

Precision Determination of the Neutral Weak Form Factor of ^{48}Ca

(The CREX Collaboration)

D. Adhikari,¹ H. Albataineh,² D. Androic,³ K.A. Aniol,⁴ D.S. Armstrong,⁵ T. Averett,⁵ C. Ayerbe Gayoso,⁵ S.K. Barcus,⁶ V. Bellini,⁷ R.S. Beminiwattha,⁸ J.F. Benesch,⁶ H. Bhatt,⁹ D. Bhatta Pathak,⁸ D. Bhetuwal,⁹ B. Blaikie,¹⁰ J. Boyd,¹¹ Q. Campagna,⁵ A. Camsonne,⁶ G.D. Cates,¹¹ Y. Chen,⁸ C. Clarke,¹² J.C. Cornejo,¹³ S. Covrig Dusa,⁶ M. M. Dalton,⁶ P. Datta,¹⁴ A. Deshpande,^{12,15,16} D. Dutta,⁹ C. Feldman,^{12,17} E. Fuchey,¹⁴ C. Gal,^{15,9,11,12} D. Gaskell,⁶ T. Gautam,¹⁸ M. Gericke,¹⁰ C. Ghosh,^{19,12} I. Halilovic,¹⁰ J.-O. Hansen,⁶ O. Hassan,¹⁰ F. Hauenstein,⁶ W. Henry,²⁰ C.J. Horowitz,²¹ C. Jantzi,¹¹ S. Jian,¹¹ S. Johnston,¹⁹ D.C. Jones,^{20,6} S. Kakkar,¹⁰ S. Katugampola,¹¹ C. Keppel,⁶ P.M. King,²² D.E. King,^{23,20} K.S. Kumar,¹⁹ T. Kutz,¹² N. Lashley-Colthirst,¹⁸ G. Leverick,¹⁰ H. Liu,¹⁹ N. Liyanage,¹¹ J. Mammei,¹⁰ R. Mammei,²⁴ M. McCaughan,⁶ D. McNulty,¹ D. Meekins,⁶ C. Metts,⁵ R. Michaels,⁶ M. Mihovilovic,^{25,26} M.M. Mondal,^{12,15} J. Napolitano,²⁰ A. Narayan,²⁷ D. Nikolaev,²⁰ V. Owen,⁵ C. Palatchi,^{11,15} J. Pan,¹⁰ B. Pandey,¹⁸ S. Park,^{9,12} K.D. Paschke,^{11,*} M. Petrusky,¹² M.L. Pitt,²⁸ S. Premathilake,¹¹ B. Quinn,¹³ R. Radloff,²² S. Rahman,¹⁰ M.N.H. Rashad,¹¹ A. Rathnayake,¹¹ B.T. Reed,²¹ P.E. Reimer,²⁹ R. Richards,¹² S. Riordan,²⁹ Y.R. Roblin,⁶ S. Seeds,¹⁴ A. Shahinyan,³⁰ P. Souder,²³ M. Thiel,³¹ Y. Tian,²³ G.M. Urciuoli,³² E.W. Wertz,⁵ B. Wojtsekhowski,⁶ B. Yale,⁵ T. Ye,¹² A. Yoon,³³ W. Xiong,^{23,34} A. Zec,¹¹ W. Zhang,¹² J. Zhang,^{12,15,34} and X. Zheng¹¹

¹Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho 83209, USA

²Texas A & M University - Kingsville, Kingsville, Texas 78363, USA

³University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science, Zagreb, HR 10002, Croatia

⁴California State University, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90032, USA

⁵William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185, USA

⁶Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, Virginia 23606, USA

⁷Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, Sezione di Catania, 95123 Catania, Italy

⁸Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana 71272, USA

⁹Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762, USA

¹⁰University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T2N2 Canada

¹¹University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22904, USA

¹²Stony Brook, State University of New York, Stony Brook, New York 11794, USA

¹³Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213, USA

¹⁴University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut 06269, USA

¹⁵Center for Frontiers in Nuclear Science, Stony Brook, New York 11794, USA

¹⁶Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York 11973, USA

¹⁷Institute for Advanced Computational Science, Stony Brook, New York 11794, USA

¹⁸Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia 23668, USA

¹⁹University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003, USA

²⁰Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122, USA

²¹Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, USA

²²Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA

²³Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244, USA

²⁴University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B2E9 Canada

²⁵Jožef Stefan Institute, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

²⁶Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, University of Ljubljana, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

²⁷Veer Kunwar Singh University, Ara, Bihar 802301, India

²⁸Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, USA

²⁹Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Lemont, Illinois 60439, USA

³⁰A. I. Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory (Yerevan Physics Institute), Yerevan 0036, Armenia

³¹Institut für Kernphysik, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz 55122, Germany

³²INFN - Sezione di Roma, I-00185, Rome, Italy

³³Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia 23606, USA

³⁴Shandong University, Qingdao, Shandong 266237, China

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We report a precise measurement of the parity-violating asymmetry A_{PV} in the elastic scattering of longitudinally polarized electrons from ^{48}Ca . We measure $A_{PV} = 2668 \pm 106$ (stat) ± 40 (syst) parts per billion, leading to an extraction of the neutral weak form factor $F_W(q = 0.8733 \text{ fm}^{-1}) = 0.1304 \pm 0.0052$ (stat) ± 0.0020 (syst) and the charge minus the weak form factor $F_{ch} - F_W = 0.0277 \pm 0.0055$. The resulting neutron skin thickness $R_n - R_p = 0.121 \pm 0.026$ (exp) ± 0.024 (model) fm is relatively thin yet consistent with many model calculations. The combined CREX and PREX results will

have implications for future energy density functional calculations and on the density dependence of the symmetry energy of nuclear matter.

Parity-violating electron scattering (PVES) can locate neutrons in nuclei with minimal model dependence since the electroweak reaction is free from most strong interaction uncertainties [1–3]. PVES measurements can be optimized to extract the thickness of the neutron skin, the excess in the root mean-square size of the distribution of neutrons over that of the protons, which depends on the pressure of neutron-rich matter as neutrons are pushed out against surface tension [4]. Recently PREX-2 accurately measured the thickness of the neutron skin in ^{208}Pb using this technique [5].

Chiral effective field theory can predict neutron skin thicknesses using two- and three-nucleon interactions [6]. These interactions are typically measured in few-nucleon systems where important three-neutron forces [7] are difficult to probe. Although such calculations using coupled cluster wave functions for both ^{48}Ca and ^{208}Pb have now been performed [6, 8], microscopic calculations are more feasible in the lighter ^{48}Ca system than for ^{208}Pb . We report here on a PVES measurement to constrain the neutron radius of ^{48}Ca . While the ^{208}Pb nucleus more closely approximates uniform nuclear matter, the ^{48}Ca nucleus lies in a different regime of smaller nuclei for which the neutron skin is more closely related to the details of the nuclear force. Not only is the new measurement complementary to the earlier ^{208}Pb result in this way, but it will allow direct comparison to more microscopic calculations.

More accurate neutron skin predictions across the periodic table [9–11] will be facilitated by these measurements in ^{48}Ca and ^{208}Pb . Since atomic parity violation experiments depend on the overlap of atomic electrons with neutrons, PVES neutron radii constraints along with nuclear theory may allow more precise low energy tests of the Standard Model [12–15]. Coherent neutrino-nucleus elastic scattering depends on neutron radii and the same weak form factor as does PVES [16, 17]. PVES weak form factor measurements along with theory may improve sensitivity to non-standard neutrino interactions. A neutron star is 18 orders of magnitude larger than a heavy nucleus yet they have similar density, and both systems are governed by the same strong interactions and equation of state relating pressure to density. [3, 18–21]. Therefore, laboratory neutron skin measurements have important implications for neutron star properties, such as radius and tidal deformability [22], and are complementary to direct X-ray [23] and gravitational wave observations [24–30].

Information on the ^{48}Ca weak charge distribution is obtained by measuring the PVES asymmetry (A_{PV}) of longitudinally polarized electrons off an isotopically enriched ^{48}Ca target in Hall A at Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility (JLab). At first Born approx-

imation, A_{PV} for a spin-zero nucleus is proportional to the ratio of weak (F_{W}) to charge (F_{ch}) form factors as [2]:

$$A_{\text{PV}} = \frac{\sigma_{\text{R}} - \sigma_{\text{L}}}{\sigma_{\text{R}} + \sigma_{\text{L}}} \approx \frac{G_{\text{F}} Q^2}{4\pi\alpha\sqrt{2}} \frac{|Q_{\text{W}}| F_{\text{W}}(q)}{Z F_{\text{ch}}(q)}, \quad (1)$$

where σ_{R} (σ_{L}) is the elastic differential cross-section of right (left) handed electrons off the target with a four-momentum transfer squared Q^2 , $q = \sqrt{Q^2}$. G_{F} is the Fermi constant, α is the fine structure constant, and the weak charge of ^{48}Ca is $Q_{\text{W}} = -26.0 \pm 0.1$ [31]. F_{ch} from existing measurements [31, 32] is used to extract F_{W} from the measured A_{PV} . The requirements for the practical application of this formula including precise Coulomb distortion calculations [33] are described elsewhere [2].

With the PREX-2 apparatus [5] reoptimized to measure scattering from the calcium target, A_{PV} was measured at a four-momentum transfer just below the first diffractive cross-section minimum of ^{48}Ca to achieve high sensitivity to the neutron skin. Using two dipole magnets, 4° – 6° scattered electrons from a 2.18 GeV beam impinging on the calcium target were directed through precisely-machined collimators into the acceptance of the two High-Resolution Spectrometers (HRSs) [34] placed symmetrically on either side of the beam-axis. The elastically scattered electrons were focused into a peak with a momentum dispersion of about 16 m, and intercepted by a single Cherenkov detector in each HRS arm consisting of a $16\text{ cm} \times 3.5\text{ cm} \times 0.5\text{ cm}$ fused-silica tile. Total internal reflection provided efficient Cherenkov light transmission to a photo-multiplier tube (PMT) coupled to the tile. The edge of the tile was positioned to ensure a momentum cut-off at ~ 2 MeV below the elastic peak, thus minimizing contributions from inelastic scattering.

The polarized electron beam was generated using circularly polarized laser light incident on a photocathode [35]. The beam polarization sign follows the handedness of the laser circular polarization selected at 120 Hz using a Pockels cell, creating 8.13 ms time windows of constant beam helicity arranged in quartet patterns (+ − − + or − + + −) to ensure cancellation of 60 Hz AC power pickup. The sign of each quartet was selected pseudo-randomly and reported to the data acquisition system (DAQ) with a delay to suppress electronic pickup.

Production data totaling 412 Coulombs were acquired with a $150\text{ }\mu\text{A}$ beam rastered over a 4 mm^2 area on enriched ^{48}Ca targets mounted on a cryogenically cooled copper ladder. Two 1 g/cm^2 targets, with atomic ^{48}Ca percent of $95.99 \pm 0.02\%$ and $91.70 \pm 0.01\%$ were used to acquire 7.8% and 92.2% of the total data, respectively.

The PMT anode current from the ~ 28 MHz scattered flux in each detector was integrated and digitized over each helicity window by high-precision 18-bit sam-

pling ADCs. The PMT was bench-tested before and after the run using light sources mimicking the integrated Cherenkov light response to determine linearity under operating conditions. Linearity was cross-checked throughout the run by monitoring detector output variation with beam current. The independent asymmetry measurements from each HRS were combined with equal weight; the final data set comprised 87M window quartets.

The beam intensity, energy and trajectory at the target were measured with beam monitors using the same integrating DAQ. Three radio frequency (RF) cavities (BCMs) measured the beam intensity, while six RF antenna monitors (BPMs) measured beam position along the beam line, including at dispersive locations with energy sensitivity. The polarized source was tuned to minimize the average helicity-correlated changes in beam parameters on target [36]. Two techniques were used to reverse the beam polarization relative to the voltage applied to the Pockels cell. A half-wave plate (HWP) was inserted in the laser beam path, separating the data sets into alternating reversal states with a period of about ten hours. The full production data set was additionally divided into three parts characterized by a change in spin precession in the low energy injector which reversed (or not) the polarization sign on target relative to that at the polarized source. Averaging over these reversals further suppressed spurious helicity-correlated asymmetries in A_{PV} .

The helicity-correlated integrated beam charge asymmetry was controlled using active feedback, and averaged to -89 ppb over the run. Modulations of air-core magnets and an accelerating RF cavity placed upstream of all BPMs were used to calibrate detector sensitivities. This calibration was crosschecked with a regression analysis based on intrinsic beam fluctuations. The individual quartet measurements of A_{PV} were corrected for beam intensity, trajectory and energy fluctuations; the helicity-correlated correction averaged to 53 ± 5 ppb over the run. Consistency checks demonstrated that the residual detector asymmetry fluctuations were dominated by counting statistics.

Two polarimeters measured the longitudinal beam polarization P_b upstream of the target. Operating continuously through the run, the Compton polarimeter used a calorimeter to measure the energy of photons scattered by the electron beam traversing an optical cavity of circularly polarized green laser light [37]. Calibration uncertainties were minimized by integrating the calorimeter response for each helicity window, thereby eliminating a low-energy threshold. Another polarimeter that detected Møller-scattered electrons from a polarized iron foil target in a 4 T magnetic field was deployed 9 times periodically during the run. The results were consistent between polarimeters and combined to yield $P_b = 87.10 \pm 0.39\%$.

Calibration data were collected at reduced beam current (100 nA to 1 μ A) to enable counting and tracking

of individual electrons. With Cherenkov detector PMT gains increased to detect individual particle pulses in coincidence with drift chamber tracks and trigger scintillators hits, the reconstructed scattering angle and momentum were calibrated using scattered electrons from a thin carbon target and a steel-walled water flow target, mounted on a separate, water-cooled target ladder. The momentum recoil difference between elastic scattering from hydrogen and oxygen in the water target calibrates the central angle to 0.02° absolute accuracy.

Similar counting data collected with the production ^{48}Ca target were used to estimate the fractional contribution from the first three low-lying excited states in ^{48}Ca , which totaled 1.4% of the accepted rate. Calculation of the excited state asymmetries and conservative uncertainties [31] lead to the A_{PV} corrections listed in Table I. The ^{48}Ca parity-conserving transverse single-spin asymmetry A_T was independently measured [38] and, along with counting data, used to estimate a 13 ppb uncertainty in the A_T correction to A_{PV} , due to potential residual transverse beam polarization coupled to imperfect symmetry in the left-right and top-bottom acceptance.

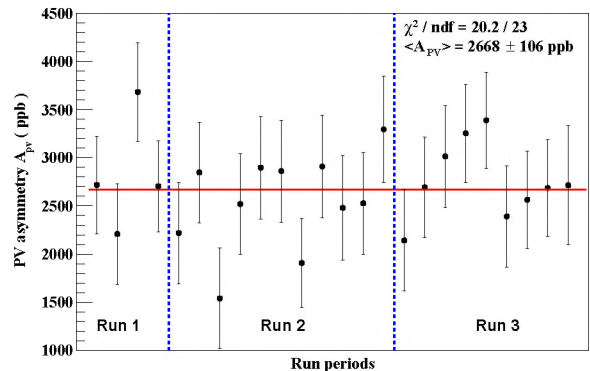


FIG. 1. Measurements of A_{PV} with statistical uncertainty; each ≈ 40 hour period includes two states with complementary HWP settings. The three run periods demarcate injector spin orientation reversals.

Using a theoretically computed $A_{PV}(^{40}\text{Ca}) = 2430 \pm 30$ ppb [31], the A_{PV} contribution from the assayed 7.95% ^{40}Ca target fraction was calculated to be 19 ± 3 ppb. Figure 1 shows A_{PV} measurements after all corrections in roughly uniform periods, with the global average $A_{PV} = 2668 \pm 106$ ppb.

To compare this result to a theoretical model, the acceptance function $\epsilon(\theta)$ provides the distribution of scattering angles intercepting the Cherenkov detectors:

$$\langle A \rangle = \frac{\int d\theta \sin \theta A(\theta) \frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega} \epsilon(\theta)}{\int d\theta \sin \theta \frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega} \epsilon(\theta)} \quad (2)$$

where $\frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega}$ is the differential cross-section and $A(\theta)$ is the modeled parity violating asymmetry as a function of scattering angle [39]. Simulation modeling of the calibration

data was used to calculate $\epsilon(\theta)$. Radiative and rescattering effects in the target change the average accepted angle by 1.5%. The mean kinematics were found to be $\langle\theta\rangle = 4.51^\circ \pm 0.02^\circ$ and $\langle Q^2 \rangle = 0.0297 \pm 0.0002 \text{ (GeV/c)}^2$. Alternative acceptance functions, calculated using geometric and magnetic tolerances but still constrained to match spectra from calibration runs, were used to calculate an uncertainty of ± 24 ppb on A_{PV} due to possible variation of $\epsilon(\theta)$.

TABLE I. A_{PV} corrections and corresponding systematic uncertainties, normalized to account for polarization and background fractions.

Correction	Absolute [ppb]	Relative [%]
Beam polarization	382 ± 13	14.3 ± 0.5
Beam trajectory & energy	68 ± 7	2.5 ± 0.3
Beam charge asymmetry	112 ± 1	4.2 ± 0.0
Isotopic purity	19 ± 3	0.7 ± 0.1
3.831 MeV (2^+) inelastic	-35 ± 19	-1.3 ± 0.7
4.507 MeV (3^-) inelastic	0 ± 10	0 ± 0.4
5.370 MeV (3^-) inelastic	-2 ± 4	-0.1 ± 0.1
Transverse asymmetry	0 ± 13	0 ± 0.5
Detector non-linearity	0 ± 7	0 ± 0.3
Acceptance	0 ± 24	0 ± 0.9
Radiative corrections (Q_W)	0 ± 10	0 ± 0.4
Total systematic uncertainty	40 ppb	1.5%
Statistical uncertainty	106 ppb	4.0%

Table I lists all significant corrections and corresponding uncertainties; the total systematic uncertainty is 40 ppb.

The weak form factor is directly related to A_{PV} in Eqn 1, and is the Fourier transform of the weak charge density ρ_W ,

$$F_W(q) = \frac{1}{Q_W} \int d^3r j_0(qr) \rho_W(r). \quad (3)$$

We assume a shape for $\rho_W(r)$ and calculate A_{PV} , including Coulomb distortions and integrating over the acceptance $\epsilon(\theta)$. After adjusting the radius parameter in the $\rho_W(r)$ model [31] to reproduce the measured A_{PV} , we evaluate $F_W(q)$ in Eq. 3 using this $\rho_W(r)$ at the reference momentum transfer $q = 0.8733 \text{ fm}^{-1}$. This procedure is insensitive to the form of the model ρ_W and yields the results in Table II.

While the extracted value of F_W depends on F_{ch} , F_W/F_{ch} and $F_{ch} - F_W$ are quite insensitive to F_{ch} . In order to determine $F_{ch}(q) = \int d^3r j_0(qr) \rho_{ch}(r)/Z$, we use a composite charge density for ^{48}Ca starting with an accurate sum of Gaussians density for ^{40}Ca [40] and add a Fourier Bessel expansion for the small difference between the charge densities of ^{48}Ca and ^{40}Ca [32, 41], see [31]. This procedure yields a ^{48}Ca charge radius of 3.481 fm, close to the experimental value of 3.477 fm [42].

TABLE II. CREX form factor results for ^{48}Ca , with q and F_{ch} input values. The uncertainties are due to statistics and experimental systematics, respectively.

Quantity	Value $\pm$ (stat) $\pm$ (sys)
q	0.8733 fm^{-1}
$F_W(q)/F_{ch}(q)$	$0.8248 \pm 0.0328 \pm 0.0124$
$F_{ch}(q)$	0.1581
$F_W(q)$	$0.1304 \pm 0.0052 \pm 0.0020$
$F_{ch}(q) - F_W(q)$	$0.0277 \pm 0.0052 \pm 0.0020$

A main result of this paper is a measurement of the difference between charge and weak form factors,

$$F_{ch}(q) - F_W(q) = 0.0277 \pm 0.0055 \text{ (exp)}. \quad (4)$$

The uncertainty is the quadrature sum of the experimental statistical and systematic uncertainties, referred to henceforth as the experimental error (exp), dominated by counting statistics. We emphasize that the Eq. 4 result is model-independent and quite insensitive to the assumed shape for the weak density $\rho_W(r)$.

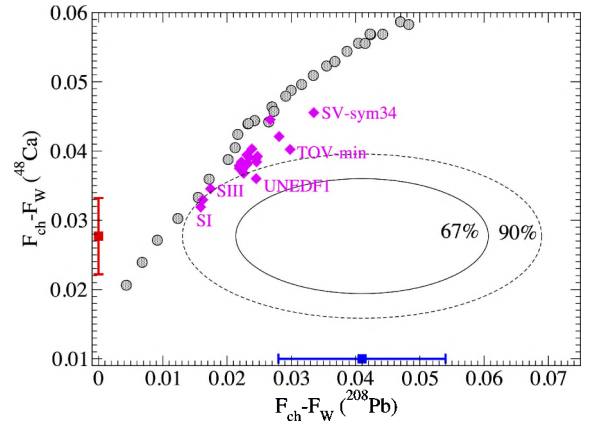


FIG. 2. Difference between the charge and weak form factors of ^{48}Ca (CREX) versus that of ^{208}Pb (PREX-2) at their respective momentum transfers. The blue (red) data point shows the PREX-2 (CREX) measurements. The ellipses are joint PREX-2 and CREX 67% and 90% probability contours. The gray circles (magenta diamonds) are a range of relativistic (non-relativistic) density functionals. For clarity only some of these functionals are labeled. The complete list is in ref. [31].

Figure 2 displays Eq. 4 for ^{48}Ca along with the PREX-2 result $F_{ch} - F_W = 0.041 \pm 0.013$ for ^{208}Pb at a smaller momentum transfer of 0.3977 fm^{-1} [5]. The figure also shows a series of relativistic energy functional models with density-dependent symmetry energy slope parameter L [43, 44] that varies over a large range from small negative values at the lower left to large positive values at the upper right. Additionally, a diverse collection of non-relativistic density functional models are

shown [31]. Here, F_{ch} and F_{W} include proton and neutron densities folded with single nucleon electric and magnetic form factors and spin orbit currents [45]. The models that best reproduce both the CREX and PREX-2 results tend to predict $F_{\text{ch}} - F_{\text{W}}$ slightly below the PREX-2 result for ^{208}Pb and slightly above the CREX result for ^{48}Ca .

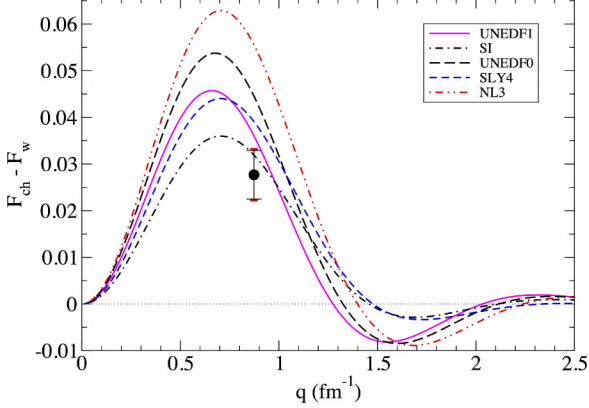


FIG. 3. The difference between the charge and weak form factors for ^{48}Ca as a function of momentum transfer $q = \sqrt{Q^2}$. The curves show results for non-relativistic (SI, SLy4, UNEDF0, UNEDF1) and relativistic (NL3) density functional models. The CREX measurement is indicated by a circle with the inner black error bar showing the contribution from statistics and the total experimental error bar in red.

Figure 3 shows the momentum transfer dependence of $F_{\text{ch}} - F_{\text{W}}$ as predicted by a few non-relativistic and relativistic density functional models. It is evident that some model results cross as a function of q , emphasizing the somewhat different q dependence. In the limit $q \rightarrow 0$, $F_{\text{ch}}(q) - F_{\text{W}}(q) \approx q^2(R_{\text{W}}^2 - R_{\text{ch}}^2)/6$, where R_{W} is the rms radius of $\rho_{\text{W}}(r)$ and R_{ch} is the charge radius. Since this equation is not valid at the larger q of CREX, the extraction of $R_{\text{W}} - R_{\text{ch}}$ introduces some model dependence.

Relativistic and non-relativistic density functional model predictions of $R_{\text{W}} - R_{\text{ch}}$ are plotted in Fig. 4(a) versus $F_{\text{ch}}(q) - F_{\text{W}}(q)$. The somewhat different $\rho_{\text{W}}(r)$ shapes lead to the vertical spread in the non-relativistic models. Figure 4(b) shows a similar plot of point neutron minus proton radii $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ versus $F_{\text{ch}}(q) - F_{\text{W}}(q)$. To calculate $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ given $F_{\text{ch}} - F_{\text{W}}$ one must include full current operators including spin orbit ($\vec{L} \cdot \vec{S}$) contributions [41]. Relativistic models tend to have somewhat larger $\vec{L} \cdot \vec{S}$ currents. As a result the gray circles in Fig. 4(b) are somewhat lower than those in Fig. 4(a) when compared to non-relativistic models. Lines with slope matching that of the relativistic model variation are drawn to enclose the full range of displayed models, providing the model range and central values listed in

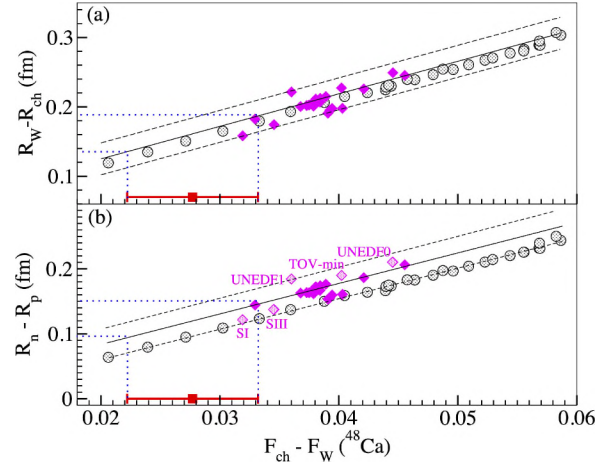


FIG. 4. (a) ^{48}Ca weak minus charge rms radius versus charge minus weak form factor at the CREX momentum transfer. The CREX experimental value and uncertainty is shown (red square). The gray circles (magenta diamonds) show a range of relativistic (non-relativistic) density functionals. (b) ^{48}Ca neutron minus proton rms radius versus charge minus weak form factor.

Table III. This underscores the fact that the CREX ^{48}Ca $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ has significant modeling uncertainty, in contrast to the PREX ^{208}Pb $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$, see [31]. Reduced model uncertainty would result if theoretical predictions were compared to the model-independent $F_{\text{ch}} - F_{\text{W}}$ in Fig. 2 rather than to $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ in Fig. 5.

TABLE III. Extracted $R_{\text{W}} - R_{\text{ch}}$ and $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ radii. The first uncertainty is experimental and the second reflects the shape uncertainty in $\rho_{\text{W}}(r)$ estimated from the spread in Fig. 4.

Quantity	Value $\pm$ (exp) $\pm$ (model) [fm]
$R_{\text{W}} - R_{\text{ch}}$	$0.159 \pm 0.026 \pm 0.023$
$R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$	$0.121 \pm 0.026 \pm 0.024$

$R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ for ^{48}Ca versus $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ for ^{208}Pb is shown in Fig. 5. A number of models including the microscopic coupled cluster calculations [8] are consistent with our results, slightly under-predicting ^{208}Pb while slightly over-predicting ^{48}Ca . Dispersive optical model calculations agree well for ^{208}Pb but substantially over-predict $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ for ^{48}Ca [46].

In conclusion, we have reported a new and precise measurement of the PVES asymmetry from ^{48}Ca and a model-independent extraction of the difference between the charge form factor and the weak form factor $F_{\text{ch}} - F_{\text{W}}$ at $q = 0.8733 \text{ fm}^{-1}$. In addition, we have extracted, with a small model dependence, the weak skin $R_{\text{W}} - R_{\text{ch}}$ and the neutron skin $R_{\text{n}} - R_{\text{p}}$ of ^{48}Ca and compared it to that of ^{208}Pb . The extracted neutron skin of ^{48}Ca (CREX) is relatively thin compared to the prediction of most mod-

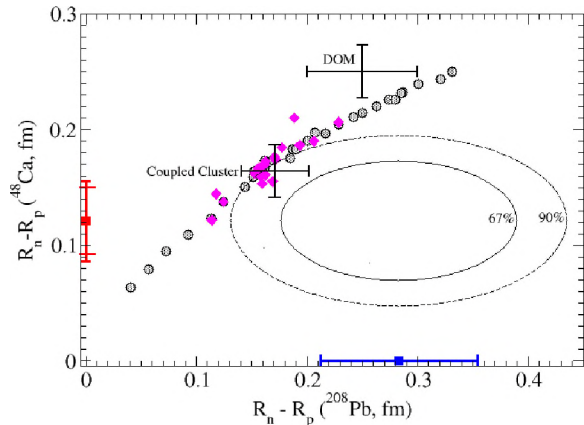


FIG. 5. ^{48}Ca neutron minus proton radius versus that for ^{208}Pb . The PREX-2+PREX-1 experimental result is shown as a blue square, while that for CREX is shown as a red square with the inner error bars indicating the experimental error and the outer error bars including the model error. The gray circles (magenta diamonds) show a variety of relativistic (non-relativistic) density functionals. Coupled cluster [8] and dispersive optical model (DOM) predictions [46] are also shown.

els, while that of ^{208}Pb (PREX) is thick, yet both are consistent with a number of density functional models and with the microscopic coupled cluster models [8]. This will have implications for future energy density functional calculations and the density dependence of the symmetry energy.

The small model dependence of this result could be further constrained with a future measurement of A_{PV} from ^{48}Ca at an additional Q^2 [47]. Experimental techniques from this work, including excellent systematic control of helicity-correlated fluctuations and demonstration of high precision electron beam polarimetry, will inform the design of future projects MOLLER [48] and SoLID [49] at JLab measuring fundamental electroweak couplings, as well as P2 and the ^{208}Pb radius experimental proposals at Mainz [50].

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* paschke@virginia.edu

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