Donor–acceptor polymers with tunable infrared photoresponse†

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Donor–acceptor (DA) conjugated polymers provide an important platform for the development of solution-processed optoelectronic devices. The complex interrelation between electronic properties and conformational disorder in these materials complicates the identification of design guidelines to control the bandgap at low energies, limiting the design of new optoelectronic and device functionalities. Here, we demonstrate that DA polymers comprised of exocyclic olefin substituted cyclopentadithiophene donors, in combination with conventional electron acceptors, display very narrow optical bandgaps (1.2 > $E_g^{\text{opt}} > 0.7$ eV) and primary photoexcitations extending into the shortwave infrared. Theoretical calculations reveal fundamental structure–property relationships toward bandgap and energy level control in these spectral regions. Bulk heterojunction photodiodes fabricated using these new materials demonstrate a detectivity ($D^*$) of > 10¹¹ Jones within a spectral range of 0.6–1.43 µm and measurable $D^*$ to 1.8 µm, the longest reported to date for conjugated polymer based systems.

Unlike inorganic semiconductors, photoexcitation of OSCs does not lead to substantial instantaneous free carrier generation. Organic photoresponsive devices necessitate a lower ionization potential species (donor polymer) that manifests a singlet manifold transition $[S_0 \rightarrow S_1]$ and possess a large intensity in the spectral region of interest. Photoexcitation results in bound electron–hole pairs (excitons), which require a suitable energy offset, facilitated by a higher electron affinity acceptor (typically a fullerene derivative, Fig. 1), to separate the exciton and drive charge transfer at the interface (heterojunction) between the two materials. Dissociated charges are transported to their respective electrodes through interpenetrating bicontinuous donor and acceptor networks formed through nanoscale phase separation, driven in part, by solubilizing substituents required for solution processing. While general

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**Introduction**

The inherent flexibility afforded by molecular design has accelerated the development of a wide variety of (opto)electronic technologies based on solution-processable organic semiconductors (OSCs). Donor–acceptor (DA) polymers comprised of alternating electron-rich (donor) and electron-poor (acceptor) moieties have emerged as the dominant class of high performance materials to date in organic photovoltaic (OPV) and photodetector (OPD) applications. State-of-the-art OPDs, based on a bulk heterojunction (BHJ) architecture, have demonstrated a broad spectral response (0.3–1.45 µm), detectivities ($D^*$) > 10¹² Jones (1 Jones = 1 cm Hz¹/₂ W⁻¹), and a linear dynamic range over 100 dB in the visible sub-band (0.5 and 0.8 µm). There is significant interest in expanding the scope of these materials to improve functionality in the near-infrared (NIR: 0.9–1.4 µm) and extend utility into the short-wave IR (SWIR: 1.4–3 µm) to serve as alternatives to conventional inorganic semiconductor materials.²

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Fig. 1. Molecular structures of (a) poly(2,6-(4,4-bis(alkyl)-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b']dithiophene)-alt-4,7-(2,1,3-benzothiadiazole)] (PCPDTBT), (b) bridgehead imine substituted analog (P1b), where FG corresponds to a functional group, and (c) [6,6]-phenyl-C₇₀-butyric acid methyl ester ([70]PCBM).
design guidelines exist to tailor the HOMO–LUMO (highest occupied/lowest unoccupied molecular orbital) energies, absorption profiles, and transport characteristics of DA polymers, the complex interrelation between electronic properties and conformational disorder has precluded similar control at low energies.6

These complexities motivated our investigation of molecular design strategies that yield a reduction in bandgap and promote the appropriate properties suitable for long wavelength (l) light detection in a conventional BHJ architecture. The prototypical narrow bandgap polymer PCPDFTB (P1a) is shown in Fig. 1. In combination with [6,6]-phenyl-C61 butyric acid methyl ester ([70]PCBM), this material exhibits photoresponsivity extending into the NIR and high detectivities in solution-processed OPDs.167 Closely related bridgehead imine (C=N-Nph) substituted analogs (P1b) offer the advantage of systematic HOMO–LUMO modulation through varying electronic functionality on the phenyl (Ph) substituent.8 This design motif also permits careful control of structural and electronic features necessary to overcome conjugation saturation behavior and achieve solution-processable DA polymers with very narrow optical bandgaps ($E_{opt} < 0.5$ eV).9 It seemed reasonable that similar considerations should apply to copolymers comprised of bridgehead olefin (C=CHPh) substituted cyclopenta-dithiophene (CPDT) structural units, with the advantage of increasing the LUMO energies of the resultant polymers to facilitate photoinduced electron transfer (PET) to conventional fullerene acceptors.10,11

Experimental

Materials and methods

All manipulations of air and/or moisture sensitive compounds were performed under an inert atmosphere using standard glove box and Schlenk techniques. Reagents, unless otherwise specified, were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and used without further purification. Solvents (xylene, THF, toluene, and ethanol) were degassed and dried over 4 Å molecular sieves. Deuterated solvents (C6D6, CDCl3, and C2D2Cl4) were purchased from Cambridge Isotope Labs and used as received. 3,5-Dibromobenzaldehyde and 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]thiadiazole were purchased from Oakwood Chemical and Sigma-Aldrich respectively, and purified by column chromatography prior to use. Tetrakis(triphenylphosphine)palladium(0) was prepared according to previously reported procedures.9 2,6-Dibromo-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b’]dithiophene,10d 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]selenadiazole, 4,7-dibromo-[1,2,5]selenadiazolo[3,4-c]pyridine, 4,9-bis[5-bromo-thiophen-2-yl]-6,7-diocetyl-[1,2,5]thiadiazolo[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazole and 4,6-bis[5-bromo-2-thienyl]thieno[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazole were prepared according to previously reported procedures.12

$^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR spectra were collected on a Bruker Ascend 600 MHz spectrometer and chemical shifts, δ (ppm) were referenced to the residual solvent impurity peak of the given solvent. Data reported as: s = singlet, d = doublet, t = triplet, m = multiplet, br = broad; coupling constant(s), J are given in Hz. Flash chromatography was performed on a Teledyne Isco CombiFlash Purification System using RediSep RF prepacked columns. Microwave assisted reactions were performed in a CEM Discover microwave reactor. Matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight (MALDI-TOF) mass spectra were measured on a Bruker Microflex LT system. The number average molecular weight ($M_n$) and dispersity (D) were determined by gel permeation chromatography (GPC) relative to polystyrene standards at 160 °C in 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene (stabilized with 125 ppm of BHT) in an Agilent PL-GPC 220 High Temperature GPC/SEC system using a set of four PLgel 10 μm MIXED-B columns. Polymer samples were pre-dissolved at a concentration of 1.00–2.00 mg mL$^{-1}$ in 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene with stirring for 4 h at 150 °C. Overlap of aromatic protons with solvent occurred in both CDCl3 and C6D6 for compounds 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b. The structures were confirmed using $^{13}$C NMR and MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry.

UV-Vis-NIR spectroscopy

UV-Vis-NIR spectra were recorded using a Cary 5000 UV-Vis-NIR spectrophotometer. Thin films were prepared by spin coating a 10 mg mL$^{-1}$ chlorobenzene (C6H5Cl) solution onto quartz substrates at 2000 rpm.

Electrochemistry

Electrochemical characteristics were determined by cyclic voltammetry (50 mV s$^{-1}$) carried out on drop-cast polymer films at room temperature in degassed anhydrous acetonitrile with tetrabutylammonium hexafluorophosphate (0.1 M) as the supporting electrolyte. The working electrode was a platinum wire, the counter electrode was a platinum wire and the reference electrode was Ag/AgCl. After each measurement the reference electrode was calibrated with ferrocene and the potential axis was corrected to the normal hydrogen electrode (NHE) using −4.75 eV for NHE.7

Device fabrication

Pre-patterned indium tin oxide (ITO) substrates were ultrasonically cleaned in detergent, deionized water and 2-propanol for 15 min sequentially. Polyethyleneimine (PEIE) (35–40 wt%, 7000 g mol$^{-1}$, Sigma-Aldrich) was diluted with 2-methoxy-ethanol to achieve a concentration of 0.4 wt%. The diluted PEIE solution was spin coated onto the cleaned ITO substrate at 3500 rpm to form a film of ~10 nm, which was then annealed at 120 °C for 10 min in ambient conditions. For P2, the polymer and [70]PCBM (Osilla Ltd) in a 1:2 ratio were dissolved in anhydrous chlorobenzene : chloroform (3:1) at a polymer concentration of 14 mg mL$^{-1}$. For P3, the polymer and [70]PCBM (1:2) were dissolved in chlorobenzene : chloroform (2:1) at a polymer concentration of 15 mg mL$^{-1}$. The solutions were stirred at 45 °C overnight in a nitrogen atmosphere. 4% 1,8-diiodooctane (DIO) was added prior to spin coating P3. For P4 and P5, the polymers (8.5 mg mL$^{-1}$ and 7.5 mg mL$^{-1}$) were dissolved in chlorobenzene at 80 °C.
overnight in a nitrogen atmosphere then filtered. [70]PCBM was added to give a solution with a 1:2 polymer: fullerene ratio and stirred at 80 °C for an additional 1 h. After this time, 3% DIO was added to the solution. The blend solutions were spin coated on the PEIE/ITO substrate at a spin speed of 1800, 1800, 700, and 300 rpm to form films with thicknesses of 175, 184, 385, and 255 nm for P2, P3, P4, and P5 based devices, respectively. To complete the fabrication of the OPD, 15 nm MoO3, followed by 100 nm Ag, was deposited on top of the blend film through thermal evaporation in a vacuum chamber at a pressure of 3 × 10⁻⁶ mbar. The effective areas of these photodetectors was 8.5 mm² (P2) and 9.0 mm² (P3-P5) measured with the help of an optical microscope. The devices were encapsulated between glass slides bonded with epoxy and subsequently characterized in air. The photodiode spectral response was amplified through a low-noise amplifier with an internal load resistor of 100 kΩ for (low gain) and measured with a lock-in amplifier, using a Ω internal load resistor of 100 kΩ (for low gain) and measured with the help of an optical microscope. The devices were then pored into a separatory funnel, the water layer removed, and the organic phase washed with 3 × 100 mL 1 M NaOH with EDTA (3 equiv). NaOH with EDTA, water (1 × 100 mL), and brine (1 × 100 mL). The organic solution was then dried with MgSO₄ and filtered through Celite. Volatiles were removed in vacuo and purified by flash chromatography on silica gel (hexanes to hexanes: ethyl acetate = 95:5 as the eluent) afforded a colorless oil (4.06 g, 70%). ³¹H NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 9.97 {1H, s}, 7.51 {2H, s}, 2.66 {4H, t, J = 7.8 Hz}, 1.64 {4H, m}, 1.40–1.20 {44H, m}, 0.89 {6H, t, J = 6.7 Hz}. ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 192.96, 143.97, 136.83, 135.13, 127.28, 35.78, 32.08, 31.46, 29.86, 29.84, 29.83, 29.81, 29.73, 29.62, 29.52, 29.42, 29.42, 22.84, 14.25. MS (MALDI-TOF) m/z calculated for C₃₅H₆₂O: 498.48, found 498.83.

2,6-Dibromo-4-(3,5-didodecybenzylidene)-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b′]dithiophene (2a). Under nitrogen, sodium ethoxide (0.463 g, 6.80 mmol) was added to a suspension of 2,6-dibromo-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b′]dithiophene (1.04 g, 3.09 mmol) in ethanol (10 mL) at 50 °C. After 30 min of stirring, a 50 °C solution of 1a (1.37 g, 3.09 mmol) in ethanol (20 mL) was added dropwise. The reaction mixture was cooled and filtered under nitrogen for 3 h. The reaction was quenched with saturated NH₄Cl (150 mL) and stirred at that temperature for 2 h. Upon cooling, the reaction mixture was washed with water (1 × 100 mL) and extracted with dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed with water (1 × 100 mL), brine (1 × 100 mL), and then dried with MgSO₄. After filtration through a Buchner funnel, volatiles were removed in vacuo and purified by flash chromatography (pentane as the eluent) to yield a red oil that solidified upon standing (1.67 g, 71%). ¹³C NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 9.98 {1H, s}, 7.51 {2H, s}, 2.66 {4H, t, J = 7.8 Hz}, 1.64 {4H, m}, 1.40–1.20 {36H, m}, 0.89 {6H, t, J = 6.7 Hz}. ³¹H NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.23 {1H, s}, 7.01 {2H, s}, 6.83 {1H, s}, 2.57 {4H, t, J = 7.8 Hz}, 1.66 {4H, m}, 1.47–1.21 {36H, m}, 0.91 {6H, t, J = 6.7 Hz}. ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 145.18, 143.55, 140.58, 140.48, 136.69, 136.22, 132.04, 130.38, 130.05, 127.74, 126.48, 123.29, 111.46, 110.40, 36.31, 32.38, 32.06, 30.21, 30.16, 30.13, 30.12, 30.08, 29.87, 29.87, 23.16, 14.40. MS (MALDI-TOF) m/z calculated for C₄₀H₅₆Br₂S₂: 760.81, found 760.22.

2,6-Dibromo-4-(3,5-ditetradeccylbenzylidene)-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b′]dithiophene (2b). Under nitrogen, sodium ethoxide (0.453 g, 6.67 mmol) was added to a suspension of 2,6-dibromo-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b′]dithiophene (1.02 g, 3.03 mmol) in ethanol (10 mL) at 50 °C. After 30 min of stirring, a 50 °C solution of 1b (1.51 g, 3.03 mmol) in ethanol (20 mL) was added dropwise. The reaction mixture was slowly heated and refluxed under nitrogen for 3 h. The reaction was quenched with saturated NH₄Cl (150 mL) and stirred at that temperature for 2 h. Upon cooling, the reaction mixture was washed with water (1 × 100 mL) and extracted with dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed with water (1 × 100 mL), brine...
1H NMR (600 MHz, C6D6) δ 7.52 (1H, s), 7.49 (1H, s), 7.42 (1H, s), 7.36 (1H, s), 7.30 (1H, s), 7.06 (1H, s), 2.64 (4H, t, J = 7.8 Hz), 1.70 (4H, m), 1.47–1.21 (36H, m), 0.92 (6H, t, J = 6.7 Hz). 13C NMR (151 MHz, C6D6) δ 150.78, 147.29, 145.74, 143.29, 142.18, 137.50, 136.41, 131.59, 129.19, 129.14, 128.22, 128.06, 127.90, 36.43, 32.38, 32.15, 30.21, 30.18, 30.16, 30.06, 30.02, 29.87, 23.15, 14.42, –8.30, –8.37. MS (MALDI-TOF) m/z calculated for C44H64Br2S2: 816.47, found 816.28.

Synthesis of P3. A microwave tube was loaded with 3a (150 mg, 0.162 mmol) and 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]thiadiazole (45.4 mg, 0.154 mmol). The tube was brought inside a glove box and approximately 6.5 mg of Pd[PPh3]4 and 750 µL of xylenes were added. The tube was sealed and subjected to the following reaction conditions in a microwave reactor: 120 °C for 5 min, 140 °C for 5 min and 170 °C for 40 min. After this time the reaction was allowed to cool leaving a solid gelled material. The mixture was precipitated into methanol and collected via filtration. The residual solid was loaded into an extraction thimble and washed successively with methanol (4 h), acetone (4 h), hexanes (12 h), hexanes : THF (3 : 1) (12 h), and again with acetone (2 h). The polymer was dried in vacuo to give 89 mg (67%) of a blue solid. GPC (160 °C, 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene) Mn = 3.4 kg mol−1, Mw = 15.9 kg mol−1, PDI = 4.6. 1H NMR (600 MHz, C6D6) δ 8.55–8.65 (8H, br m), 3.35–2.51 (4H, br), 2.30–0.85 (46H, br).

Synthesis of P2. A microwave tube was loaded with 3a (150 mg, 0.162 mmol) and 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]selenadiazole (52.6 mg, 0.154 mmol). The tube was brought inside a glove box and approximately 6.5 mg of Pd[PPh3]4 and 750 µL of xylenes were added. The tube was sealed and subjected to the following reaction conditions in a microwave reactor: 120 °C for 5 min, 140 °C for 5 min and 170 °C for 40 min. After this time the reaction was allowed to cool leaving a solid gelled material. The mixture was precipitated into methanol and collected via filtration. The residual solid was loaded into an extraction thimble and washed successively with methanol (4 h), acetone (4 h), hexanes (12 h), hexanes : THF (3 : 1) (12 h), and again with acetone (2 h). The polymer was dried in vacuo to give 89 mg (71%) of a green solid. GPC (160 °C, 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene) Mn = 10.1 kg mol−1, Mw = 29.0 kg mol−1, PDI = 2.90. 1H NMR (600 MHz, C2D2Cl4, 398 K) δ 8.55–6.35 (8H, br m), 3.35–2.43 (4H, br), 2.27–0.81 (46H, br).

Synthesis of P1. A microwave tube was loaded with 3a (150 mg, 0.162 mmol) and 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]diadiazole (45.4 mg, 0.154 mmol). The tube was brought inside a glove box and approximately 6.5 mg of Pd[PPh3]4 and 750 µL of xylenes were added. The tube was sealed and subjected to the following reaction conditions in a microwave reactor: 120 °C for 5 min, 140 °C for 5 min and 170 °C for 40 min. After this time the reaction was allowed to cool leaving a solid gelled material. The mixture was precipitated into methanol and collected via filtration. The residual solid was loaded into an extraction thimble and washed successively with methanol (4 h), acetone (4 h), hexanes (12 h), hexanes : THF (3 : 1) (12 h), and again with acetone (2 h). The polymer was dried in vacuo to give 89 mg (66%) of a green solid. GPC (160 °C, 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene) Mn = 13.2 kg mol−1, Mw = 36.4 kg mol−1, PDI = 2.90. 1H NMR (600 MHz, C2D2Cl4, 398 K) δ 8.55–6.35 (8H, br m), 3.35–2.43 (4H, br), 2.27–0.81 (46H, br).
The mixture was precipitated into methanol and collected via filtration. The residual solid was loaded into an extraction thimble and washed successively with methanol (4 h), acetone (4 h), hexanes (12 h), THF (12 h), and again with acetone (2 h). The polymer was dried in vacuo to give 109 mg (74%) of a purple solid. GPC (160 °C, 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene) $M_n = 18.8$ kg mol$^{-1}$, $D = 1.91$. $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (solution, CHCl$_3$, 25 °C)/nm 1073 ($\epsilon$ L mol$^{-1}$ cm$^{-1}$ 34 009); $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (thin film)/nm 1079. $^1$H NMR (600 MHz, C$_2$D$_2$Cl$_4$, 398 K) $\delta$ 8.75–6.20 (7H, br m), 3.40–2.53 (4H, br m), 2.52–0.79 (46H, br).

**Synthesis of P5.** A microwave tube was loaded with 3b (150 mg, 0.152 mmol) and 4,6-bis(5-bromo-2-thienyl)thieno[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazole (67.2 mg, 0.145 mmol). The tube was brought inside a glove box and 4,6-bis(5-bromo-2-thienyl)thieno[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazole (67.2 mg, 0.145 mmol). The tube was brought inside a glove box and approximately 6.5 mg of Pd[PPh$_3$]$_4$ and 750 µL of xylenes were added. The tube was sealed and subjected to the following reaction conditions in a microwave reactor: 120 °C for 5 min, 140 °C for 5 min and 170 °C for 50 min. After this time the reaction was allowed to cool leaving a solid gelled material. The mixture was precipitated into methanol and collected via filtration. The residual solid was loaded into an extraction thimble and washed successively with methanol (4 h), acetone (4 h), hexanes (12 h), THF (12 h), and again with acetone (2 h). The polymer was dried in vacuo to give 153 mg (80%) of a purple solid. GPC (160 °C, 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene) $M_n = 18.8$ kg mol$^{-1}$, $D = 1.64$. $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (solution, CHCl$_3$, 25 °C)/nm 963 ($\epsilon$ L mol$^{-1}$ cm$^{-1}$ 22 843); $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (thin film)/nm 967. $^1$H NMR (600 MHz, C$_2$D$_2$Cl$_4$, 398 K) $\delta$ 8.55–6.25 (10H, br m), 3.25–2.43 (4H, br m), 2.50–0.51 (54H, br).

**Results and discussion**

Fig. 2 displays the copolymer structures considered in this study. DA polymers comprised of a C==CPh substituted CPDT donor (R, $R' = CH_3$ for theoretical examination) and acceptors based on 2,1,3-benzothiadiazole (BT, P1), 2,1,3-benzoselenadiazole (BSe, P2), pyridal[2,1,3]selenadiazole (PSe, P3), thiophene flanked [1,2,5]thiadiazolo[3,4-g]quinoxaline (TQ, P4), and thiophene flanked thieno[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazole (TT, P5), were theoretically examined on the basis of incorporating design elements anticipated to lead to progressive bandgap narrowing.$^{7a,c,12}$ The optimized ground-state ($S_0$) structures, electronic properties, and lowest excited-state ($S_1$) energies of P1–P5 were calculated with density functional theory (DFT) and time-dependent DFT, respectively, at the B3LYP/6-31G(d) level of theory. The HOMO and LUMO wavefunctions of P1, P4 and P5 are highlighted in Fig. 2 ($n = 4$ shown for clarity). P2 and P3 display similar structural and nodal characteristics to P1 and are highlighted in Fig. S1–S4 in the ESI.$^\dagger$

The comparatively lower bandgap of P1 ($E_{g}^{\text{DFT}} = 1.34$ eV) relative to P1a and P1b ($E_{g}^{\text{DFT}} = 1.56$ eV and 1.47 eV, respectively) can be ascribed to planarization of the CPDT core (in contrast to the modest curvature of C, Si, and C==NPh substituted analogs),$^{7a,c,12}$ a reduction in the overall bond length alternation (see Fig. S5, ESI).$^{14}$ P1 is highly planar with negligible rotational disorder (donor/acceptor dihedral angle = 179.36°), which contributes to extended electron delocalization.$^{13a}$ Solubilizing substituents are oriented nearly orthogonal and situated at a site remote to the polymer backbone in P1. Collectively, these structural features are likely to permit improved π-interactions, further mitigate backbone torsion, and increase resilience toward conjugation saturation behavior.$^{15}$ The lowest vertical excitation energy ($E_{\text{vert}}^{\text{opt}}$), which more appropriately approximates the onset of optical absorption, was obtained through extrapolation of a series of oligomers ($n = 1–6$) to $n \rightarrow \infty$ and fitting the data to the Kuhn equation.$^{16}$ In moving across the series we note a progressive narrowing of $E_{\text{vert}}^{\text{opt}}$: P1 = 1.04 eV; P2 = 0.94 eV; P3 = 0.88 eV; P4 = 0.68 eV; P5 = 0.63 eV, illustrating iterative control throughout the NIR and extension into the SWIR. Structural and electronic characteristics associated with C==CPh substitution manifest in other
donor/heterocyclic acceptor configurations (P4 and P5). As in several other similar materials, the HOMO is delocalized over the whole π-system and the LUMO is more localized on the acceptor. The spectra of the (P1–P5) oligomers exhibit one dominant S0 → S1 transition of HOMO → LUMO character with large oscillator strengths, consistent with DA polymers commonly utilized in photoresponsive devices (see ESI† for full details).13

Bandgap engineering at low energies will require careful chemical, electronic, and structural control. Modular side-chain engineering approaches are also necessary owing to the immense difficulty in achieving the appropriate phase characteristics associated with polymers5b and heterojunction blends.17 To address these challenges, we developed a synthetic route amenable to systematic structural and electronic variation as depicted in Scheme 1. Linear (R = C12H25 and C14H29) solubilizing groups were introduced into the 3,5-positions of the Ph ring to minimize backbone torsion and promote solubility. The coupling of dodecylzinc bromide and tetradecylzinc bromide with 3,5-dibromobenzaldehyde was accomplished using a Pd-PEPPSI-IPr pre-catalyst. Optimization of the solvent system (toluene/THF = 1:3), catalyst loading (3.5%), and heating of the reaction mixture ensured high conversions, providing the coupled products (1a and 1b) in overall yields > 60% in the presence of the aldehyde functionality. The reaction of 1a and 1b with 2,6-dibromo-4H-cyclopenta[2,1-b:3,4-b′]dithiophene using sodium ethoxide (NaOEt) in ethanol (EtOH) afforded the desired C=CPh substituted CPDT donors (2a and 2b) in 71% and 61% yield.18 Reaction with 5 equiv. of hexamethylditin (Me3SnSnMe3) using Pd(PPh3)4 in toluene affords the bis-trimethylstannyl donors (3a and 3b) in > 70% yields.

Copolymerization of 3a with 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]-thiadiazole (P1), 4,7-dibromobenzo[c][1,2,5]selenadiazole (P2), 4,7-dibromo-[1,2,5]selenadiazolo[3,4-c]pyridine (P3) 4,9-bis (5-bromothiophen-2-yl)-6,7-dioctyl-[1,2,5]thiadiazolo[3,4-c]quinoxaline (P4), and 3b with 4,6-bis(5-bromo-2-thienyl)thieno[3,4-c][1,2,5]thiadiazolo (P5) was carried out via microwave heating using Pd(PPh3)4 (3.5 mol%) as the catalyst in xylene.7a,12 This results in the rapid formation of polymers in reaction times < 60 minutes and isolated yields of 65–80% after purification by soxhlet extraction. P4 (R = C12H25, R' = C6H13) and P5 (R = C14H29) required additional solubilizing units to promote solubility of the extended π-systems in common organic solvents used for solution processing. Gel permeation chromatography (GPC) at 160 °C in 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene showed number average molecular weights (Mn) ~8–19 kg mol−1 ensuring > 10 repeat units to allow a comparison between experiment and theory, albeit well below typical high performance materials.

Absorption spectra of P1–P5 at 25 °C in chloroform (CHCl3) and as thin-films are shown in Fig. 3. Broad absorption profiles that peak in the NIR (λmax = 0.89–1.08 µm) with electronic transitions extending into the SWIR (~1.8 µm) are evident. In transitioning from CHCl3, at 25 °C to the solid state, λmax and the onset of optical absorption exhibit a bathochromic shift highly dependent on the structure of the polymer, indicating intermolecular interactions in the solid state. The optical bandgap (Eg(opt)) of P1 is ~1.1 eV, as estimated from the absorption onset of the thin film. Cyclic voltammetry (CV) is widely utilized to determine the frontier orbital energy levels of the donor and acceptor components in organic photoresponsive devices.19 CV shows that the HOMO is localized at ~−5.01 eV and the LUMO at ~−3.65 eV, as determined by the oxidation and reduction onset, respectively. This gives an electrochemical bandgap (Eg(lec)) of 1.36 eV, in excellent agreement with theory (Eg(opt) = 1.34 eV). We note an increase in the HOMO and stabilization of the LUMO relative to P1a (R = C12H25; EHO = −5.33 eV; ELUMO = −3.52 eV, Eg(lec) of 1.81 eV).76 Comparison with the corresponding C=NPh substituted analog shows an increase in both the HOMO–LUMO energies and overall narrowing of the bandgap (P1b: Ph = 3,5-C6H4(C2H5); EHO = −5.40 eV; ELUMO = −3.96 eV, Eg(lec) of 1.44 eV).76

Substitution of BT for BSe (P2), wherein a single atom in the benzochalcogenodiazole unit is varied from sulfur (S) to selenium (Se), results in red-shifted absorption profile (λmax = 0.93 µm) with measurable absorbance extending to λ > 1.4 µm in the solid state. The electrochemical characteristics reflect a
modest reduction in the LUMO energy ($E_{\text{LUMO}} = -3.75$ eV; $E_{\text{LUMO}}^\text{elec}$ of 1.26 eV). A further reduction is obtained by incorporating a PSe analog (P3), resulting in higher electron affinity in the backbone and a narrower bandgap ($E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt} = 0.94$ eV). A pronounced bathochromic shift is evident in transitioning to the solid state in P3, leading to measurable absorbance extending to $\lambda > 1.6$ µm. It should be noted that the PSe for BSe substitution also reduces the symmetry of the repeat unit, which may account for the broad spectral features. Electrochemical measurements are consistent with a reduction in both the HOMO-LUMO energies ($E_{\text{HOMO}} = -5.10$ eV; $E_{\text{LUMO}} = -3.95$ eV; $E_{\text{g}}^\text{elec}$ of 1.15 eV).

Heteroannulated variants of BT, such as thiazololo-quinoxaline (TQ) result in a significant reduction in the LUMO, which can be mitigated by the presence of thiophene space-filling interactions ($\lambda_{\text{opt}}$)–0.85 eV (1.46 µm). The pronounced absorption shoulder and similar spectral profiles in solution and the solid state are consistent with strong intermolecular interactions in P4. Substitution of the TQ-based acceptor with a thiophene flanked thiényl3,4-c[1,2,5]thiadiazole heterocycle results in a further redshift consistent with theoretical predictions (P5): $E_{\text{HOMO}} = -4.85$ eV; $E_{\text{LUMO}} = -3.95$ eV; $E_{\text{g}}^\text{elec}$ of 0.90 eV; $E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt}$ −0.74 eV). The utility of bridgehead C=CPh substitution in mitigating conjugation saturation behavior is evident in view of values for $E_{\text{g}}^\text{elec}$ and $E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt}$ that are similar with those from theory ($E_{\text{g}}^\text{BT}$ and $E_{\text{g}}^\text{BT}$), compared in Table 1. P1–P5 retain the appropriate difference in electrochemical potential relative to common fullerene acceptors, such as [60]PCBM and [70]PCBM (LUMO $\sim$−4.2 and −4.3 eV, respectively), providing the necessary driving force needed for efficient charge separation.

To demonstrate the ultimate utility of copolymers based on C=CPh substitution, BHJ photodetectors were fabricated using P2–P5 in combination with [70]PCBM. The device structure of the photodiode is shown in Fig. 4a and was used for screening purposes in the absence of significant optimization. The fabrication and measurement procedures were carried out as previously reported. Based on the energy level diagram in Fig. 4a, charge separated carriers can be efficiently generated by PET and subsequently transported via the BHJ nanomorphology to opposite electrodes. The low work function of 80% ethoxylated polyethyleneimine (PEIE) modified indium tin oxide (ITO) favors the collection of electrons at the cathode. MoO3 is used as the electron blocking layer at the anode. From initial examination, the devices in Fig. 4b show external quantum efficiencies (EQEs) similar to previously reported narrow bandgap organic devices demonstrating that photons absorbed by P2–P5 contribute to the photocurrent, spectrally resolved NIR-SWIR EQEs of 4%, 7%, 6%, and 0.2% were measured at $\lambda = 0.90, 1.10, 1.20,$ and 1.35 µm for P2, P3, P4, and P5 based devices, respectively. We note that devices based on the P5 [70]PCBM combination generally resulted in poor film quality when compared to P2–P4 devices.

The specific detectivity ($D^*$) is the main figure of merit that takes both dark current (Fig. 4c) and EQE (Fig. 4b) into account. It is defined as: $D^* = (\Delta F)^{1/2}/R_i n_i$, where $R_i$ is the responsivity related to EQE, A is the effective photodetector area, $\Delta F$ is the electrical bandwidth, and $n_i$ is the noise current measured in the dark. In P2 devices, peak specific detectivities at zero bias, where $D^* > 10^{11}$ Jones are obtained in the region of maximum absorption (0.6 < $\lambda < 1.1$ µm). At $\lambda_{\text{max}}$, $D^* = 5 \times 10^{11}$ Jones is obtained with measurable photocurrent spanning the range of absorption ($D^* = 1 \times 10^{10}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.3$ µm). P3 devices exhibit $D^* > 10^{11}$ Jones within a range of 0.6 < $\lambda < 1.3$ µm, $D^* = 2 \times 10^{11}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.33$ µm, and $D^* > 1 \times 10^{10}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.5$ µm. Addition of [70]PCBM alters the absorption spectra of P3 (Fig. S13†), leading to a bathochromic shift and increased photocurrent at longer $\lambda$. P4 devices operate between 0.6 < $\lambda < 1.5$ µm with $D^* = 3 \times 10^{11}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.2$ µm. We note that $D^*$ obtained for devices based on P3 and P4, in the absence of optimization, are greater than fused porphyrins ($D^* = 1.6 \times 10^{11}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.09$ µm and 2.3 × 10$^{10}$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.35$ µm)24 and are com-

![Table 1 Optical, electrochemical, and calculated properties of P1–P5](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (µm)</th>
<th>$E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt}$ [eV]</th>
<th>$E_{\text{g}}^\text{elec}$ [eV]</th>
<th>$E_{\text{HOMO}}/E_{\text{LUMO}}$</th>
<th>$E_{\text{g}}^\text{elec}$ [eV]</th>
<th>$E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt}$ [eV]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>−5.01/−3.65</td>
<td>1.36/1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>−5.01/−3.75</td>
<td>1.26/1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>−5.10/−3.95</td>
<td>1.15/1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>−4.80/−3.66</td>
<td>1.14/0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>−4.85/−3.95</td>
<td>0.90/0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Films spin coated from a C8H12Cl solution (10 mg mL$^{-1}$). $^b$Estimated from the absorption onset of the film. $^c$Estimated from the absorption onset of the film. $^d$HOMO/LUMO orbital energy gap ($E_{\text{g}}$). $^e$HOMO/LUMO orbital energy gap ($E_{\text{g}}^\text{opt}$).
parable to cooled PbS detectors in this range.²₆ P₅ devices exhibit $D^* > 10^4$ Jones within a range of $0.6 < \lambda < 1.65 \mu m$, with measurable photocurrent spanning the range of absorption ($D^* = 1.2 \times 10^8$ Jones at $\lambda = 1.8 \mu m$). The photocurrent generation of P₅ spans the technologically relevant region from 1–1.8 µm, traditionally accomplished using alloys of Ga₅In₃As. Fig. 4d demonstrates a progressive increase in the dark current as the bandgap is narrowed potentially limiting $D^*$ obtained with the P₅:PCBM combination, but pointing toward improvements associated with material and device optimization.

Conclusions

These results demonstrate detection of longer $\lambda$ light than was previously possible using OSCs and highlight the potential of tunable NIR-SWIR photoresponsive DA polymers that can be applied in a variety of photodetection applications traditionally limited to inorganic semiconductors, colloidal quantum dots, and carbon nanotubes. From a broader perspective, more precise narrow bandgap DA polymers will enable targeted engineering of the bandgap at low energies, the generation of materials for fundamental studies, and enable new functionality in the IR spectral regions.

Acknowledgements


References

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