New Precision Limit on the Strange Vector Form Factors of the Proton

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The parity-violating cross-section asymmetry in the elastic scattering of polarized electrons from unpolarized protons has been measured at a four-momentum transfer squared $Q^2 = 0.624$ GeV$^2$ and beam energy $E_b = 3.48$ GeV to be $A_{PV} = -23.80 \pm 0.78 ($stat$) \pm 0.36 ($syst$)$ parts per million. This result
difficult; one notable exception is the extraction of the
Cleanly isolating the effects of the quark sea is typically
and sea quarks in nucleon substructure is imperative.
ucleon mass, a better understanding of the role of gluons
valence-quark masses account for only about 1% of the
quarks, has been scrutinized. More generally, since
that quark spins are not the dominant contribution to
gimes. With the discovery by the EMC collaboration [1]
known to dominate interactions in certain kinematic re-
depth inelastic scattering, for example, sea quarks are
measurement were chosen to be particularly sensitive to
statistical accuracy and small systematic uncertainties.
the range of uncertainty in the strange-quark condensate
neutral weak scattering [2].

The HAPPEX collaboration [10]. A 100 μA continuous electron beam of longitudi-
nally polarized electrons at 3.481 GeV was incident on a
25 cm long liquid hydrogen target. The twin Hall A High
Resolution Spectrometers [12] each accepted scattered
electrons over a solid angle of 5 msr with an averaged
polar angle of ⟨θ⟩ ~ 13.7°. Electrons which scattered elas-
tically from protons were focused onto a calorimeter in
each spectrometer; electrons from inelastic processes on
free protons were not transported to the focal plane. Each
calorimeter was composed of alternating layers of lead and
Lucite, with Čerenkov light from the electromagnetic
shower collected by a single photomultiplier tube.

The polarized beam is generated through photoemission
from a doped GaAs superlattice crystal. The polarization
state of the electron beam was held constant for a time
window of about 33 ms, then flipped to the complementary
state. The polarities of these pairs of time windows were
selected from a pseudorandom sequence. The responses of
beam monitors and the electron calorimeters were inte-
grated over each period of stable helicity. Periods of in-
stability in the beam, spectrometer, or data acquisition
electronics were cut from the accepted data. A total of
29.9 × 10^6 pairs passed all cuts and formed the final data
sample, including 1.0 × 10^6 pairs in which only one of the
two spectrometers was functional.

The helicity-dependent asymmetry in the integrated
calorimeter response A_{raw} was computed for each pair of
helicity windows. The physics asymmetry A_{PV} is derived
after normalization for beam intensity fluctuations, with
corrections for background contributions, kinematics nor-
malization, beam polarization, and changes in beam energy
and trajectory. The magnitude and estimated uncertainty
due to each of these corrections are described below and
summarized in Table I.

The laser optics of the polarized source were carefully
configured to minimize changes to the electron beam pa-
rameters under polarization reversal [13]. A feedback sys-
tem was used to minimize the helicity-correlated intensity
asymmetry of the beam. Averaged over the course of the
experimental run, the helicity-correlated asymmetries in
the electron beam were 0.20 ppm in intensity, 0.003 ppm in
energy, and 3 nm in position.

Because of the symmetric acceptance of the two spec-
 trometers and the small run-averaged values of helicity-
correlated beam asymmetries, the cumulative correction
due to beam trajectory and energy asymmetry was only
0.016 ± 0.034 ppm. The calorimeter system response was
measured to be linear, with an uncertainty of less than 0.5%, through dedicated tests using pulsed light-emitting diodes. Electrons scattered from the aluminum windows of the cryogenic hydrogen vessel were the largest background. Because of the high $Q^2$, aluminum elastic scattering did not contribute significantly, leaving quasielastic scattering as the dominant background source. The contributed signal fraction was determined to be (1.15 ± 0.35)% using the evacuated target cell to directly measure the aluminum-scattered rate; these rates were checked using aluminum targets matched to the full target radiation length. The asymmetry of this background was calculated to be $-34.5$ ppm, with an uncertainty of 30% to account for potential contributions from inelastic states.

Inelastically scattered electrons can also rescatter in the spectrometer and produce a signal in the calorimeter. Dedicated studies of electron rescattering in the spectrometer were combined with parametrizations of the electron-proton inelastic spectra to estimate a fractional contribution of (0.29 ± 0.08)% to the total rate. The dominant mechanism was $\Delta$ production, for which the theoretical calculated asymmetry of $-63$ ppm was used with an uncertainty of 20%. An additional systematic uncertainty contribution of 0.14 ppm accounted for the possibility that a small fraction of the signal ($< 10^{-4}$) could have originated from rescattering with ferromagnetic material [10]. The total correction from all sources of background amounted to (1.0 ± 0.8)% of $A_{PV}$.

Both Compton and Møller scattering processes were used to precisely determine the electron beam polarization. The accuracy of the Hall A Møller polarimeter was improved through a careful study of the uniformity of the ferromagnetic foil target, leading to a result of (89.2 ± 1.5)%). The dominant source of uncertainty in previous analyses of backscattered photons in the Hall A Compton polarimeter [12] lay in the effect of the trigger threshold on the normalization of the analyzing power. This was improved through thresholdless integration of the photon signal, with a result of (89.41 ± 0.86)%). Averaged, the beam polarization was determined to be (89.36 ± 0.75)%. Dedicated low-current data were periodically taken to measure $Q^2$ using the standard tracking package of the High Resolution Spectrometers [12]. A water target was used to calibrate the spectrometer angle, with momentum differences from the elastic hydrogen and elastic and inelastic oxygen peaks determining the scattering angle to a precision of 0.4 mrad. Including the spectrometer calibration resolution, the average $Q^2$ was determined to be 0.624 ± 0.003 GeV$^2$, which implies a 0.8% uncertainty on the quoted $A_{PV}$. An additional correction factor $\kappa$, which relates the asymmetry measurement over a finite range of initial-state energy and solid angle to the quoted $Q^2$, was determined through simulation to be $\kappa = 0.995 ± 0.002$.

After all corrections to $A_{raw}$, as summarized in Table I, the parity-violating asymmetry $A_{PV} = -23.80 ± 0.78$ (stat) ± 0.36 (syst) ppm at $Q^2 = 0.624$ GeV$^2$.

Following notation from [9], the theoretical expectation for $A_{PV}$ can be expressed in three terms: $A_{PV} = A_V + A_A + A_S$. $A_V$ and $A_A$ depend on the proton weak charge $(1 - 4\sin^2\theta_W)$ and the nucleon vector and axial-vector electromagnetic form factors, respectively, while strange-quark contributions to the vector form factors are isolated in $A_S$. At tree level,

$$A_S = A_0 \left[ \frac{eG_E^p G_E^\nu + \tau G_M^p G_M^\nu}{e(G_E^p)^2 + \tau(G_M^p)^2} \right].$$

Here $A_0 = G_F Q^2/(4\pi\sqrt{2} \alpha)$, $\tau = Q^2/(4M_p^2)$, $\epsilon = [1 + 2(1 + \tau)\tan^2(\theta/2)]^{-1}$, and $G_E^p$ is the proton electric (magnetic) form factor.

If strange quarks did not contribute to the vector form factors, the asymmetry at $Q^2 = 0.624$ GeV$^2$ would be expected to be $A_{NS} = A_V + A_A = -24.062 ± 0.734$ ppm. This calculation utilizes parametrizations of the electromagnetic form factors which incorporate two-photon-exchange corrections to published form-factor data [14]. The uncertainty in $A_{NS}$ primarily results from uncertainties in these form factors and in radiative corrections in the axial term $A_A$ involving parity-violating multiquark interactions. While theoretical investigation [15] has suggested that the latter corrections could be as large as 30% of the axial form factor, the net uncertainty in $A_{NS}$ is small for forward-angle studies where the small coefficient $\sqrt{1 - \epsilon^2(1 - 4\sin^2\theta_W)}$ suppresses the axial term. The uncertainty in these corrections, as a fraction of the axial form factor, is assumed to be constant with $Q^2$.

Standard electroweak corrections [16] are also included in the calculation of $A_{NS}$. Recent improvements to theoretical treatments of $\gamma Z$ box diagrams, evaluated at $Q^2 = 0$, imply a significant additional correction to the proton weak charge [17–20]. This correction is expected to drop with increasing $Q^2$ [20], suggesting that the correction is suppressed for the measurement reported here. If this expected suppression is ignored, the $Q^2 = 0$ value would imply an increase in the magnitude of $A_{NS}$ by 1.4% at
$Q^2 = 0.62$ GeV$^2$, which should be compared to the uncertainty in $A_N$ quoted above as 3.1%. In the absence of a calculation at a $Q^2$ appropriate to the measurement reported here, this correction is not applied.

Comparing $A_N$ to the measured $A_{PV}$, the strange-quark contributions are determined to be $G_E^s + 0.517 G_M^s = 0.003 \pm 0.010 \pm 0.004 \pm 0.009$, where the error bars correspond to statistical, systematic, and the $A_N$ uncertainties, respectively.

The constraints on the 2D space spanned by $G_E^s$ and $G_M^s$ from all measurements near $Q^2 \sim 0.62$ GeV$^2$ are shown in Fig. 1. The experimental constraints at 1σ are represented by the shaded bands indicating the combined statistical and experimental systematic error bars. The contours, representing the 68% and 95% uncertainty boundaries as indicated, combine all three measurements and also account for the uncertainties in $A_N$. The independently separated values resulting from this fit are $G_E^s = 0.047 \pm 0.034$ and $G_M^s = -0.070 \pm 0.067$, with a correlation coefficient of $-0.93$. The combined constraint is consistent with $G_E^s = G_M^s = 0$.

Figure 2 shows all published data on the net strangeness contribution $G_E^s + \eta G_M^s$ in forward-angle scattering measurements from the proton versus $Q^2$. Here, $\eta = \tau G_M^s/(\epsilon G_E^s)$, and is approximately numerically equal to $Q^2/(\text{GeV}^2)$ over the range of the plot. Data from the HAPPEXI & II, G0 [7], and A4 [8,9] collaborations are shown. On each data point, the error bars indicate both the statistical error and the quadrature sum of statistical and uncorrelated systematic error. For the G0 data, some systematic uncertainties are correlated between points with a magnitude indicated by the shaded region at the bottom of the plot. A shaded region around the zero-net-strangeness line represents the uncertainties in $A_N$ at 1σ; this uncertainty is not also included in the individual data points.

While there is no reliable theoretical guidance on the possible $Q^2$ dependence of the strange form factors, it is reasonable to expect that they would not change rapidly with $Q^2$, consistent with nucleon form factors in this range which are described to a reasonable precision by smooth dipole or Galster parametrizations [14]. The linear combination of electric and magnetic proton form-factors $G_E^s + \eta G_M^s$, scaled by a factor of 0.03 for convenience, is also plotted for comparison in Fig. 2. The results of this Letter rule out large contributions from strange vector form factors with $Q^2$ behavior similar to that of the nucleon electromagnetic form factors.

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