⁸,
 V.A. Kantserov⁹⁸, J. Kanzaki⁶⁶, B. Kaplan¹¹⁰, L.S. Kaplan¹⁷³, A. Kapliy³¹, D. Kar^{145c}, K. Karakostas¹⁰,
 A. Karamaoun³, N. Karastathis^{10,107}, M.J. Kareem⁵⁴, E. Karentzos¹⁰, M. Karnevskiy⁸³, S.N. Karpov⁶⁵,
 Z.M. Karpova⁶⁵, K. Karthik¹¹⁰, V. Kartvelishvili⁷², A.N. Karyukhin¹³⁰, K. Kasahara¹⁶⁰, L. Kashif¹⁷³,
 R.D. Kass¹¹¹, A. Kastanas¹⁴, Y. Kataoka¹⁵⁵, C. Kato¹⁵⁵, A. Katre⁴⁹, J. Katzy⁴², K. Kawagoe⁷⁰,
 T. Kawamoto¹⁵⁵, G. Kawamura⁵⁴, S. Kazama¹⁵⁵, V.F. Kazanin^{109,c}, R. Keeler¹⁶⁹, R. Kehoe⁴⁰,
 J.S. Keller⁴², J.J. Kempster⁷⁷, H. Keoshkerian⁸⁴, O. Kepka¹²⁷, B.P. Kerševan⁷⁵, S. Kersten¹⁷⁵,
 R.A. Keyes⁸⁷, F. Khalil-zada¹¹, H. Khandanyan^{146a,146b}, A. Khanov¹¹⁴, A.G. Kharlamov^{109,c},
 T.J. Khoo²⁸, V. Khovanskii⁹⁷, E. Khramov⁶⁵, J. Khubua^{51b,v}, S. Kido⁶⁷, H.Y. Kim⁸, S.H. Kim¹⁶⁰,
 Y.K. Kim³¹, N. Kimura¹⁵⁴, O.M. Kind¹⁶, B.T. King⁷⁴, M. King¹⁶⁷, S.B. King¹⁶⁸, J. Kirk¹³¹,
 A.E. Kiryunin¹⁰¹, T. Kishimoto⁶⁷, D. Kisielewska^{38a}, F. Kiss⁴⁸, K. Kiuchi¹⁶⁰, O. Kivernyk¹³⁶,
 E. Kladiva^{144b}, M.H. Klein³⁵, M. Klein⁷⁴, U. Klein⁷⁴, K. Kleinknecht⁸³, P. Klimek^{146a,146b},
 A. Klimentov²⁵, R. Klingenberg⁴³, J.A. Klinger¹³⁹, T. Klioutchnikova³⁰, E.-E. Kluge^{58a}, P. Kluit¹⁰⁷,
 S. Kluth¹⁰¹, J. Knapik³⁹, E. Kneringer⁶², E.B.F.G. Knoop⁸⁵, A. Knue⁵³, A. Kobayashi¹⁵⁵,
 D. Kobayashi¹⁵⁷, T. Kobayashi¹⁵⁵, M. Kobel⁴⁴, M. Kocian¹⁴³, P. Kodys¹²⁹, T. Koffas²⁹, E. Koffeman¹⁰⁷,
 L.A. Kogan¹²⁰, S. Kohlmann¹⁷⁵, Z. Kohout¹²⁸, T. Kohriki⁶⁶, T. Koi¹⁴³, H. Kolanoski¹⁶, M. Kolb^{58b},
 I. Koletsou⁵, A.A. Komar^{96,*}, Y. Komori¹⁵⁵, T. Kondo⁶⁶, N. Kondrashova⁴², K. Köneke⁴⁸,
 A.C. König¹⁰⁶, T. Kono⁶⁶, R. Konoplich^{110,w}, N. Konstantinidis⁷⁸, R. Kopeliansky¹⁵², S. Koperny^{38a},
 L. Köpke⁸³, A.K. Kopp⁴⁸, K. Korcyl³⁹, K. Kordas¹⁵⁴, A. Korn⁷⁸, A.A. Korol^{109,c}, I. Korolkov¹²,
 E.V. Korolkova¹³⁹, O. Kortner¹⁰¹, S. Kortner¹⁰¹, T. Kosek¹²⁹, V.V. Kostyukhin²¹, V.M. Kotov⁶⁵,
 A. Kotwal⁴⁵, A. Kourkoumeli-Charalampidi¹⁵⁴, C. Kourkoumelis⁹, V. Kouskoura²⁵, A. Koutsman^{159a},
 R. Kowalewski¹⁶⁹, T.Z. Kowalski^{38a}, W. Kozanecki¹³⁶, A.S. Kozhin¹³⁰, V.A. Kramarenko⁹⁹,
 G. Kramberger⁷⁵, D. Krasnopevtsev⁹⁸, M.W. Krasny⁸⁰, A. Krasznahorkay³⁰, J.K. Kraus²¹,
 A. Kravchenko²⁵, S. Kreiss¹¹⁰, M. Kretz^{58c}, J. Kretzschmar⁷⁴, K. Kreutzfeldt⁵², P. Krieger¹⁵⁸,
 K. Krizka³¹, K. Kroeninger⁴³, H. Kroha¹⁰¹, J. Kroll¹²², J. Kroseberg²¹, J. Krstic¹³, U. Kruchonak⁶⁵,
 H. Krüger²¹, N. Krumnack⁶⁴, A. Kruse¹⁷³, M.C. Kruse⁴⁵, M. Kruskal²², T. Kubota⁸⁸, H. Kucuk⁷⁸,
 S. Kudah^{4b}, S. Kuehn⁴⁸, A. Kugel^{58c}, F. Kuger¹⁷⁴, A. Kuhl¹³⁷, T. Kuhl⁴², V. Kukhtin⁶⁵, R. Kukla¹³⁶,
 Y. Kulchitsky⁹², S. Kuleshov^{32b}, M. Kuna^{132a,132b}, T. Kunigo⁶⁸, A. Kupco¹²⁷, H. Kurashige⁶⁷,
 Y.A. Kurochkin⁹², V. Kus¹²⁷, E.S. Kuwertz¹⁶⁹, M. Kuze¹⁵⁷, J. Kvita¹¹⁵, T. Kwan¹⁶⁹,
 D. Kyriazopoulos¹³⁹, A. La Rosa¹³⁷, J.L. La Rosa Navarro^{24d}, L. La Rotonda^{37a,37b}, C. Lacasta¹⁶⁷,
 F. Lacava^{132a,132b}, J. Lacey²⁹, H. Lacker¹⁶, D. Lacour⁸⁰, V.R. Lacuesta¹⁶⁷, E. Ladygin⁶⁵, R. Lafaye⁵,
 B. Laforge⁸⁰, T. Lagouri¹⁷⁶, S. Lai⁵⁴, L. Lambourne⁷⁸, S. Lammers⁶¹, C.L. Lampen⁷, W. Lampl⁷,
 E. Lançon¹³⁶, U. Landgraf⁴⁸, M.P.J. Landon⁷⁶, V.S. Lang^{58a}, J.C. Lange¹², A.J. Lankford¹⁶³, F. Lanni²⁵,
 K. Lantzsck²¹, A. Lanza^{121a}, S. Laplace⁸⁰, C. Lapoire³⁰, J.F. Laporte¹³⁶, T. Lari^{91a},
 F. Lasagni Manghi^{20a,20b}, M. Lassnig³⁰, P. Laurelli⁴⁷, W. Lavrijsen¹⁵, A.T. Law¹³⁷, P. Laycock⁷⁴,
 T. Lazovich⁵⁷, O. Le Dortz⁸⁰, E. Le Guirriec⁸⁵, E. Le Menedeu¹², M. LeBlanc¹⁶⁹, T. LeCompte⁶,
 F. Ledroit-Guillon⁵⁵, C.A. Lee^{145b}, S.C. Lee¹⁵¹, L. Lee¹, G. Lefebvre⁸⁰, M. Lefebvre¹⁶⁹, F. Legger¹⁰⁰,
 C. Leggett¹⁵, A. Lehan⁷⁴, G. Lehmann Miotto³⁰, X. Lei⁷, W.A. Leight²⁹, A. Leisos^{154,x}, A.G. Leister¹⁷⁶,

M.A.L. Leite^{24d}, R. Leitner¹²⁹, D. Lellouch¹⁷², B. Lemmer⁵⁴, K.J.C. Leney⁷⁸, T. Lenz²¹, B. Lenzi³⁰,
R. Leone⁷, S. Leone^{124a,124b}, C. Leonidopoulos⁴⁶, S. Leontsinis¹⁰, C. Leroy⁹⁵, C.G. Lester²⁸,
M. Levchenko¹²³, J. Levêque⁵, D. Levin⁸⁹, L.J. Levinson¹⁷², M. Levy¹⁸, A. Lewis¹²⁰, A.M. Leyko²¹,
M. Leyton⁴¹, B. Li^{33b,y}, H. Li¹⁴⁸, H.L. Li³¹, L. Li⁴⁵, L. Li^{33c}, S. Li⁴⁵, X. Li⁸⁴, Y. Li^{33c,z}, Z. Liang¹³⁷,
H. Liao³⁴, B. Liberti^{133a}, A. Liblong¹⁵⁸, P. Lichard³⁰, K. Lie¹⁶⁵, J. Liebal²¹, W. Liebig¹⁴, C. Limbach²¹,
A. Limosani¹⁵⁰, S.C. Lin^{151,aa}, T.H. Lin⁸³, F. Linde¹⁰⁷, B.E. Lindquist¹⁴⁸, J.T. Linnemann⁹⁰,
E. Lipeles¹²², A. Lipniacka¹⁴, M. Lisovyi^{58b}, T.M. Liss¹⁶⁵, D. Lissauer²⁵, A. Lister¹⁶⁸, A.M. Litke¹³⁷,
B. Liu^{151,ab}, D. Liu¹⁵¹, H. Liu⁸⁹, J. Liu⁸⁵, J.B. Liu^{33b}, K. Liu⁸⁵, L. Liu¹⁶⁵, M. Liu⁴⁵, M. Liu^{33b},
Y. Liu^{33b}, M. Livan^{121a,121b}, A. Lleres⁵⁵, J. Llorente Merino⁸², S.L. Lloyd⁷⁶, F. Lo Sterzo¹⁵¹,
E. Lobodzinska⁴², P. Loch⁷, W.S. Lockman¹³⁷, F.K. Loebinger⁸⁴, A.E. Loevschall-Jensen³⁶,
K.M. Loew²³, A. Loginov¹⁷⁶, T. Lohse¹⁶, K. Lohwasser⁴², M. Lokajicek¹²⁷, B.A. Long²², J.D. Long¹⁶⁵,
R.E. Long⁷², K.A. Looper¹¹¹, L. Lopes^{126a}, D. Lopez Mateos⁵⁷, B. Lopez Paredes¹³⁹, I. Lopez Paz¹²,
J. Lorenz¹⁰⁰, N. Lorenzo Martinez⁶¹, M. Losada¹⁶², P.J. Lösel¹⁰⁰, X. Lou^{33a}, A. Lounis¹¹⁷, J. Love⁶,
P.A. Love⁷², N. Lu⁸⁹, H.J. Lubatti¹³⁸, C. Luci^{132a,132b}, A. Lucotte⁵⁵, C. Luedtke⁴⁸, F. Luehring⁶¹,
W. Lukas⁶², L. Luminari^{132a}, O. Lundberg^{146a,146b}, B. Lund-Jensen¹⁴⁷, D. Lynn²⁵, R. Lysak¹²⁷,
E. Lytken⁸¹, H. Ma²⁵, L.L. Ma^{33d}, G. Maccarrone⁴⁷, A. Macchiolo¹⁰¹, C.M. Macdonald¹³⁹, B. Maček⁷⁵,
J. Machado Miguens^{122,126b}, D. Macina³⁰, D. Madaffari⁸⁵, R. Madar³⁴, H.J. Maddocks⁷², W.F. Mader⁴⁴,
A. Madsen¹⁶⁶, J. Maeda⁶⁷, S. Maeland¹⁴, T. Maeno²⁵, A. Maeviskiy⁹⁹, E. Magradze⁵⁴, K. Mahboubi⁴⁸,
J. Mahlstedt¹⁰⁷, C. Maiani¹³⁶, C. Maidantchik^{24a}, A.A. Maier¹⁰¹, T. Maier¹⁰⁰, A. Maio^{126a,126b,126d},
S. Majewski¹¹⁶, Y. Makida⁶⁶, N. Makovec¹¹⁷, B. Malaescu⁸⁰, Pa. Malecki³⁹, V.P. Maleev¹²³, F. Malek⁵⁵,
U. Mallik⁶³, D. Malon⁶, C. Malone¹⁴³, S. Maltezos¹⁰, V.M. Malyshev¹⁰⁹, S. Malyukov³⁰, J. Mamuzic⁴²,
G. Mancini⁴⁷, B. Mandelli³⁰, L. Mandelli^{91a}, I. Mandić⁷⁵, R. Mandrysch⁶³, J. Maneira^{126a,126b},
A. Manfredini¹⁰¹, L. Manhaes de Andrade Filho^{24b}, J. Manjarres Ramos^{159b}, A. Mann¹⁰⁰,
A. Manousakis-Katsikakis⁹, B. Mansoulie¹³⁶, R. Mantifel⁸⁷, M. Mantoani⁵⁴, L. Mapelli³⁰, L. March^{145c},
G. Marchiori⁸⁰, M. Marcisovsky¹²⁷, C.P. Marino¹⁶⁹, M. Marjanovic¹³, D.E. Marley⁸⁹, F. Marroquim^{24a},
S.P. Marsden⁸⁴, Z. Marshall¹⁵, L.F. Marti¹⁷, S. Marti-Garcia¹⁶⁷, B. Martin⁹⁰, T.A. Martin¹⁷⁰,
V.J. Martin⁴⁶, B. Martin dit Latour¹⁴, M. Martinez^{12,o}, S. Martin-Haugh¹³¹, V.S. Martoiu^{26b},
A.C. Martyniuk⁷⁸, M. Marx¹³⁸, F. Marzano^{132a}, A. Marzin³⁰, L. Masetti⁸³, T. Mashimo¹⁵⁵,
R. Mashinistov⁹⁶, J. Masik⁸⁴, A.L. Maslennikov^{109,c}, I. Massa^{20a,20b}, L. Massa^{20a,20b}, P. Mastrandrea¹⁴⁸,
A. Mastroberardino^{37a,37b}, T. Masubuchi¹⁵⁵, P. Mättig¹⁷⁵, J. Mattmann⁸³, J. Maurer^{26b}, S.J. Maxfield⁷⁴,
D.A. Maximov^{109,c}, R. Mazini¹⁵¹, S.M. Mazza^{91a,91b}, L. Mazzaferro^{133a,133b}, G. Mc Goldrick¹⁵⁸,
S.P. Mc Kee⁸⁹, A. McCarn⁸⁹, R.L. McCarthy¹⁴⁸, T.G. McCarthy²⁹, N.A. McCubbin¹³¹,
K.W. McFarlane^{56,*}, J.A. MCFayden⁷⁸, G. Mchedlidge⁵⁴, S.J. McMahon¹³¹, R.A. McPherson^{169,k},
M. Medinnis⁴², S. Meehan^{145a}, S. Mehlhase¹⁰⁰, A. Mehta⁷⁴, K. Meier^{58a}, C. Meineck¹⁰⁰, B. Meirose⁴¹,
B.R. Mellado Garcia^{145c}, F. Meloni¹⁷, A. Mengarelli^{20a,20b}, S. Menke¹⁰¹, E. Meoni¹⁶¹, K.M. Mercurio⁵⁷,
S. Mergelmeyer²¹, P. Mermod⁴⁹, L. Merola^{104a,104b}, C. Meroni^{91a}, F.S. Merritt³¹, A. Messina^{132a,132b},
J. Metcalfe²⁵, A.S. Mete¹⁶³, C. Meyer⁸³, C. Meyer¹²², J-P. Meyer¹³⁶, J. Meyer¹⁰⁷,
H. Meyer Zu Theenhausen^{58a}, R.P. Middleton¹³¹, S. Miglioranza^{164a,164c}, L. Mijović²¹, G. Mikenberg¹⁷²,
M. Mikestikova¹²⁷, M. Mikuž⁷⁵, M. Milesi⁸⁸, A. Milic³⁰, D.W. Miller³¹, C. Mills⁴⁶, A. Milov¹⁷²,
D.A. Milstead^{146a,146b}, A.A. Minaenko¹³⁰, Y. Minami¹⁵⁵, I.A. Minashvili⁶⁵, A.I. Mincer¹¹⁰,
B. Mindur^{38a}, M. Mineev⁶⁵, Y. Ming¹⁷³, L.M. Mir¹², K.P. Mistry¹²², T. Mitani¹⁷¹, J. Mitrevski¹⁰⁰,
V.A. Mitsou¹⁶⁷, A. Miucci⁴⁹, P.S. Miyagawa¹³⁹, J.U. Mjörnmark⁸¹, T. Moa^{146a,146b}, K. Mochizuki⁸⁵,
S. Mohapatra³⁵, W. Mohr⁴⁸, S. Molander^{146a,146b}, R. Moles-Valls²¹, R. Monden⁶⁸, K. Mönig⁴²,
C. Monini⁵⁵, J. Monk³⁶, E. Monnier⁸⁵, J. Montejo Berlingen¹², F. Monticelli⁷¹, S. Monzani^{132a,132b},
R.W. Moore³, N. Morange¹¹⁷, D. Moreno¹⁶², M. Moreno Llácer⁵⁴, P. Morettini^{50a}, D. Mori¹⁴²,
T. Mori¹⁵⁵, M. Morii⁵⁷, M. Morinaga¹⁵⁵, V. Morisbak¹¹⁹, S. Moritz⁸³, A.K. Morley¹⁵⁰, G. Mornacchi³⁰,
J.D. Morris⁷⁶, S.S. Mortensen³⁶, A. Morton⁵³, L. Morvaj¹⁰³, M. Mosidze^{51b}, J. Moss¹⁴³,

K. Motohashi¹⁵⁷, R. Mount¹⁴³, E. Mountricha²⁵, S.V. Mouraviev^{96,*}, E.J.W. Moyse⁸⁶, S. Muanza⁸⁵,
 R.D. Mudd¹⁸, F. Mueller¹⁰¹, J. Mueller¹²⁵, R.S.P. Mueller¹⁰⁰, T. Mueller²⁸, D. Muenstermann⁴⁹,
 P. Mullen⁵³, G.A. Mullier¹⁷, J.A. Murillo Quijada¹⁸, W.J. Murray^{170,131}, H. Musheghyan⁵⁴, E. Musto¹⁵²,
 A.G. Myagkov^{130,ac}, M. Myska¹²⁸, B.P. Nachman¹⁴³, O. Nackenhorst⁵⁴, J. Nadal⁵⁴, K. Nagai¹²⁰,
 R. Nagai¹⁵⁷, Y. Nagai⁸⁵, K. Nagano⁶⁶, A. Nagarkar¹¹¹, Y. Nagasaka⁵⁹, K. Nagata¹⁶⁰, M. Nagel¹⁰¹,
 E. Nagy⁸⁵, A.M. Nairz³⁰, Y. Nakahama³⁰, K. Nakamura⁶⁶, T. Nakamura¹⁵⁵, I. Nakano¹¹²,
 H. Namasivayam⁴¹, R.F. Naranjo Garcia⁴², R. Narayan³¹, D.I. Narrias Villar^{58a}, T. Naumann⁴²,
 G. Navarro¹⁶², R. Nayyar⁷, H.A. Neal⁸⁹, P.Yu. Nechaeva⁹⁶, T.J. Neep⁸⁴, P.D. Nef¹⁴³, A. Negri^{121a,121b},
 M. Negrini^{20a}, S. Nektarijevic¹⁰⁶, C. Nellist¹¹⁷, A. Nelson¹⁶³, S. Nemecek¹²⁷, P. Nemethy¹¹⁰,
 A.A. Nepomuceno^{24a}, M. Nessi^{30,ad}, M.S. Neubauer¹⁶⁵, M. Neumann¹⁷⁵, R.M. Neves¹¹⁰, P. Nevski²⁵,
 P.R. Newman¹⁸, D.H. Nguyen⁶, R.B. Nickerson¹²⁰, R. Nicolaidou¹³⁶, B. Nicquevert³⁰, J. Nielsen¹³⁷,
 N. Nikiforou³⁵, A. Nikiforov¹⁶, V. Nikolaenko^{130,ac}, I. Nikolic-Audit⁸⁰, K. Nikolopoulos¹⁸,
 J.K. Nilsen¹¹⁹, P. Nilsson²⁵, Y. Ninomiya¹⁵⁵, A. Nisati^{132a}, R. Nisius¹⁰¹, T. Nobe¹⁵⁵, M. Nomachi¹¹⁸,
 I. Nomidis²⁹, T. Nooney⁷⁶, S. Norberg¹¹³, M. Nordberg³⁰, O. Novgorodova⁴⁴, S. Nowak¹⁰¹,
 M. Nozaki⁶⁶, L. Nozka¹¹⁵, K. Ntekas¹⁰, G. Nunes Hanninger⁸⁸, T. Nunnemann¹⁰⁰, E. Nurse⁷⁸, F. Nuti⁸⁸,
 B.J. O'Brien⁴⁶, F. O'grady⁷, D.C. O'Neil¹⁴², V. O'Shea⁵³, F.G. Oakham^{29,d}, H. Oberlack¹⁰¹,
 T. Obermann²¹, J. Ocariz⁸⁰, A. Ochi⁶⁷, I. Ochoa⁷⁸, J.P. Ochoa-Ricoux^{32a}, S. Oda⁷⁰, S. Odaka⁶⁶,
 H. Ogren⁶¹, A. Oh⁸⁴, S.H. Oh⁴⁵, C.C. Ohm¹⁵, H. Ohman¹⁶⁶, H. Oide³⁰, W. Okamura¹¹⁸, H. Okawa¹⁶⁰,
 Y. Okumura³¹, T. Okuyama⁶⁶, A. Olariu^{26b}, S.A. Olivares Pino⁴⁶, D. Oliveira Damazio²⁵,
 E. Oliver Garcia¹⁶⁷, A. Olszewski³⁹, J. Olszowska³⁹, A. Onofre^{126a,126e}, K. Onogi¹⁰³, P.U.E. Onyisi^{31,s},
 C.J. Oram^{159a}, M.J. Oreglia³¹, Y. Oren¹⁵³, D. Orestano^{134a,134b}, N. Orlando¹⁵⁴, C. Oropeza Barrera⁵³,
 R.S. Orr¹⁵⁸, B. Osculati^{50a,50b}, R. Ospanov⁸⁴, G. Otero y Garzon²⁷, H. Otono⁷⁰, M. Ouchrif^{135d},
 F. Ould-Saada¹¹⁹, A. Ouraou¹³⁶, K.P. Oussoren¹⁰⁷, Q. Ouyang^{33a}, A. Ovcharova¹⁵, M. Owen⁵³,
 R.E. Owen¹⁸, V.E. Ozcan^{19a}, N. Ozturk⁸, K. Pachal¹⁴², A. Pacheco Pages¹², C. Padilla Aranda¹²,
 M. Pačáková⁴⁸, S. Pagan Griso¹⁵, E. Paganis¹³⁹, F. Paige²⁵, P. Pais⁸⁶, K. Pajchel¹¹⁹, G. Palacino^{159b},
 S. Palestini³⁰, M. Palka^{38b}, D. Pallin³⁴, A. Palma^{126a,126b}, Y.B. Pan¹⁷³, E.St. Panagiotopoulou¹⁰,
 C.E. Pandini⁸⁰, J.G. Panduro Vazquez⁷⁷, P. Pani^{146a,146b}, S. Panitkin²⁵, D. Pantea^{26b}, L. Paolozzi⁴⁹,
 Th.D. Papadopoulou¹⁰, K. Papageorgiou¹⁵⁴, A. Paramonov⁶, D. Paredes Hernandez¹⁵⁴, M.A. Parker²⁸,
 K.A. Parker¹³⁹, F. Parodi^{50a,50b}, J.A. Parsons³⁵, U. Parzefall¹⁴⁸, E. Pasqualucci^{132a}, S. Passaggio^{50a},
 F. Pastore^{134a,134b,*}, Fr. Pastore⁷⁷, G. Pásztor²⁹, S. Pataraiia¹⁷⁵, N.D. Patel¹⁵⁰, J.R. Pater⁸⁴, T. Pauly³⁰,
 J. Pearce¹⁶⁹, B. Pearson¹¹³, L.E. Pedersen³⁶, M. Pedersen¹¹⁹, S. Pedraza Lopez¹⁶⁷, R. Pedro^{126a,126b},
 S.V. Peleganchuk^{109,c}, D. Pelikan¹⁶⁶, O. Penc¹²⁷, C. Peng^{33a}, H. Peng^{33b}, B. Penning³¹, J. Penwell⁶¹,
 D.V. Perepelitsa²⁵, E. Perez Codina^{159a}, M.T. Pérez García-Estañ¹⁶⁷, L. Perini^{91a,91b}, H. Pernegger³⁰,
 S. Perrella^{104a,104b}, R. Peschke⁴², V.D. Peshekhonov⁶⁵, K. Peters³⁰, R.F.Y. Peters⁸⁴, B.A. Petersen³⁰,
 T.C. Petersen³⁶, E. Petit⁴², A. Petridis¹, C. Petridou¹⁵⁴, P. Petroff¹¹⁷, E. Petrolu^{132a}, F. Petrucci^{134a,134b},
 N.E. Pettersson¹⁵⁷, R. Pezoa^{32b}, P.W. Phillips¹³¹, G. Piacquadio¹⁴³, E. Pianori¹⁷⁰, A. Picazio⁴⁹,
 E. Piccaro⁷⁶, M. Piccinini^{20a,20b}, M.A. Pickering¹²⁰, R. Piegaia²⁷, D.T. Pignotti¹¹¹, J.E. Pilcher³¹,
 A.D. Pilkington⁸⁴, A.W.J. Pin⁸⁴, J. Pina^{126a,126b,126d}, M. Pinamonti^{164a,164c,ae}, J.L. Pinfeld³, A. Pingel³⁶,
 S. Pires⁸⁰, H. Pirumov⁴², M. Pitt¹⁷², C. Pizio^{91a,91b}, L. Plazak^{144a}, M.-A. Pleier²⁵, V. Pleskot¹²⁹,
 E. Plotnikova⁶⁵, P. Plucinski^{146a,146b}, D. Pluth⁶⁴, R. Poettgen^{146a,146b}, L. Poggioli¹¹⁷, D. Pohl²¹,
 G. Polesello^{121a}, A. Poley⁴², A. Policicchio^{37a,37b}, R. Polifka¹⁵⁸, A. Polini^{20a}, C.S. Pollard⁵³,
 V. Polychronakos²⁵, K. Pommès³⁰, L. Pontecorvo^{132a}, B.G. Pope⁹⁰, G.A. Popeneciu^{26c}, D.S. Popovic¹³,
 A. Poppleton³⁰, S. Pospisil¹²⁸, K. Potamianos¹⁵, I.N. Potrap⁶⁵, C.J. Potter¹⁴⁹, C.T. Potter¹¹⁶,
 G. Poulard³⁰, J. Poveda³⁰, V. Pozdnyakov⁶⁵, P. Pralavorio⁸⁵, A. Pranko¹⁵, S. Prasad³⁰, S. Prell⁶⁴,
 D. Price⁸⁴, L.E. Price⁶, M. Primavera^{73a}, S. Prince⁸⁷, M. Proissl⁴⁶, K. Prokofiev^{60c}, F. Prokoshin^{32b},
 E. Protopapadaki¹³⁶, S. Protopopescu²⁵, J. Proudfoot⁶, M. Przybycien^{38a}, E. Ptacek¹¹⁶,
 D. Puddu^{134a,134b}, E. Pueschel⁸⁶, D. Poldon¹⁴⁸, M. Purohit^{25,af}, P. Puzo¹¹⁷, J. Qian⁸⁹, G. Qin⁵³, Y. Qin⁸⁴,

A. Quadt⁵⁴, D.R. Quarrie¹⁵, W.B. Quayle^{164a,164b}, M. Queitsch-Maitland⁸⁴, D. Quilty⁵³, S. Raddum¹¹⁹,
 V. Radeka²⁵, V. Radescu⁴², S.K. Radhakrishnan¹⁴⁸, P. Radloff¹¹⁶, P. Rados⁸⁸, F. Ragusa^{91a,91b},
 G. Rahal¹⁷⁸, S. Rajagopalan²⁵, M. Rammensee³⁰, C. Rangel-Smith¹⁶⁶, F. Rauscher¹⁰⁰, S. Rave⁸³,
 T. Ravenscroft⁵³, M. Raymond³⁰, A.L. Read¹¹⁹, N.P. Readioff⁷⁴, D.M. Rebutzi^{121a,121b},
 A. Redelbach¹⁷⁴, G. Redlinger²⁵, R. Reece¹³⁷, K. Reeves⁴¹, L. Rehnisch¹⁶, J. Reichert¹²², H. Reisin²⁷,
 C. Rembser³⁰, H. Ren^{33a}, A. Renaud¹¹⁷, M. Rescigno^{132a}, S. Resconi^{91a}, O.L. Rezanova^{109,c},
 P. Reznicek¹²⁹, R. Rezvani⁹⁵, R. Richter¹⁰¹, S. Richter⁷⁸, E. Richter-Was^{38b}, O. Ricken²¹, M. Ridel⁸⁰,
 P. Rieck¹⁶, C.J. Riegel¹⁷⁵, J. Rieger⁵⁴, O. Rifki¹¹³, M. Rijssenbeek¹⁴⁸, A. Rimoldi^{121a,121b}, L. Rinaldi^{20a},
 B. Ristić⁴⁹, E. Ritsch³⁰, I. Riu¹², F. Rizatdinova¹¹⁴, E. Rizvi⁷⁶, S.H. Robertson^{87,k},
 A. Robichaud-Veronneau⁸⁷, D. Robinson²⁸, J.E.M. Robinson⁴², A. Robson⁵³, C. Roda^{124a,124b}, S. Roe³⁰,
 O. Røhne¹¹⁹, S. Rolli¹⁶¹, A. Romaniouk⁹⁸, M. Romano^{20a,20b}, S.M. Romano Saez³⁴,
 E. Romero Adam¹⁶⁷, N. Rompotis¹³⁸, M. Ronzani⁴⁸, L. Roos⁸⁰, E. Ros¹⁶⁷, S. Rosati^{132a}, K. Rosbach⁴⁸,
 P. Rose¹³⁷, P.L. Rosendahl¹⁴, O. Rosenthal¹⁴¹, V. Rossetti^{146a,146b}, E. Rossi^{104a,104b}, L.P. Rossi^{50a},
 J.H.N. Rosten²⁸, R. Rosten¹³⁸, M. Rotaru^{26b}, I. Roth¹⁷², J. Rothberg¹³⁸, D. Rousseau¹¹⁷, C.R. Royon¹³⁶,
 A. Rozanov⁸⁵, Y. Rozen¹⁵², X. Ruan^{145c}, F. Rubbo¹⁴³, I. Rubinskiy⁴², V.I. Rud⁹⁹, C. Rudolph⁴⁴,
 M.S. Rudolph¹⁵⁸, F. Rühr⁴⁸, A. Ruiz-Martinez³⁰, Z. Rurikova⁴⁸, N.A. Rusakovich⁶⁵, A. Ruschke¹⁰⁰,
 H.L. Russell¹³⁸, J.P. Rutherford⁷, N. Ruthmann⁴⁸, Y.F. Ryabov¹²³, M. Rybar¹⁶⁵, G. Rybkin¹¹⁷,
 N.C. Ryder¹²⁰, A.F. Saavedra¹⁵⁰, G. Sabato¹⁰⁷, S. Sacerdoti²⁷, A. Saddique³, H.F.W. Sadrozinski¹³⁷,
 R. Sadykov⁶⁵, F. Safai Tehrani^{132a}, P. Saha¹⁰⁸, M. Sahinsoy^{58a}, M. Saimpert¹³⁶, T. Saito¹⁵⁵,
 H. Sakamoto¹⁵⁵, Y. Sakurai¹⁷¹, G. Salamanna^{134a,134b}, A. Salamon^{133a}, J.E. Salazar Loyola^{32b},
 M. Saleem¹¹³, D. Salek¹⁰⁷, P.H. Sales De Bruin¹³⁸, D. Salihagic¹⁰¹, A. Salnikov¹⁴³, J. Salt¹⁶⁷,
 D. Salvatore^{37a,37b}, F. Salvatore¹⁴⁹, A. Salvucci^{60a}, A. Salzburger³⁰, D. Sammel⁴⁸, D. Sampsonidis¹⁵⁴,
 A. Sanchez^{104a,104b}, J. Sánchez¹⁶⁷, V. Sanchez Martinez¹⁶⁷, H. Sandaker¹¹⁹, R.L. Sandbach⁷⁶,
 H.G. Sander⁸³, M.P. Sanders¹⁰⁰, M. Sandhoff¹⁷⁵, C. Sandoval¹⁶², R. Sandstroem¹⁰¹, D.P.C. Sankey¹³¹,
 M. Sannino^{50a,50b}, A. Sansoni⁴⁷, C. Santoni³⁴, R. Santonico^{133a,133b}, H. Santos^{126a},
 I. Santoyo Castillo¹⁴⁹, K. Sapp¹²⁵, A. Saponov⁶⁵, J.G. Saraiva^{126a,126d}, B. Sarrazin²¹, O. Sasaki⁶⁶,
 Y. Sasaki¹⁵⁵, K. Sato¹⁶⁰, G. Sauvage^{5,*}, E. Sauvan⁵, G. Savage⁷⁷, P. Savard^{158,d}, C. Sawyer¹³¹,
 L. Sawyer^{79,n}, J. Saxon³¹, C. Sbarra^{20a}, A. Sbrizzi^{20a,20b}, T. Scanlon⁷⁸, D.A. Scannicchio¹⁶³,
 M. Scarcella¹⁵⁰, V. Scarfone^{37a,37b}, J. Schaarschmidt¹⁷², P. Schacht¹⁰¹, D. Schaefer³⁰, R. Schaefer⁴²,
 J. Schaeffer⁸³, S. Schaepe²¹, S. Schaezel^{58b}, U. Schäfer⁸³, A.C. Schaffer¹¹⁷, D. Schaile¹⁰⁰,
 R.D. Schamberger¹⁴⁸, V. Scharf^{58a}, V.A. Schegelsky¹²³, D. Scheirich¹²⁹, M. Schernau¹⁶³,
 C. Schiavi^{50a,50b}, C. Schillo⁴⁸, M. Schioppa^{37a,37b}, S. Schlenker³⁰, K. Schmieden³⁰, C. Schmitt⁸³,
 S. Schmitt^{58b}, S. Schmitt⁴², B. Schneider^{159a}, Y.J. Schnellbach⁷⁴, U. Schnoor⁴⁴, L. Schoeffel¹³⁶,
 A. Schoening^{58b}, B.D. Schoenrock⁹⁰, E. Schopf²¹, A.L.S. Schorlemmer⁵⁴, M. Schott⁸³, D. Schouten^{159a},
 J. Schovancova⁸, S. Schramm⁴⁹, M. Schreyer¹⁷⁴, C. Schroeder⁸³, N. Schuh⁸³, M.J. Schultens²¹,
 H.-C. Schultz-Coulon^{58a}, H. Schulz¹⁶, M. Schumacher⁴⁸, B.A. Schumm¹³⁷, Ph. Schune¹³⁶,
 C. Schwanenberger⁸⁴, A. Schwartzman¹⁴³, T.A. Schwarz⁸⁹, Ph. Schwegler¹⁰¹, H. Schweiger⁸⁴,
 Ph. Schwemling¹³⁶, R. Schwienhorst⁹⁰, J. Schwindling¹³⁶, T. Schwindt²¹, F.G. Sciacca¹⁷, E. Scifo¹¹⁷,
 G. Sciolla²³, F. Scuri^{124a,124b}, F. Scutti²¹, J. Searcy⁸⁹, G. Sedov⁴², E. Sedykh¹²³, P. Seema²¹,
 S.C. Seidel¹⁰⁵, A. Seiden¹³⁷, F. Seifert¹²⁸, J.M. Seixas^{24a}, G. Sekhniaidze^{104a}, K. Sekhon⁸⁹,
 S.J. Sekula⁴⁰, D.M. Seliverstov^{123,*}, N. Semprini-Cesari^{20a,20b}, C. Serfon³⁰, L. Serin¹¹⁷,
 L. Serkin^{164a,164b}, T. Serre⁸⁵, M. Sessa^{134a,134b}, R. Seuster^{159a}, H. Severini¹¹³, T. Sfiligoj⁷⁵, F. Sforza³⁰,
 A. Sfyrila³⁰, E. Shabalina⁵⁴, M. Shamim¹¹⁶, L.Y. Shan^{33a}, R. Shang¹⁶⁵, J.T. Shank²², M. Shapiro¹⁵,
 P.B. Shatalov⁹⁷, K. Shaw^{164a,164b}, S.M. Shaw⁸⁴, A. Shcherbakova^{146a,146b}, C.Y. Shehu¹⁴⁹, P. Sherwood⁷⁸,
 L. Shi^{151,ag}, S. Shimizu⁶⁷, C.O. Shimmin¹⁶³, M. Shimojima¹⁰², M. Shiyakova⁶⁵, A. Shmeleva⁹⁶,
 D. Shoaleh Saadi⁹⁵, M.J. Shochet³¹, S. Shojaii^{91a,91b}, S. Shrestha¹¹¹, E. Shulga⁹⁸, M.A. Shupe⁷,
 S. Shushkevich⁴², P. Sicho¹²⁷, P.E. Sidebo¹⁴⁷, O. Sidiropoulou¹⁷⁴, D. Sidorov¹¹⁴, A. Sidoti^{20a,20b},

F. Siegert⁴⁴, Dj. Sijacki¹³, J. Silva^{126a,126d}, Y. Silver¹⁵³, S.B. Silverstein^{146a}, V. Simak¹²⁸, O. Simard⁵, Lj. Simic¹³, S. Simion¹¹⁷, E. Simioni⁸³, B. Simmons⁷⁸, D. Simon³⁴, P. Sinervo¹⁵⁸, N.B. Sinev¹¹⁶, M. Sioli^{20a,20b}, G. Siragusa¹⁷⁴, A.N. Sisakyan^{65,*}, S.Yu. Sivoklov⁹⁹, J. Sjölin^{146a,146b}, T.B. Sjursen¹⁴, M.B. Skinner⁷², H.P. Skottowe⁵⁷, P. Skubic¹¹³, M. Slater¹⁸, T. Slavicek¹²⁸, M. Slawinska¹⁰⁷, K. Sliwa¹⁶¹, V. Smakhtin¹⁷², B.H. Smart⁴⁶, L. Smestad¹⁴, S.Yu. Smirnov⁹⁸, Y. Smirnov⁹⁸, L.N. Smirnova^{99,ah}, O. Smirnova⁸¹, M.N.K. Smith³⁵, R.W. Smith³⁵, M. Smizanska⁷², K. Smolek¹²⁸, A.A. Snesev⁹⁶, G. Snidero⁷⁶, S. Snyder²⁵, R. Sobie^{169,k}, F. Socher⁴⁴, A. Soffer¹⁵³, D.A. Soh^{151.ag}, G. Sokhranyi⁷⁵, C.A. Solans³⁰, M. Solar¹²⁸, J. Solc¹²⁸, E.Yu. Soldatov⁹⁸, U. Soldevila¹⁶⁷, A.A. Solodkov¹³⁰, A. Soloshenko⁶⁵, O.V. Solovyanov¹³⁰, V. Solovyev¹²³, P. Sommer⁴⁸, H.Y. Song^{33b,y}, N. Soni¹, A. Sood¹⁵, A. Sopczak¹²⁸, B. Sopko¹²⁸, V. Sopko¹²⁸, V. Sorin¹², D. Sosa^{58b}, M. Sosebee⁸, C.L. Sotiropoulou^{124a,124b}, R. Soualah^{164a,164c}, A.M. Soukharev^{109,c}, D. South⁴², B.C. Sowden⁷⁷, S. Spagnolo^{73a,73b}, M. Spalla^{124a,124b}, M. Spangenberg¹⁷⁰, F. Spanò⁷⁷, W.R. Spearman⁵⁷, D. Sperlich¹⁶, F. Spettel¹⁰¹, R. Spighi^{20a}, G. Spigo³⁰, L.A. Spiller⁸⁸, M. Spousta¹²⁹, T. Spreitzer¹⁵⁸, R.D. St. Denis^{53,*}, A. Stabile^{91a}, S. Staerz⁴⁴, J. Stahlman¹²², R. Stamen^{58a}, S. Stamm¹⁶, E. Stanecka³⁹, C. Stanescu^{134a}, M. Stanescu-Bellu⁴², M.M. Stanitzki⁴², S. Stapnes¹¹⁹, E.A. Starchenko¹³⁰, J. Stark⁵⁵, P. Staroba¹²⁷, P. Starovoitov^{58a}, R. Staszewski³⁹, P. Steinberg²⁵, B. Stelzer¹⁴², H.J. Stelzer³⁰, O. Stelzer-Chilton^{159a}, H. Stenzel⁵², G.A. Stewart⁵³, J.A. Stillings²¹, M.C. Stockton⁸⁷, M. Stoebe⁸⁷, G. Stoica^{26b}, P. Stolte⁵⁴, S. Stonjek¹⁰¹, A.R. Stradling⁸, A. Straessner⁴⁴, M.E. Stramaglia¹⁷, J. Strandberg¹⁴⁷, S. Strandberg^{146a,146b}, A. Strandlie¹¹⁹, E. Strauss¹⁴³, M. Strauss¹¹³, P. Strizenec^{144b}, R. Ströhmer¹⁷⁴, D.M. Strom¹¹⁶, R. Stroynowski⁴⁰, A. Strubig¹⁰⁶, S.A. Stucci¹⁷, B. Stugu¹⁴, N.A. Styles⁴², D. Su¹⁴³, J. Su¹²⁵, R. Subramaniam⁷⁹, A. Succurro¹², S. Suchek^{58a}, Y. Sugaya¹¹⁸, M. Suk¹²⁸, V.V. Sulin⁹⁶, S. Sultansoy^{4c}, T. Sumida⁶⁸, S. Sun⁵⁷, X. Sun^{33a}, J.E. Sundermann⁴⁸, K. Suruliz¹⁴⁹, G. Susinno^{37a,37b}, M.R. Sutton¹⁴⁹, S. Suzuki⁶⁶, M. Svatos¹²⁷, M. Swiatlowski¹⁴³, I. Sykora^{144a}, T. Sykora¹²⁹, D. Ta⁴⁸, C. Taccini^{134a,134b}, K. Tackmann⁴², J. Taenzer¹⁵⁸, A. Taffard¹⁶³, R. Tafirout^{159a}, N. Taiblum¹⁵³, H. Takai²⁵, R. Takashima⁶⁹, H. Takeda⁶⁷, T. Takeshita¹⁴⁰, Y. Takubo⁶⁶, M. Talby⁸⁵, A.A. Talyshv^{109,c}, J.Y.C. Tam¹⁷⁴, K.G. Tan⁸⁸, J. Tanaka¹⁵⁵, R. Tanaka¹¹⁷, S. Tanaka⁶⁶, B.B. Tannenwald¹¹¹, N. Tannoury²¹, S. Tapprogge⁸³, S. Tarem¹⁵², F. Tarrade²⁹, G.F. Tartarelli^{91a}, P. Tas¹²⁹, M. Tasevsky¹²⁷, T. Tashiro⁶⁸, E. Tassi^{37a,37b}, A. Tavares Delgado^{126a,126b}, Y. Tayalati^{135d}, F.E. Taylor⁹⁴, G.N. Taylor⁸⁸, P.T.E. Taylor⁸⁸, W. Taylor^{159b}, F.A. Teischinger³⁰, M. Teixeira Dias Castanheira⁷⁶, P. Teixeira-Dias⁷⁷, K.K. Temming⁴⁸, D. Temple¹⁴², H. Ten Kate³⁰, P.K. Teng¹⁵¹, J.J. Teoh¹¹⁸, F. Tepel¹⁷⁵, S. Terada⁶⁶, K. Terashi¹⁵⁵, J. Terron⁸², S. Terzo¹⁰¹, M. Testa⁴⁷, R.J. Teuscher^{158,k}, T. Theveneaux-Pelzer³⁴, J.P. Thomas¹⁸, J. Thomas-Wilsker⁷⁷, E.N. Thompson³⁵, P.D. Thompson¹⁸, R.J. Thompson⁸⁴, A.S. Thompson⁵³, L.A. Thomsen¹⁷⁶, E. Thomson¹²², M. Thomson²⁸, R.P. Thun^{89,*}, M.J. Tibbetts¹⁵, R.E. Ticse Torres⁸⁵, V.O. Tikhomirov^{96,ai}, Yu.A. Tikhonov^{109,c}, S. Timoshenko⁹⁸, E. Tiouchichine⁸⁵, P. Tipton¹⁷⁶, S. Tisserant⁸⁵, K. Todome¹⁵⁷, T. Todorov^{5,*}, S. Todorova-Nova¹²⁹, J. Tojo⁷⁰, S. Tokár^{144a}, K. Tokushuku⁶⁶, K. Tollefson⁹⁰, E. Tolley⁵⁷, L. Tomlinson⁸⁴, M. Tomoto¹⁰³, L. Tompkins^{143,aj}, K. Toms¹⁰⁵, E. Torrence¹¹⁶, H. Torres¹⁴², E. Torró Pastor¹³⁸, J. Toth^{85,ak}, F. Touchard⁸⁵, D.R. Tovey¹³⁹, T. Trefzger¹⁷⁴, L. Tremblet³⁰, A. Tricoli³⁰, I.M. Trigger^{159a}, S. Trincaz-Duvoid⁸⁰, M.F. Tripiana¹², W. Trischuk¹⁵⁸, B. Trocme⁵⁵, C. Troncon^{91a}, M. Trotter-McDonald¹⁵, M. Trovatelli¹⁶⁹, L. Truong^{164a,164c}, M. Trzebinski³⁹, A. Trzupek³⁹, C. Tsarouchas³⁰, J.C-L. Tseng¹²⁰, P.V. Tsiareshka⁹², D. Tsonou¹⁵⁴, G. Tsipolitis¹⁰, N. Tsirintanis⁹, S. Tsiskaridze¹², V. Tsiskaridze⁴⁸, E.G. Tskhadadze^{51a}, I.I. Tsukerman⁹⁷, V. Tsulaia¹⁵, S. Tsuno⁶⁶, D. Tsybychev¹⁴⁸, A. Tudorache^{26b}, V. Tudorache^{26b}, A.N. Tuna⁵⁷, S.A. Tupputi^{20a,20b}, S. Turchikhin^{99,ah}, D. Turecek¹²⁸, R. Turra^{91a,91b}, A.J. Turvey⁴⁰, P.M. Tuts³⁵, A. Tykhonov⁴⁹, M. Tylmad^{146a,146b}, M. Tyndel¹³¹, I. Ueda¹⁵⁵, R. Ueno²⁹, M. Ughetto^{146a,146b}, M. Uglan¹⁴, F. Ukegawa¹⁶⁰, G. Unal³⁰, A. Undrus²⁵, G. Unel¹⁶³, F.C. Ungaro⁴⁸, Y. Unno⁶⁶, C. Unverdorben¹⁰⁰, J. Urban^{144b}, P. Urquijo⁸⁸, P. Urrejola⁸³, G. Usai⁸, A. Usanova⁶², L. Vacavant⁸⁵, V. Vacek¹²⁸, B. Vachon⁸⁷, C. Valderanis⁸³, N. Valencic¹⁰⁷, S. Valentinetti^{20a,20b},

A. Valero¹⁶⁷, L. Valery¹², S. Valkar¹²⁹, E. Valladolid Gallego¹⁶⁷, S. Vallecorsa⁴⁹, J.A. Valls Ferrer¹⁶⁷, W. Van Den Wollenberg¹⁰⁷, P.C. Van Der Deijl¹⁰⁷, R. van der Geer¹⁰⁷, H. van der Graaf¹⁰⁷, N. van Eldik¹⁵², P. van Gemmeren⁶, J. Van Nieuwkoop¹⁴², I. van Vulpen¹⁰⁷, M.C. van Woerden³⁰, M. Vanadia^{132a,132b}, W. Vandelli³⁰, R. Vanguri¹²², A. Vaniachine⁶, F. Vannucci⁸⁰, G. Vardanyan¹⁷⁷, R. Vari^{132a}, E.W. Varnes⁷, T. Varol⁴⁰, D. Varouchas⁸⁰, A. Vartapetian⁸, K.E. Varvell¹⁵⁰, F. Vazeille³⁴, T. Vazquez Schroeder⁸⁷, J. Veatch⁷, L.M. Veloce¹⁵⁸, F. Veloso^{126a,126c}, T. Velz²¹, S. Veneziano^{132a}, A. Ventura^{73a,73b}, D. Ventura⁸⁶, M. Venturi¹⁶⁹, N. Venturi¹⁵⁸, A. Venturini²³, V. Vercesi^{121a}, M. Verducci^{132a,132b}, W. Verkerke¹⁰⁷, J.C. Vermeulen¹⁰⁷, A. Vest⁴⁴, M.C. Vetterli^{142,d}, O. Viazlo⁸¹, I. Vichou¹⁶⁵, T. Vickey¹³⁹, O.E. Vickey Boeriu¹³⁹, G.H.A. Viehhauser¹²⁰, S. Viel¹⁵, R. Vigne⁶², M. Villa^{20a,20b}, M. Villaplana Perez^{91a,91b}, E. Vilucchi⁴⁷, M.G. Vincter²⁹, V.B. Vinogradov⁶⁵, I. Vivarelli¹⁴⁹, F. Vives Vaque³, S. Vlachos¹⁰, D. Vladioiu¹⁰⁰, M. Vlasak¹²⁸, M. Vogel^{32a}, P. Vokac¹²⁸, G. Volpi^{124a,124b}, M. Volpi⁸⁸, H. von der Schmitt¹⁰¹, H. von Radziewski⁴⁸, E. von Toerne²¹, V. Vorobel¹²⁹, K. Vorobev⁹⁸, M. Vos¹⁶⁷, R. Voss³⁰, J.H. Vosseveld⁷⁴, N. Vranjes¹³, M. Vranjes Milosavljevic¹³, V. Vrba¹²⁷, M. Vreeswijk¹⁰⁷, R. Vuillermet³⁰, I. Vukotic³¹, Z. Vykydal¹²⁸, P. Wagner²¹, W. Wagner¹⁷⁵, H. Wahlberg⁷¹, S. Wahrmond⁴⁴, J. Wakabayashi¹⁰³, J. Walder⁷², R. Walker¹⁰⁰, W. Walkowiak¹⁴¹, C. Wang¹⁵¹, F. Wang¹⁷³, H. Wang¹⁵, H. Wang⁴⁰, J. Wang⁴², J. Wang¹⁵⁰, K. Wang⁸⁷, R. Wang⁶, S.M. Wang¹⁵¹, T. Wang²¹, T. Wang³⁵, X. Wang¹⁷⁶, C. Wanotayaroj¹¹⁶, A. Warburton⁸⁷, C.P. Ward²⁸, D.R. Wardrope⁷⁸, A. Washbrook⁴⁶, C. Wasicki⁴², P.M. Watkins¹⁸, A.T. Watson¹⁸, I.J. Watson¹⁵⁰, M.F. Watson¹⁸, G. Watts¹³⁸, S. Watts⁸⁴, B.M. Waugh⁷⁸, S. Webb⁸⁴, M.S. Weber¹⁷, S.W. Weber¹⁷⁴, J.S. Webster³¹, A.R. Weidberg¹²⁰, B. Weinert⁶¹, J. Weingarten⁵⁴, C. Weiser⁴⁸, H. Weits¹⁰⁷, P.S. Wells³⁰, T. Wenaus²⁵, T. Wengler³⁰, S. Wenig³⁰, N. Wermes²¹, M. Werner⁴⁸, P. Werner³⁰, M. Wessels^{58a}, J. Wetter¹⁶¹, K. Whalen¹¹⁶, A.M. Wharton⁷², A. White⁸, M.J. White¹, R. White^{32b}, S. White^{124a,124b}, D. Whiteson¹⁶³, F.J. Wickens¹³¹, W. Wiedenmann¹⁷³, M. Wielers¹³¹, P. Wienemann²¹, C. Wiglesworth³⁶, L.A.M. Wiik-Fuchs²¹, A. Wildauer¹⁰¹, H.G. Wilkens³⁰, H.H. Williams¹²², S. Williams¹⁰⁷, C. Willis⁹⁰, S. Willocq⁸⁶, A. Wilson⁸⁹, J.A. Wilson¹⁸, I. Wingerter-Seez⁵, F. Winklmeier¹¹⁶, B.T. Winter²¹, M. Wittgen¹⁴³, J. Wittkowski¹⁰⁰, S.J. Wollstadt⁸³, M.W. Wolter³⁹, H. Wolters^{126a,126c}, B.K. Wosiek³⁹, J. Wotschack³⁰, M.J. Woudstra⁸⁴, K.W. Wozniak³⁹, M. Wu⁵⁵, M. Wu³¹, S.L. Wu¹⁷³, X. Wu⁴⁹, Y. Wu⁸⁹, T.R. Wyatt⁸⁴, B.M. Wynne⁴⁶, S. Xella³⁶, D. Xu^{33a}, L. Xu²⁵, B. Yabsley¹⁵⁰, S. Yacoub^{145a}, R. Yakabe⁶⁷, M. Yamada⁶⁶, D. Yamaguchi¹⁵⁷, Y. Yamaguchi¹¹⁸, A. Yamamoto⁶⁶, S. Yamamoto¹⁵⁵, T. Yamanaka¹⁵⁵, K. Yamauchi¹⁰³, Y. Yamazaki⁶⁷, Z. Yan²², H. Yang^{33e}, H. Yang¹⁷³, Y. Yang¹⁵¹, W-M. Yao¹⁵, Y. Yasu⁶⁶, E. Yatsenko⁵, K.H. Yau Wong²¹, J. Ye⁴⁰, S. Ye²⁵, I. Yeletsikh⁶⁵, A.L. Yen⁵⁷, E. Yildirim⁴², K. Yorita¹⁷¹, R. Yoshida⁶, K. Yoshihara¹²², C. Young¹⁴³, C.J.S. Young³⁰, S. Youssef²², D.R. Yu¹⁵, J. Yu⁸, J.M. Yu⁸⁹, J. Yu¹¹⁴, L. Yuan⁶⁷, S.P.Y. Yuen²¹, A. Yurkewicz¹⁰⁸, I. Yusuff^{28,a1}, B. Zabinski³⁹, R. Zaidan⁶³, A.M. Zaitsev^{130,ac}, J. Zalieckas¹⁴, A. Zaman¹⁴⁸, S. Zambito⁵⁷, L. Zanello^{132a,132b}, D. Zanzi⁸⁸, C. Zeitnitz¹⁷⁵, M. Zeman¹²⁸, A. Zemla^{38a}, Q. Zeng¹⁴³, K. Zengel²³, O. Zenin¹³⁰, T. Ženiš^{144a}, D. Zerwas¹¹⁷, D. Zhang⁸⁹, F. Zhang¹⁷³, H. Zhang^{33c}, J. Zhang⁶, L. Zhang⁴⁸, R. Zhang^{33b,i}, X. Zhang^{33d}, Z. Zhang¹¹⁷, X. Zhao⁴⁰, Y. Zhao^{33d,117}, Z. Zhao^{33b}, A. Zhemchugov⁶⁵, J. Zhong¹²⁰, B. Zhou⁸⁹, C. Zhou⁴⁵, L. Zhou³⁵, L. Zhou⁴⁰, M. Zhou¹⁴⁸, N. Zhou^{33f}, C.G. Zhu^{33d}, H. Zhu^{33a}, J. Zhu⁸⁹, Y. Zhu^{33b}, X. Zhuang^{33a}, K. Zhukov⁹⁶, A. Zibell¹⁷⁴, D. Zieminska⁶¹, N.I. Zimine⁶⁵, C. Zimmermann⁸³, S. Zimmermann⁴⁸, Z. Zinonos⁵⁴, M. Zinser⁸³, M. Ziolkowski¹⁴¹, L. Živković¹³, G. Zobernig¹⁷³, A. Zoccoli^{20a,20b}, M. zur Nedden¹⁶, G. Zurzolo^{104a,104b}, L. Zwalinski³⁰.

¹ Department of Physics, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

² Physics Department, SUNY Albany, Albany NY, United States of America

³ Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton AB, Canada

⁴ (a) Department of Physics, Ankara University, Ankara; (b) Istanbul Aydin University, Istanbul; (c)

Division of Physics, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, Turkey

⁵ LAPP, CNRS/IN2P3 and Université Savoie Mont Blanc, Annecy-le-Vieux, France

⁶ High Energy Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne IL, United States of America

⁷ Department of Physics, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ, United States of America

⁸ Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington TX, United States of America

⁹ Physics Department, University of Athens, Athens, Greece

¹⁰ Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou, Greece

¹¹ Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan

¹² Institut de Física d'Altes Energies and Departament de Física de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

¹³ Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

¹⁴ Department for Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

¹⁵ Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley CA, United States of America

¹⁶ Department of Physics, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

¹⁷ Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

¹⁸ School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

¹⁹ ^(a) Department of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul; ^(b) Department of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep; ^(c) Department of Physics, Dogus University, Istanbul, Turkey

²⁰ ^(a) INFN Sezione di Bologna; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy

²¹ Physikalisches Institut, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany

²² Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston MA, United States of America

²³ Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham MA, United States of America

²⁴ ^(a) Universidade Federal do Rio De Janeiro COPPE/EE/IF, Rio de Janeiro; ^(b) Electrical Circuits Department, Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora; ^(c) Federal University of Sao Joao del Rei (UFSJ), Sao Joao del Rei; ^(d) Instituto de Fisica, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil

²⁵ Physics Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton NY, United States of America

²⁶ ^(a) Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania; ^(b) National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest; ^(c) National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Physics Department, Cluj Napoca; ^(d) University Politehnica Bucharest, Bucharest; ^(e) West University in Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania

²⁷ Departamento de Física, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina

²⁸ Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

²⁹ Department of Physics, Carleton University, Ottawa ON, Canada

³⁰ CERN, Geneva, Switzerland

³¹ Enrico Fermi Institute, University of Chicago, Chicago IL, United States of America

³² ^(a) Departamento de Física, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago; ^(b) Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile

³³ ^(a) Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing; ^(b) Department of Modern Physics, University of Science and Technology of China, Anhui; ^(c) Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Jiangsu; ^(d) School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong; ^(e) Department of Physics and Astronomy, Shanghai Key Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai; ^(f) Physics Department, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China

³⁴ Laboratoire de Physique Corpusculaire, Clermont Université and Université Blaise Pascal and CNRS/IN2P3, Clermont-Ferrand, France

- 35 Nevis Laboratory, Columbia University, Irvington NY, United States of America
- 36 Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, Kobenhavn, Denmark
- 37 ^(a) INFN Gruppo Collegato di Cosenza, Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università della Calabria, Rende, Italy
- 38 ^(a) AGH University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, Krakow; ^(b) Marian Smoluchowski Institute of Physics, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland
- 39 Institute of Nuclear Physics Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow, Poland
- 40 Physics Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas TX, United States of America
- 41 Physics Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson TX, United States of America
- 42 DESY, Hamburg and Zeuthen, Germany
- 43 Institut für Experimentelle Physik IV, Technische Universität Dortmund, Dortmund, Germany
- 44 Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden, Germany
- 45 Department of Physics, Duke University, Durham NC, United States of America
- 46 SUPA - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
- 47 INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
- 48 Fakultät für Mathematik und Physik, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg, Germany
- 49 Section de Physique, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland
- 50 ^(a) INFN Sezione di Genova; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova, Italy
- 51 ^(a) E. Andronikashvili Institute of Physics, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi; ^(b) High Energy Physics Institute, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 52 II Physikalisches Institut, Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Giessen, Germany
- 53 SUPA - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom
- 54 II Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany
- 55 Laboratoire de Physique Subatomique et de Cosmologie, Université Grenoble-Alpes, CNRS/IN2P3, Grenoble, France
- 56 Department of Physics, Hampton University, Hampton VA, United States of America
- 57 Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, United States of America
- 58 ^(a) Kirchhoff-Institut für Physik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg; ^(b) Physikalisches Institut, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg; ^(c) ZITI Institut für technische Informatik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Mannheim, Germany
- 59 Faculty of Applied Information Science, Hiroshima Institute of Technology, Hiroshima, Japan
- 60 ^(a) Department of Physics, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong; ^(b) Department of Physics, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; ^(c) Department of Physics, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China
- 61 Department of Physics, Indiana University, Bloomington IN, United States of America
- 62 Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, Austria
- 63 University of Iowa, Iowa City IA, United States of America
- 64 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Iowa State University, Ames IA, United States of America
- 65 Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, JINR Dubna, Dubna, Russia
- 66 KEK, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, Tsukuba, Japan
- 67 Graduate School of Science, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan
- 68 Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
- 69 Kyoto University of Education, Kyoto, Japan
- 70 Department of Physics, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan
- 71 Instituto de Física La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET, La Plata, Argentina
- 72 Physics Department, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom

- 73 ^(a) INFN Sezione di Lecce; ^(b) Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università del Salento, Lecce, Italy
- 74 Oliver Lodge Laboratory, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom
- 75 Department of Physics, Jožef Stefan Institute and University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- 76 School of Physics and Astronomy, Queen Mary University of London, London, United Kingdom
- 77 Department of Physics, Royal Holloway University of London, Surrey, United Kingdom
- 78 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University College London, London, United Kingdom
- 79 Louisiana Tech University, Ruston LA, United States of America
- 80 Laboratoire de Physique Nucléaire et de Hautes Energies, UPMC and Université Paris-Diderot and CNRS/IN2P3, Paris, France
- 81 Fysiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund, Sweden
- 82 Departamento de Física Teórica C-15, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
- 83 Institut für Physik, Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany
- 84 School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom
- 85 CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France
- 86 Department of Physics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA, United States of America
- 87 Department of Physics, McGill University, Montreal QC, Canada
- 88 School of Physics, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- 89 Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI, United States of America
- 90 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI, United States of America
- 91 ^(a) INFN Sezione di Milano; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Milano, Milano, Italy
- 92 B.I. Stepanov Institute of Physics, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Minsk, Republic of Belarus
- 93 National Scientific and Educational Centre for Particle and High Energy Physics, Minsk, Republic of Belarus
- 94 Department of Physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge MA, United States of America
- 95 Group of Particle Physics, University of Montreal, Montreal QC, Canada
- 96 P.N. Lebedev Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia
- 97 Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP), Moscow, Russia
- 98 National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia
- 99 D.V. Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
- 100 Fakultät für Physik, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, München, Germany
- 101 Max-Planck-Institut für Physik (Werner-Heisenberg-Institut), München, Germany
- 102 Nagasaki Institute of Applied Science, Nagasaki, Japan
- 103 Graduate School of Science and Kobayashi-Maskawa Institute, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan
- 104 ^(a) INFN Sezione di Napoli; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Napoli, Napoli, Italy
- 105 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM, United States of America
- 106 Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University Nijmegen/Nikhef, Nijmegen, Netherlands
- 107 Nikhef National Institute for Subatomic Physics and University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 108 Department of Physics, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb IL, United States of America
- 109 Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, SB RAS, Novosibirsk, Russia

- ¹¹⁰ Department of Physics, New York University, New York NY, United States of America
- ¹¹¹ Ohio State University, Columbus OH, United States of America
- ¹¹² Faculty of Science, Okayama University, Okayama, Japan
- ¹¹³ Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Oklahoma, Norman OK, United States of America
- ¹¹⁴ Department of Physics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater OK, United States of America
- ¹¹⁵ Palacký University, RCPTM, Olomouc, Czech Republic
- ¹¹⁶ Center for High Energy Physics, University of Oregon, Eugene OR, United States of America
- ¹¹⁷ LAL, Université Paris-Sud and CNRS/IN2P3, Orsay, France
- ¹¹⁸ Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan
- ¹¹⁹ Department of Physics, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
- ¹²⁰ Department of Physics, Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom
- ¹²¹ ^(a) INFN Sezione di Pavia; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
- ¹²² Department of Physics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA, United States of America
- ¹²³ National Research Centre "Kurchatov Institute" B.P.Konstantinov Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, St. Petersburg, Russia
- ¹²⁴ ^(a) INFN Sezione di Pisa; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica E. Fermi, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
- ¹²⁵ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA, United States of America
- ¹²⁶ ^(a) Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas - LIP, Lisboa; ^(b) Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa; ^(c) Department of Physics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra; ^(d) Centro de Física Nuclear da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa; ^(e) Departamento de Física, Universidade do Minho, Braga; ^(f) Departamento de Física Teórica y del Cosmos and CAFPE, Universidad de Granada, Granada (Spain); ^(g) Dep Física and CEFITEC of Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Caparica, Portugal
- ¹²⁷ Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic
- ¹²⁸ Czech Technical University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
- ¹²⁹ Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
- ¹³⁰ State Research Center Institute for High Energy Physics (Protvino), NRC KI, Russia, Russia
- ¹³¹ Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
- ¹³² ^(a) INFN Sezione di Roma; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma, Italy
- ¹³³ ^(a) INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata; ^(b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma, Italy
- ¹³⁴ ^(a) INFN Sezione di Roma Tre; ^(b) Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università Roma Tre, Roma, Italy
- ¹³⁵ ^(a) Faculté des Sciences Ain Chock, Réseau Universitaire de Physique des Hautes Energies - Université Hassan II, Casablanca; ^(b) Centre National de l'Énergie des Sciences Techniques Nucleaires, Rabat; ^(c) Faculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, LPHEA-Marrakech; ^(d) Faculté des Sciences, Université Mohamed Premier and LPTPM, Oujda; ^(e) Faculté des sciences, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, Morocco
- ¹³⁶ DSM/IRFU (Institut de Recherches sur les Lois Fondamentales de l'Univers), CEA Saclay (Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique et aux Énergies Alternatives), Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- ¹³⁷ Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz CA, United States of America
- ¹³⁸ Department of Physics, University of Washington, Seattle WA, United States of America
- ¹³⁹ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom
- ¹⁴⁰ Department of Physics, Shinshu University, Nagano, Japan

- ¹⁴¹ Fachbereich Physik, Universität Siegen, Siegen, Germany
- ¹⁴² Department of Physics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, Canada
- ¹⁴³ SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, Stanford CA, United States of America
- ¹⁴⁴ ^(a) Faculty of Mathematics, Physics & Informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava; ^(b) Department of Subnuclear Physics, Institute of Experimental Physics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Kosice, Slovak Republic
- ¹⁴⁵ ^(a) Department of Physics, University of Cape Town, Cape Town; ^(b) Department of Physics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg; ^(c) School of Physics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
- ¹⁴⁶ ^(a) Department of Physics, Stockholm University; ^(b) The Oskar Klein Centre, Stockholm, Sweden
- ¹⁴⁷ Physics Department, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden
- ¹⁴⁸ Departments of Physics & Astronomy and Chemistry, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY, United States of America
- ¹⁴⁹ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom
- ¹⁵⁰ School of Physics, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
- ¹⁵¹ Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
- ¹⁵² Department of Physics, Technion: Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, Israel
- ¹⁵³ Raymond and Beverly Sackler School of Physics and Astronomy, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel
- ¹⁵⁴ Department of Physics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece
- ¹⁵⁵ International Center for Elementary Particle Physics and Department of Physics, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan
- ¹⁵⁶ Graduate School of Science and Technology, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Tokyo, Japan
- ¹⁵⁷ Department of Physics, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan
- ¹⁵⁸ Department of Physics, University of Toronto, Toronto ON, Canada
- ¹⁵⁹ ^(a) TRIUMF, Vancouver BC; ^(b) Department of Physics and Astronomy, York University, Toronto ON, Canada
- ¹⁶⁰ Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, and Center for Integrated Research in Fundamental Science and Engineering, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan
- ¹⁶¹ Department of Physics and Astronomy, Tufts University, Medford MA, United States of America
- ¹⁶² Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Antonio Narino, Bogota, Colombia
- ¹⁶³ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California Irvine, Irvine CA, United States of America
- ¹⁶⁴ ^(a) INFN Gruppo Collegato di Udine, Sezione di Trieste, Udine; ^(b) ICTP, Trieste; ^(c) Dipartimento di Chimica, Fisica e Ambiente, Università di Udine, Udine, Italy
- ¹⁶⁵ Department of Physics, University of Illinois, Urbana IL, United States of America
- ¹⁶⁶ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden
- ¹⁶⁷ Instituto de Física Corpuscular (IFIC) and Departamento de Física Atómica, Molecular y Nuclear and Departamento de Ingeniería Electrónica and Instituto de Microelectrónica de Barcelona (IMB-CNM), University of Valencia and CSIC, Valencia, Spain
- ¹⁶⁸ Department of Physics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC, Canada
- ¹⁶⁹ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Victoria, Victoria BC, Canada
- ¹⁷⁰ Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom
- ¹⁷¹ Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan
- ¹⁷² Department of Particle Physics, The Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel
- ¹⁷³ Department of Physics, University of Wisconsin, Madison WI, United States of America
- ¹⁷⁴ Fakultät für Physik und Astronomie, Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, Germany

- ¹⁷⁵ Fachbereich C Physik, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany
- ¹⁷⁶ Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven CT, United States of America
- ¹⁷⁷ Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
- ¹⁷⁸ Centre de Calcul de l'Institut National de Physique Nucléaire et de Physique des Particules (IN2P3), Villeurbanne, France
- ^a Also at Department of Physics, King's College London, London, United Kingdom
- ^b Also at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan
- ^c Also at Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia
- ^d Also at TRIUMF, Vancouver BC, Canada
- ^e Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Fresno CA, United States of America
- ^f Also at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland
- ^g Also at Departamento de Física e Astronomia, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade do Porto, Portugal
- ^h Also at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia
- ⁱ Also at CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France
- ^j Also at Università di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli, Italy
- ^k Also at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP), Canada
- ^l Also at Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
- ^m Also at Department of Physics, St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia
- ⁿ Also at Louisiana Tech University, Ruston LA, United States of America
- ^o Also at Institutio Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona, Spain
- ^p Also at Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI, United States of America
- ^q Also at Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan
- ^r Also at Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan
- ^s Also at Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin TX, United States of America
- ^t Also at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Iliia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
- ^u Also at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland
- ^v Also at Georgian Technical University (GTU), Tbilisi, Georgia
- ^w Also at Manhattan College, New York NY, United States of America
- ^x Also at Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece
- ^y Also at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
- ^z Also at LAL, Université Paris-Sud and CNRS/IN2P3, Orsay, France
- ^{aa} Also at Academia Sinica Grid Computing, Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
- ^{ab} Also at School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China
- ^{ac} Also at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia
- ^{ad} Also at Section de Physique, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland
- ^{ae} Also at International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA), Trieste, Italy
- ^{af} Also at Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of South Carolina, Columbia SC, United States of America
- ^{ag} Also at School of Physics and Engineering, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China
- ^{ah} Also at Faculty of Physics, M.V.Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
- ^{ai} Also at National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia
- ^{aj} Also at Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford CA, United States of America
- ^{ak} Also at Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
- ^{al} Also at University of Malaya, Department of Physics, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- * Deceased