



High-energy neutrino follow-up search of gravitational wave event GW150914 with ANTARES and IceCube

S. Adrián-Martínez *et al.**

(ANTARES Collaboration, IceCube Collaboration, LIGO Scientific Collaboration, and Virgo Collaboration)

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We present the high-energy-neutrino follow-up observations of the first gravitational wave transient GW150914 observed by the Advanced LIGO detectors on September 14, 2015. We search for coincident neutrino candidates within the data recorded by the IceCube and ANTARES neutrino detectors. A possible joint detection could be used in targeted electromagnetic follow-up observations, given the significantly better angular resolution of neutrino events compared to gravitational waves. We find no neutrino candidates in both temporal and spatial coincidence with the gravitational wave event. Within ± 500 s of the gravitational wave event, the number of neutrino candidates detected by IceCube and ANTARES were three and zero, respectively. This is consistent with the expected atmospheric background, and none of the neutrino candidates were directionally coincident with GW150914. We use this nondetection to constrain neutrino emission from the gravitational-wave event.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Advanced LIGO's first observation periods [1,2] represent a major step in probing the dynamical origin of high-energy emission from cosmic transients [3]. The significant improvement in gravitational wave (GW) search sensitivity enables a comprehensive multimessenger observational effort involving partner electromagnetic observatories from radio to gamma-rays, as well as neutrino detectors. The goals of multimessenger observations are to gain a more complete understanding of cosmic processes through a combination of information from different probes, and to increase search sensitivity over an analysis using a single messenger [4–6].

The merger of neutron stars and black holes, and potentially massive stellar core collapse with rapidly rotating cores, are expected to be significant sources of GWs [3]. These events can result in a black hole plus accretion disk system that drives a relativistic outflow [7,8]. Energy dissipation in the outflow produces non-thermal, high-energy radiation that is observed as gamma-ray bursts (GRBs), and may have a \gg GeV neutrino component at comparable luminosities.

Multiple detectors have been built that can search for this high-energy neutrino signature, including the IceCube Neutrino Observatory—a cubic-kilometer facility at the South Pole [9–11], and ANTARES [12–14] in the Mediterranean sea. The construction of the KM3NeT cubic-kilometer scale neutrino detector in the Mediterranean Sea has started in December 2015 with the successful

deployment of the first detection string [15]. IceCube is planning a substantial increase in sensitivity with near-future upgrades [16,17]. Another facility, the Baikal Neutrino Telescope is also planning an upgrade to cubic-kilometer volume [18]. An astrophysical high-energy neutrino flux has recently been discovered by IceCube [19–22], demonstrating the production of nonthermal high-energy neutrinos. The specific origin of this neutrino flux is currently unknown. Multimessenger analyses constraining the common sources of high-energy neutrinos and GWs have been carried out in the past with both ANTARES and IceCube [23–25].

On September 14, 2015 at 09:50:45 UTC, a highly significant GW signal was recorded by the LIGO Hanford, WA and Livingston, LA detectors [26]. The event, labeled GW150914, was produced by a stellar-mass binary black hole merger at redshift $z = 0.09_{-0.04}^{+0.03}$. The reconstructed mass of each black hole is $\sim 30 M_{\odot}$. Such a system may produce electromagnetic emission and emit neutrinos if the merger happens in a sufficiently baryon-dense environment, and a black hole plus accretion disk system is formed [27]. Current consensus is that such a scenario is unlikely, nevertheless, there are no significant observational constraints.

Here we report the results of a neutrino follow-up search of GW150914 using ANTARES and IceCube. After brief descriptions of the GW search (Sec. II) and the neutrino follow-up (Sec. III), we present the joint analysis, results of the search and source constraints, and conclusions (Sec. IV).

II. GRAVITATIONAL WAVE DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCOVERY

GW150914 was initially identified by low-latency searches for generic GW transients [28–30]. Subsequent

*Full author list given at end of the article.

analysis with three independent matched-filter analyses using models of compact binary coalescence waveforms [31,32] confirmed that the event was produced by the merger of two black holes. The analyses established a false alarm rate of less than 1 event per 203000 years, equivalent to a significance $>5.1\sigma$ [26]. Source parameters were reconstructed using the LALINFERENCE package [32–34], finding black-hole masses $36_{-4}^{+5} M_{\odot}$ and $29_{-4}^{+4} M_{\odot}$ and luminosity distance $D_{\text{gw}} = 410_{-180}^{+160}$ Mpc, where the error ranges correspond to the range of the 90% credible interval. The duration of the signal within LIGO’s sensitive band was 0.2 s.

The directional point spread function (sky map) of the GW event was computed through the full parameter estimation of the signal, carried out using the LALINFERENCE package [33,34]. The LALINFERENCE results presented here account for calibration uncertainty in the GW strain signal. The sky map is shown in Fig. 1. At 90% (50%) credible level (CL), the sky map covers 610 deg^2 (150 deg^2).

III. HIGH-ENERGY NEUTRINO COINCIDENCE SEARCH

High-energy neutrino observatories are primarily sensitive to neutrinos with $\gg \text{GeV}$ energies. IceCube and ANTARES are both sensitive to through-going muons (called track events), produced by neutrinos near the detector, above $\sim 100 \text{ GeV}$. In this analysis, ANTARES data include only up-going tracks for events originating from the Southern hemisphere, while IceCube data include both up-going tracks (from the Northern hemisphere) as well as down-going tracks (from the Southern hemisphere). The energy threshold of neutrino candidates increases in the Southern hemisphere for IceCube, since downward-going

atmospheric muons are not filtered by the Earth, greatly increasing the background at lower energies. Neutrino times of arrival are determined at μs precision.

Since neutrino telescopes continuously take data observing the whole sky, it is possible to look back and search for neutrino counterparts to an interesting GW signal at any time around the GW observation.

To search for neutrinos coincident with GW150914, we used a time window of $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ around the GW transient. This search window, which was used in previous GW-neutrino searches, is a conservative, observation-based upper limit on the plausible emission of GWs and high-energy neutrinos in the case of GRBs, which are thought to be driven by a stellar-mass black hole—accretion disk system [35]. While the relative time of arrival of GWs and neutrinos can be informative [36–38], here we do not use detailed temporal information beyond the $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ time window.

The search for high-energy neutrino candidates recorded by IceCube within $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ of GW150914 used IceCube’s online event stream. The online event stream implements an event selection similar to the event selection used for neutrino point source searches [39], but optimized for real-time performance at the South Pole. This event selection consists primarily of cosmic-ray-induced background events, with an expectation per 1000 seconds of 2.2 events in the Northern sky (atmospheric neutrinos), and 2.2 events in the Southern sky (high-energy atmospheric muons). In the search window of $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ centered on the GW alert time (see below), one event was found in the Southern sky and two in the Northern sky, which is consistent with the background expectation. The properties of these events are listed in Table I. The neutrino candidates’ directions are shown in Fig. 1.

The muon energy in Table I is reconstructed assuming a single muon is producing the event. While the event from the Southern hemisphere has a significantly greater reconstructed energy [41] than the other two events, 12.5% of the background events in the same declination range in the Southern hemisphere have energies in excess of the one observed. The intense flux of atmospheric muons and bundles of muons that constitute the background for

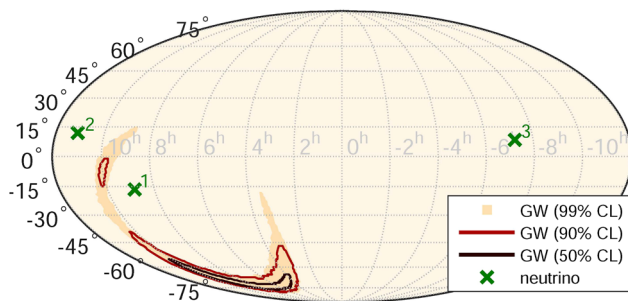


FIG. 1. GW skymap in equatorial coordinates, showing the reconstructed probability density contours of the GW event at 50%, 90% and 99% CL, and the reconstructed directions of high-energy neutrino candidates detected by IceCube (crosses) during a $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ time window around the GW event. The neutrino directional uncertainties are $< 1^\circ$ and are not shown. GW shading indicates the reconstructed probability density of the GW event, darker regions corresponding to higher probability. Neutrino numbers refer to the first column of Table I.

TABLE I. Parameters of neutrino candidates identified by IceCube within the $\pm 500 \text{ s}$ time window around GW150914. ΔT is the time of arrival of the neutrino candidates relative to that of GW150914. E_{μ}^{rec} is the reconstructed muon energy. $\sigma_{\mu}^{\text{rec}}$ is the angular uncertainty of the reconstructed track direction [40]. The last column shows the fraction of background neutrino candidates with higher reconstructed energy at the same declination ($\pm 5^\circ$).

No.	ΔT [s]	RA [h]	Dec [$^\circ$]	$\sigma_{\mu}^{\text{rec}}$ [$^\circ$]	E_{μ}^{rec} [TeV]	Fraction
1	+37.2	8.84	-16.6	0.35	175	12.5%
2	+163.2	11.13	12.0	1.95	1.22	26.5%
3	+311.4	-7.23	8.4	0.47	0.33	98.4%

IceCube in the Southern hemisphere gradually falls as the cosmic ray flux declines with energy [42]. The use of energy cuts to remove most of this background is the reason that IceCube’s sensitivity in the Southern sky is shifted to higher energies.

An additional search was performed using the high-energy starting event selection described in [19]. No events were found in coincidence with GW150914.

The IceCube detector also has sensitivity to outbursts of MeV neutrinos (as occur for example in core-collapse supernovae) via a sudden increase in the photomultiplier rates [43]. The global photomultiplier noise rate is monitored continuously, and deviations sufficient to trigger the lowest-level of alert occur roughly once per hour. No alert was triggered during the ± 500 second time-window around the GW candidate event.

The search for coincident neutrinos for ANTARES within ± 500 s of GW150914 used ANTARES’s online reconstruction pipeline [44]. A fast and robust algorithm [45] selected up-going neutrino candidates with \sim mHz rate, with atmospheric muon contamination less than 10%. In addition, to reduce the background of atmospheric neutrinos [46], a requirement of a minimum reconstructed energy reduced the online event rate to 1.2 events/day. Consequently, for ANTARES the expected number of neutrino candidates from the Southern sky in a 1000 s window in the Southern sky is 0.015. We found no neutrino events from ANTARES that were temporally coincident with GW150914. This is consistent with the expected background event rate.

IV. RESULTS

A. Joint analysis

We carried out the joint GW and neutrino search following the analysis developed for previous GW and neutrino data sets using initial GW detectors [23,25,35,47]. After identifying the GW event GW150914 with the cWB pipeline, we used reconstructed neutrino candidates to search for temporal and directional coincidences between GW150914 and neutrinos. We assumed that the *a priori* source directional distribution is uniform. For temporal coincidence, we searched within a ± 500 s time window around GW150914.

The relative difference in propagation time for \gg GeV neutrinos and GWs (which travel at the speed of light in general relativity) traveling to Earth from the source is expected to be $\ll 1$ s. The relative propagation time between neutrinos and GWs may change in alternative gravity models [48,49]. However, discrepancies from general relativity could in principle be probed with a joint GW-neutrino detection by comparing the arrival times against the expected time frame of emission.

Directionally, we searched for overlap between the GW sky map and the neutrino point spread functions,

assumed to be Gaussian with standard deviation $\sigma_{\mu}^{\text{rec}}$ (see Table I).

The search identified no ANTARES neutrino candidates that were temporally coincident with GW150914.

For IceCube, none of the three neutrino candidates temporally coincident with GW150914 were compatible with the GW direction at 90% CL. Additionally, the reconstructed energy of the neutrino candidates with respect to the expected background does not make them significant. See Fig. 1 for the directional relation of GW150914 and the IceCube neutrino candidates detected within the ± 500 s window. This nondetection is consistent with our expectation from a binary black hole merger.

To better understand the probability that the detected neutrino candidates are consistent with background, we briefly consider different aspects of the data separately. First, the number of detected neutrino candidates, i.e. 3 and 0 for IceCube and ANTARES, respectively, is fully consistent with the expected background rate of 4.4 and $\ll 1$ for the two detectors, with p-value $1 - F_{\text{pois}}(N_{\text{observed}} \leq 2, N_{\text{expected}} = 4.4) = 0.81$, where F_{pois} is the Poisson cumulative distribution function. Second, for the most significant reconstructed muon energy (Table I), 12.5% of background events will have greater muon energy. The probability that at least one neutrino candidate, out of 3 detected events, has an energy high enough to make it appear even less background-like, is $1 - (1 - 0.125)^3 \approx 0.33$. Third, with the GW sky area 90% CL of $\Omega_{\text{gw}} = 610 \text{ deg}^2$, the probability of a background neutrino candidate being directionally coincident is $\Omega_{\text{gw}}/\Omega_{\text{all}} \approx 0.015$. We expect $3\Omega_{\text{gw}}/\Omega_{\text{all}}$ directionally coincident neutrinos, given 3 temporal coincidences. Therefore, the probability that at least one of the 3 neutrino candidates is directionally coincident with the 90% CL skymap of GW150914 is $1 - (1 - 0.015)^3 \approx 0.04$.

B. Constraints on the source

We used the nondetection of coincident neutrino candidates by ANTARES and IceCube to derive a standard frequentist neutrino spectral fluence upper limit for GW150914 at 90% CL. Considering no spatially and temporally coincident neutrino candidates, we calculated the source fluence that on average would produce 2.3 detected neutrino candidates. We carried out this analysis as a function of source direction, and independently for ANTARES and IceCube.

The obtained spectral fluence upper limits as a function of source direction are shown in Fig. 2. We considered a standard $dN/dE \propto E^{-2}$ source model, as well as a model with a spectral cutoff at high energies: $dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \exp[-\sqrt{(E/100 \text{ TeV})}]$. The latter model is expected for sources with exponential cutoff in the primary proton spectrum [50]. This is expected for some galactic sources, and is also adopted here for comparison to previous

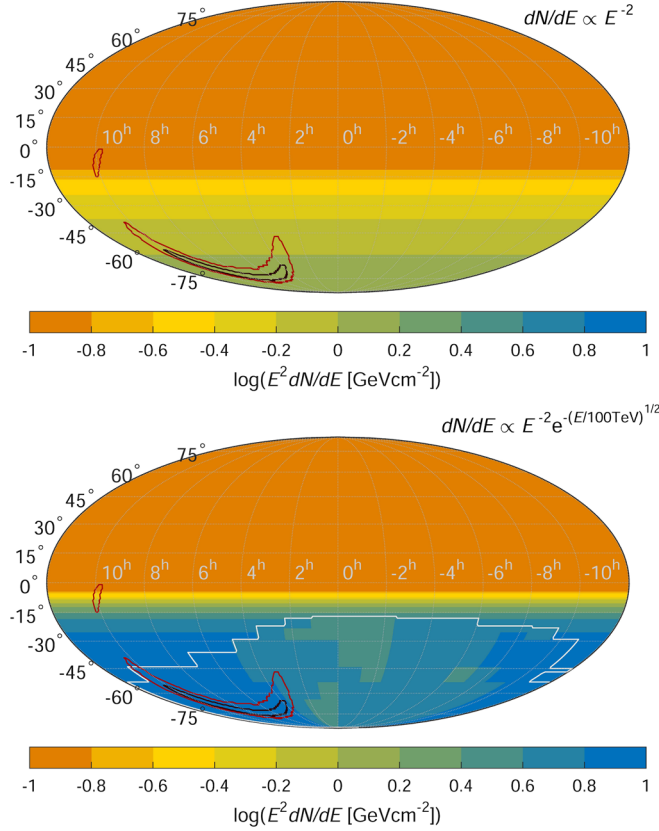


FIG. 2. Upper limit on the high-energy neutrino spectral fluence ($\nu_\mu + \bar{\nu}_\mu$) from GW150914 as a function of source direction, assuming $dN/dE \propto E^{-2}$ (top) and $dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \exp[-\sqrt{(E/100 \text{ TeV})}]$ (bottom) neutrino spectra. The region surrounded by a white line shows the part of the sky in which ANTARES is more sensitive (close to nadir), while on the rest of the sky, IceCube is more sensitive. For comparison, the 50% CL and 90% CL contours of the GW sky map are also shown.

analyses [51]. For each spectral model, the upper limit shown in each direction of the sky is the more stringent limit provided by one or the other detector. We see in Fig. 2 that the constraint strongly depends on the source direction, and is mostly within $E^2 dN/dE \sim 10^{-1} - 10 \text{ GeV cm}^{-2}$. Furthermore, the upper limits by ANTARES and IceCube constrain different energy ranges in the region of the sky close to the GW candidate. For an E^{-2} power-law source spectrum, 90% of ANTARES signal neutrinos are in the energy range from 3 TeV to 1 PeV, whereas for IceCube at this southern declination the corresponding energy range is 200 TeV to 100 PeV.

To characterize the dependence of neutrino spectral fluence limits on source direction, we calculate these limits separately for the two distinct areas in the 90% credible region of the GW skymap. For the larger region farther South (hereafter *South region*), we find upper limits $E^2 dN/dE = 1.2^{+0.25}_{-0.36} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2}$ and $E^2 dN/dE = 7.0^{+3.2}_{-2.0} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2}$ for our two spectral models without and with a cutoff, respectively. The error bars define the

90% confidence interval of the upper limit, showing the level of variation within each region. The average values were obtained as geometric averages, which better represent the upper limit values as they are distributed over a wide numerical range. For the smaller region farther North (hereafter *North region*), we find upper limits $E^2 dN/dE = 0.10^{+0.12}_{-0.06} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2}$ and $E^2 dN/dE = 0.55^{+1.79}_{-0.44} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2}$. As expected, we see that the limits are much more constraining for the North region, given the stronger limits at the Northern hemisphere due to IceCube's greatly improved sensitivity there. Additionally, we see that the 90% confidence intervals for the South region, which is much more likely to contain the real source direction than the North region, are fairly small around the average, with the lower and higher limits only differing by about a factor of 2. The upper limits within this area can be considered essentially uniform. We observe a much greater variation in the North region.

To provide a more detailed picture of our constraints on neutrino emission, we additionally calculated neutrino fluence upper limits for different energy bands. For these limits, we assume $dN/dE \propto E^{-2}$ within each energy band. We focus on Dec = -70° , which is consistent with the most likely source direction, and also with most of the GW sky area's credible region. For each energy range, we use the limit from the most sensitive detector within that range. The obtained limits are given in Table II.

We now convert our fluence upper limits into a constraint on the total energy emitted in neutrinos by the source. To obtain this constraint, we integrate emission within [100 GeV, 100 PeV] for each source model. The obtained constraint will vary with respect to source direction as we saw above. It will also depend on the uncertain source distance. To account for these uncertainties, we provide the range of values from the lowest to the highest possible within the 90% confidence intervals with respect to source direction and the 90% credible interval with respect to source distance. For simplicity, we treat the estimated source distance and its uncertainty independent of the source direction. We consider both of the distinct sky regions to provide an inclusive range. For our two spectral

TABLE II. Upper limits on neutrino spectral fluence ($\nu_\mu + \bar{\nu}_\mu$) from GW150914, separately for different spectral ranges, at Dec = -70° . We assume $dN/dE \propto E^{-2}$ within each energy band.

Energy range	Limit [GeV cm^{-2}]
100 GeV–1 TeV	150
1 TeV–10 TeV	18
10 TeV–100 TeV	5.1
100 TeV–1 PeV	5.5
1 PeV–10 PeV	2.8
10 PeV–100 PeV	6.5
100 PeV–1 EeV	28

models, we obtain the following upper limit on the total energy radiated in neutrinos:

$$E_{\nu,\text{tot}}^{\text{ul}} = 5.4 \times 10^{51} - 1.3 \times 10^{54} \text{ erg} \quad (1)$$

$$E_{\nu,\text{tot}}^{\text{ul(cutoff)}} = 6.6 \times 10^{51} - 3.7 \times 10^{54} \text{ erg} \quad (2)$$

with the first and second lines of the equation corresponding to the spectral models without and with cutoff, respectively. For comparison, the total energy radiated in GWs from the source is $\sim 5 \times 10^{54}$ erg. This value can also be compared to high-energy emission expected in some scenarios for accreting stellar-mass black holes. For example, typical GRB isotropic-equivalent energies are $\sim 10^{51}$ erg for long and $\sim 10^{49}$ erg for short GRBs [52]. The total energy radiated in high-energy neutrinos in the case of GRBs can be comparable [53–57] or in some cases much greater [58,59] than the high-energy electromagnetic emission. There is little reason, however, to expect an associated GRB for a binary black hole merger (see, nevertheless, [60]).

V. CONCLUSION

The results above represent the first concrete limit on neutrino emission from this GW source type, and the first neutrino follow-up of a significant GW event. With the continued increase of Advanced LIGO-Virgo sensitivities for the next observation periods, and the implied source rate of $2\text{--}400 \text{ Gpc}^{-3} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ in the comoving frame based on this first detection [61], we can expect to detect a significant number of GW sources, allowing for stacked neutrino analyses and significantly improved constraints. Similar analyses for the upcoming observation periods of Advanced LIGO-Virgo will be important to provide constraints on or to detect other joint GW and neutrino sources.

Joint GW and neutrino searches will also be used to improve the efficiency of electromagnetic follow-up observations over GW-only triggers. Given the significantly more accurate direction reconstruction of neutrinos ($\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$ for track events in IceCube [40,41] and $\sim 0.2 \text{ deg}^2$ in ANTARES [62]) compared to GWs ($\gtrsim 100 \text{ deg}^2$), a joint event candidate provides a greatly reduced sky area for follow-up observatories [63]. The delay induced by the event filtering and reconstruction after the recorded trigger time is typically 3–5 s for ANTARES [44], 20–30 s for IceCube [64], and $\mathcal{O}(1 \text{ min})$ for LIGO-Virgo, making data available for rapid analyses.

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S. Adrián-Martínez,¹ A. Albert,² M. André,³ M. Anghinolfi,⁴ G. Anton,⁵ M. Ardid,¹ J.-J. Aubert,⁶ T. Avgitas,⁷ B. Baret,⁷ J. Barrios-Martí,⁸ S. Basa,⁹ V. Bertin,⁶ S. Biagi,¹⁰ R. Bormuth,^{11,12} M. C. Bouwhuis,¹¹ R. Bruijn,^{11,13} J. Brunner,⁶ J. Bustó,⁶ A. Capone,^{14,15} L. Caramete,¹⁶ J. Carr,⁶ S. Celli,^{14,15,17} T. Chiarusi,¹⁸ M. Circella,¹⁹ A. Coleiro,⁷ R. Coniglione,¹⁰ H. Costantini,⁶ P. Coyle,⁶ A. Creusot,⁷ A. Deschamps,²⁰ G. De Bonis,^{14,15} C. Distefano,¹⁰ C. Donzaud,^{7,21} D. Dornic,⁶ D. Drouhin,² T. Eberl,⁵ I. El Bojaddaini,²² D. Elsässer,²³ A. Enzenhöfer,⁵ K. Fehn,⁵ I. Felis,²⁴ L. A. Fusco,^{25,18} S. Galatà,⁷ P. Gay,^{26,27} S. Geißelsöder,⁵ K. Geyer,⁵ V. Giordano,²⁸ A. Gleixner,⁵ H. Glotin,^{29,30} R. Gracia-Ruiz,⁷ K. Graf,⁵ S. Hallmann,⁵ H. van Haren,³¹ A. J. Heijboer,¹¹ Y. Hello,²⁰ J. J. Hernández-Rey,⁸ J. Höfl,⁵ J. Hofestädt,⁵ C. Hugon,^{4,32} G. Illuminati,^{14,15} C. W. James,⁵ M. de Jong,^{11,12} M. Jongen,¹¹ M. Kadler,²³ O. Kalekin,⁵ U. Katz,⁵ D. Kießling,⁵ A. Kouchner,^{7,30} M. Kreter,²³ I. Kreykenbohm,³³ V. Kulikovskiy,^{10,34} C. Lachaud,⁷ R. Lahmann,⁵ D. Lefèvre,³⁵ E. Leonora,²⁸ S. Loucatos,³⁶ M. Marcelin,⁹ A. Margiotta,^{25,18} A. Marinelli,^{37,38} J. A. Martínez-Mora,¹ A. Mathieu,⁶ K. Melis,¹³ T. Michael,¹¹ P. Migliozzi,³⁹ A. Moussa,²² C. Mueller,²³ E. Nezri,⁹ G. E. Pávālas,¹⁶ C. Pellegrino,^{25,18} C. Perrina,^{14,15} P. Piattelli,¹⁰ V. Popa,¹⁶ T. Pradier,⁴⁰ C. Racca,² G. Riccobene,¹⁰ K. Roensch,⁵ M. Saldaña,¹ D. F. E. Samtleben,^{11,12} A. Sánchez-Losa,^{8,41} M. Sanguineti,^{4,32} P. Sapienza,¹⁰ J. Schnabel,⁵ F. Schüssler,³⁶ T. Seitz,⁵ C. Sieger,⁵ M. Spurio,^{25,18} Th. Stolarczyk,³⁶ M. Taiuti,^{4,32} A. Trovato,¹⁰ M. Tselengidou,⁵ D. Turpin,⁶ C. Tönnis,⁸ B. Vallage,^{36,27} C. Vallée,⁶ V. Van Elewyck,⁷ D. Vivolo,^{39,42} S. Wagner,⁵ J. Wilms,³³ J. D. Zornoza,⁸ and J. Zúñiga⁸

(ANTARES Collaboration)

M. G. Aartsen,⁴³ K. Abraham,⁴⁴ M. Ackermann,⁴⁵ J. Adams,⁴⁶ J. A. Aguilar,⁴⁷ M. Ahlers,⁴⁸ M. Ahrens,⁴⁹ D. Altmann,⁵ T. Anderson,⁵⁰ I. Anseau,⁴⁷ G. Anton,⁵ M. Archinger,⁵¹ C. Argüelles,⁵² T. C. Arlen,⁵⁰ J. Auffenberg,⁵³ X. Bai,⁵⁴ S. W. Barwick,⁵⁵ V. Baum,⁵¹ R. Bay,⁵⁶ J. J. Beatty,^{57,58} J. Becker Tjus,⁵⁹ K.-H. Becker,⁶⁰ E. Beiser,⁴⁸ S. BenZvi,⁶¹ P. Berghaus,⁴⁵ D. Berley,⁶² E. Bernardini,⁴⁵ A. Bernhard,⁴⁴ D. Z. Besson,⁶³ G. Binder,^{64,56} D. Bindig,⁶⁰ M. Bissok,⁵³ E. Blaufuss,⁶² J. Blumenthal,⁵³ D. J. Boersma,⁶⁵ C. Boehm,⁴⁹ M. Börner,⁶⁶ F. Bos,⁵⁹ D. Bose,⁶⁷ S. Böser,⁵¹ O. Botner,⁶⁵ J. Braun,⁴⁸ L. Brayeur,⁶⁸ H.-P. Bretz,⁴⁵ N. Buzinsky,⁶⁹ J. Casey,⁷⁰ M. Casier,⁶⁸ E. Cheung,⁶² D. Chirkin,⁴⁸ A. Christov,⁷¹ K. Clark,⁷² L. Classen,⁵ S. Coenders,⁴⁴ G. H. Collin,⁵² J. M. Conrad,⁵² D. F. Cowen,^{50,73} A. H. Cruz Silva,⁴⁵ J. Daughhetee,⁷⁰ J. C. Davis,⁵⁷ M. Day,⁴⁸ J. P. A. M. de André,⁷⁴ C. De Clercq,⁶⁸ E. del Pino Rosendo,⁵¹ H. Dembinski,⁷⁵ S. De Ridder,⁷⁶ P. Desiati,⁴⁸ K. D. de Vries,⁶⁸ G. de Wasseige,⁶⁸ M. de With,⁷⁷ T. DeYoung,⁷⁴ J. C. Díaz-Vélez,⁴⁸ V. di Lorenzo,⁵¹ H. Dujmovic,⁶⁷ J. P. Dumm,⁴⁹ M. Dunkman,⁵⁰ B. Eberhardt,⁵¹ T. Ehrhardt,⁵¹ B. Eichmann,⁵⁹ S. Euler,⁶⁵ P. A. Evenson,⁷⁵ S. Fahey,⁴⁸ A. R. Fazely,⁷⁸ J. Feintzeig,⁴⁸ J. Felde,⁶² K. Filimonov,⁵⁶ C. Finley,⁴⁹ S. Flis,⁴⁹ C.-C. Fösig,⁵¹ T. Fuchs,⁶⁶ T. K. Gaisser,⁷⁵ R. Gaior,⁷⁹ J. Gallagher,⁸⁰ L. Gerhardt,^{64,56} K. Ghorbani,⁴⁸ D. Gier,⁵³ L. Gladstone,⁴⁸ M. Glagla,⁵³ T. Glüsenkamp,⁴⁵ A. Goldschmidt,⁶⁴ G. Golup,⁶⁸ J. G. Gonzalez,⁷⁵ D. Góra,⁴⁵ D. Grant,⁶⁹ Z. Griffith,⁴⁸ C. Ha,^{64,56} C. Haack,⁵³ A. Haj Ismail,⁷⁶ A. Hallgren,⁶⁵ F. Halzen,⁴⁸ E. Hansen,⁸¹ B. Hansmann,⁵³ T. Hansmann,⁵³ K. Hanson,⁴⁸ D. Hebecker,⁷⁷ D. Heereman,⁴⁷ K. Helbing,⁶⁰ R. Hellauer,⁶² S. Hickford,⁶⁰ J. Hignight,⁷⁴ G. C. Hill,⁴³ K. D. Hoffman,⁶² R. Hoffmann,⁶⁰ K. Holzappel,⁴⁴ A. Homeier,⁸² K. Hoshina,^{48,‡} F. Huang,⁵⁰ M. Huber,⁴⁴ W. Huelsnitz,⁶² P. O. Hulth,⁴⁹ K. Hultqvist,⁴⁹ S. In,⁶⁷ A. Ishihara,⁷⁹ E. Jacobi,⁴⁵ G. S. Japaridze,⁸³ M. Jeong,⁶⁷ K. Jero,⁴⁸ B. J. P. Jones,⁵² M. Jurkovic,⁴⁴ A. Kappes,⁵ T. Karg,⁴⁵ A. Karle,⁴⁸ U. Katz,⁵ M. Kauer,^{48,84} A. Keivani,⁵⁰ J. L. Kelley,⁴⁸ J. Kemp,⁵³ A. Kheirandish,⁴⁸

M. Kim,⁶⁷ T. Kintscher,⁴⁵ J. Kiryluk,⁸⁵ S. R. Klein,^{64,56} G. Kohnen,⁸⁶ R. Koirala,⁷⁵ H. Kolanoski,⁷⁷ R. Konietz,⁵³ L. Köpke,⁵¹ C. Kopper,⁶⁹ S. Kopper,⁶⁰ D. J. Koskinen,⁸¹ M. Kowalski,^{77,45} K. Krings,⁴⁴ G. Kroll,⁵¹ M. Kroll,⁵⁹ G. Krückl,⁵¹ J. Kunnen,⁶⁸ S. Kunwar,⁴⁵ N. Kurahashi,⁸⁷ T. Kuwabara,⁷⁹ M. Labare,⁷⁶ J. L. Lanfranchi,⁵⁰ M. J. Larson,⁸¹ D. Lennarz,⁷⁴ M. Lesiak-Bzdak,⁸⁵ M. Leuermann,⁵³ J. Leuner,⁵³ L. Lu,⁷⁹ J. Lünemann,⁶⁸ J. Madsen,⁸⁸ G. Maggi,⁶⁸ K. B. M. Mahn,⁷⁴ M. Mandelartz,⁵⁹ R. Maruyama,⁸⁴ K. Mase,⁷⁹ H. S. Matis,⁶⁴ R. Maunu,⁶² F. McNally,⁴⁸ K. Meagher,⁴⁷ M. Medici,⁸¹ M. Meier,⁶⁶ A. Meli,⁷⁶ T. Menne,⁶⁶ G. Merino,⁴⁸ T. Meures,⁴⁷ S. Miarecki,^{64,56} E. Middell,⁴⁵ L. Mohrmann,⁴⁵ T. Montaruli,⁷¹ R. Morse,⁴⁸ R. Nahnauer,⁴⁵ U. Naumann,⁶⁰ G. Neer,⁷⁴ H. Niederhausen,⁸⁵ S. C. Nowicki,⁶⁹ D. R. Nygren,⁶⁴ A. Obertacke Pollmann,⁶⁰ A. Olivas,⁶² A. Omairat,⁶⁰ A. O'Murchadha,⁴⁷ T. Palczewski,⁸⁹ H. Pandya,⁷⁵ D. V. Pankova,⁵⁰ L. Paul,⁵³ J. A. Pepper,⁸⁹ C. Pérez de los Heros,⁶⁵ C. Pfendner,⁵⁷ D. Pieloth,⁶⁶ E. Pinat,⁴⁷ J. Posselt,⁶⁰ P. B. Price,⁵⁶ G. T. Przybylski,⁶⁴ M. Quinnan,⁵⁰ C. Raab,⁴⁷ L. Rädcl,⁵³ M. Rameez,⁷¹ K. Rawlins,⁹⁰ R. Reimann,⁵³ M. Relich,⁷⁹ E. Resconi,⁴⁴ W. Rhode,⁶⁶ M. Richman,⁸⁷ S. Richter,⁴⁸ B. Riedel,⁶⁹ S. Robertson,⁴³ M. Rongen,⁵³ C. Rott,⁶⁷ T. Ruhe,⁶⁶ D. Ryckbosch,⁷⁶ L. Sabbatini,⁴⁸ H.-G. Sander,⁵¹ A. Sandrock,⁶⁶ J. Sandroos,⁵¹ S. Sarkar,^{81,91} K. Schatto,⁵¹ M. Schimp,⁵³ P. Schlunder,⁶⁶ T. Schmidt,⁶² S. Schoenen,⁵³ S. Schöneberg,⁵⁹ A. Schönwald,⁴⁵ L. Schumacher,⁵³ D. Seckel,⁷⁵ S. Seunarine,⁸⁸ D. Soldin,⁶⁰ M. Song,⁶² G. M. Spiczak,⁸⁸ C. Spiering,⁴⁵ M. Stahlberg,⁵³ M. Stamatikos,^{57,§} T. Stanev,⁷⁵ A. Stasik,⁴⁵ A. Steuer,⁵¹ T. Stezelberger,⁶⁴ R. G. Stokstad,⁶⁴ A. Stöbl,⁴⁵ R. Ström,⁶⁵ N. L. Strotjohann,⁴⁵ G. W. Sullivan,⁶² M. Sutherland,⁵⁷ H. Taavola,⁶⁵ I. Taboada,⁷⁰ J. Tatar,^{64,56} S. Ter-Antonyan,⁷⁸ A. Terliuk,⁴⁵ G. Tešić,⁵⁰ S. Tilav,⁷⁵ P. A. Toale,⁸⁹ M. N. Tobin,⁴⁸ S. Toscano,⁶⁸ D. Tosi,⁴⁸ M. Tselengidou,⁵ A. Turcati,⁴⁴ E. Unger,⁶⁵ M. Usner,⁴⁵ S. Vallecorsa,⁷¹ J. Vandenbroucke,⁴⁸ N. van Eijndhoven,⁶⁸ S. Vanheule,⁷⁶ J. van Santen,⁴⁵ J. Veenkamp,⁴⁴ M. Vehring,⁵³ M. Voge,⁸² M. Vraeghe,⁷⁶ C. Walck,⁴⁹ A. Wallace,⁴³ M. Wallraff,⁵³ N. Wandkowsky,⁴⁸ Ch. Weaver,⁶⁹ C. Wendt,⁴⁸ S. Westerhoff,⁴⁸ B. J. Whelan,⁴³ K. Wiebe,⁵¹ C. H. Wiebusch,⁵³ L. Wille,⁴⁸ D. R. Williams,⁸⁹ L. Wills,⁸⁷ H. Wissing,⁶² M. Wolf,⁴⁹ T. R. Wood,⁶⁹ K. Woschnagg,⁵⁶ D. L. Xu,⁴⁸ X. W. Xu,⁷⁸ Y. Xu,⁸⁵ J. P. Yanez,⁴⁵ G. Yodh,⁵⁵ S. Yoshida,⁷⁹ and M. Zoll⁴⁹
(IceCube Collaboration)

B. P. Abbott,⁹² R. Abbott,⁹² T. D. Abbott,⁹³ M. R. Abernathy,⁹² F. Acernese,^{94,95} K. Ackley,⁹⁶ C. Adams,⁹⁷ T. Adams,⁹⁸ P. Addesso,⁹⁴ R. X. Adhikari,⁹² V. B. Adya,⁹⁹ C. Affeldt,⁹⁹ M. Agathos,¹⁰⁰ K. Agatsuma,¹⁰⁰ N. Aggarwal,¹⁰¹ O. D. Aguiar,¹⁰² L. Aiello,^{103,104} A. Ain,¹⁰⁵ P. Ajith,¹⁰⁶ B. Allen,^{99,107,108} A. Allocca,^{109,110} P. A. Altin,¹¹¹ S. B. Anderson,⁹² W. G. Anderson,¹⁰⁷ K. Arai,⁹² M. C. Araya,⁹² C. C. Arceneaux,¹¹² J. S. Areeda,¹¹³ N. Arnaud,¹¹⁴ K. G. Arun,¹¹⁵ S. Ascenzi,^{116,104} G. Ashton,¹¹⁷ M. Ast,¹¹⁸ S. M. Aston,⁹⁷ P. Astone,¹¹⁹ P. Aufmuth,⁹⁹ C. Aulbert,⁹⁹ S. Babak,¹²⁰ P. Bacon,¹²¹ M. K. M. Bader,¹⁰⁰ P. T. Baker,¹²² F. Baldaccini,^{123,124} G. Ballardin,¹²⁵ S. W. Ballmer,¹²⁶ J. C. Barayoga,⁹² S. E. Barclay,¹²⁷ B. C. Barish,⁹² D. Barker,¹²⁸ F. Barone,^{94,95} B. Barr,¹²⁷ L. Barsotti,¹⁰¹ M. Barsuglia,¹²¹ D. Barta,¹²⁹ J. Bartlett,¹²⁸ I. Bartos,¹³⁰ R. Bassiri,¹³¹ A. Basti,^{109,110} J. C. Batch,¹²⁸ C. Baune,⁹⁹ V. Bavigadda,¹²⁵ M. Bazzan,^{132,133} B. Behnke,¹²⁰ M. Bejger,¹³⁴ C. Belczynski,¹³⁵ A. S. Bell,¹²⁷ C. J. Bell,¹²⁷ B. K. Berger,⁹² J. Bergman,¹²⁸ G. Bergmann,⁹⁹ C. P. L. Berry,¹³⁶ D. Bersanetti,^{137,138} A. Bertolini,¹⁰⁰ J. Betzwieser,⁹⁷ S. Bhagwat,¹²⁶ R. Bhandare,¹³⁹ I. A. Bilenko,¹⁴⁰ G. Billingsley,⁹² J. Birch,⁹⁷ I. A. Birney,¹⁴¹ S. Biscans,¹⁰¹ A. Bisht,^{99,108} M. Bitossi,¹²⁵ C. Biwer,¹²⁶ M. A. Bizouard,¹¹⁴ J. K. Blackburn,⁹² C. D. Blair,¹⁴² D. G. Blair,¹⁴² R. M. Blair,¹²⁸ S. Bloemen,¹⁴³ O. Bock,⁹⁹ T. P. Bodiya,¹⁰¹ M. Boer,¹⁴⁴ G. Bogaert,¹⁴⁴ C. Bogan,⁹⁹ A. Bohe,¹²⁰ P. Bojtos,¹⁴⁵ C. Bond,¹³⁶ F. Bondu,¹⁴⁶ R. Bonnand,⁹⁸ B. A. Boom,¹⁰⁰ R. Bork,⁹² V. Boschi,^{109,110} S. Bose,^{147,105} Y. Bouffanais,¹²¹ A. Bozzi,¹²⁵ C. Bradaschia,¹¹⁰ P. R. Brady,¹⁰⁷ V. B. Braginsky,¹⁴⁰ M. Branchesi,^{148,149} J. E. Brau,¹⁵⁰ T. Briant,¹⁵¹ A. Brillet,¹⁴⁴ M. Brinkmann,⁹⁹ V. Brisson,¹¹⁴ P. Brockill,¹⁰⁷ A. F. Brooks,⁹² D. A. Brown,¹²⁶ D. D. Brown,¹³⁶ N. M. Brown,¹⁰¹ C. C. Buchanan,⁹³ A. Buikema,¹⁰¹ T. Bulik,¹³⁵ H. J. Bulten,^{152,100} A. Buonanno,^{120,153} D. Buskulic,⁹⁸ C. Buy,¹²¹ R. L. Byer,¹³¹ L. Cadonati,¹⁵⁴ G. Cagnoli,^{155,156} C. Cahillane,⁹² J. Calderón Bustillo,^{157,154} T. Callister,⁹² E. Calloni,^{158,95} J. B. Camp,¹⁵⁹ K. C. Cannon,¹⁶⁰ J. Cao,¹⁶¹ C. D. Capano,⁹⁹ E. Capocasa,¹²¹ F. Carbognani,¹²⁵ S. Caride,¹⁶² J. Casanueva Diaz,¹¹⁴ C. Casentini,^{116,104} S. Caudill,¹⁰⁷ M. Cavaglià,¹¹² F. Cavalier,¹¹⁴ R. Cavalieri,¹²⁵ G. Cella,¹¹⁰ C. B. Cepeda,⁹² L. Cerboni Baiardi,^{148,149} G. Cerretani,^{109,110} E. Cesarini,^{116,104} R. Chakraborty,⁹² T. Chalermsoongsak,⁹² S. J. Chamberlin,¹⁶³ M. Chan,¹²⁷ S. Chao,¹⁶⁴ P. Charlton,¹⁶⁵ E. Chassande-Mottin,¹²¹ H. Y. Chen,¹⁶⁶ Y. Chen,¹⁶⁷ C. Cheng,¹⁶⁴ A. Chincarini,¹³⁸ A. Chiummo,¹²⁵ H. S. Cho,¹⁶⁸ M. Cho,¹⁵³ J. H. Chow,¹¹¹ N. Christensen,¹⁶⁹ Q. Chu,¹⁴² S. Chua,¹⁵¹ S. Chung,¹⁴² G. Ciani,⁹⁶ F. Clara,¹²⁸ J. A. Clark,¹⁵⁴ F. Cleva,¹⁴⁴ E. Coccia,^{116,103,104} P.-F. Cohadon,¹⁵¹ A. Colla,^{170,119} C. G. Collette,¹⁷¹ L. Cominsky,¹⁷² M. Constancio Jr.,¹⁰² A. Conte,^{170,119} L. Conti,¹³³ D. Cook,¹²⁸ T. R. Corbitt,⁹³ N. Cornish,¹²² A. Corsi,¹⁶² S. Cortese,¹²⁵ C. A. Costa,¹⁰² M. W. Coughlin,¹⁶⁹ S. B. Coughlin,¹⁷³ J.-P. Coulon,¹⁴⁴ S. T. Countryman,¹³⁰ P. Couvares,⁹² E. E. Cowan,¹⁵⁴

D. M. Coward,¹⁴² M. J. Cowart,⁹⁷ D. C. Coyne,⁹² R. Coyne,¹⁶² K. Craig,¹²⁷ J. D. E. Creighton,¹⁰⁷ J. Cripe,⁹³ S. G. Crowder,¹⁷⁴ A. Cumming,¹²⁷ L. Cunningham,¹²⁷ E. Cuoco,¹²⁵ T. Dal Canton,⁹⁹ S. L. Danilishin,¹²⁷ S. D'Antonio,¹⁰⁴ K. Danzmann,^{108,99} N. S. Darman,¹⁷⁵ V. Dattilo,¹²⁵ I. Dave,¹³⁹ H. P. Daveloza,¹⁷⁶ M. Davier,¹¹⁴ G. S. Davies,¹²⁷ E. J. Daw,¹⁷⁷ R. Day,¹²⁵ D. DeBra,¹³¹ G. Debreczeni,¹²⁹ J. Degallaix,¹⁵⁶ M. De Laurentis,^{158,95} S. Deléglise,¹⁵¹ W. Del Pozzo,¹³⁶ T. Denker,^{99,108} T. Dent,⁹⁹ H. Dereli,¹⁴⁴ V. Dergachev,⁹² R. T. DeRosa,⁹⁷ R. De Rosa,^{158,95} R. DeSalvo,¹⁷⁸ S. Dhurandhar,¹⁰⁵ M. C. Díaz,⁹⁵ L. Di Fiore,⁹⁵ M. Di Giovanni,^{170,119} A. Di Lieto,^{109,110} S. Di Pace,^{170,119} I. Di Palma,^{120,99} A. Di Virgilio,¹¹⁰ G. Dojcinovski,¹⁷⁹ V. Dolique,¹⁵⁶ F. Donovan,¹⁰¹ K. L. Dooley,¹¹² S. Doravari,^{97,99} R. Douglas,¹²⁷ T. P. Downes,¹⁰⁷ M. Drago,^{99,180,181} R. W. P. Drever,⁹² J. C. Driggers,¹²⁸ Z. Du,¹⁶¹ M. Ducrot,⁹⁸ S. E. Dwyer,¹²⁸ T. B. Edo,¹⁷⁷ M. C. Edwards,¹⁶⁹ A. Effler,⁹⁷ H.-B. Eggenstein,⁹⁹ P. Ehrens,⁹² J. Eichholz,⁹⁶ S. S. Eikenberry,⁹⁶ W. Engels,¹⁶⁷ R. C. Essick,¹⁰¹ T. Etzel,⁹² M. Evans,¹⁰¹ T. M. Evans,⁹⁷ R. Everett,¹⁶³ M. Factourovich,¹³⁰ V. Fafone,^{116,104,103} H. Fair,¹²⁶ S. Fairhurst,¹⁸² X. Fan,¹⁶¹ Q. Fang,¹⁴² S. Farinon,¹³⁸ B. Farr,¹⁶⁶ W. M. Farr,¹³⁶ M. Favata,¹⁷⁹ M. Fays,¹⁸² H. Fehrmann,⁹⁹ M. M. Fejer,¹³¹ I. Ferrante,^{109,110} E. C. Ferreira,¹⁰² F. Ferrini,¹²⁵ F. Fidecaro,^{109,110} I. Fiori,¹²⁵ D. Fiorucci,¹²¹ R. P. Fisher,¹²⁶ R. Flaminio,^{156,183} M. Fletcher,¹²⁷ J.-D. Fournier,¹⁴⁴ S. Franco,¹¹⁴ S. Frasca,^{170,119} F. Frasconi,¹¹⁰ Z. Frei,¹⁴⁵ A. Freise,¹³⁶ R. Frey,¹⁵⁰ V. Frey,¹¹⁴ T. T. Fricke,⁹⁹ P. Fritschel,¹⁰¹ V. V. Frolov,⁹⁷ P. Fulda,⁹⁶ M. Fyffe,⁹⁷ H. A. G. Gabbard,¹¹² J. R. Gair,¹⁸⁴ L. Gammaitoni,^{123,124} S. G. Gaonkar,¹⁰⁵ F. Garufi,^{158,95} A. Gatto,¹²¹ G. Gaur,^{185,186} N. Gehrels,¹⁵⁹ G. Gemme,¹³⁸ B. Gendre,¹⁴⁴ E. Genin,¹²⁵ A. Gennai,¹¹⁰ J. George,¹³⁹ L. Gergely,¹⁸⁷ V. Germain,⁹⁸ Archisman Ghosh,¹⁰⁶ S. Ghosh,^{143,100} J. A. Giaime,^{93,97} K. D. Giardina,⁹⁷ A. Giazotto,¹¹⁰ K. Gill,¹⁸⁸ A. Glaefke,¹²⁷ E. Goetz,¹⁸⁹ R. Goetz,⁹⁶ L. Gondan,¹⁴⁵ G. González,⁹³ J. M. Gonzalez Castro,^{109,110} A. Gopakumar,¹⁹⁰ N. A. Gordon,¹²⁷ M. L. Gorodetsky,¹⁴⁰ S. E. Gossan,⁹² M. Gosselin,¹²⁵ R. Gouaty,⁹⁸ C. Graef,¹²⁷ P. B. Graff,¹⁵³ M. Granata,¹⁵⁶ A. Grant,¹²⁷ S. Gras,¹⁰¹ C. Gray,¹²⁸ G. Greco,^{148,149} A. C. Green,¹³⁶ P. Groot,¹⁴³ H. Grote,⁹⁹ S. Grunewald,¹²⁰ G. M. Guidi,^{148,149} X. Guo,¹⁶¹ A. Gupta,¹⁰⁵ M. K. Gupta,¹⁸⁶ K. E. Gushwa,⁹² E. K. Gustafson,⁹² R. Gustafson,¹⁸⁹ J. J. Hacker,¹¹³ B. R. Hall,¹⁴⁷ E. D. Hall,⁹² G. Hammond,¹²⁷ M. Haney,¹⁹⁰ M. M. Hanke,⁹⁹ J. Hanks,¹²⁸ C. Hanna,¹⁶³ M. D. Hannam,¹⁸² J. Hanson,⁹⁷ T. Hardwick,⁹³ J. Harms,^{148,149} G. M. Harry,¹⁹¹ I. W. Harry,¹²⁰ M. J. Hart,¹²⁷ M. T. Hartman,⁹⁶ C.-J. Haster,¹³⁶ K. Haughian,¹²⁷ A. Heidmann,¹⁵¹ M. C. Heintze,^{96,97} H. Heitmann,¹⁴⁴ P. Hello,¹¹⁴ G. Hemming,¹²⁵ M. Hendry,¹²⁷ I. S. Heng,¹²⁷ J. Hennig,¹²⁷ A. W. Heptonstall,⁹² M. Heurs,^{99,108} S. Hild,¹²⁷ D. Hoak,¹⁹² K. A. Hodge,⁹² D. Hofman,¹⁵⁶ S. E. Hollitt,⁴³ K. Holt,⁹⁷ D. E. Holz,¹⁶⁶ P. Hopkins,¹⁸² D. J. Hosken,⁴³ J. Hough,¹²⁷ E. A. Houston,¹²⁷ E. J. Howell,¹⁴² Y. M. Hu,¹²⁷ S. Huang,¹⁶⁴ E. A. Huerta,^{193,173} D. Huet,¹¹⁴ B. Hughey,¹⁸⁸ S. Husa,¹⁵⁷ S. H. Huttner,¹²⁷ T. Huynh-Dinh,⁹⁷ A. Idrisy,¹⁶³ N. Indik,⁹⁹ D. R. Ingram,¹²⁸ R. Inta,¹⁶² H. N. Isa,¹²⁷ J.-M. Isac,¹⁵¹ M. Isi,⁹² G. Islas,¹¹³ T. Isogai,¹⁰¹ B. R. Iyer,¹⁰⁶ K. Izumi,¹²⁸ T. Jacqmin,¹⁵¹ H. Jang,¹⁶⁸ K. Jani,¹⁵⁴ P. Jaranowski,¹⁹⁴ S. Jawahar,¹⁹⁵ F. Jiménez-Forteza,¹⁵⁷ W. W. Johnson,⁹³ D. I. Jones,¹¹⁷ R. Jones,¹²⁷ R. J. G. Jonker,¹⁰⁰ L. Ju,¹⁴² K. Haris,¹⁹⁶ C. V. Kalaghatgi,^{115,182} V. Kalogera,¹⁷³ S. Kandhasamy,¹¹² G. Kang,¹⁶⁸ J. B. Kanner,⁹² S. Karki,¹⁵⁰ M. Kasprzack,^{93,114,125} E. Katsavounidis,¹⁰¹ W. Katzman,⁹⁷ S. Kaufer,¹⁰⁸ T. Kaur,¹⁴² K. Kawabe,¹²⁸ F. Kawazoe,^{99,108} F. Kéfélian,¹⁴⁴ M. S. Kehl,¹⁶⁰ D. Keitel,^{99,157} D. B. Kelley,¹²⁶ W. Kells,⁹² R. Kennedy,¹⁷⁷ J. S. Key,¹⁷⁶ A. Khalaidovski,⁹⁹ F. Y. Khalili,¹⁴⁰ I. Khan,¹⁰³ S. Khan,¹⁸² Z. Khan,¹⁸⁶ E. A. Khazanov,¹⁹⁷ N. Kijbunchoo,¹²⁸ C. Kim,¹⁶⁸ J. Kim,¹⁹⁸ K. Kim,¹⁹⁹ Nam-Gyu Kim,¹⁶⁸ Namjun Kim,¹³¹ Y.-M. Kim,¹⁹⁸ E. J. King,⁴³ P. J. King,¹²⁸ D. L. Kinzel,⁹⁷ J. S. Kissel,¹²⁸ L. Kleybolte,¹¹⁸ S. Klimenko,⁹⁶ S. M. Koehlenbeck,⁹⁹ K. Kokeyama,⁹³ S. Koley,¹⁰⁰ V. Kondrashov,⁹² A. Kontos,¹⁰¹ M. Korobko,¹¹⁸ W. Z. Korth,⁹² I. Kowalska,¹³⁵ D. B. Kozak,⁹² V. Kringel,⁹⁹ B. Krishnan,⁹⁹ A. Królak,^{200,201} C. Krueger,¹⁰⁸ G. Kuehn,⁹⁹ P. Kumar,¹⁶⁰ L. Kuo,¹⁶⁴ A. Kutynia,²⁰⁰ B. D. Lackey,¹²⁶ M. Landry,¹²⁸ J. Lange,²⁰² B. Lantz,¹³¹ P. D. Lasky,²⁰³ A. Lazzarini,⁹² C. Lazzaro,^{154,133} P. Leaci,^{120,170,119} S. Leavey,¹²⁷ E. O. Lebigot,^{121,161} C. H. Lee,¹⁹⁸ H. K. Lee,¹⁹⁹ H. M. Lee,²⁰⁴ K. Lee,¹²⁷ A. Lenon,¹²⁶ M. Leonardi,^{180,181} J. R. Leong,⁹⁹ N. Leroy,¹¹⁴ N. Letendre,⁹⁸ Y. Levin,²⁰³ B. M. Levine,¹²⁸ T. G. F. Li,⁹² A. Libson,¹⁰¹ T. B. Littenberg,²⁰⁵ N. A. Lockerbie,¹⁹⁵ J. Logue,¹²⁷ A. L. Lombardi,¹⁹² J. E. Lord,¹²⁶ M. Lorenzini,^{103,104} V. Lorette,²⁰⁶ M. Lormand,⁹⁷ G. Losurdo,¹⁴⁹ J. D. Lough,^{99,108} H. Lück,^{108,99} A. P. Lundgren,⁹⁹ J. Luo,¹⁶⁹ R. Lynch,¹⁰¹ Y. Ma,¹⁴² T. MacDonald,¹³¹ B. Machenschalk,⁹⁹ M. MacInnis,¹⁰¹ D. M. Macleod,⁹³ F. Magaña-Sandoval,¹²⁶ R. M. Magee,¹⁴⁷ M. Mageswaran,⁹² E. Majorana,¹¹⁹ I. Maksimovic,²⁰⁶ V. Malvezzi,^{116,104} N. Man,¹⁴⁴ I. Mandel,¹³⁶ V. Mandic,¹⁷⁴ V. Mangano,¹²⁷ G. L. Mansell,¹¹¹ M. Manske,¹⁰⁷ M. Mantovani,¹²⁵ F. Marchesoni,^{207,124} F. Marion,⁹⁸ S. Márka,¹³⁰ Z. Márka,¹³⁰ A. S. Markosyan,¹³¹ E. Maros,⁹² F. Martelli,^{148,149} L. Martellini,¹⁴⁴ I. W. Martin,¹²⁷ R. M. Martin,⁹⁶ D. V. Martynov,⁹² J. N. Marx,⁹² K. Mason,¹⁰¹ A. Masserot,⁹⁸ T. J. Massinger,¹²⁶ M. Masso-Reid,¹²⁷ F. Matichard,¹⁰¹ L. Matone,¹³⁰ N. Mavalvala,¹⁰¹ N. Mazumder,¹⁴⁷ G. Mazzolo,⁹⁹ R. McCarthy,¹²⁸ D. E. McClelland,¹¹¹ S. McCormick,⁹⁷ S. C. McGuire,²⁰⁸ G. McIntyre,⁹² J. McIver,⁹²

D. J. McManus,¹¹¹ S. T. McWilliams,¹⁹³ D. Meacher,¹⁶³ G. D. Meadors,^{120,99} J. Meidam,¹⁰⁰ A. Melatos,¹⁷⁵ G. Mendell,¹²⁸
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M. Montani,^{148,149} B. C. Moore,¹⁷⁹ C. J. Moore,²¹¹ D. Moraru,¹²⁸ G. Moreno,¹²⁸ S. R. Morriss,¹⁷⁶ K. Mossavi,⁹⁹
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S. Mukherjee,¹⁷⁶ N. Mukund,¹⁰⁵ A. Mullavey,⁹⁷ J. Munch,⁴³ D. J. Murphy,¹³⁰ P. G. Murray,¹²⁷ A. Mytidis,⁹⁶
I. Nardecchia,^{116,104} L. Naticchioni,^{170,119} R. K. Nayak,²¹² V. Necula,⁹⁶ K. Nedkova,¹⁹² G. Nelemans,^{143,100} M. Neri,^{137,138}
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R. O'Shaughnessy,²⁰² C. D. Ott,¹⁶⁷ D. J. Ottaway,⁴³ R. S. Ottens,⁹⁶ H. Overmier,⁹⁷ B. J. Owen,¹⁶² A. Pai,¹⁹⁶ S. A. Pai,¹³⁹
J. R. Palamos,¹⁵⁰ O. Palashov,¹⁹⁷ C. Palomba,¹¹⁹ A. Pal-Singh,¹¹⁸ H. Pan,¹⁶⁴ C. Pankow,¹⁷³ F. Pannarale,¹⁸² B. C. Pant,¹³⁹
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L. Pekowsky,¹²⁶ A. Pele,⁹⁷ S. Penn,²¹⁶ A. Perreca,⁹² M. Phelps,¹²⁷ O. Piccinni,^{170,119} M. Pichot,¹⁴⁴ F. Piergiovanni,^{148,149}
V. Pierro,¹⁷⁸ G. Pillant,¹²⁵ L. Pinard,¹⁵⁶ I. M. Pinto,¹⁷⁸ M. Pitkin,¹²⁷ R. Poggiani,^{109,110} P. Popolizio,¹²⁵ A. Post,⁹⁹
J. Powell,¹²⁷ J. Prasad,¹⁰⁵ V. Predoi,¹⁸² S. S. Premachandra,²⁰³ T. Prestegard,¹⁷⁴ L. R. Price,⁹² M. Prijatelj,¹²⁵
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H. Radkins,¹²⁸ P. Raffai,¹⁴⁵ S. Raja,¹³⁹ M. Rakhmanov,¹⁷⁶ P. Rapagnani,^{170,119} V. Raymond,¹²⁰ M. Razzano,^{109,110} V. Re,¹¹⁶
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V. J. Roma,¹⁵⁰ J. D. Romano,¹⁷⁶ R. Romano,^{94,95} G. Romanov,²⁰⁹ J. H. Romie,⁹⁷ D. Rosińska,^{217,134} S. Rowan,¹²⁷
A. Rüdiger,⁹⁹ P. Ruggi,¹²⁵ K. Ryan,¹²⁸ S. Sachdev,⁹² T. Sadecki,¹²⁸ L. Sadeghian,¹⁰⁷ L. Salconi,¹²⁵ M. Saleem,¹⁹⁶
F. Salemi,⁹⁹ A. Samajdar,²¹² L. Sammut,^{175,203} E. J. Sanchez,⁹² V. Sandberg,¹²⁸ B. Sandeen,¹⁷³ J. R. Sanders,^{189,126}
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R. Schilling,^{99,†} J. Schmidt,⁹⁹ P. Schmidt,^{92,167} R. Schnabel,¹¹⁸ R. M. S. Schofield,¹⁵⁰ A. Schönbeck,¹¹⁸ E. Schreiber,⁹⁹
D. Schuette,^{99,108} B. F. Schutz,^{182,120} J. Scott,¹²⁷ S. M. Scott,¹¹¹ D. Sellers,⁹⁷ A. S. Sengupta,¹⁸⁵ D. Sentenac,¹²⁵
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M. S. Shahriar,¹⁷³ M. Shaltev,⁹⁹ Z. Shao,⁹² B. Shapiro,¹³¹ P. Shawhan,¹⁵³ A. Sheperd,¹⁰⁷ D. H. Shoemaker,¹⁰¹
D. M. Shoemaker,¹⁵⁴ K. Siellez,^{144,154} X. Siemens,¹⁰⁷ D. Sigg,¹²⁸ A. D. Silva,¹⁰² D. Simakov,⁹⁹ A. Singer,⁹² L. P. Singer,¹⁵⁹
A. Singh,^{120,99} R. Singh,⁹³ A. Singhal,¹⁰³ A. M. Sintès,¹⁵⁷ B. J. J. Slagmolen,¹¹¹ J. R. Smith,¹¹³ N. D. Smith,⁹²
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M. Steinke,⁹⁹ J. Steinlechner,¹²⁷ S. Steinlechner,¹²⁷ D. Steinmeyer,^{99,108} B. C. Stephens,¹⁰⁷ R. Stone,¹⁷⁶ K. A. Strain,¹²⁷
N. Straniero,¹⁵⁶ G. Stratta,^{148,149} N. A. Strauss,¹⁶⁹ S. Strigin,¹⁴⁰ R. Sturani,²¹⁰ A. L. Stuver,⁹⁷ T. Z. Summerscales,²¹⁸
L. Sun,¹⁷⁵ P. J. Sutton,¹⁸² B. L. Swinkels,¹²⁵ M. J. Szczepańczyk,¹⁸⁸ M. Tacca,¹²¹ D. Talukder,¹⁵⁰ D. B. Tanner,⁹⁶
M. Tápai,¹⁸⁷ S. P. Tarabrin,⁹⁹ A. Taracchini,¹²⁰ R. Taylor,⁹² T. Theeg,⁹⁹ M. P. Thirugnanasambandam,⁹² E. G. Thomas,¹³⁶
M. Thomas,⁹⁷ P. Thomas,¹²⁸ K. A. Thorne,⁹⁷ K. S. Thorne,¹⁶⁷ E. Thrane,²⁰³ S. Tiwari,¹⁰³ V. Tiwari,¹⁸² K. V. Tokmakov,¹⁹⁵
C. Tomlinson,¹⁷⁷ M. Tonelli,^{109,110} C. V. Torres,^{92,†} C. I. Torrie,⁹² D. Töyrä,¹³⁶ F. Travasso,^{123,124} G. Traylor,⁹⁷ D. Trifirò,¹¹²
M. C. Tringali,^{180,181} L. Trozzo,^{219,110} M. Tse,¹⁰¹ M. Turconi,¹⁴⁴ D. Tuyenbayev,¹⁷⁶ D. Ugolini,²²⁰ C. S. Unnikrishnan,¹⁹⁰
A. L. Urban,¹⁰⁷ S. A. Usman,¹²⁶ H. Vahlbruch,¹⁰⁸ G. Vajente,⁹² G. Valdes,¹⁷⁶ N. van Bakel,¹⁰⁰ M. van Beuzekom,¹⁰⁰
J. F. J. van den Brand,^{152,100} C. Van Den Broeck,¹⁰⁰ D. C. Vander-Hyde,^{126,113} L. van der Schaaf,¹⁰⁰ J. V. van Heijningen,¹⁰⁰
A. A. van Veggel,¹²⁷ M. Vardaro,^{132,133} S. Vass,⁹² M. Vasúth,¹²⁹ R. Vaulin,¹⁰¹ A. Vecchio,¹³⁶ G. Vedovato,¹³³ J. Veitch,¹³⁶
P. J. Veitch,⁴³ K. Venkateswara,²²¹ D. Verkindt,⁹⁸ F. Vetranò,^{148,149} A. Viceré,^{148,149} S. Vinciguerra,¹³⁶ D. J. Vine,¹⁴¹
J.-Y. Vinet,¹⁴⁴ S. Vitale,¹⁰¹ T. Vo,¹²⁶ H. Vocca,^{123,124} C. Vorvick,¹²⁸ D. Voss,⁹⁶ W. D. Vousden,¹³⁶ S. P. Vyatchanin,¹⁴⁰
A. R. Wade,¹¹¹ L. E. Wade,²²² M. Wade,²²² M. Walker,⁹³ L. Wallace,⁹² S. Walsh,^{107,99,120} G. Wang,¹⁰³ H. Wang,¹³⁶
M. Wang,¹³⁶ X. Wang,¹⁶¹ Y. Wang,¹⁴² R. L. Ward,¹¹¹ J. Warner,¹²⁸ M. Was,⁹⁸ B. Weaver,¹²⁸ L.-W. Wei,¹⁴⁴ M. Weinert,⁹⁹

A. J. Weinstein,⁹² R. Weiss,¹⁰¹ T. Welborn,⁹⁷ L. Wen,¹⁴² P. Weßels,⁹⁹ T. Westphal,⁹⁹ K. Wette,⁹⁹ J. T. Whelan,^{202,99} S. E. Whitcomb,⁹² D. J. White,¹⁷⁷ B. F. Whiting,⁹⁶ R. D. Williams,⁹² A. R. Williamson,¹⁸² J. L. Willis,²²³ B. Willke,^{108,99} M. H. Wimmer,^{99,108} W. Winkler,⁹⁹ C. C. Wipf,⁹² H. Wittel,^{99,108} G. Woan,¹²⁷ J. Worden,¹²⁸ J. L. Wright,¹²⁷ G. Wu,⁹⁷ J. Yablon,¹⁷³ W. Yam,¹⁰¹ H. Yamamoto,⁹² C. C. Yancey,¹⁵³ M. J. Yap,¹¹¹ H. Yu,¹⁰¹ M. Yvert,⁹⁸ A. Zadrożny,²⁰⁰ L. Zangrando,¹³³ M. Zanolin,¹⁸⁸ J.-P. Zendri,¹³³ M. Zevin,¹⁷³ F. Zhang,¹⁰¹ L. Zhang,⁹² M. Zhang,²⁰⁹ Y. Zhang,²⁰² C. Zhao,¹⁴² M. Zhou,¹⁷³ Z. Zhou,¹⁷³ X. J. Zhu,¹⁴² M. E. Zucker,^{92,101} S. E. Zuraw,¹⁹² and J. Zweizig⁹²
(LIGO Scientific Collaboration and Virgo Collaboration)

- ¹*Institut d'Investigació per a la Gestió Integrada de les Zones Costaneres (IGIC) - Universitat Politècnica de València. C/ Paranimf 1, 46730 Gandia, Spain*
- ²*GRPHE - Université de Haute Alsace - Institut universitaire de technologie de Colmar, 34 rue du Grillenbreit BP 50568 - 68008 Colmar, France*
- ³*Technical University of Catalonia, Laboratory of Applied Bioacoustics, Rambla Exposició, 08800 Vilanova i la Geltrú, Barcelona, Spain*
- ⁴*INFN - Sezione di Genova, Via Dodecaneso 33, 16146 Genova, Italy*
- ⁵*Erlangen Centre for Astroparticle Physics, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, D-91058 Erlangen, Germany*
- ⁶*Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS/IN2P3, CPPM UMR 7346, 13288 Marseille, France*
- ⁷*APC, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/IRFU, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, 75205 Paris, France*
- ⁸*IFIC - Instituto de Física Corpuscular (CSIC - Universitat de València), c/Catedrático José Beltrán, 2, 46980 Paterna, Valencia, Spain*
- ⁹*LAM - Laboratoire d'Astrophysique de Marseille, Pôle de l'Étoile Site de Château-Gombert, rue Frédéric Joliot-Curie 38, 13388 Marseille Cedex 13, France*
- ¹⁰*INFN - Laboratori Nazionali del Sud (LNS), Via S. Sofia 62, 95123 Catania, Italy*
- ¹¹*Nikhef, Science Park, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*
- ¹²*Huygens-Kamerlingh Onnes Laboratorium, Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands*
- ¹³*Universiteit van Amsterdam, Instituut voor Hoge-Energie Fysica, Science Park 105, 1098 XG Amsterdam, The Netherlands*
- ¹⁴*INFN -Sezione di Roma, P.le Aldo Moro 2, 00185 Roma, Italy*
- ¹⁵*Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università La Sapienza, P.le Aldo Moro 2, 00185 Roma, Italy*
- ¹⁶*Institute for Space Science, RO-077125 Bucharest, Măgurele, Romania*
- ¹⁷*INFN, Gran Sasso Science Institute, Viale Francesco Crispi 7, LAquila, 67100 Italy*
- ¹⁸*INFN - Sezione di Bologna, Viale Berti-Pichat 6/2, 40127 Bologna, Italy*
- ¹⁹*INFN - Sezione di Bari, Via E. Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy*
- ²⁰*Géozur, UCA, CNRS, IRD, Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur, Sophia Antipolis, France*
- ²¹*Univ. Paris-Sud, 91405 Orsay Cedex, France*
- ²²*University Mohammed I, Laboratory of Physics of Matter and Radiations, B.P.717, Oujda 6000, Morocco*
- ²³*Institut für Theoretische Physik und Astrophysik, Universität Würzburg, Emil-Fischer Str. 31, 97074 Würzburg, Germany*
- ²⁴*Institut d'Investigació per a la Gestió Integrada de les Zones Costaneres (IGIC) - Universitat Politècnica de València. C/ Paranimf 1, 46730 Gandia, Spain.*
- ²⁵*Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia dell'Università, Viale Berti Pichat 6/2, 40127 Bologna, Italy*
- ²⁶*Laboratoire de Physique Corpusculaire, Clermont Université, Université Blaise Pascal, CNRS/IN2P3, BP 10448, F-63000 Clermont-Ferrand, France*
- ²⁷*Also at APC, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/IRFU, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, 75205 Paris, France*
- ²⁸*INFN - Sezione di Catania, Viale Andrea Doria 64, 95125 Catania, Italy*
- ²⁹*LSIS, Aix Marseille Université CNRS ENSAM LSIS UMR 7296 13397 Marseille, France; Université de Toulon CNRS LSIS UMR 7296 83957 La Garde, France*
- ³⁰*Institut Universitaire de France, 75005 Paris, France*
- ³¹*Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), Landsdiep 4, 1797 SZ 't Horntje (Texel), The Netherlands*
- ³²*Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università, Via Dodecaneso 33, 16146 Genova, Italy*
- ³³*Dr. Reemis-Sternwarte and ECAP, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Sternwartstr. 7, 96049 Bamberg, Germany*

- ³⁴*Moscow State University, Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Leninskie gory, 119991 Moscow, Russia*
- ³⁵*Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography (MIO), Aix-Marseille University, 13288, Marseille, Cedex 9, France; Université du Sud Toulon-Var, 83957, La Garde Cedex, France CNRS-INSU/IRD UM 110*
- ³⁶*Direction de la recherche fondamentale - Institut de recherche sur les lois fondamentales de l'Univers - Service de Physique des Particules, CEA Saclay, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette Cedex, France*
- ³⁷*INFN - Sezione di Pisa, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy*
- ³⁸*Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy*
- ³⁹*INFN - Sezione di Napoli, Via Cintia 80126 Napoli, Italy*
- ⁴⁰*Université de Strasbourg, IPHC, 23 rue du Loess 67037 Strasbourg, France - CNRS, UMR7178, 67037 Strasbourg, France*
- ⁴¹*now at INFN - Sezione di Bari, Via E. Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy*
- ⁴²*Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università Federico II di Napoli, Via Cintia 80126, Napoli, Italy*
- ⁴³*University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia 5005, Australia*
- ⁴⁴*Technische Universität München, D-85748 Garching, Germany*
- ⁴⁵*DESY, D-15735 Zeuthen, Germany*
- ⁴⁶*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand*
- ⁴⁷*Université Libre de Bruxelles, Science Faculty CP230, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium*
- ⁴⁸*Department of Physics and Wisconsin IceCube Particle Astrophysics Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA*
- ⁴⁹*Oskar Klein Centre and Department of Physics, Stockholm University, SE-10691 Stockholm, Sweden*
- ⁵⁰*Department of Physics, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802, USA*
- ⁵¹*Institute of Physics, University of Mainz, Staudinger Weg 7, D-55099 Mainz, Germany*
- ⁵²*Department of Physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA*
- ⁵³*III. Physikalisches Institut, RWTH Aachen University, D-52056 Aachen, Germany*
- ⁵⁴*Physics Department, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, South Dakota 57701, USA*
- ⁵⁵*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California, Irvine, California 92697, USA*
- ⁵⁶*Department of Physics, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720, USA*
- ⁵⁷*Department of Physics and Center for Cosmology and Astro-Particle Physics, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA*
- ⁵⁸*Department of Astronomy, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA*
- ⁵⁹*Fakultät für Physik & Astronomie, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, D-44780 Bochum, Germany*
- ⁶⁰*Department of Physics, University of Wuppertal, D-42119 Wuppertal, Germany*
- ⁶¹*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 14627, USA*
- ⁶²*Department of Physics, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742, USA*
- ⁶³*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045, USA*
- ⁶⁴*Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, California 94720, USA*
- ⁶⁵*Department of Physics and Astronomy, Uppsala University, Box 516, S-75120 Uppsala, Sweden*
- ⁶⁶*Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University, D-44221 Dortmund, Germany*
- ⁶⁷*Department of Physics, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon 440-746, Korea*
- ⁶⁸*Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Dienst ELEM, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium*
- ⁶⁹*Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E1*
- ⁷⁰*School of Physics and Center for Relativistic Astrophysics, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia 30332, USA*
- ⁷¹*Département de physique nucléaire et corpusculaire, Université de Genève, CH-1211 Genève, Switzerland*
- ⁷²*Department of Physics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1A7*
- ⁷³*Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802, USA*
- ⁷⁴*Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, USA*
- ⁷⁵*Bartol Research Institute and Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716, USA*
- ⁷⁶*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Gent, B-9000 Gent, Belgium*
- ⁷⁷*Institut für Physik, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, D-12489 Berlin, Germany*
- ⁷⁸*Department of Physics, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813, USA*
- ⁷⁹*Department of Physics, Chiba University, Chiba 263-8522, Japan*
- ⁸⁰*Department of Astronomy, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA*
- ⁸¹*Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark*

- ⁸²*Physikalisches Institut, Universität Bonn, Nussallee 12, D-53115 Bonn, Germany*
- ⁸³*CTSPS, Clark-Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia 30314, USA*
- ⁸⁴*Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520, USA*
- ⁸⁵*Department of Physics and Astronomy, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York 11794-3800, USA*
- ⁸⁶*Université de Mons, 7000 Mons, Belgium*
- ⁸⁷*Department of Physics, Drexel University, 3141 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104, USA*
- ⁸⁸*Department of Physics, University of Wisconsin, River Falls, Wisconsin 54022, USA*
- ⁸⁹*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487, USA*
- ⁹⁰*Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Alaska Anchorage, 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage, Alaska 99508, USA*
- ⁹¹*Department of Physics, University of Oxford, 1 Keble Road, Oxford OX1 3NP, United Kingdom*
- ⁹²*LIGO, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125, USA*
- ⁹³*Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA*
- ⁹⁴*Università di Salerno, Fisciano, I-84084 Salerno, Italy*
- ⁹⁵*INFN, Sezione di Napoli, Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo, I-80126 Napoli, Italy*
- ⁹⁶*University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, USA*
- ⁹⁷*LIGO Livingston Observatory, Livingston, Louisiana 70754, USA*
- ⁹⁸*Laboratoire d'Annecy-le-Vieux de Physique des Particules (LAPP), Université Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS/IN2P3, F-74941 Annecy-le-Vieux, France*
- ⁹⁹*Albert-Einstein-Institut, Max-Planck-Institut für Gravitationsphysik, D-30167 Hannover, Germany*
- ¹⁰⁰*Nikhef, Science Park, 1098 XG Amsterdam, Netherlands*
- ¹⁰¹*LIGO, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA*
- ¹⁰²*Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais, 12227-010 São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil*
- ¹⁰³*INFN, Gran Sasso Science Institute, I-67100 L'Aquila, Italy*
- ¹⁰⁴*INFN, Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, I-00133 Roma, Italy*
- ¹⁰⁵*Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune 411007, India*
- ¹⁰⁶*International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bangalore 560012, India*
- ¹⁰⁷*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201, USA*
- ¹⁰⁸*Leibniz Universität Hannover, D-30167 Hannover, Germany*
- ¹⁰⁹*Università di Pisa, I-56127 Pisa, Italy*
- ¹¹⁰*INFN, Sezione di Pisa, I-56127 Pisa, Italy*
- ¹¹¹*Australian National University, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 0200, Australia*
- ¹¹²*The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi 38677, USA*
- ¹¹³*California State University Fullerton, Fullerton, California 92831, USA*
- ¹¹⁴*LAL, Université Paris-Sud, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, 91400 Orsay, France*
- ¹¹⁵*Chennai Mathematical Institute, Chennai 603103, India*
- ¹¹⁶*Università di Roma Tor Vergata, I-00133 Roma, Italy*
- ¹¹⁷*University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom*
- ¹¹⁸*Universität Hamburg, D-22761 Hamburg, Germany*
- ¹¹⁹*INFN, Sezione di Roma, I-00185 Roma, Italy*
- ¹²⁰*Albert-Einstein-Institut, Max-Planck-Institut für Gravitationsphysik, D-14476 Potsdam-Golm, Germany*
- ¹²¹*APC, AstroParticule et Cosmologie, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/Irfu, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, F-75205 Paris Cedex 13, France*
- ¹²²*Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana 59717, USA*
- ¹²³*Università di Perugia, I-06123 Perugia, Italy*
- ¹²⁴*INFN, Sezione di Perugia, I-06123 Perugia, Italy*
- ¹²⁵*European Gravitational Observatory (EGO), I-56021 Cascina, Pisa, Italy*
- ¹²⁶*Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244, USA*
- ¹²⁷*SUPA, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, United Kingdom*
- ¹²⁸*LIGO Hanford Observatory, Richland, Washington 99352, USA*
- ¹²⁹*Wigner RCP, RMKI, H-1121 Budapest, Konkoly Thege Miklós út 29-33, Hungary*
- ¹³⁰*Columbia University, New York, New York 10027, USA*
- ¹³¹*Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, USA*
- ¹³²*Università di Padova, Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia, I-35131 Padova, Italy*
- ¹³³*INFN, Sezione di Padova, I-35131 Padova, Italy*
- ¹³⁴*CAMK-PAN, 00-716 Warsaw, Poland*
- ¹³⁵*Astronomical Observatory Warsaw University, 00-478 Warsaw, Poland*

- ¹³⁶University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, United Kingdom
¹³⁷Università degli Studi di Genova, I-16146 Genova, Italy
¹³⁸INFN, Sezione di Genova, I-16146 Genova, Italy
¹³⁹RRCAT, Indore MP 452013, India
¹⁴⁰Faculty of Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow 119991, Russia
¹⁴¹SUPA, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley PA1 2BE, United Kingdom
¹⁴²University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia 6009, Australia
¹⁴³Department of Astrophysics/IMAPP, Radboud University Nijmegen, P.O. Box 9010, 6500 GL Nijmegen, Netherlands
¹⁴⁴Artemis, Université Côte d'Azur, CNRS, Observatoire Côte d'Azur, CS 34229, Nice cedex 4, France
¹⁴⁵MTA Eötvös University, "Lendulet" Astrophysics Research Group, Budapest 1117, Hungary
¹⁴⁶Institut de Physique de Rennes, CNRS, Université de Rennes 1, F-35042 Rennes, France
¹⁴⁷Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 99164, USA
¹⁴⁸Università degli Studi di Urbino "Carlo Bo," I-61029 Urbino, Italy
¹⁴⁹INFN, Sezione di Firenze, I-50019 Sesto Fiorentino, Firenze, Italy
¹⁵⁰University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403, USA
¹⁵¹Laboratoire Kastler Brossel, UPMC-Sorbonne Universités, CNRS, ENS-PSL Research University, Collège de France, F-75005 Paris, France
¹⁵²VU University Amsterdam, 1081 HV Amsterdam, Netherlands
¹⁵³University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742, USA
¹⁵⁴Center for Relativistic Astrophysics and School of Physics, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia 30332, USA
¹⁵⁵Institut Lumière Matière, Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, UMR CNRS 5306, 69622 Villeurbanne, France
¹⁵⁶Laboratoire des Matériaux Avancés (LMA), IN2P3/CNRS, Université de Lyon, F-69622 Villeurbanne, Lyon, France
¹⁵⁷Universitat de les Illes Balears, IAC3—IEEC, E-07122 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
¹⁵⁸Università di Napoli "Federico II," Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo, I-80126 Napoli, Italy
¹⁵⁹NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland 20771, USA
¹⁶⁰Canadian Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H8, Canada
¹⁶¹Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China
¹⁶²Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, USA
¹⁶³The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802, USA
¹⁶⁴National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu City, 30013 Taiwan, Republic of China
¹⁶⁵Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales 2678, Australia
¹⁶⁶University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 60637, USA
¹⁶⁷Caltech CaRT, Pasadena, California 91125, USA
¹⁶⁸Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information, Daejeon 305-806, Korea
¹⁶⁹Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota 55057, USA
¹⁷⁰Università di Roma "La Sapienza," I-00185 Roma, Italy
¹⁷¹University of Brussels, Brussels 1050, Belgium
¹⁷²Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California 94928, USA
¹⁷³Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois 60208, USA
¹⁷⁴University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Illinois 55455, USA
¹⁷⁵The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia
¹⁷⁶The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas 78520, USA
¹⁷⁷The University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, United Kingdom
¹⁷⁸University of Sannio at Benevento, I-82100 Benevento, Italy and INFN, Sezione di Napoli, I-80100 Napoli, Italy
¹⁷⁹Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey 07043, USA
¹⁸⁰Università di Trento, Dipartimento di Fisica, I-38123 Povo, Trento, Italy
¹⁸¹INFN, Trento Institute for Fundamental Physics and Applications, I-38123 Povo, Trento, Italy
¹⁸²Cardiff University, Cardiff CF24 3AA, United Kingdom
¹⁸³National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, 2-21-1 Osawa, Mitaka, Tokyo 181-8588, Japan
¹⁸⁴School of Mathematics, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH9 3FD, United Kingdom
¹⁸⁵Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar Ahmedabad Gujarat 382424, India
¹⁸⁶Institute for Plasma Research, Bhat, Gandhinagar 382428, India
¹⁸⁷University of Szeged, Dóm tér 9, Szeged 6720, Hungary
¹⁸⁸Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Prescott, Arizona 86301, USA

- ¹⁸⁹University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, USA
¹⁹⁰Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai 400005, India
¹⁹¹American University, Washington, D.C. 20016, USA
¹⁹²University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003, USA
¹⁹³West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506, USA
¹⁹⁴University of Białystok, 15-424 Białystok, Poland
¹⁹⁵SUPA, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1XQ, United Kingdom
¹⁹⁶IISER-TVM, CET Campus, Trivandrum Kerala 695016, India
¹⁹⁷Institute of Applied Physics, Nizhny Novgorod, 603950, Russia
¹⁹⁸Pusan National University, Busan 609-735, Korea
¹⁹⁹Hanyang University, Seoul 133-791, Korea
²⁰⁰NCBJ, 05-400 Świerk-Otwock, Poland
²⁰¹IM-PAN, 00-956 Warsaw, Poland
²⁰²Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York 14623, USA
²⁰³Monash University, Victoria 3800, Australia
²⁰⁴Seoul National University, Seoul 151-742, Korea
²⁰⁵University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, Alabama 35899, USA
²⁰⁶ESPCI, CNRS, F-75005 Paris, France
²⁰⁷Università di Camerino, Dipartimento di Fisica, I-62032 Camerino, Italy
²⁰⁸Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813, USA
²⁰⁹College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187, USA
²¹⁰Instituto de Física Teórica, University Estadual Paulista/ICTP South American Institute for Fundamental Research, São Paulo, São Paulo 01140-070, Brazil
²¹¹University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TN, United Kingdom
²¹²IISER-Kolkata, Mohanpur, West Bengal 741252, India
²¹³Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, HSIC, Chilton, Didcot, Oxon OX11 0QX, United Kingdom
²¹⁴Whitman College, 345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla, Washington 99362 USA
²¹⁵National Institute for Mathematical Sciences, Daejeon 305-390, Korea
²¹⁶Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York 14456, USA
²¹⁷Janusz Gil Institute of Astronomy, University of Zielona Góra, 65-265 Zielona Góra, Poland
²¹⁸Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104, USA
²¹⁹Università di Siena, I-53100 Siena, Italy
²²⁰Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas 78212, USA
²²¹University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195, USA
²²²Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio 43022, USA
²²³Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas 79699, USA

[†]Deceased.

[‡]Earthquake Research Institute, University of Tokyo, Bunkyo, Tokyo 113-0032, Japan

[§]NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland 20771, USA