

Detecting solar neutrinos with dark matter detectors

With a focus on

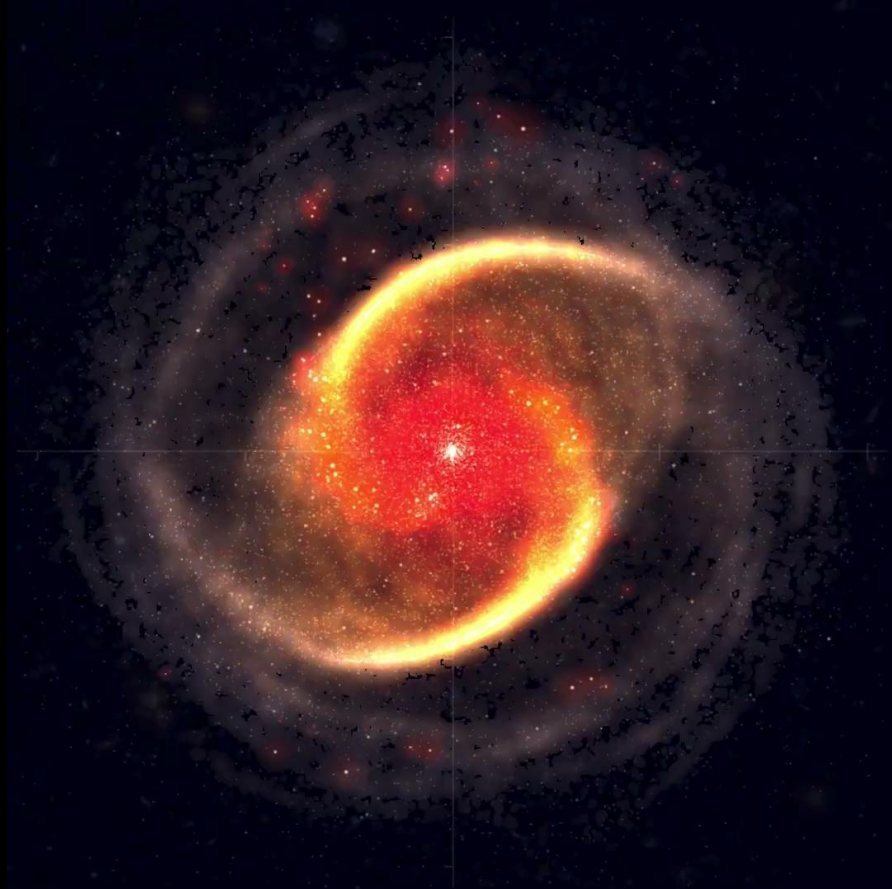


Chami Amarasinghe, UCSB
3 July 2026

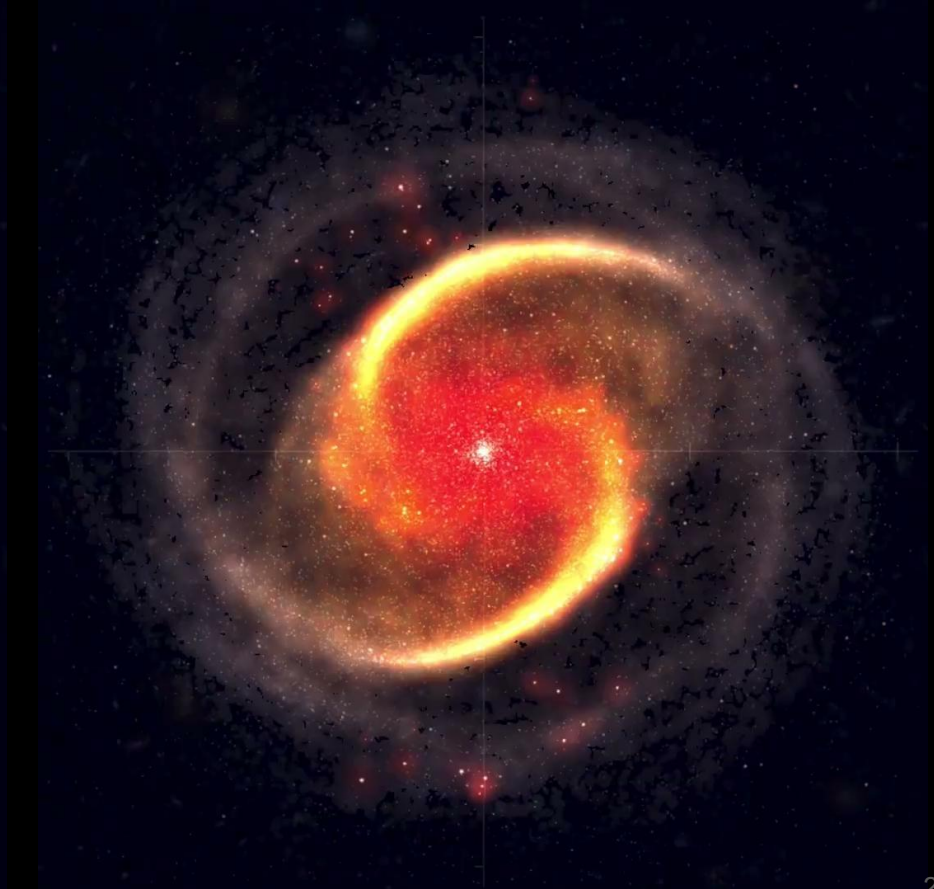


17th International Neutrino Summer School

Only stars, dust and gas



Observed



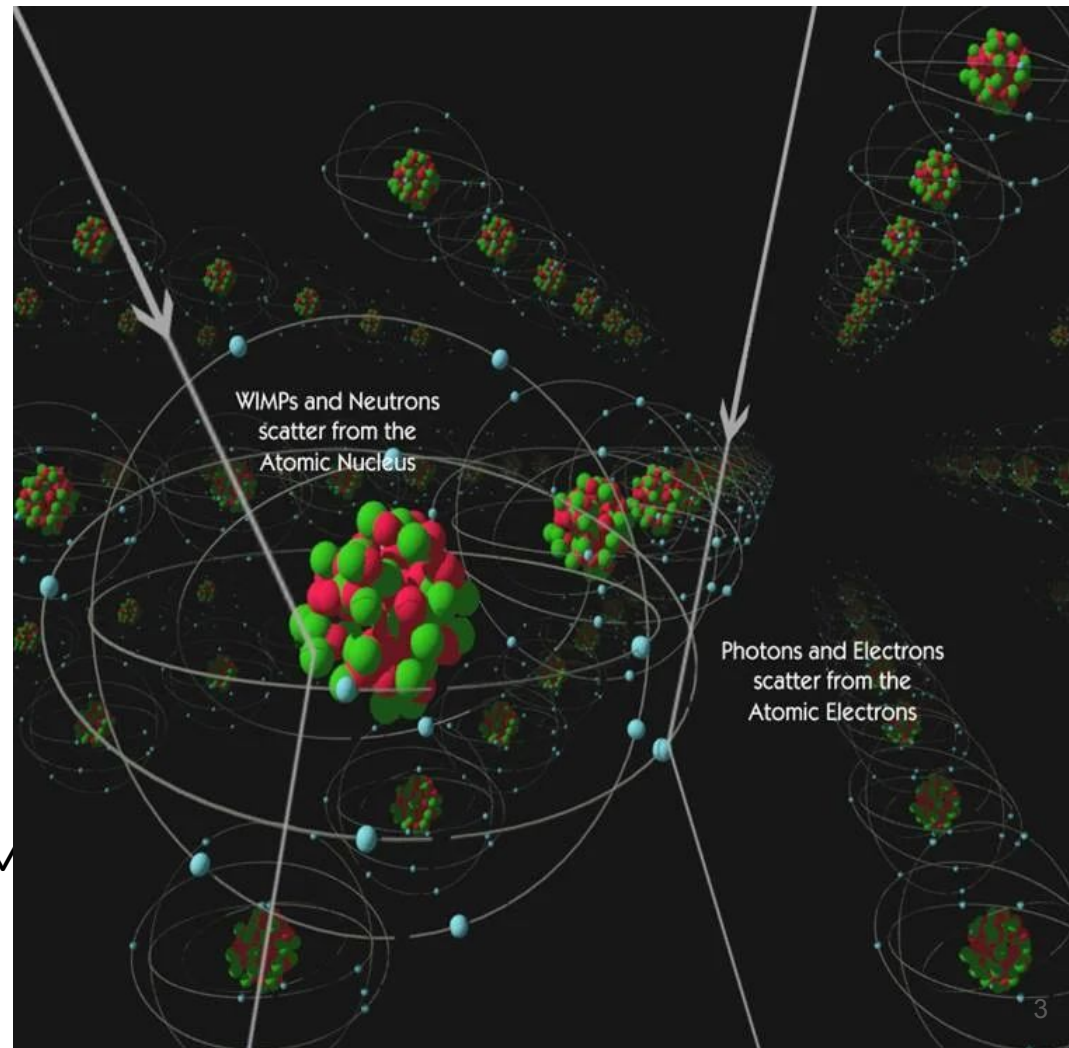
Searching for particle recoils

Scattering from particles in atoms

- Protons
- Neutrons
- Electrons

OR from the entire nucleus through a coherent interaction

- Significant enhancement in cross-section N^2
- Prime DM candidate: Weakly Interacting Massive Particle (WIMP)
- Neutrino CEvNS



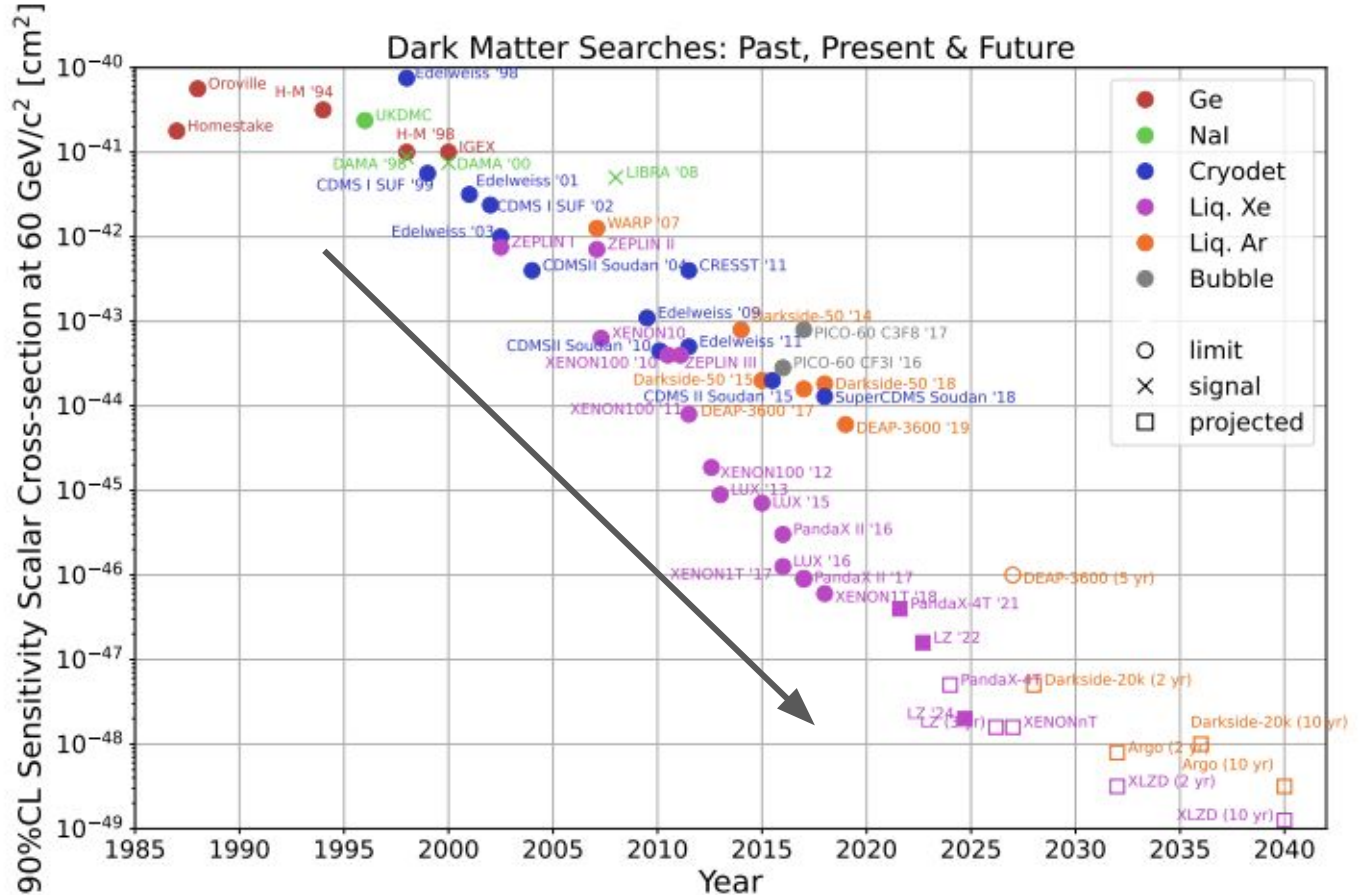
Searches for WIMPs since 1986

Noble liquids are a key technology

Moore's Law for dark matter searches (2x every 1.5 yrs)

Beating Moore's Law for Compute (2x every 2 yrs)

Slide courtesy of Rick Gaitskell

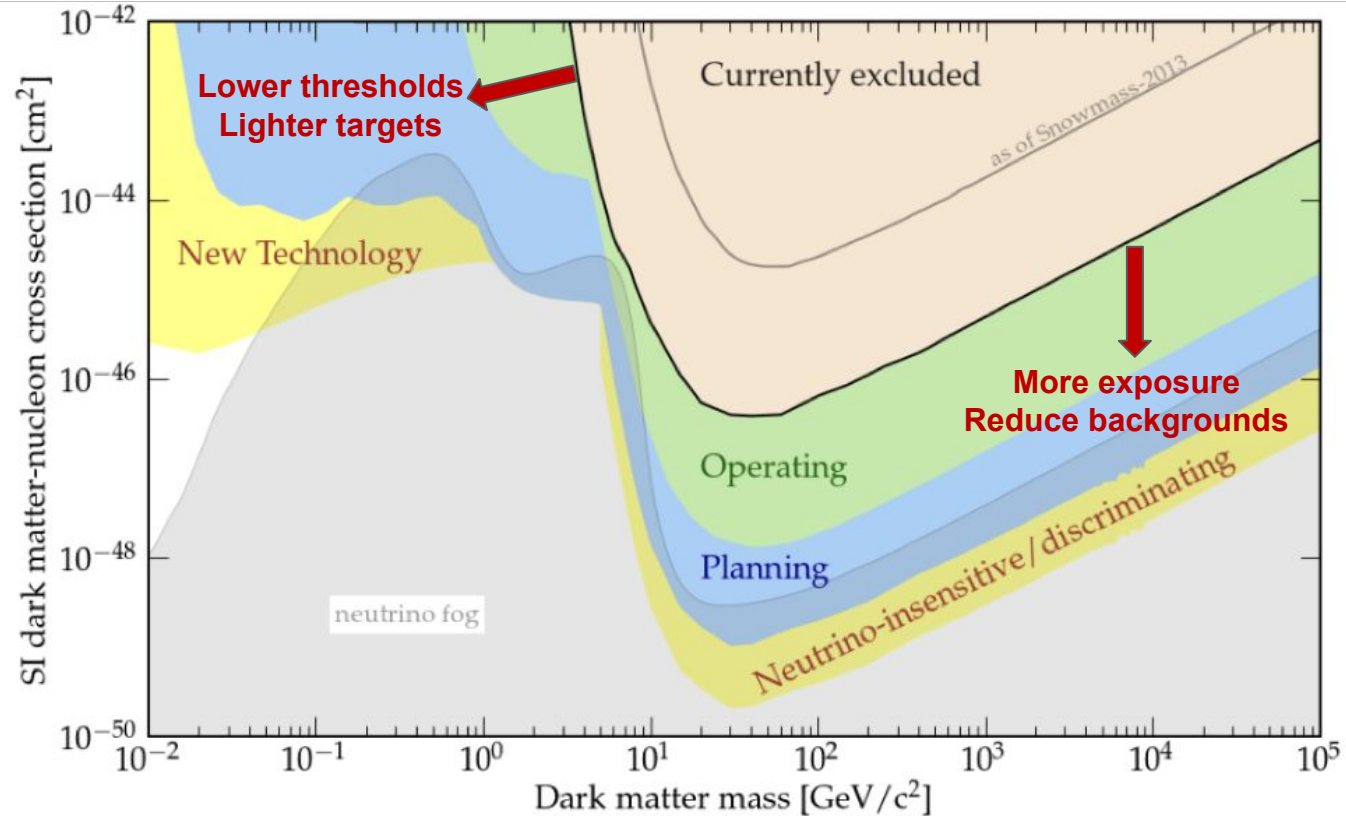


Neutrinos are a validation AND an existential threat

Limited at high-mass by dark matter number density

Limited at low-mass by detector thresholds – **challenging analyses**

Eventually limited by CEvNS mimicking WIMP signals



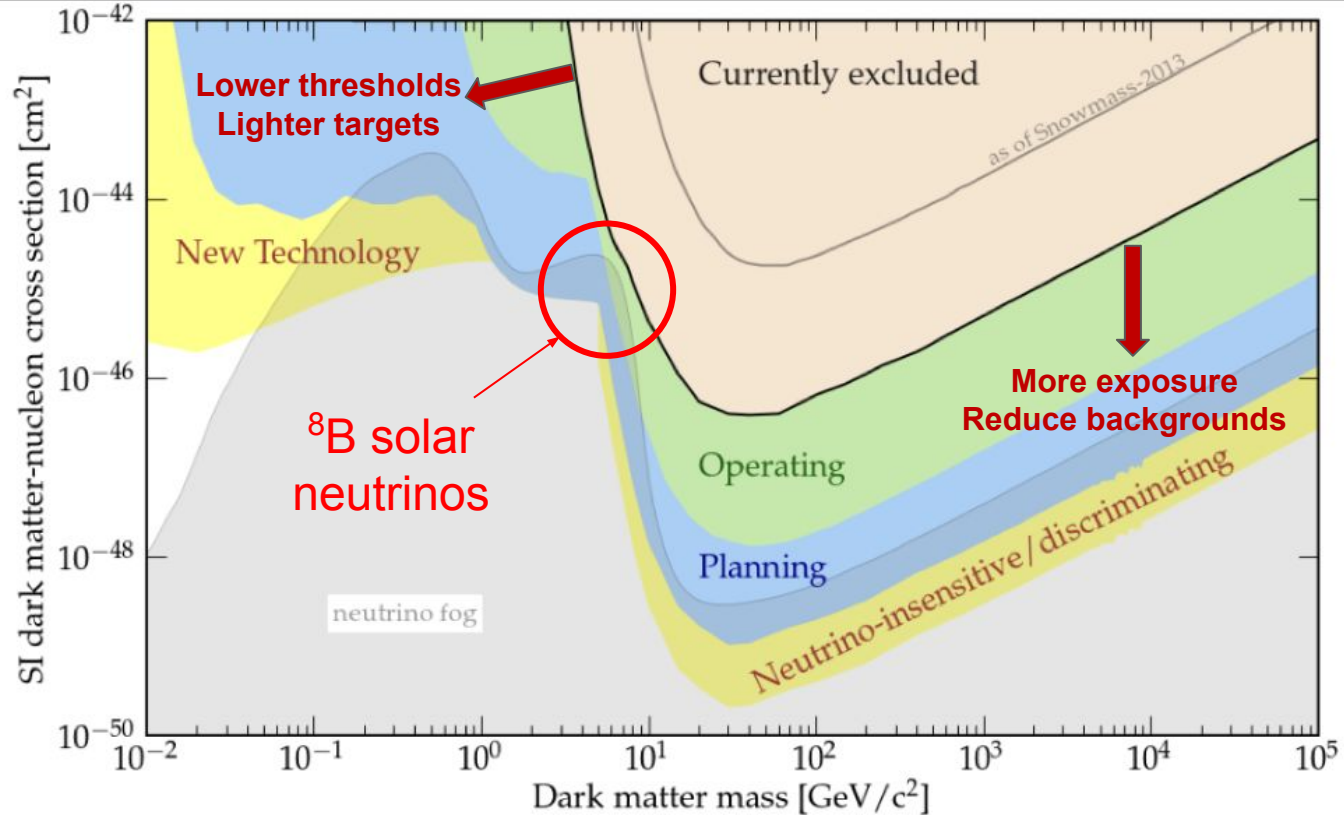
Slide courtesy of Hugh Lippincott

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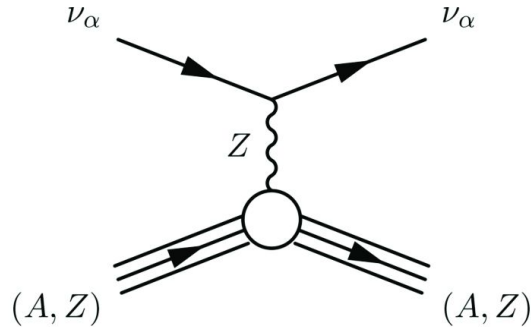
Eventually limited by CEvNS mimicking WIMP signals



Slide courtesy of Hugh Lippincott

Coherent Elastic Neutrino-Nucleus Scattering ($\text{CE}\nu\text{NS}$)

Standard Model process where neutrino “sees”
whole nucleus



$\text{CE}\nu\text{NS}$ cross-section scales with neutrons squared

- Trade-off: heavier nuclei are harder to recoil, need low thresholds
- Testing same enhancement of WIMP-Xe spin-independent cross-sections
- Modestly-sized LXe detectors can be neutrino observatories

$\text{CE}\nu\text{NS}$ first observation in COHERENT experiment (2017) using the Spallation Neutron Source [Science 357, 6356 \(2017\)](#)

Measurements with reactor anti-neutrinos:

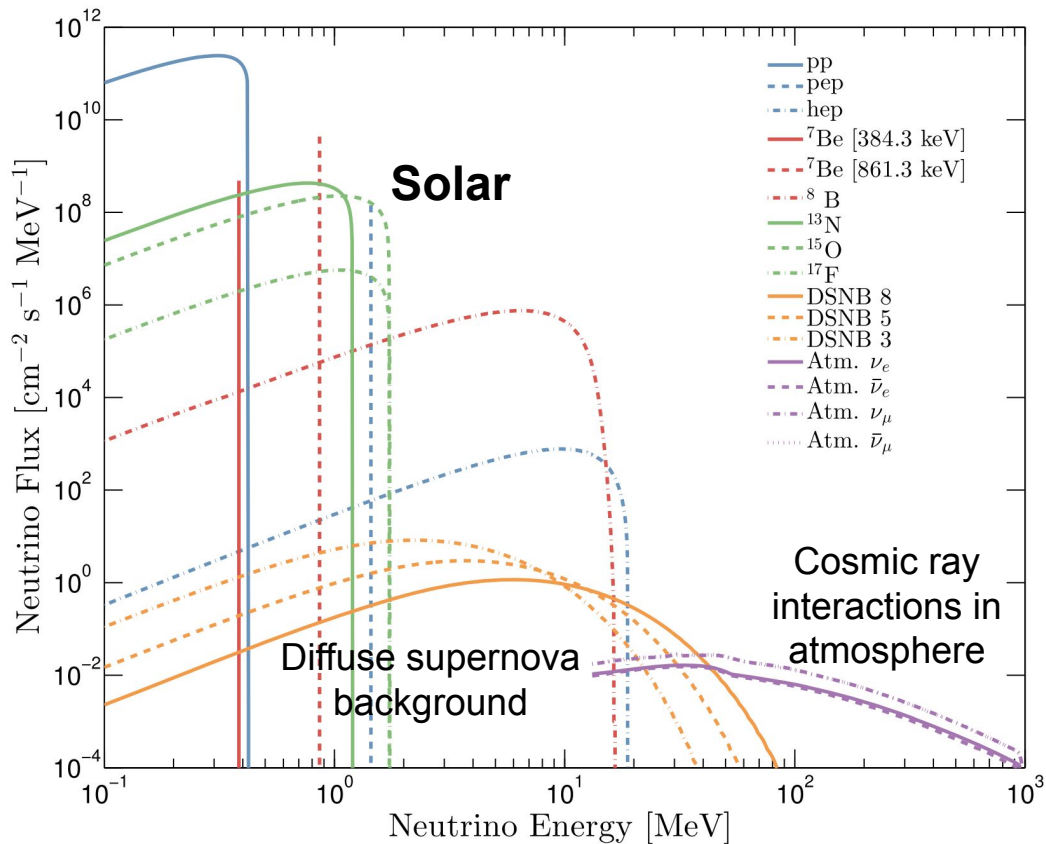
- Dresden-II [PRL 129, 211802 \(2022\)](#)
- CONUS+ [Nature 643, 1229-1233 \(2025\)](#)

First indications of $\text{CE}\nu\text{NS}$ with solar neutrinos

- PandaX-4T [PRL 133, 191001 \(2024\)](#)
- XENONnT [PRL 133, 191002 \(2024\)](#)

Together with the LZ result ([2512.08065](#), submitted to PRL), these are the first astrophysical $\text{CE}\nu\text{NS}$ measurements!

Neutrinos from astrophysical sources

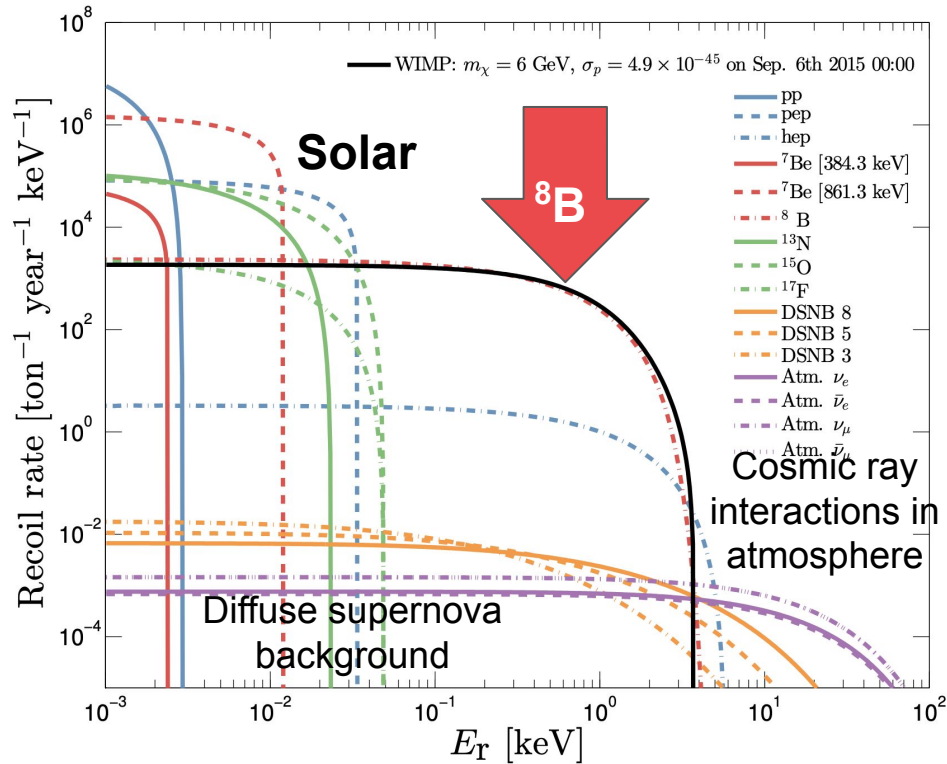


Incredible range of fluxes

Rare-event observatories have been able to detect signals from

- The Sun
- 1987 supernova @ 50kpc
- Galactic plane
- Blazars

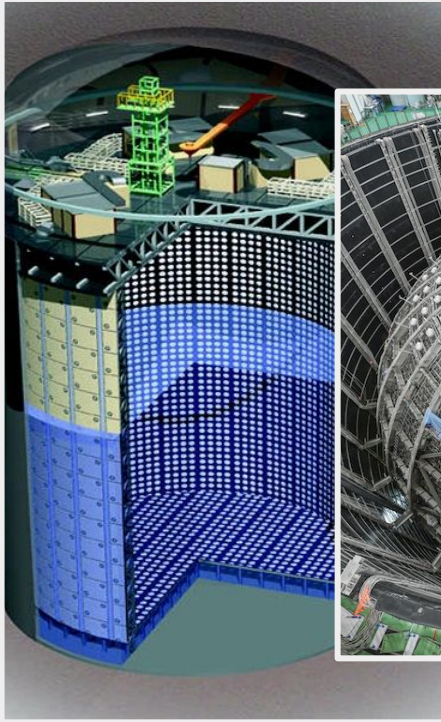
Xenon recoils from ^8B solar neutrinos CEvNS



LXe detectors are the smallest solar neutrino detectors



Storke Tower
at UCSB



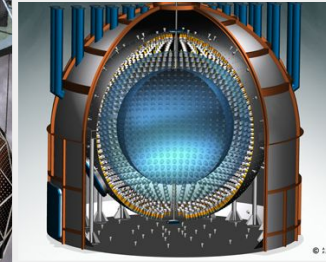
SuperK
50kt



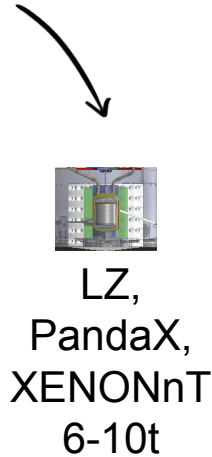
JUNO
20kt



SNO
1000t



Borexino
280t



LZ,
PandaX,
XENONnT
6-10t

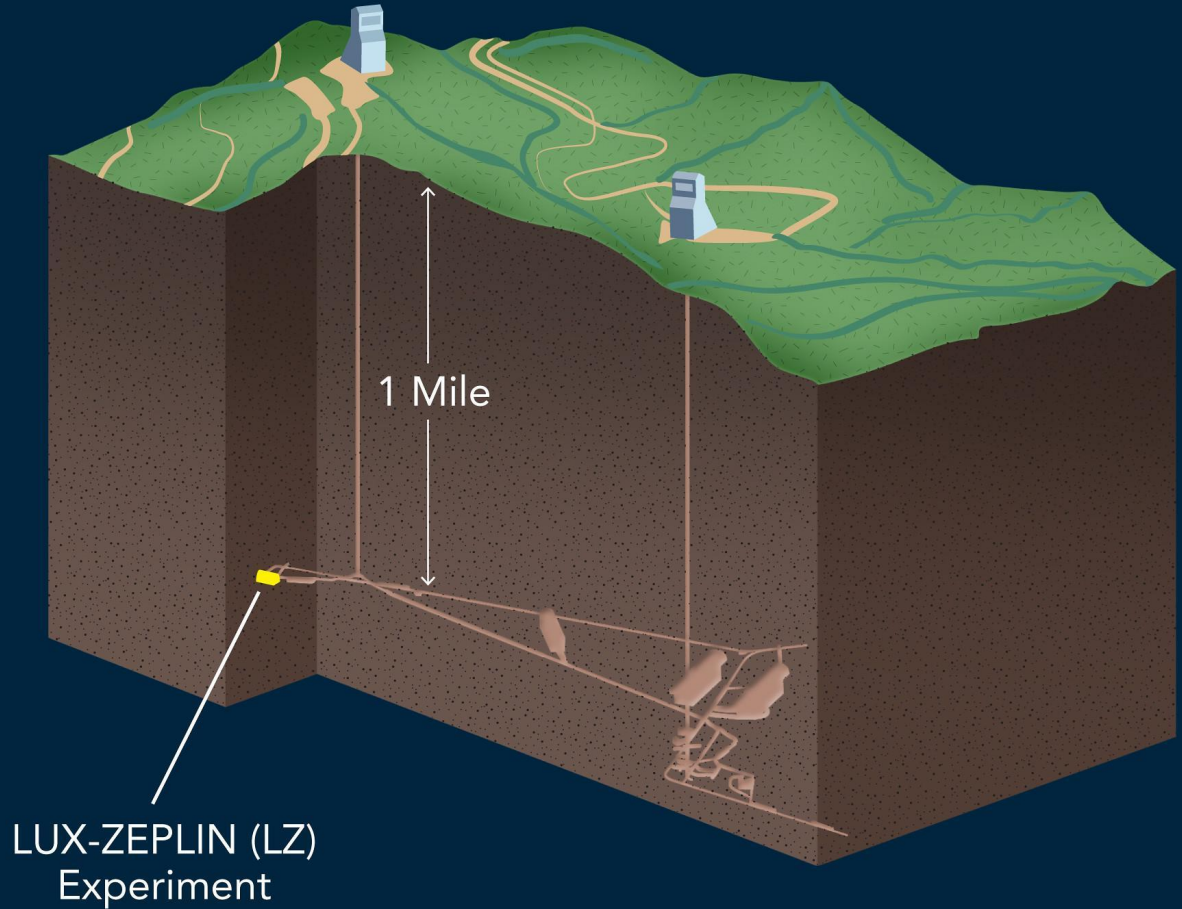
**Large
cross-sections and
low detector
thresholds**

Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) Lead, South Dakota



LZ is in the **Davis Cavern**

Underground to reduce muon flux by factor of 10^6



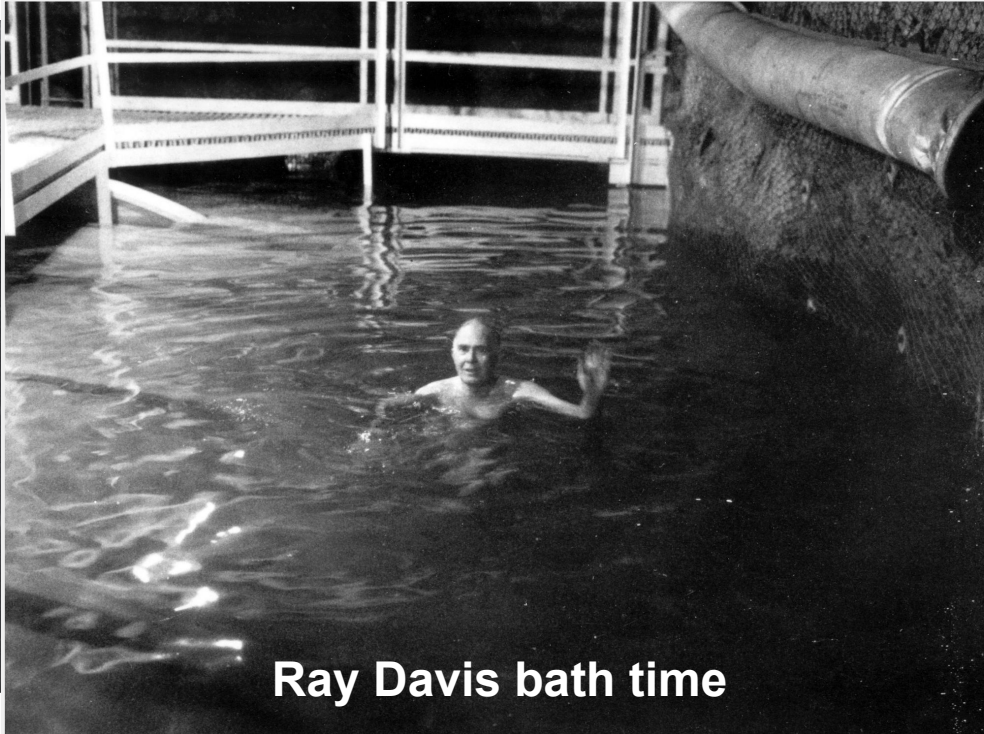
Long history of solar neutrinos at SURF

Solar neutrinos first detected in the Homestake experiment, leading to the **discovery of neutrino oscillations**

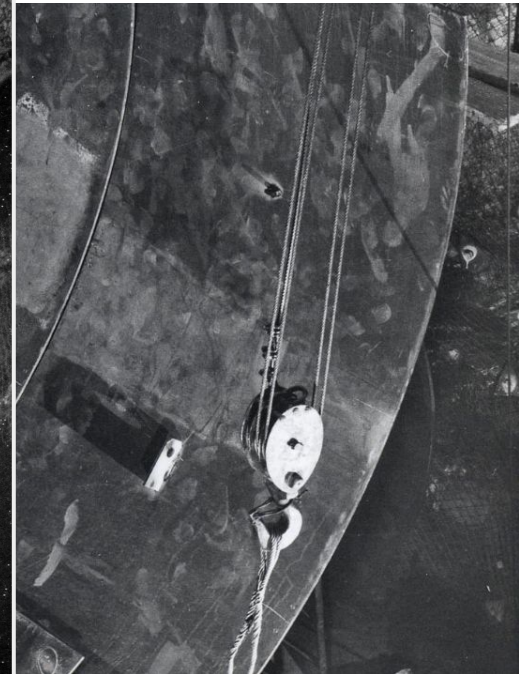


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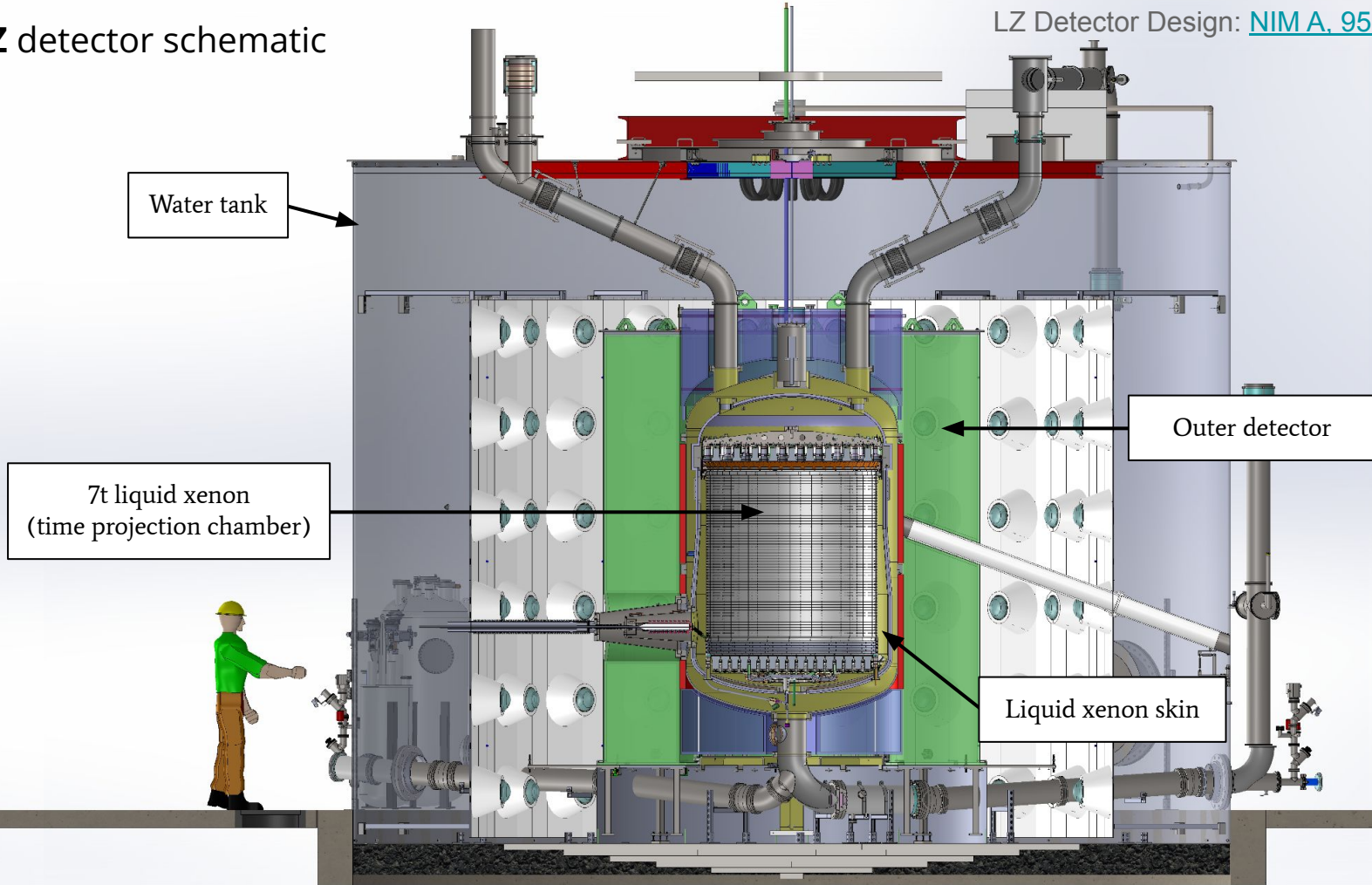
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Ray Davis bath time

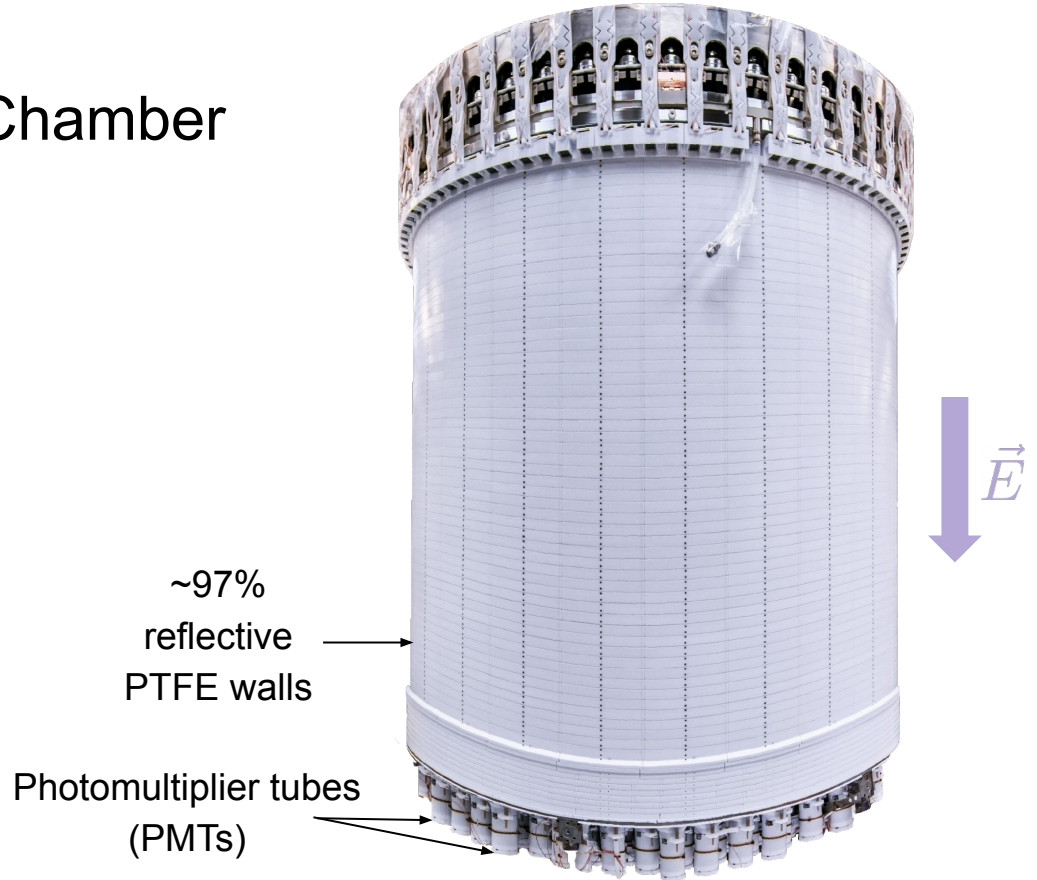


LZ detector schematic



The LZ Time Projection Chamber

- **Key stats**
 - Active mass of **7t** liquid xenon – 20% of global annual production
 - 4 woven grids custom-built at SLAC
 - Two arrays of PMTs, 494 total
- **Operational parameters**
 - ~175K temperature
 - 1.86 bara gas pressure
 - 97 V/cm drift field
 - Electrons drift >20m in Xe of our purity before capture by impurity



Measurement of PTFE reflectance
JINST 12.01 (2017): P01017-P01017.

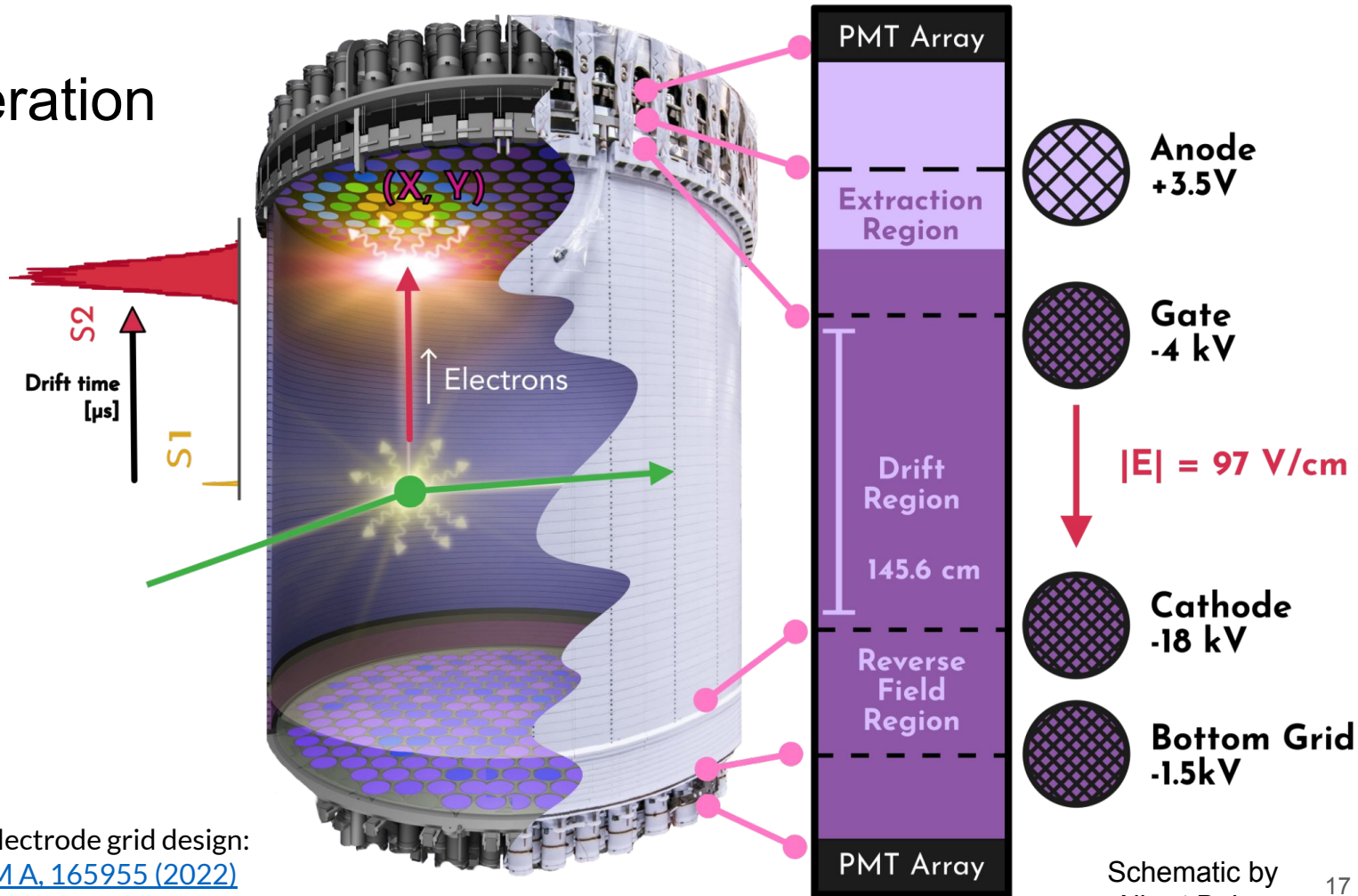
TPC operation

S1 scintillation light collected promptly

Electrons drift and are extracted into gas, where S2 scintillation light is produced

3D position reconstruction: x-y from S2 hitmap, z (depth) from drift time

LZ electrode grid design:
[NIMA, 165955 \(2022\)](#)

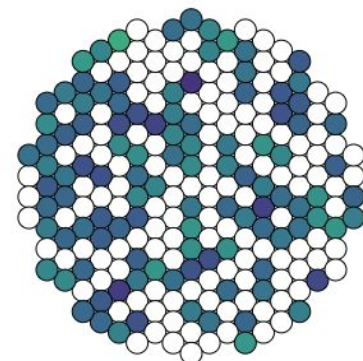
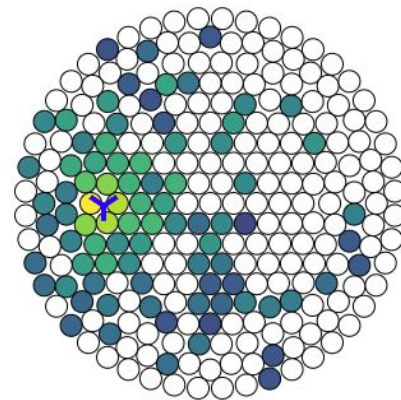
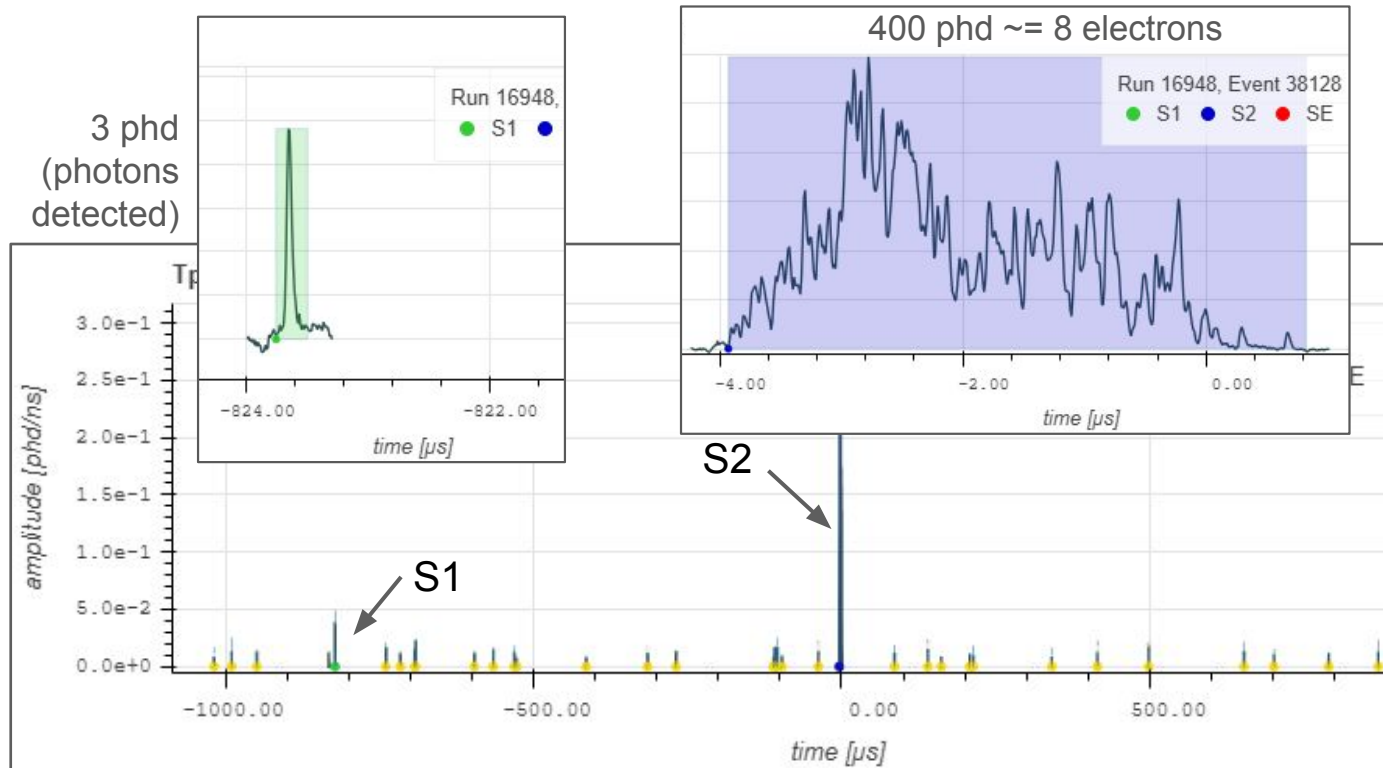


LET'S LOOK AT SOME WAVEFORMS



Courtesy former UCSB postdoc Alissa Monte. You can get this on a t-shirt, along with other LZ-related gear at our store (<https://alissas-store-3.creator-spring.com/>)

Anatomy of an event



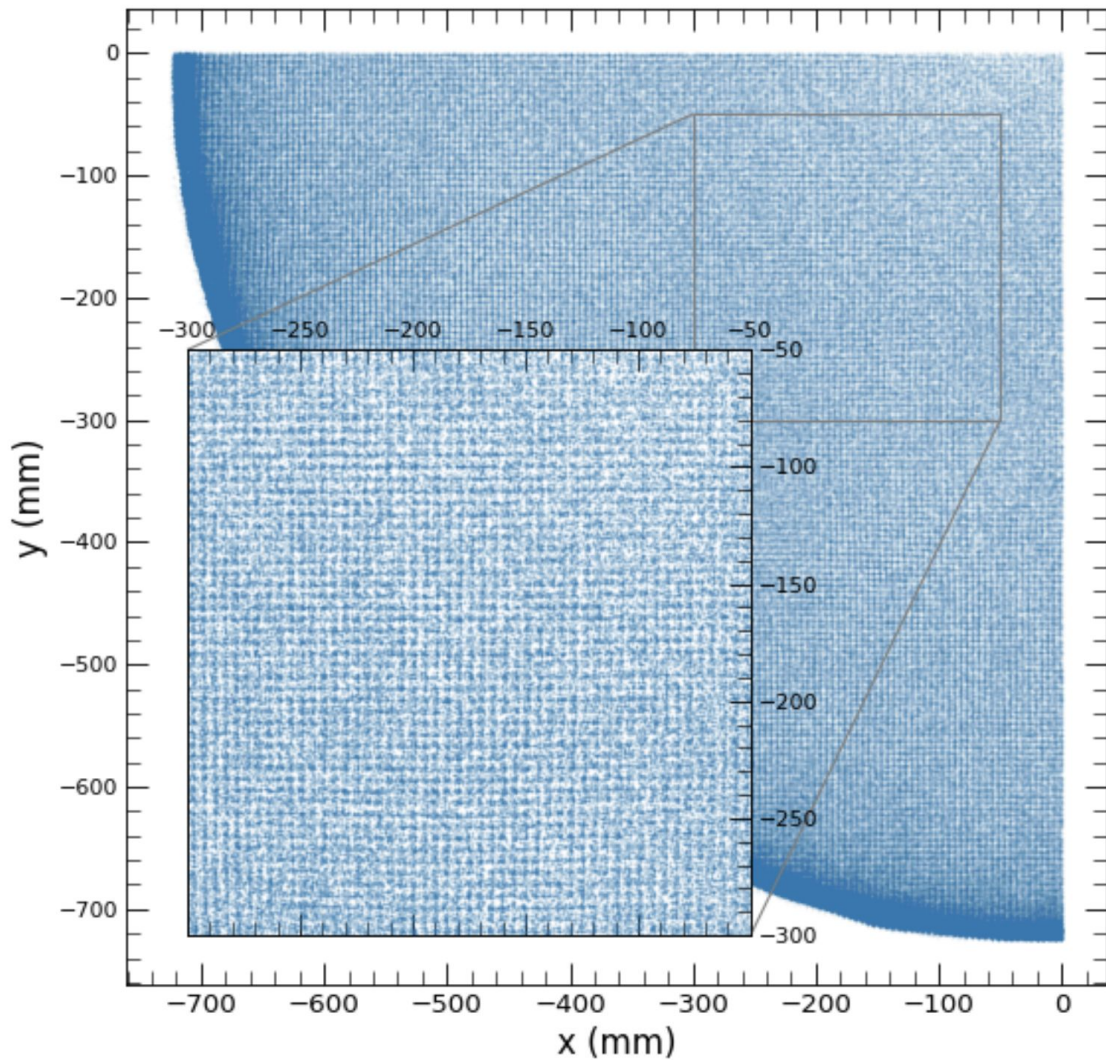
192 PMTs \geq 0.1 phd

Position resolution

At the 1mm level for both XY and Z

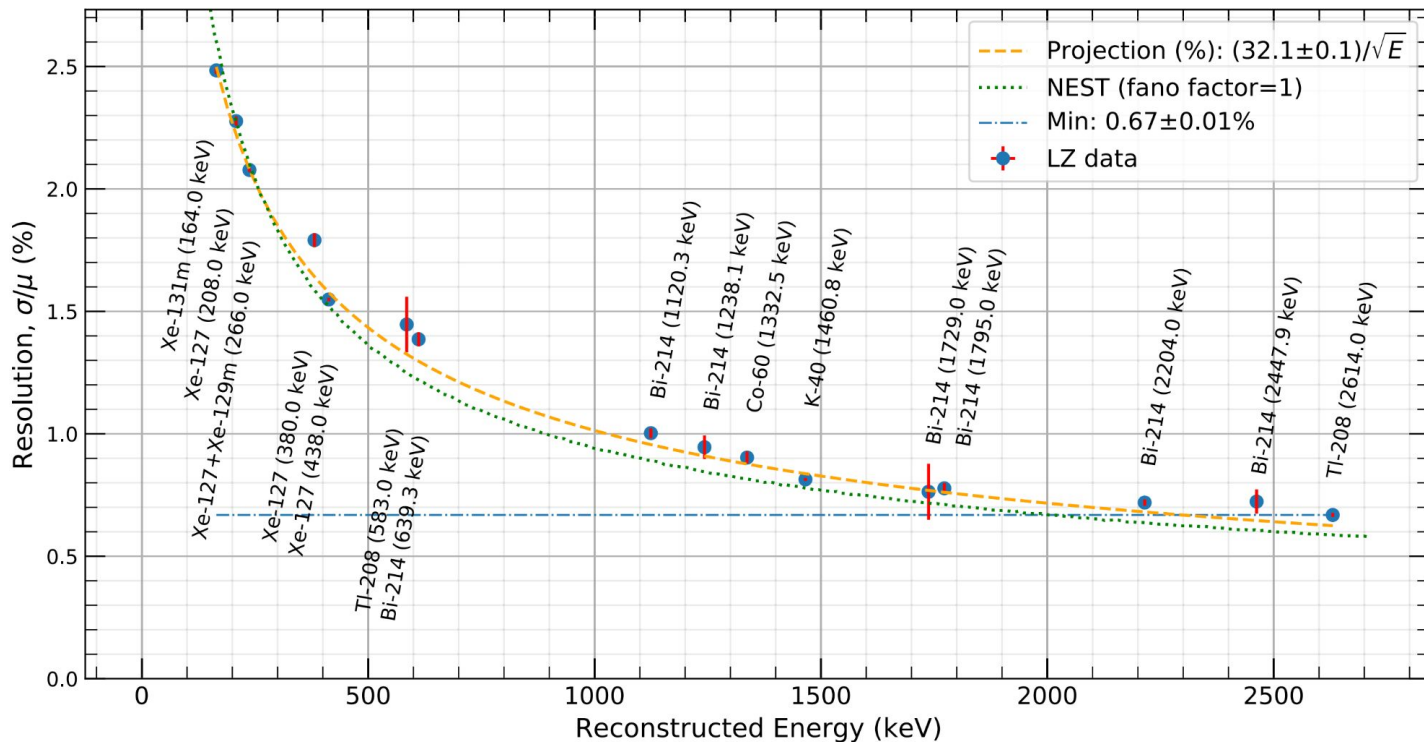
Able to resolve electrons funneling through the gate grid (5mm pitch)

Pereira, Guilherme. ***Continuous Calibration and Monitoring for LZ Dark Matter Experiment.*** PhD Diss. Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal), 2022.



Energy resolution

Unprecedented
energy
resolution for
any liquid
xenon TPC



Liquid xenon can distinguish between *electron recoils* and *nuclear recoils*

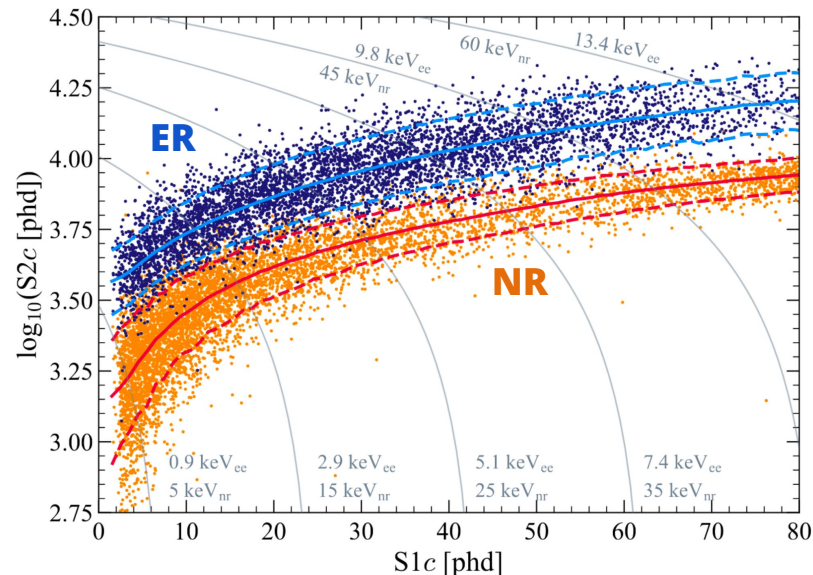
ER - *interaction with atomic electrons*

- γ, β radiation
- solar neutrinos

NR - *interaction with nuclei*

- neutrons
- coherent nucleus–neutrino scatter
- **WIMPs**

Differing exciton-ion ratios and recombination



▲ **LZ tritium & neutron calibrations,**
First WIMP search

99.9% discrimination of flat ER
background below median of 40
GeV WIMP

Extreme background reduction during construction

- WIMPs go through **hundreds of light years of lead without scattering**
- Backgrounds must be low enough to see **<10 DM events in years of data**
- All detector components carefully screened for low radioactivity
 - **A typical person is ~100,000x more radioactive than LZ**
 - TPC assembled in Rn-reduced cleanroom - **<1 gram of dust in TPC**
 - Xe distilled off-site for Kr removal (**<300 ppq**)

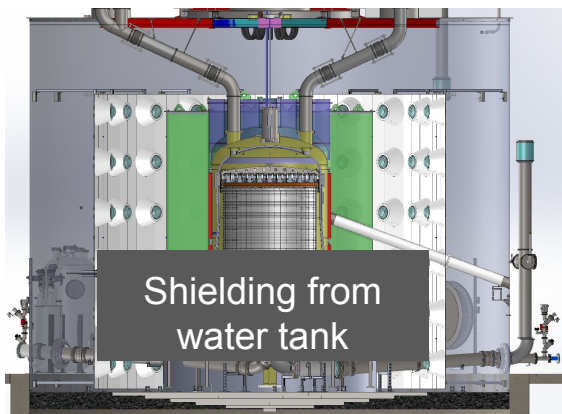
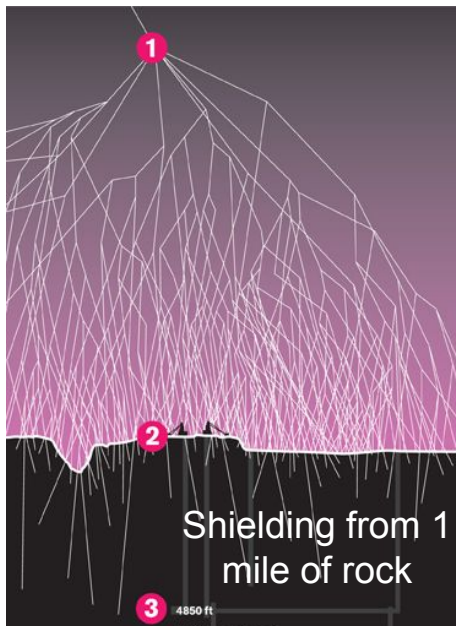


Radioassay and cleanliness: [EPJC, Vol 80: 1044 \(2020\)](#)



Ultrapure titanium cryostat: [Astropart. Phys. 96, 1 2017](#)

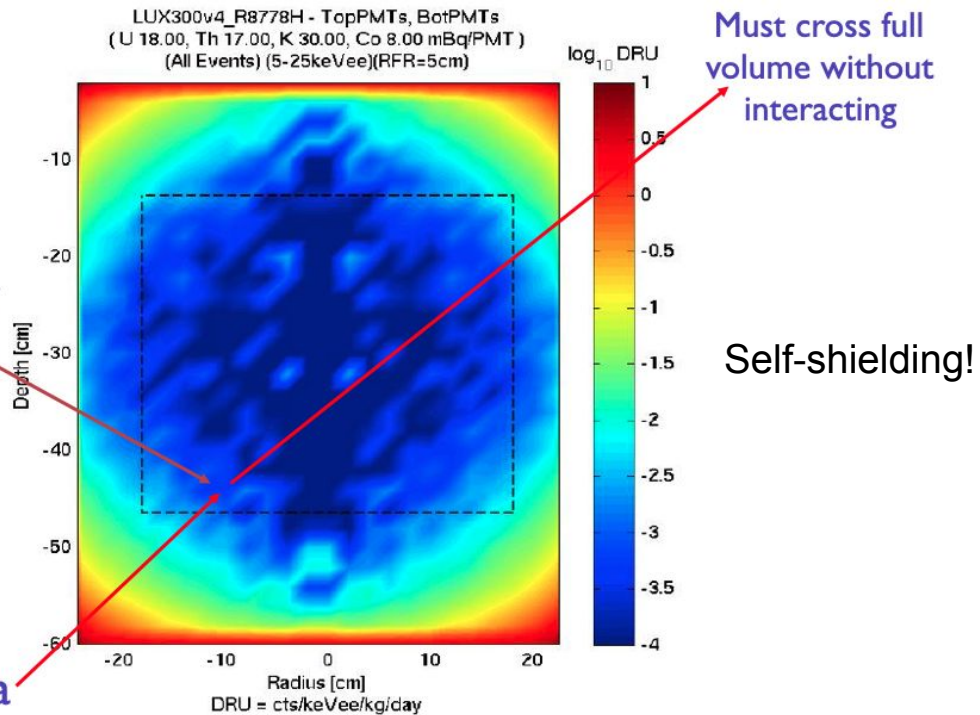
Extreme background reduction from shielding



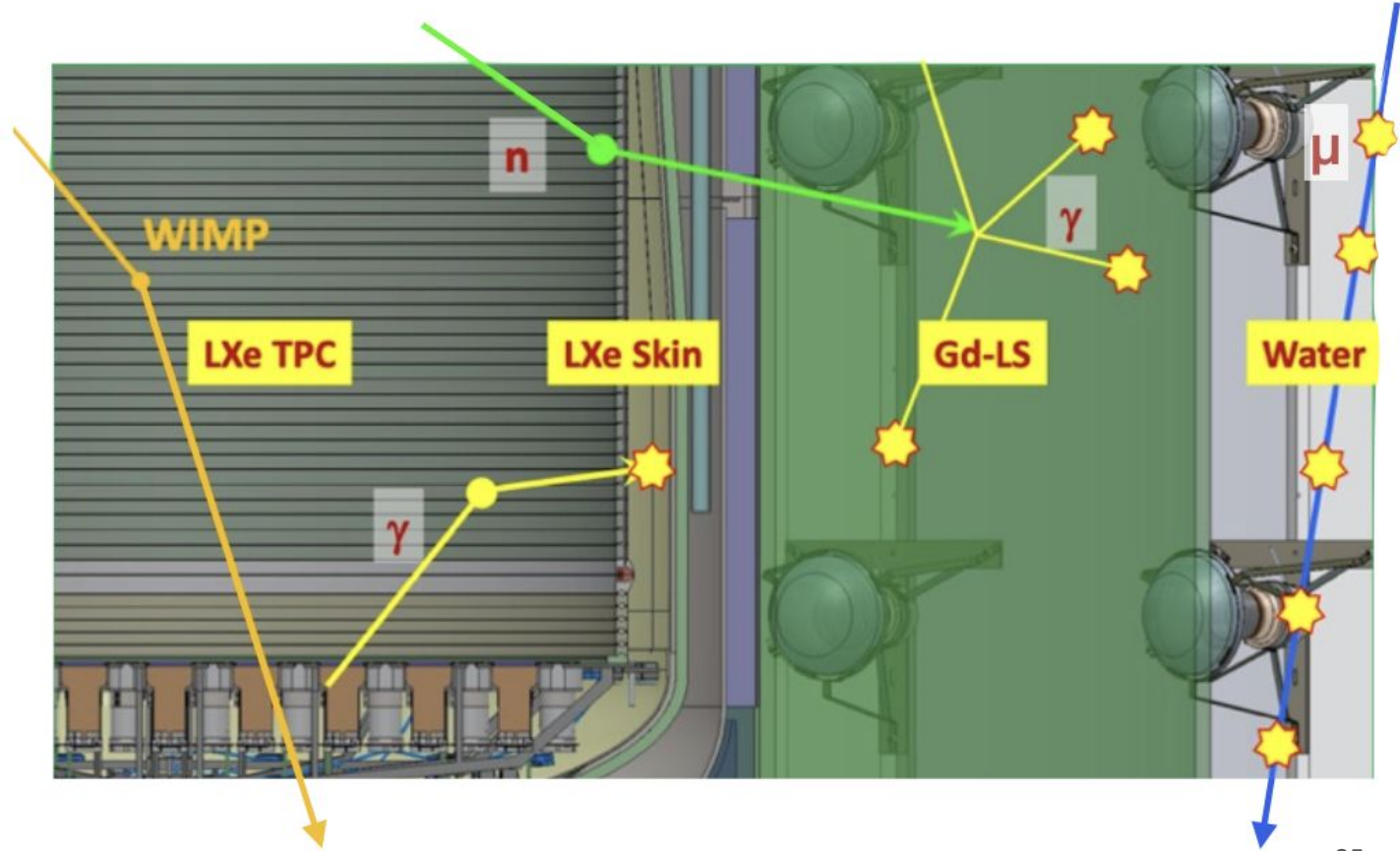
~keV energy deposit

~MeV gamma

LUX300w4_R8778H - TopPMTs, BotPMTs
(U 18.00, Th 17.00, K 30.00, Co 8.00 mBq/PMT)
(All Events) (5-25keVee)(RFR=5cm)



Veto: Backgrounds scatter multiple times, WIMPs only once



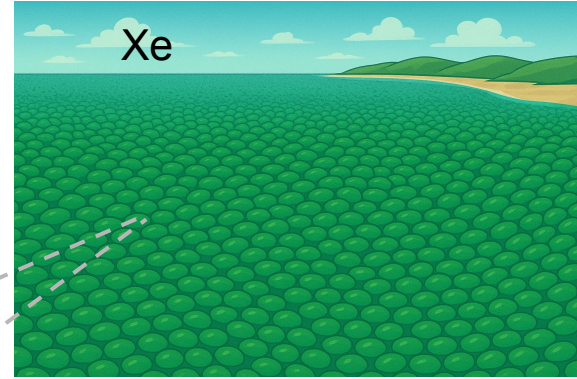
Instrumented LXe skin and outer detector form the **Veto system**

Designed to reject γ + neutron backgrounds

Extreme background reduction during operation

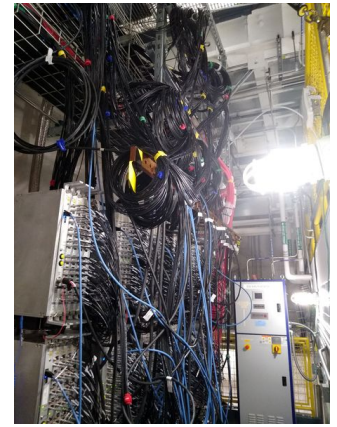
- Xenon purification

- Xe continuously circulated and purified
- Biggest background for standard WIMP: Rn at **~2 atoms/kg of Xe**
 - Like a single jelly bean in all the oceans



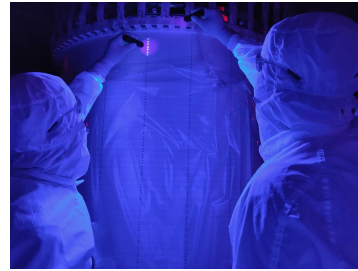
- High sensitivity = high data volume

- Many processes produce just a few detectable photons / electrons!
- Each PMT **read out every 10 ns** of active response
- Data acquisition **uptime >95%** - no sleep for detector!
 - **~1 PB of data/year** = 1 MB photo every ~30 ms
- Analysis cuts **distill data to ~1 in 50 million** - critical to success



DAQ: [NIMA, 1068 169712 \(2024\)](#)

Timeline of LZ Science



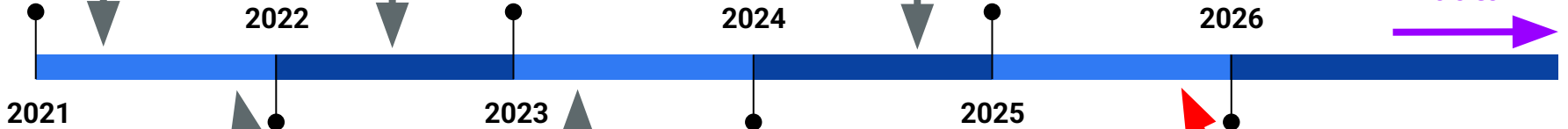
Run to end
2027 =
2x data



Commissioning
begins

WS2022 results
(60 live days)

WS2024 results
(60 + 220 live days)



2021

2022

2023

2024

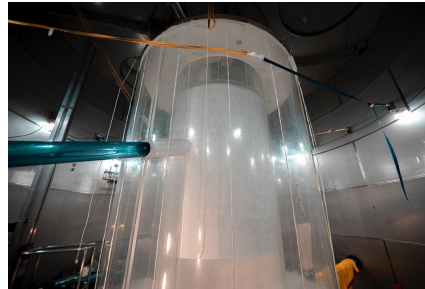
2025

2026

First WIMP
search starts
(WS2022)

WS2024
starts

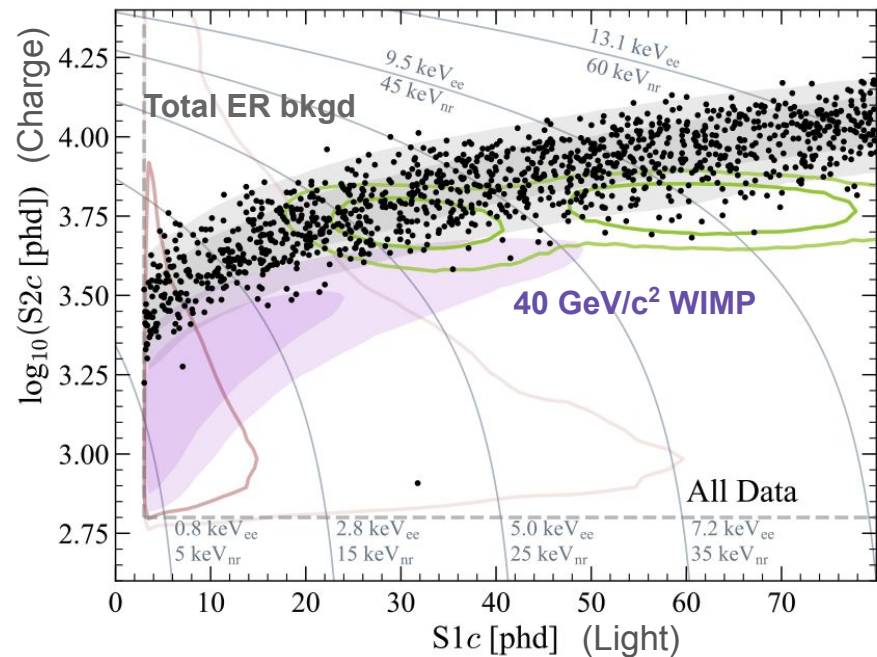
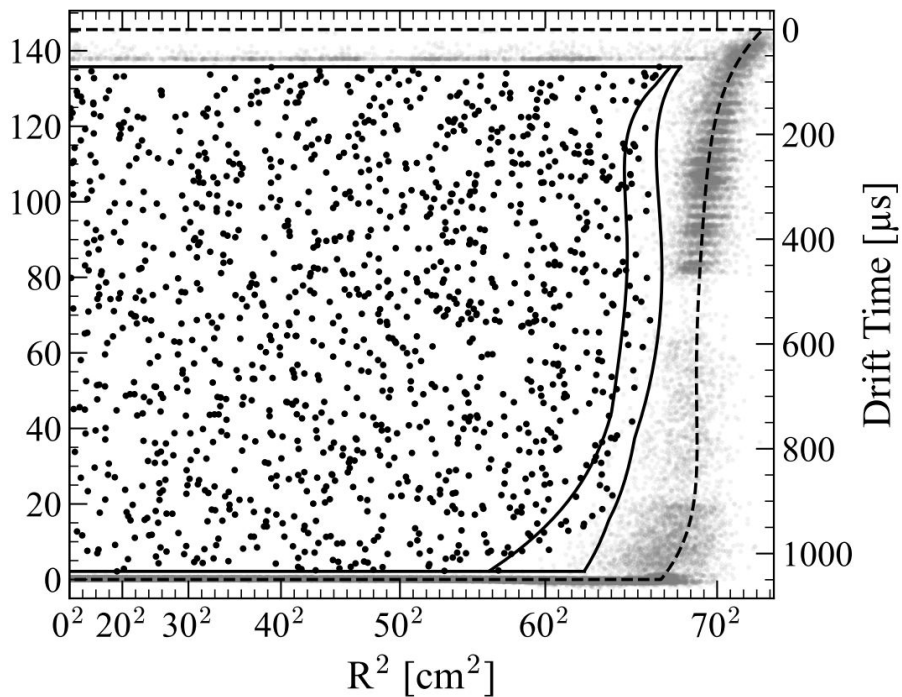
WS2025 results
(417 live days)



Periodic calibration throughout

LZ's Previous WIMP Search (WS2024) Dataset

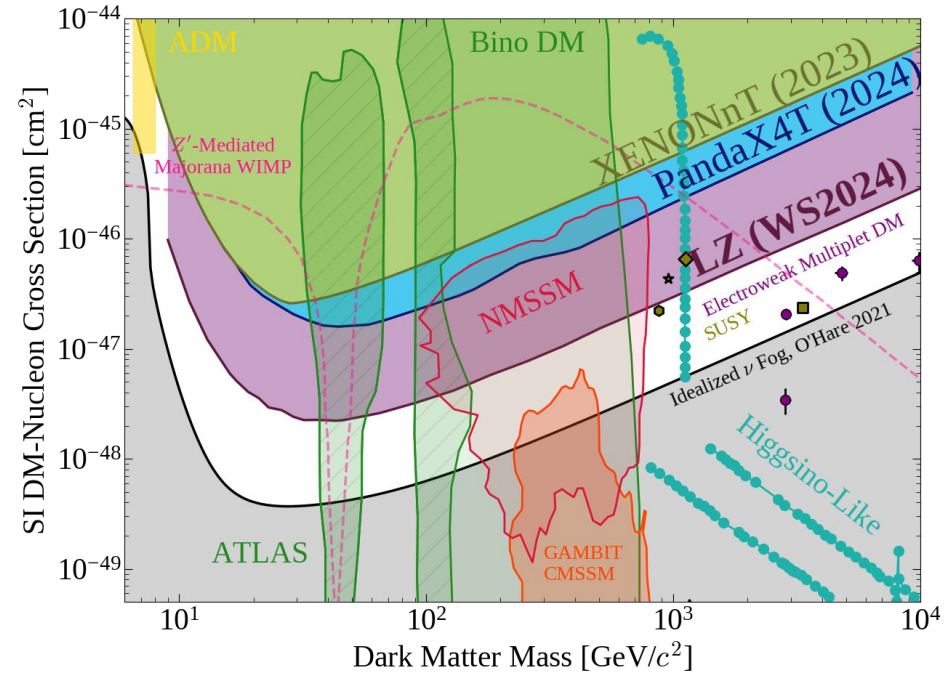
220 live days x 5.5 tonne FV = 3.3 tonne-yr



WS2024 results: [PRL 135, 011802 \(2025\)](https://arxiv.org/abs/2501.11802)

WS2024 Results

- **World-leading limits** for heavy DM (masses > 9 GeV)
- Narrowing down where DM might be hiding!



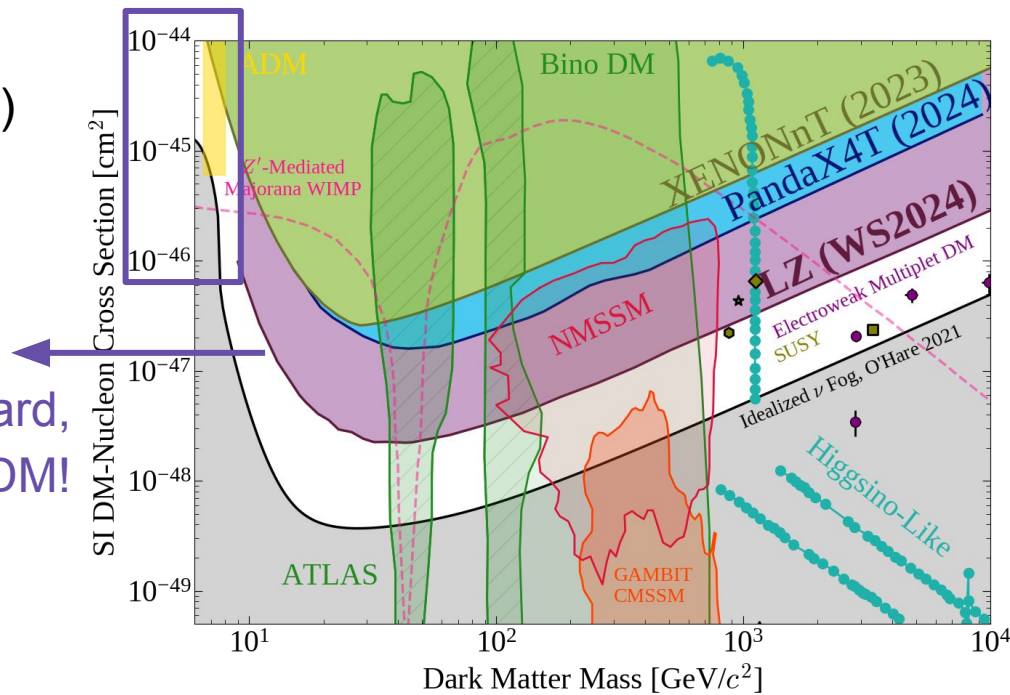
*Thanks to C. O'Hare for compiling theory models of interest

WS2024 Results

- **World-leading limits** for heavy DM (masses > 9 GeV)
- Narrowing down where DM might be hiding!

Lighter candidates produce low-energy signals with handful of photons + electrons \rightarrow Unique set of challenges

Onward,
to light DM!



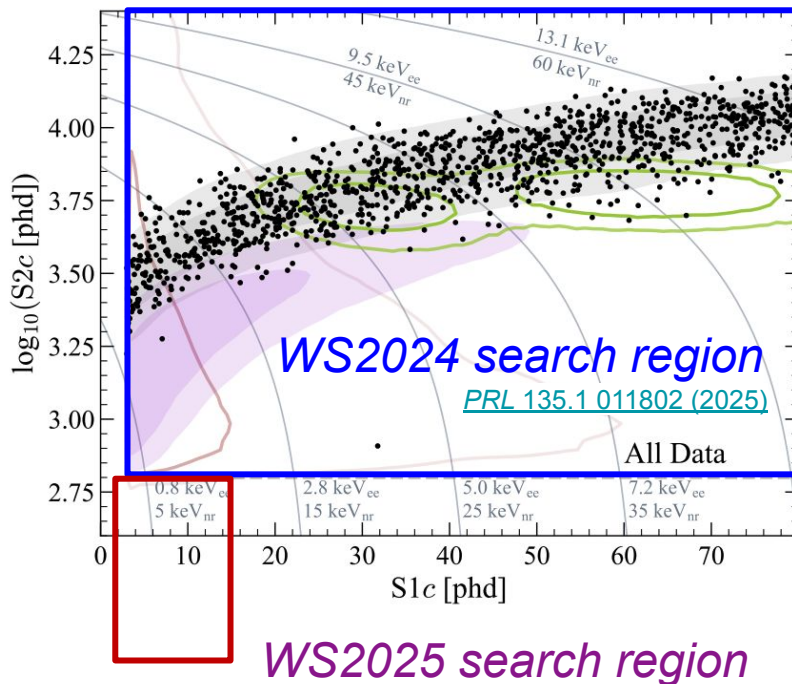
*Thanks to C. O'Hare for compiling theory models of interest

8B CEvNS and light WIMP search region

Search for single scatters: single S1 and single S2

Focus on events with 1-6 keV recoil energy

- **S1 required to have ≥ 3 PMTs hits**
- Corrected area S1c $\in [2, 15]$ photons detected (phd)
- S2 $\in [3.5, 14.5]$ electrons (44.5 phd/electron)



Accidental coincidences are the major background

Underground location and clean materials eliminate radiogenic backgrounds at low-energies

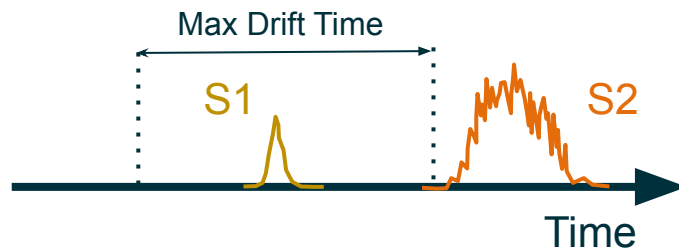
Accidental coincidence: random pairing of S1 and S2 pulses that do not come from the same energy deposition

Isolated S1s and S2s come from instrumental effects, e.g.:

- PMT dark counts,
- photon/electron noise after big energy depositions

We cut away these backgrounds as much as possible and model what is left

Possible Physical Event



Definite Accidental Event



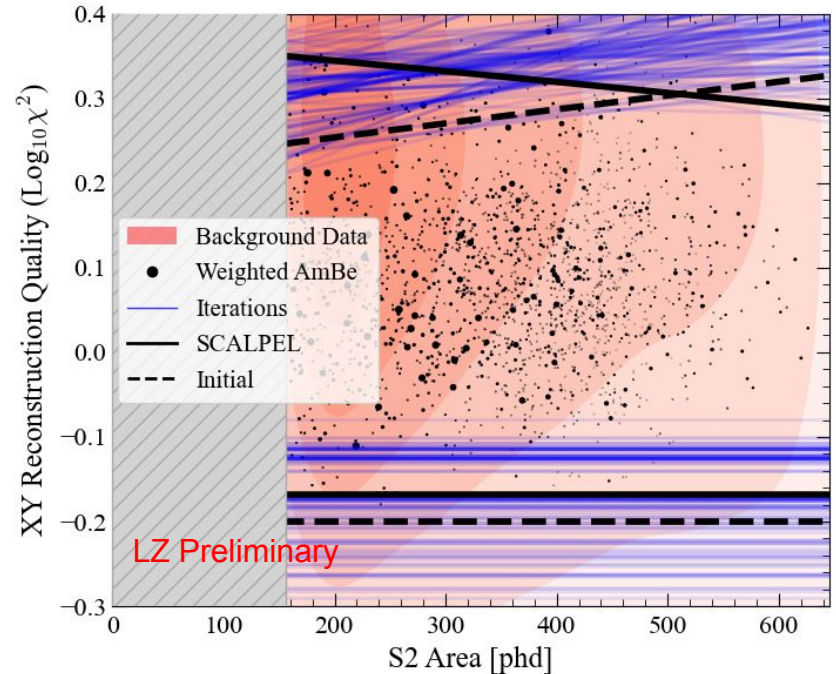
Max drift time = time for electron to drift from cathode to liquid surface (~1 ms)

Cuts targeting accidental coincidence backgrounds

Data removed:

- Time periods following large energy depositions
- Events near detector edge
- Events with coincident signals in veto detectors, targeting neutrons
- Additionally target anomalous S1 and S2 pulses (pulse shape, PMT hit map)

Selections are designed and optimized using neutron (AmBe) calibration and fabricated datasets



Optimization technique SCALPEL¹
simultaneously tunes cuts in multiple parameter
spaces

¹Using Covariance Matrix Adaptation Evolution Strategy

Accidentals modeling

LZ accidentals model *captures time-varying environment*

Generated from stitching together isolated S1s and S2s. Total rate normalized to a known accidentals sideband (> max drift time)

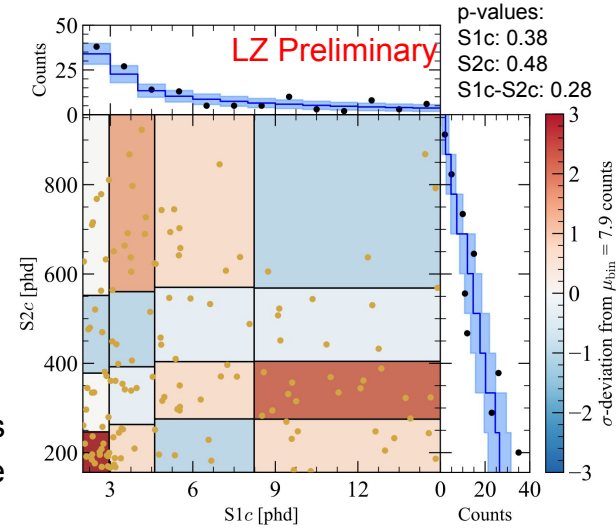
Prediction: 6.6 ± 0.3 events in full exposure (5.7 tonne-years)

Excellent agreement across a variety of detector conditions (neutron calibrations and high-photon/electron conditions) – paper in prep

Model validated using events with drift time > max drift time



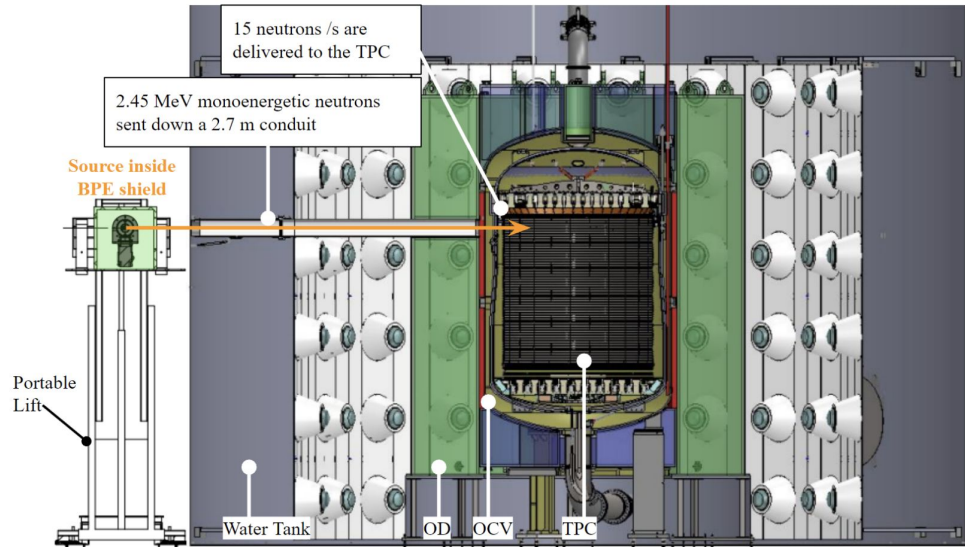
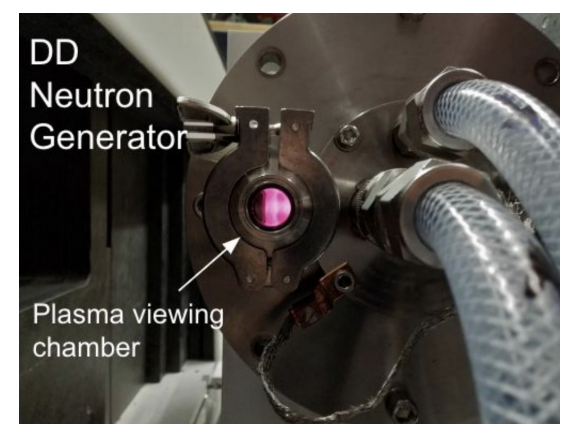
Chopstitch Event



Calibrating nuclear recoil response

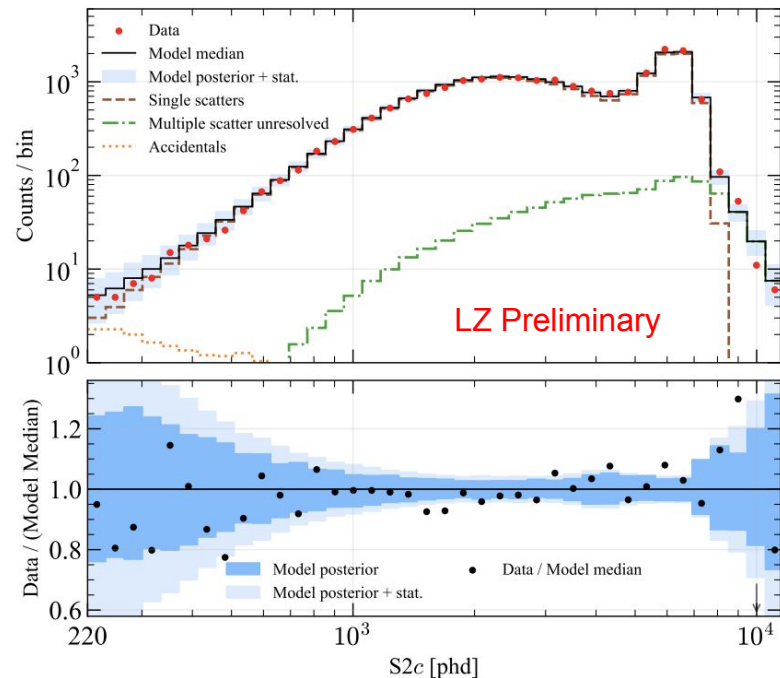
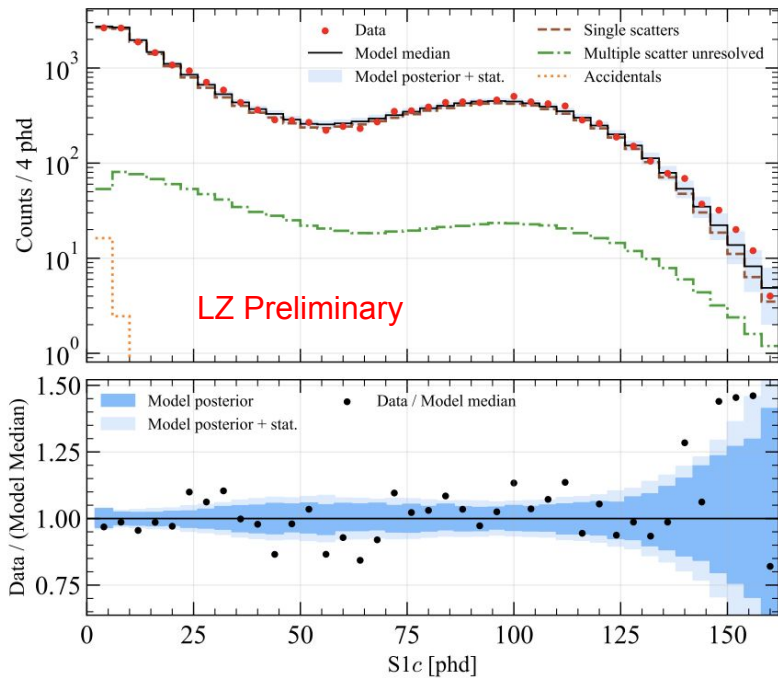
Need to calibrate nuclear recoil response and quantify uncertainties

- Nearly mono-energetic 2.45 MeV neutrons from an Adelphi deuterium-deuterium (DD) source
- DD neutrons produce nuclear recoils from 0-74 keV
- Constrain both high and low energy nuclear recoil behavior in xenon



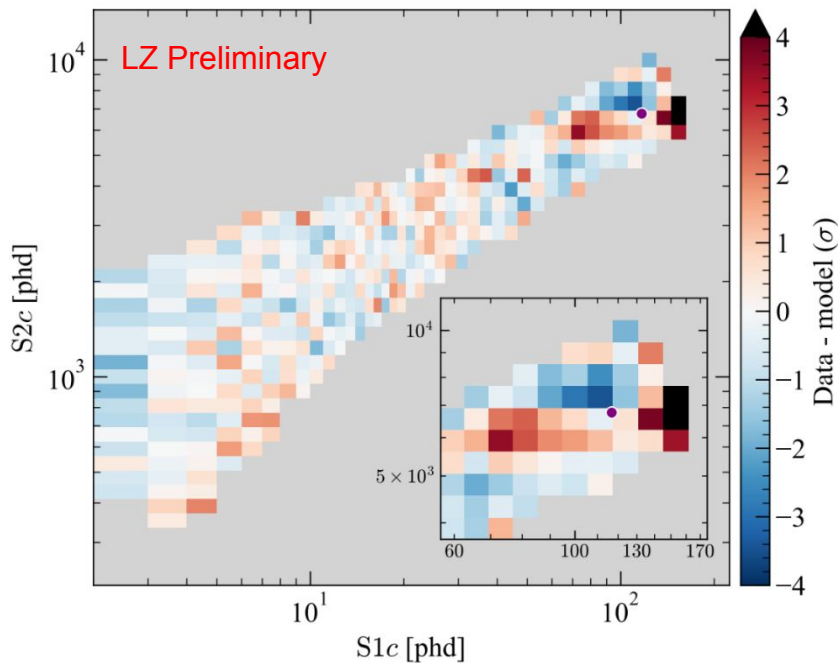
Schematic of DD neutron generator and the neutron's path into the TPC

Fit to neutron calibration data



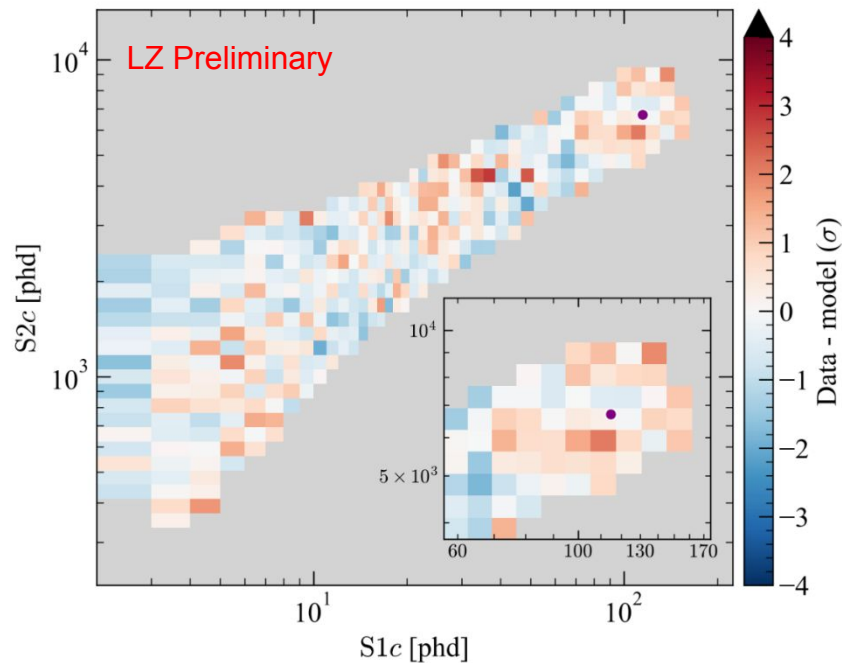
Excellent fit across 1-74 keV energy range

Require new LXe physics to describe neutron data



NEST v2.4.0 LXe microphysics framework
underpredicts S1 variance

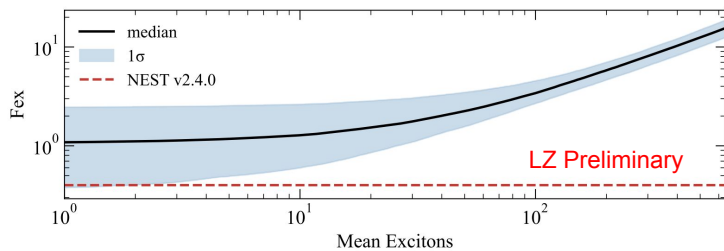
Cannot be explained by detector effects



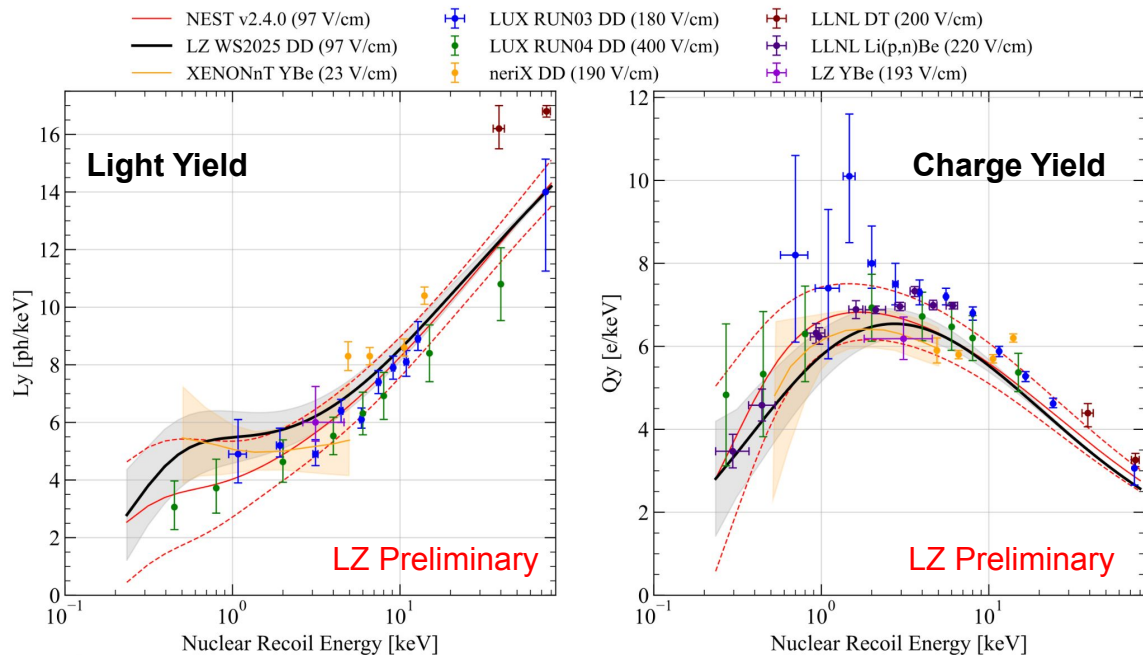
Modified microphysics with
energy-dependent fluctuations –
paper in prep

Nuclear recoil yield and fluctuation results

Quantified systematic uncertainty associated with yields, fluctuations and detection efficiencies



Exciton (photon) Fano factor as a function of excitons produced

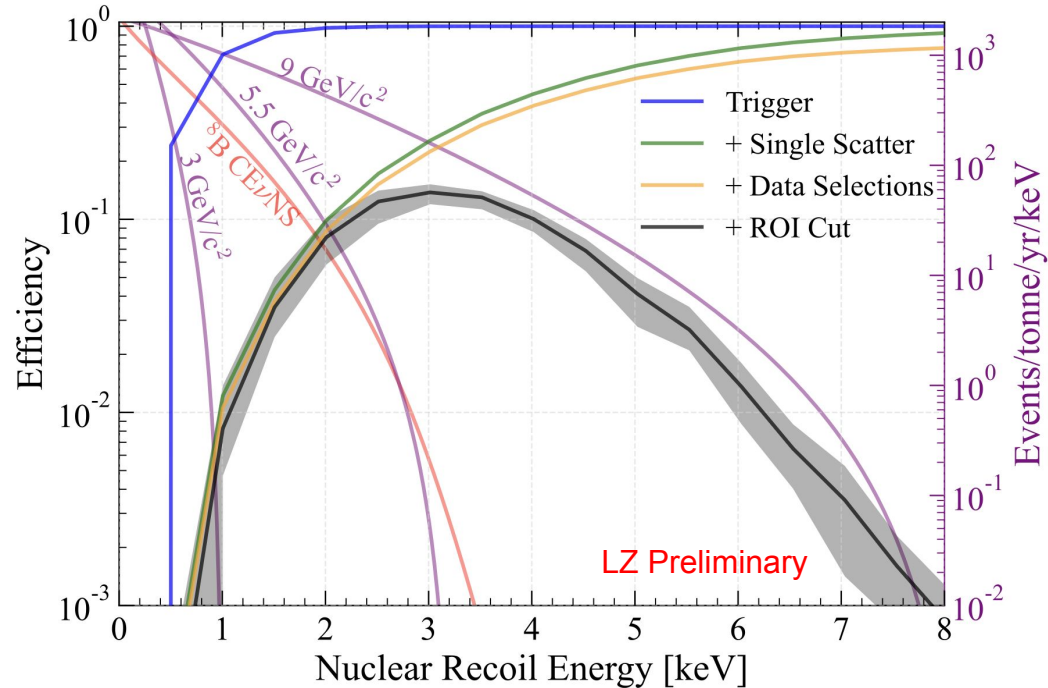


Light and charge yields from LZ (black) compared to other experimental results
arXiv:[2512.08065](https://arxiv.org/abs/2512.08065)

Signal efficiency

Threshold is set by 3-fold S1 requirement, and measured with calibration events

^8B CEvNS and low-mass WIMP detection strategy: S1 fluctuations above threshold, constrained by neutron data



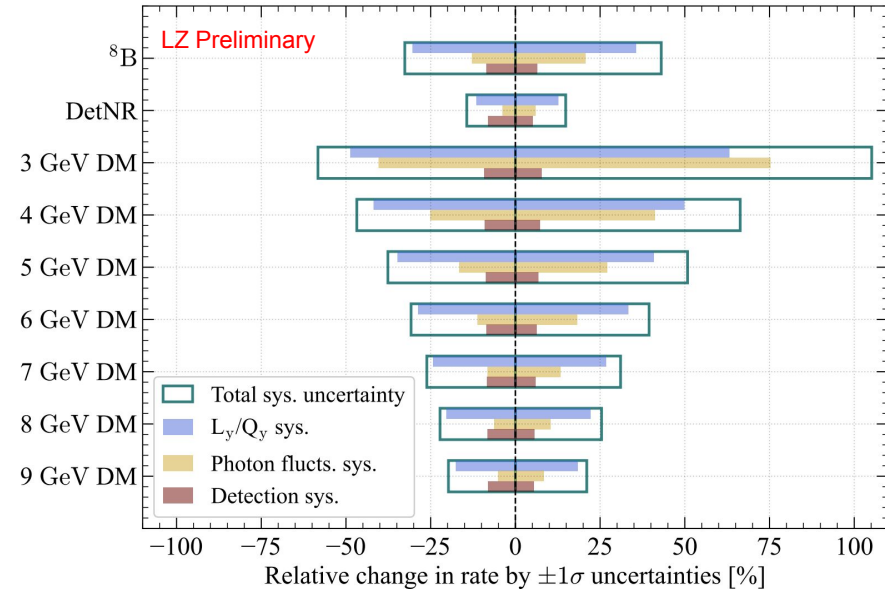
Signal efficiency as a function of nuclear recoil energy
arXiv:[2512.08065](https://arxiv.org/abs/2512.08065)

Expectations and uncertainty budget

Total uncertainty on detector response contains contributions from:

- Mean nuclear recoil yields
- Nuclear recoil fluctuations
- Threshold characterization

^8B CE ν NS expectation in full exposure (5.7 tonne-yrs): $20.6^{+8.9}_{-6.8}$ events



Total percent uncertainty and its breakdown by contribution for each simulated NR component

Bias mitigation

Artificial signal events (salt) are randomly injected into the datastream to obscure true counts

No backgrounds were measured or data selections developed using search region data

Salt revealed after analysis decisions are finalized

Data in search region

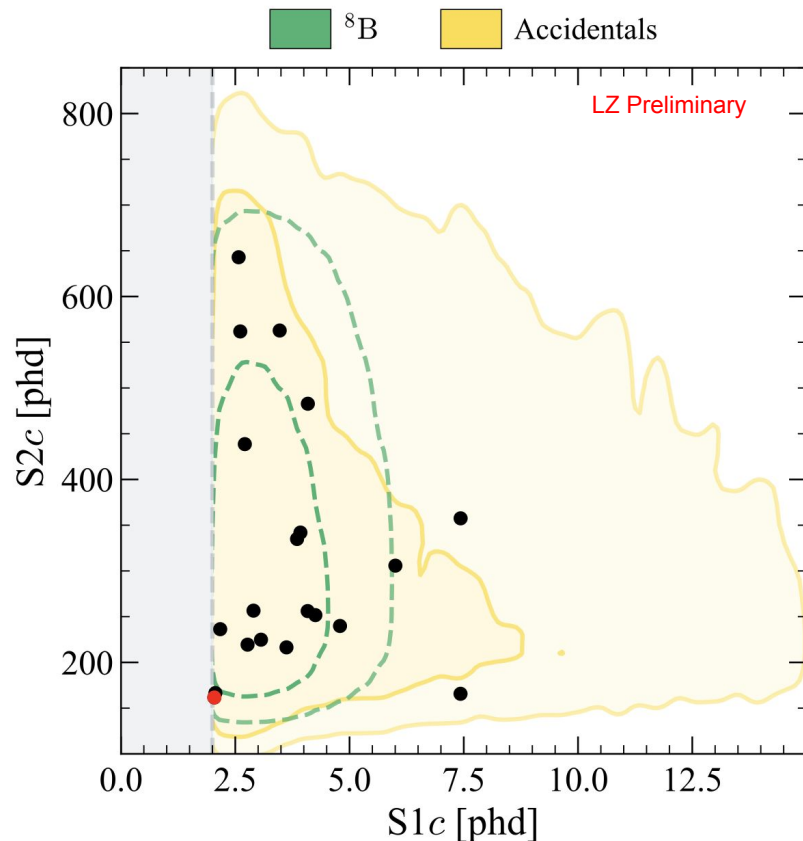
20 events in dataset after all selections

1 event was salt (red)

19 remaining events

Sideband dataset of “neutron-rich” data:
passing all selections except veto

- 1 event → in-situ constraint for neutrons
- Neutron expectation in main dataset:
 $0.04^{+0.25}_{-0.04}$ events



Final science dataset (black) with the one injected and recovered salt event (red)

Hypothesis tests

Profile likelihood ratio (PLR) test performed in

1. Search for 3-9 GeV/c² dark matter

- a. Backgrounds: ⁸B CE ν NS, accidental coincidences, detector neutrons
- b. Assume ⁸B CE ν NS rate from Standard Model¹ and flux measured by SNO experiment²

2. Search for ⁸B CE ν NS

- a. Assume *zero* DM events
- b. Backgrounds: accidental coincidences and detector neutrons
- c. ⁸B CE ν NS rate is floated freely

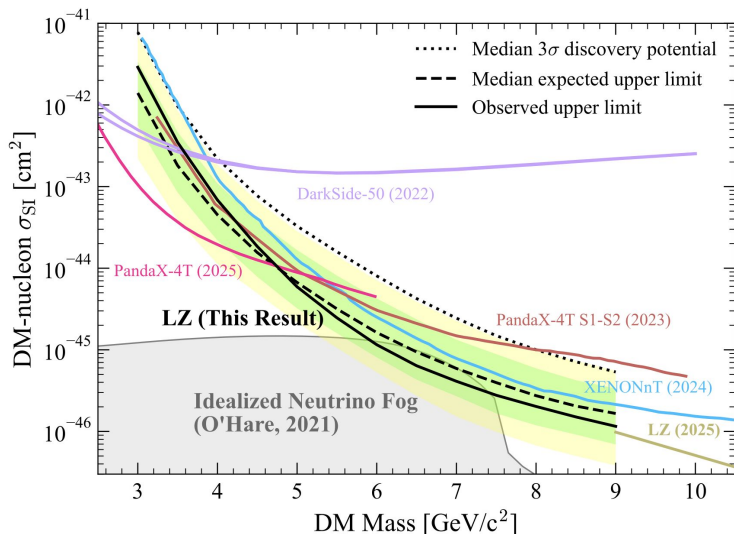
¹[Phys. Rev., D 9, 1389 \(1974\)](#)

²[Phys. Rev. C 88, 025501 \(2013\)](#)

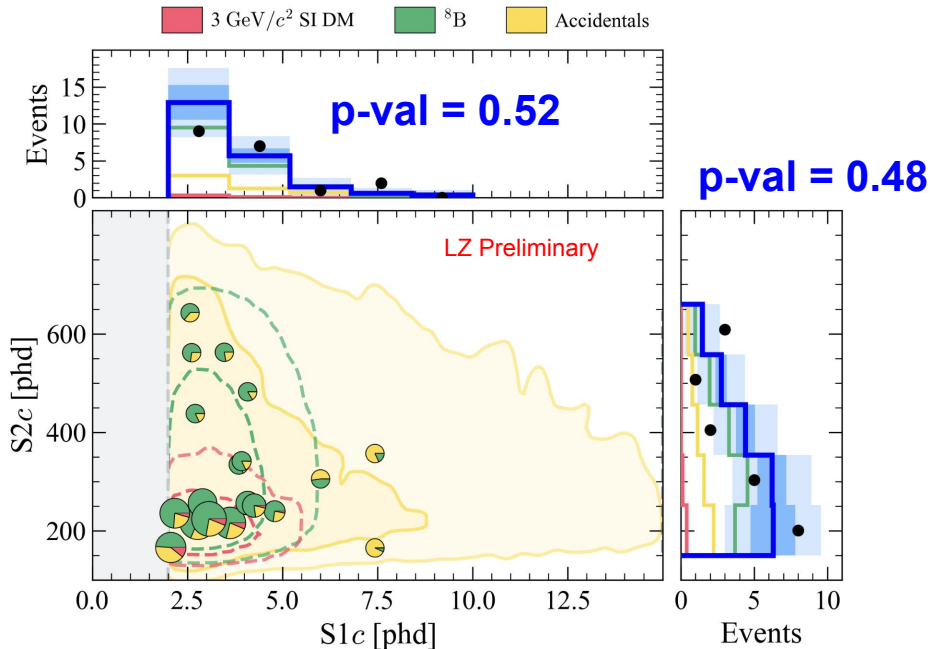
Low-mass dark matter

^8B CE ν NS, Accidentals, and Neutrons are backgrounds in this test

Best-fit number of DM events is consistent with 0 across all DM masses tested



Limit setting for Spin Independent (SI) DM-nucleon interaction strength using two-sided test statistic

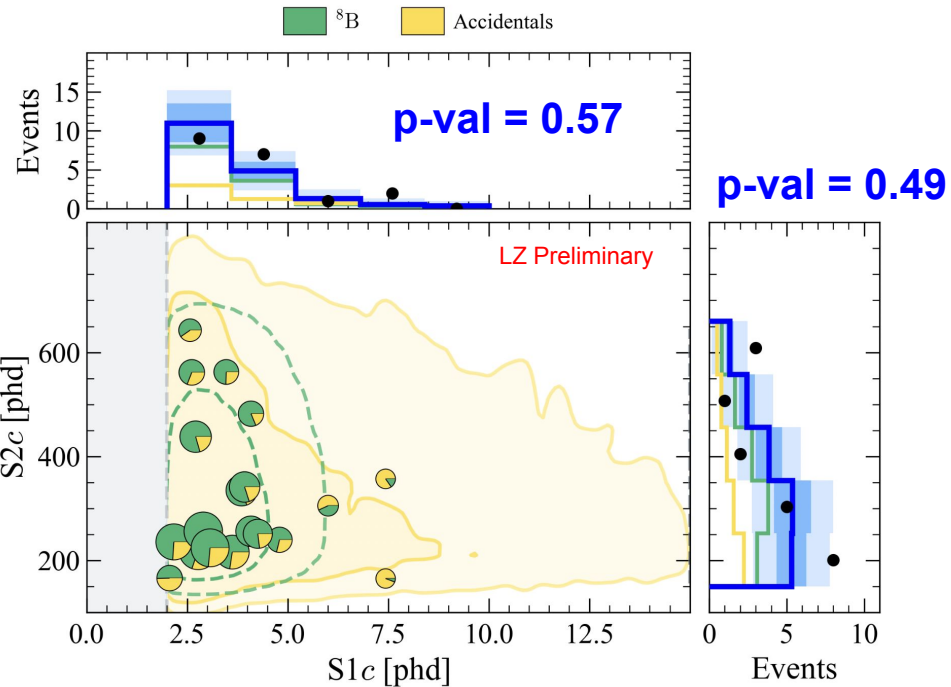
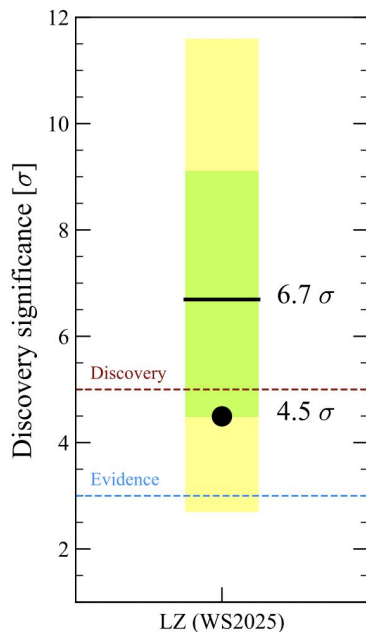


Components	Expectation	3 GeV/c ² Fit
Spin-Independent DM	-	0.5 ^{+5.1} _{-0.5}
^8B CE ν NS	20.6 ^{+8.9} _{-6.8}	14.7 ^{+3.1} _{-2.7}
Accidental coincidences	6.6 ± 0.3	6.5 ± 0.3
Detector neutrons	0.04 ^{+0.25} _{-0.04}	0.1 ^{+0.2} _{-0.1}
Total	27.2 ^{+9.2} _{-6.7}	21.7 ^{+7.1} _{-4.2}

Evidence for ^8B CE ν NS

Background-only model rejected with **4.5 σ significance**
(expected 6.7 σ)

Demonstrated ability to detect a WIMP-like signal!

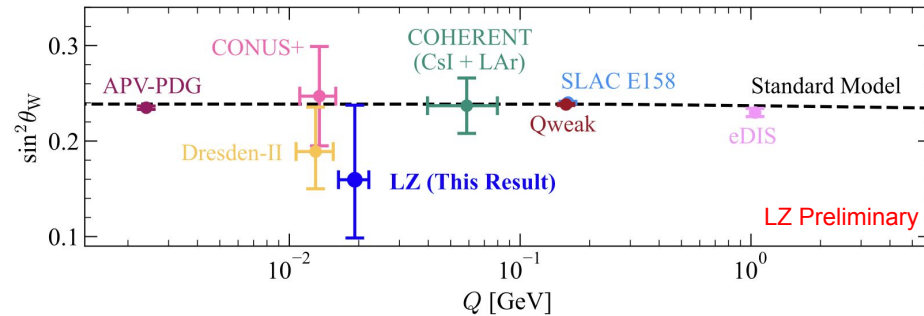
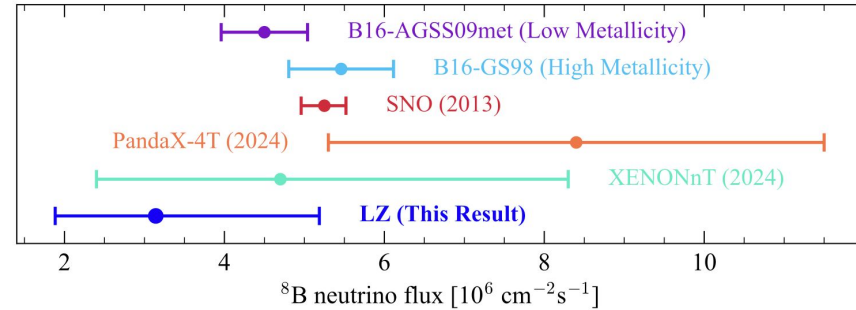


Components	Expectation	Fit Results
^8B CE ν NS	-	$12.3^{+7.0}_{-5.4}$
Accidental coincidences	6.6 ± 0.3	6.6 ± 0.3
Detector neutrons	$0.04^{+0.25}_{-0.04}$	$0.1^{+0.2}_{-0.1}$
Total	6.6 ± 0.3	$18.9^{+7.0}_{-5.5}$

Result consistent with flux measurements and SM

^8B CE ν NS used for

- Flavor-independent constraint of ^8B solar neutrino flux
- Constrain weak-mixing angle ($\sin^2\theta_W$) at low momentum transfer (Q)



What's next?

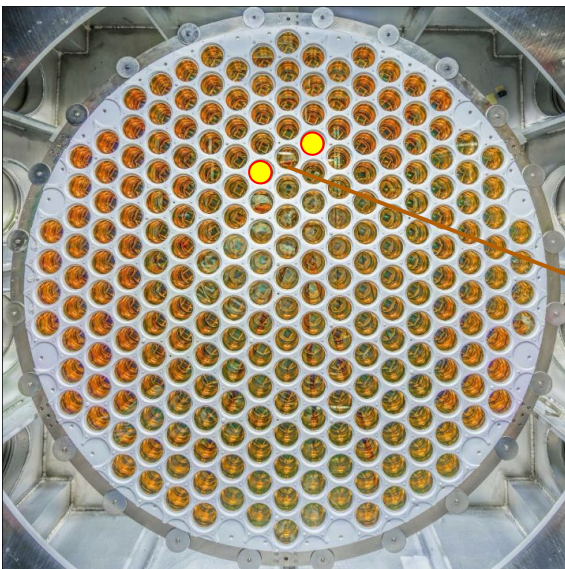
WS2025:

Demonstration of LZ's ability to detect a low-energy signals

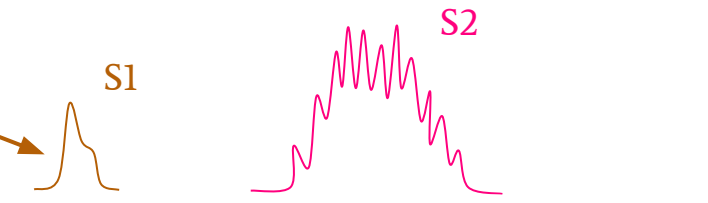


WS2026:

- Push the threshold for low-energy DM and neutrinos
- Better control of systematics & backgrounds

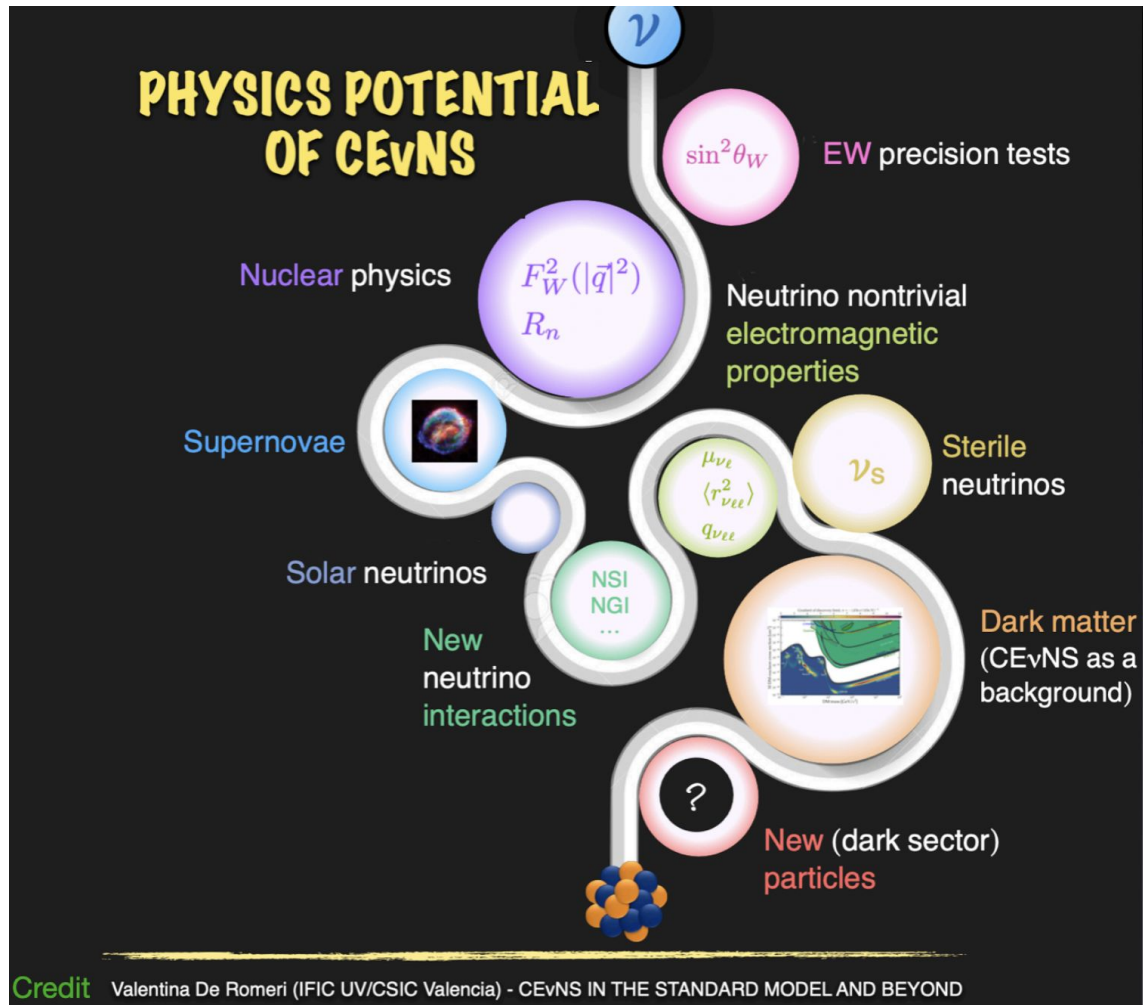


Promotes pushing threshold on primary scintillation signal i.e. going to a 2-fold coincidence!

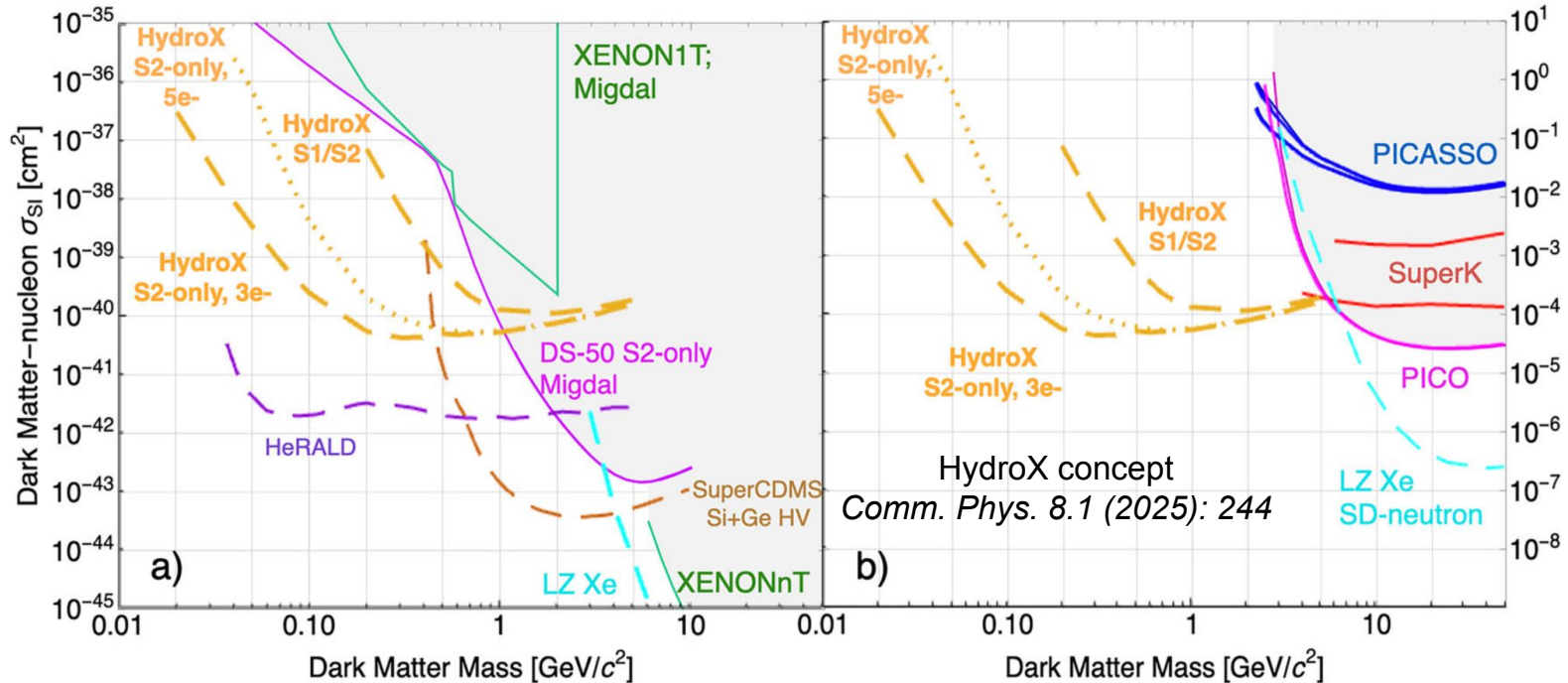


Outlook

- Liquid xenon experiments are exquisitely sensitive to WIMP dark matter and CEvNS
- Highly significant detection of ^8B CEvNS interactions
- Yesterday's signal is today's background
- Liquid xenon is also sensitive to other solar neutrino interactions
 - Davis-style neutrino capture
 - Argon: see DEAP3600 CC measurement of ^8B neutrinos [2605.12769](#)



Further ahead: HydroX (Hydrogen in Xenon)



- Dope LZ xenon with hydrogen to increase reach at lower DM masses
 - Better kinematics, better signal production
 - Significant RnD push at UCSB, LBNL, SLAC, U-Michigan to determine viability
- **Tour solubility measurement setup on Wednesday!**

More physics with LZ

- LZ is the largest and most sensitive liquid xenon TPC in the world!

[*Phys.Rev.Lett.* 135 \(2025\) 1. 011802](#)

- Other physics searches being performed in LZ...

- Effective field theory coupling of DM to xenon nuclei

[*Phys.Rev.D* 109 \(2024\) 9. 092003](#)

- Solar axions, axion-like particles, dark photons

[*Phys.Rev.Lett.* 133 \(2024\) 22. 221801](#)

- ^{136}Xe $2\nu\beta\beta$ and $0\nu\beta\beta$, also ^{124}Xe double-electron capture

[*Phys.Rev.D* 108 \(2023\) 7. 072006](#)

[*arXiv:2511.17350*](#)

- Ultraheavy Dark matter

[*Phys.Rev.D* 109 \(2024\) 11. 112010](#)

- Cosmic ray boosted DM

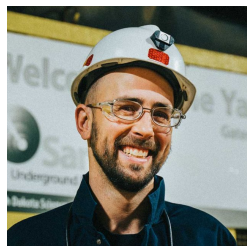
[*Phys.Rev.Lett.* 134 \(2025\) 24. 241801](#)

- Atmospheric millicharged particles

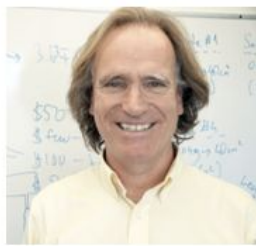
[*Phys.Rev.Lett.* 134 \(2025\) 24. 241802](#)

- And much more...

Dark matter team at UCSB



Hugh Lippincott



Harry Nelson



Chami Amarasinghe



Sabrina Zacarias

Plus new
undergraduate
members (not
pictured)

- Lynx Xu
- Nova Lian
- Darius Vlad
- Kian Hammer (REU)



Ryan Zhang



Makayla Trask



Jeonghwa Kim



Lindsey Weeldreyer



Jordan Thomas



Haley Fogg



Janhavi Singhal



Colin Ripley



Syon Maskey



High Energy Physics
Dark Matter Group

LZ (LUX-ZEPLIN) Collaboration, 38 institutions

250 scientists, engineers, and technical staff

- Black Hills State University
 - Brookhaven National Laboratory
 - Brown University
 - Center for Underground Physics
 - Edinburgh University
 - Fermi National Accelerator Lab.
 - Imperial College London
 - King's College London
 - Lawrence Berkeley National Lab.
 - Lawrence Livermore National Lab.
 - LIP Coimbra
 - Northwestern University
 - Pennsylvania State University
 - Royal Holloway University of London
 - SLAC National Accelerator Lab.
 - South Dakota School of Mines & Tech
 - South Dakota Science & Technology Authority
 - STFC Rutherford Appleton Lab.
 - Texas A&M University
 - University of Albany, SUNY
 - University of Alabama
 - University of Bristol
 - University College London
 - University of California Berkeley
 - University of California Davis
 - University of California Los Angeles
 - University of California Santa Barbara
 - University of Liverpool
 - University of Maryland
 - University of Massachusetts, Amherst
 - University of Michigan
 - University of Oxford
 - University of Rochester
 - University of Sheffield
 - University of Sydney
 - University of Texas at Austin
 - University of Wisconsin, Madison
 - University of Zürich
- US Europe Asia Oceania



LZ Collaboration Meeting at UCLA, March 2025

<https://lz.lbl.gov/>



US DOE



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Technology
Facilities Council



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UNDERGROUND
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Science Foundation



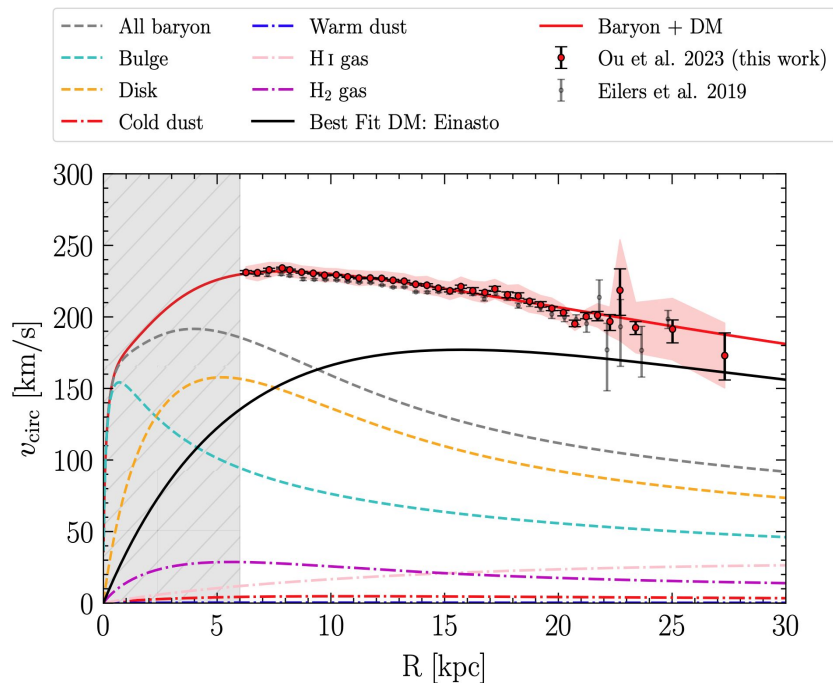
Institute for
Basic Science



Thanks to our sponsors and participating institutions!

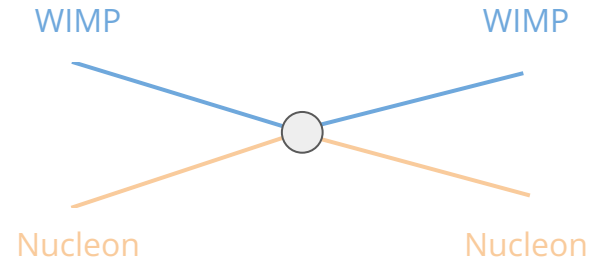
SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Dark matter *may* interact with terrestrial nuclei

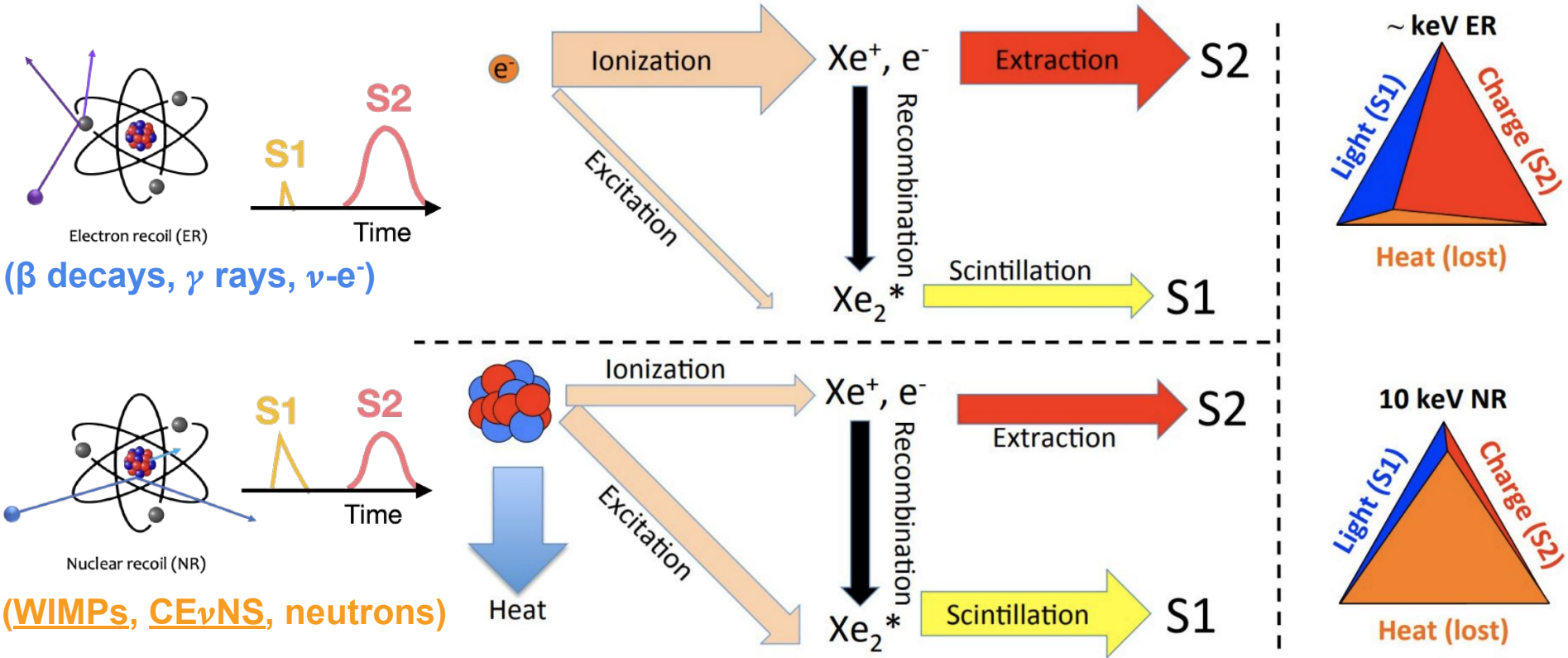


▲ Dark matter in the Milky Way,
Ou+ [2303.12838]

Local dark matter density
 $0.2 - 0.6 \text{ GeV}/\text{cm}^3$

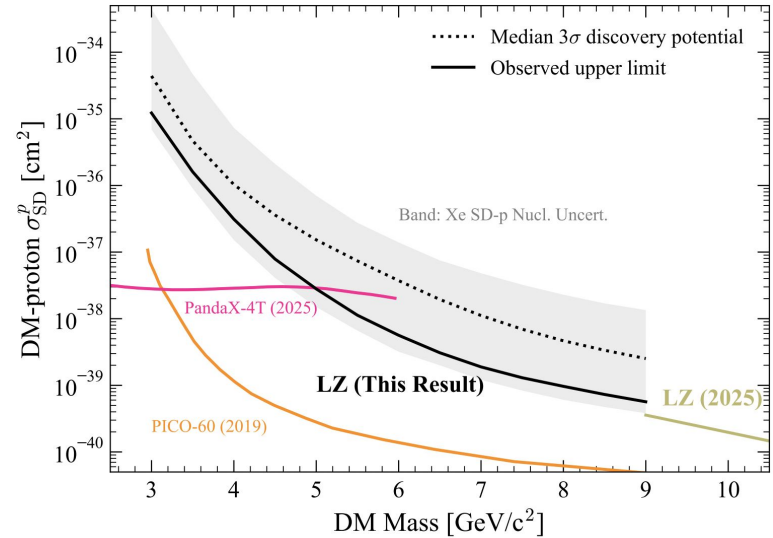
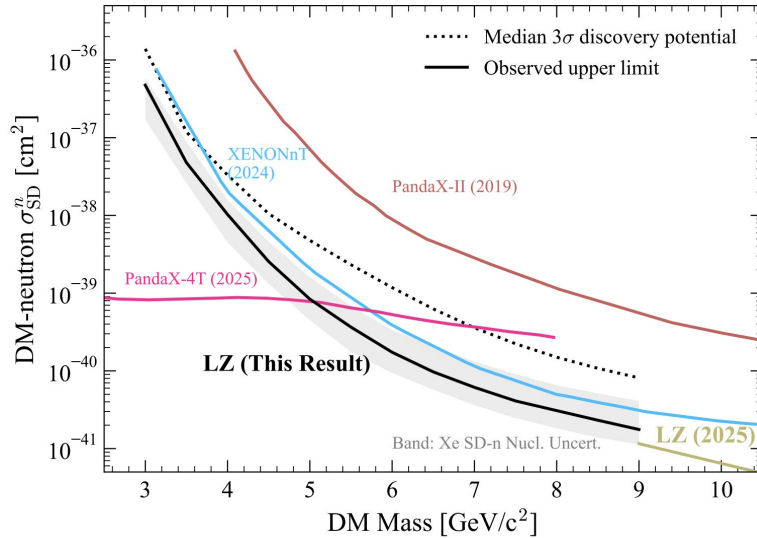


Signal production in liquid xenon



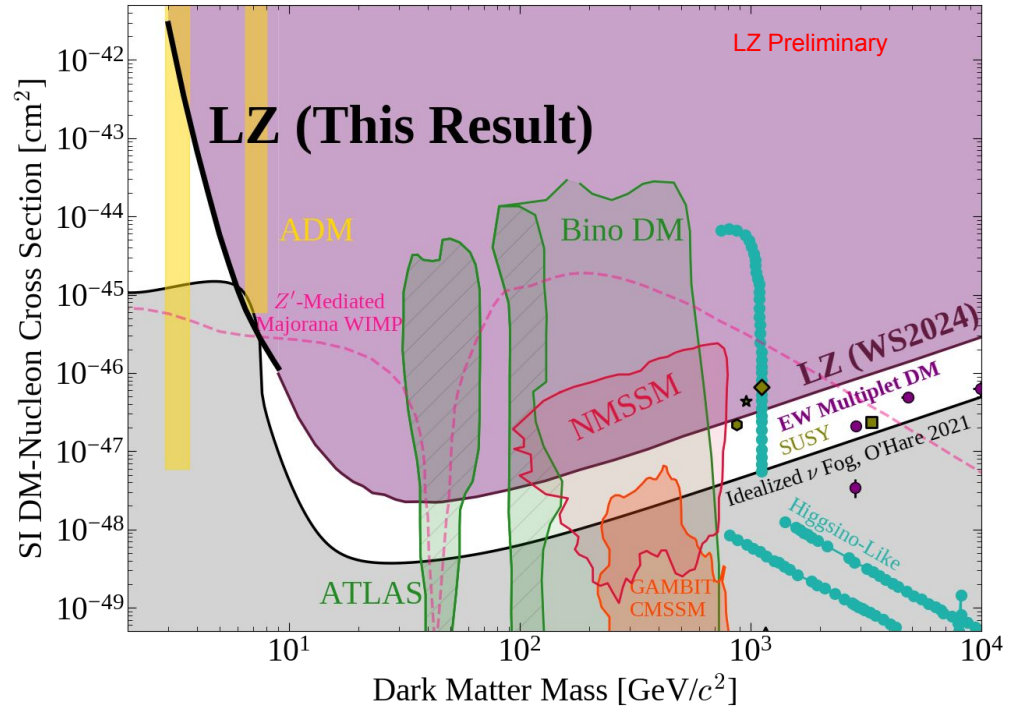
Spin Dependent DM Results

- Limits set on neutron-only or proton-only coupling to ^{129}Xe (26%) and ^{131}Xe (21%) which have unpaired neutrons leading to non-zero nuclear spin

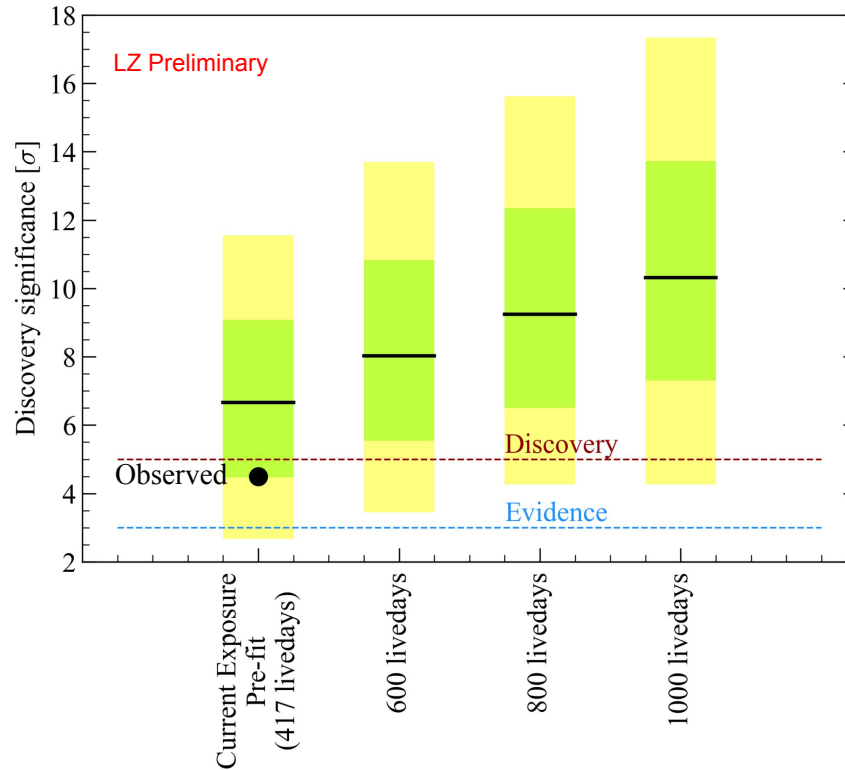


Models in limit plot

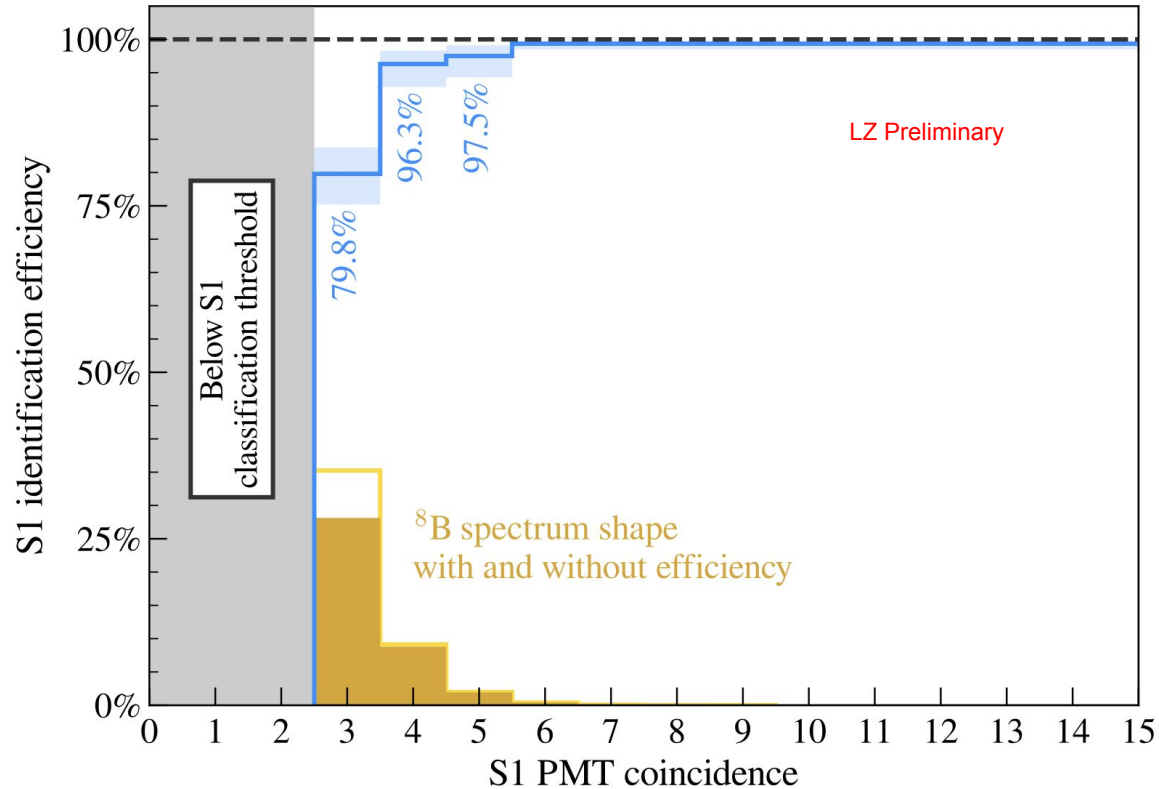
- ADM: Asymmetric Dark Matter, [PRD 82, 056001 \(2010\)](#)
- ATLAS Bino DM, [JHEP 05 106 \(2024\)](#)
- Z'-Mediated Majorana WIMP, [JCAP11 024 \(2019\)](#)
- GAMBIT CMSSM, [Eur. Phys. J. C. 77, 824 \(2017\)](#)
- NMSSM, [JHEP 2024, 212 \(2024\)](#)
- EW Multiplet DM, [Eur.Phys.J.C 82 \(2022\) 1, 31; arXiv:2410.02723](#)
- Higgsino-Like, [Eur. Phys. J. C. 83, 246 \(2023\)](#)
- SUSY electroweakinos, [Ann.Rev.Nucl.Part.Sci. 70 \(2020\) 425-454](#)



Projected ^8B $\text{CE}_{\nu\text{NS}}$ discovery significance sensitivity



S1 reconstruction efficiency



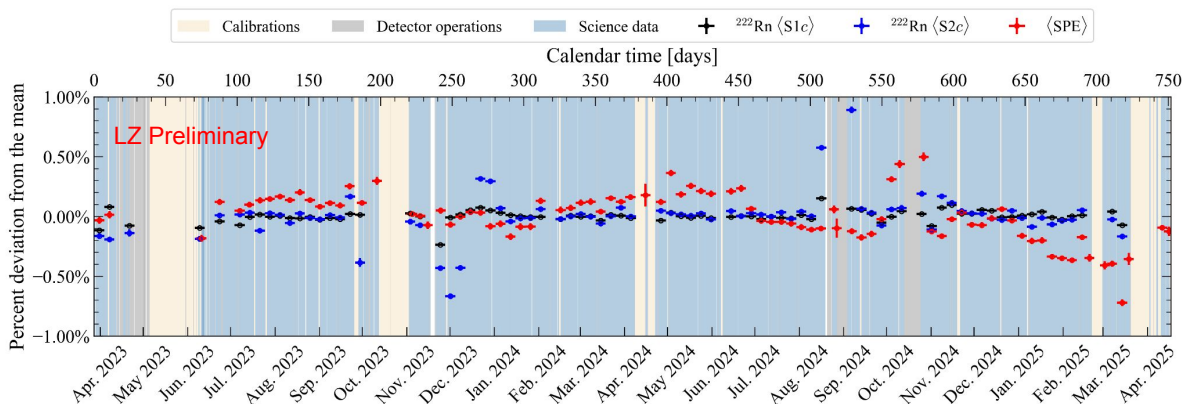
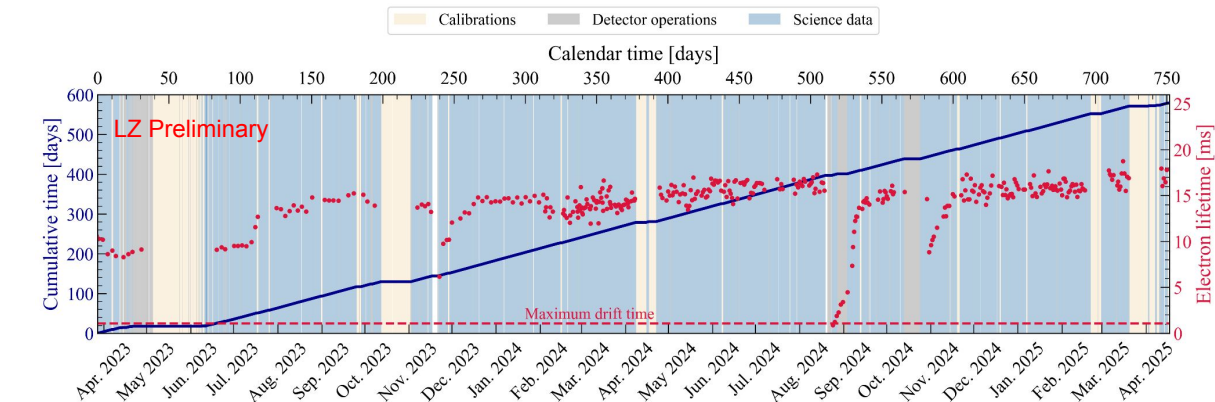
Search dataset

April 2023 to March 2025

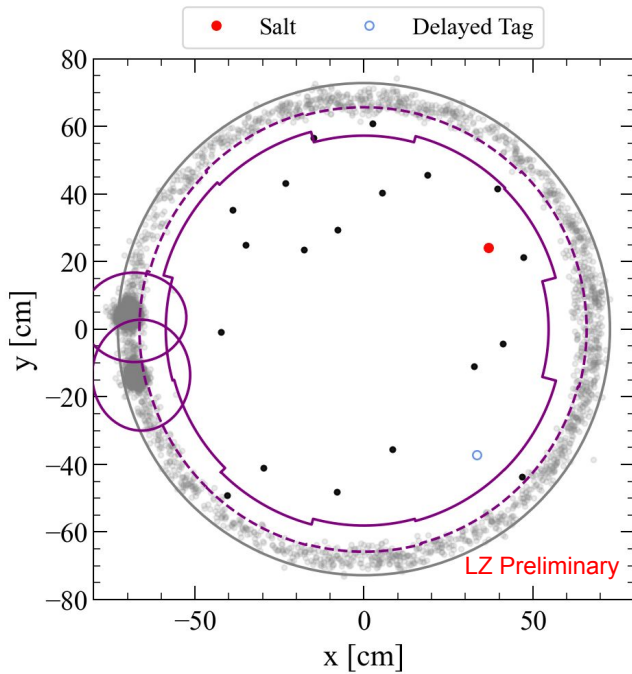
- Excellent electron lifetime
- Stable drift field of 97V/cm
- Stable extraction field of 3.4 kV/cm

S1 and S2 pulse sizes are corrected for uniformity in time and space

Corrected quantities: S1c, S2c



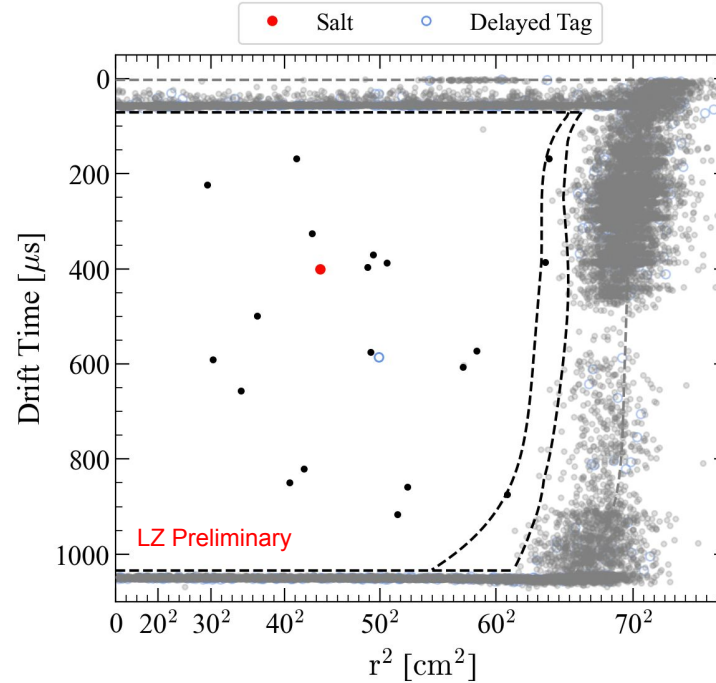
Final dataset - position distribution



Gray:
TPC edge

Purple:
FVr extents at
the top and
bottom of the
FVz

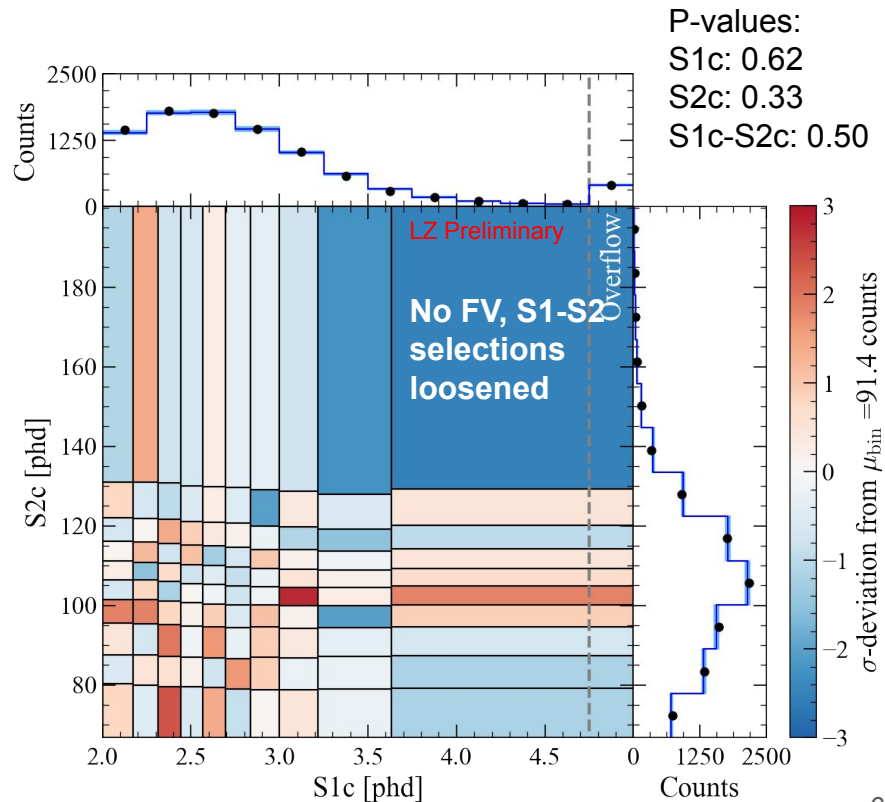
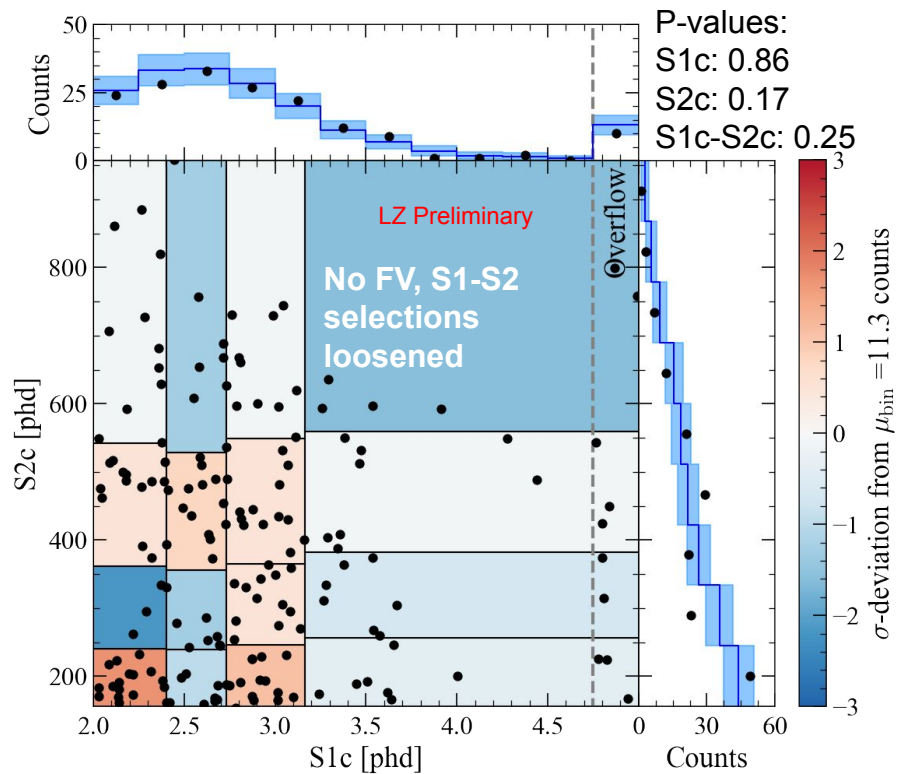
Purple circles:
Resistor cutouts



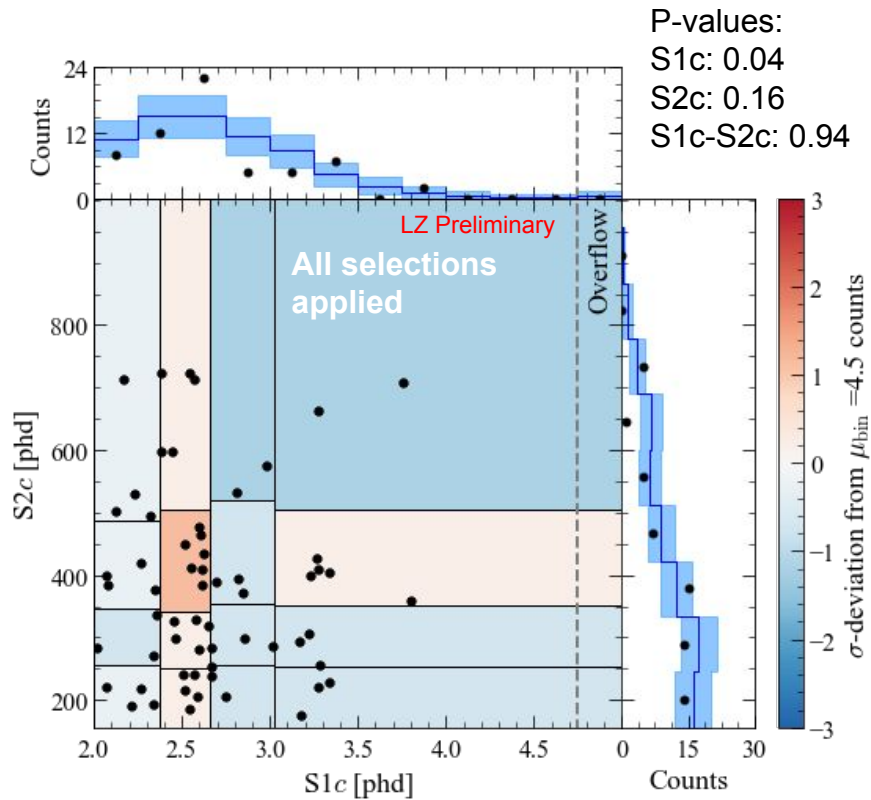
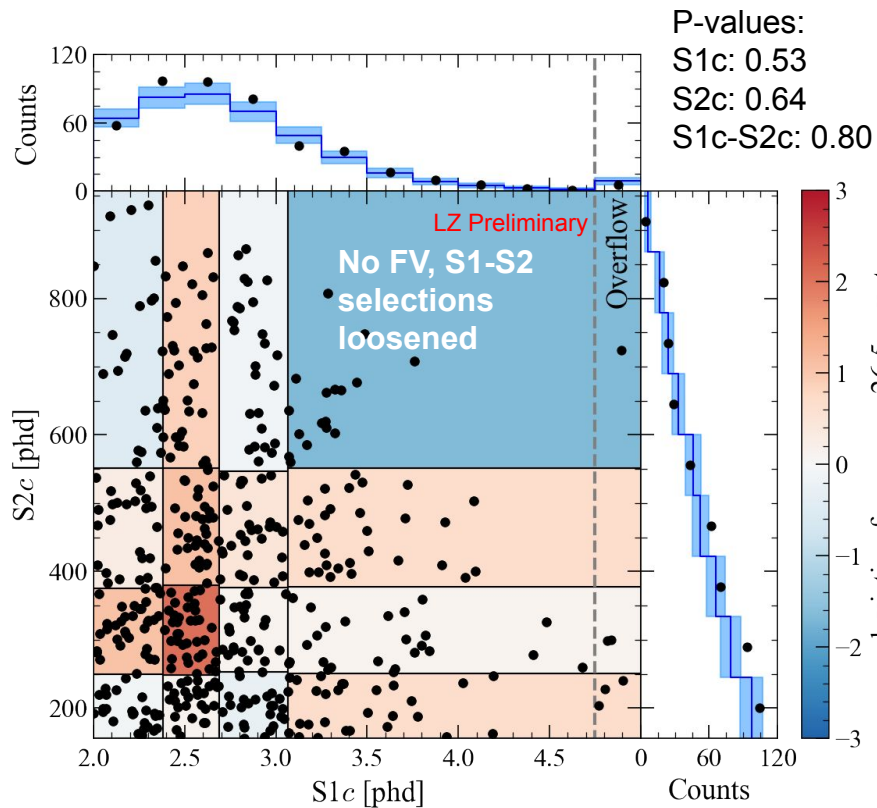
Gray:
Phi-averaged wall

Black:
Min and max FVr

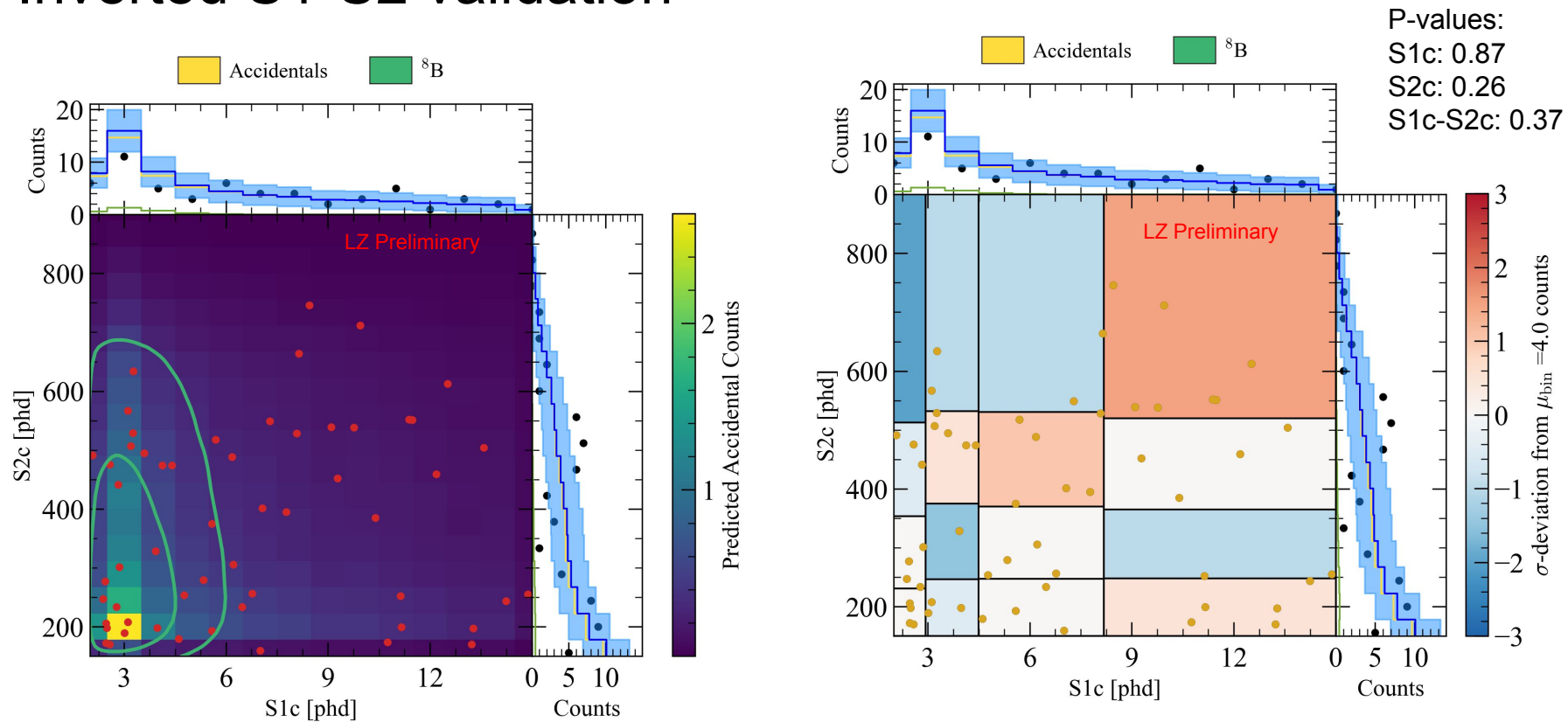
High-rate validation



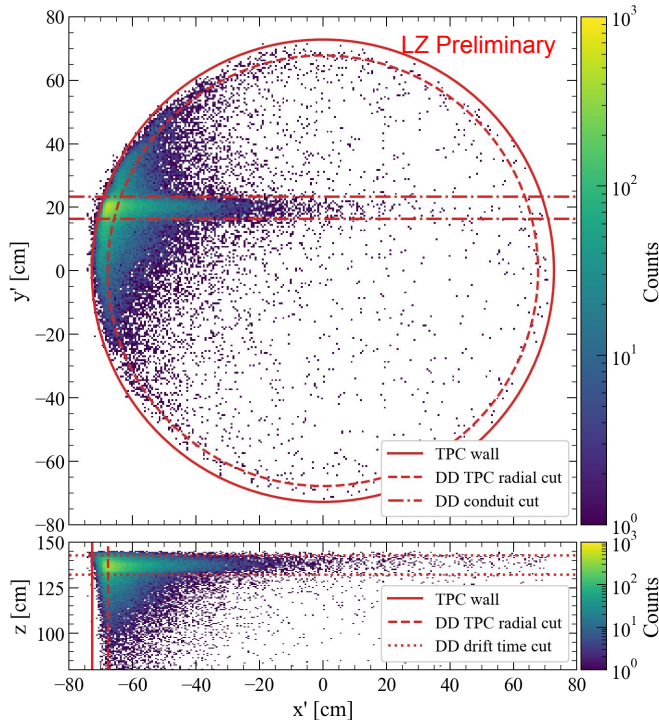
AmLi validation



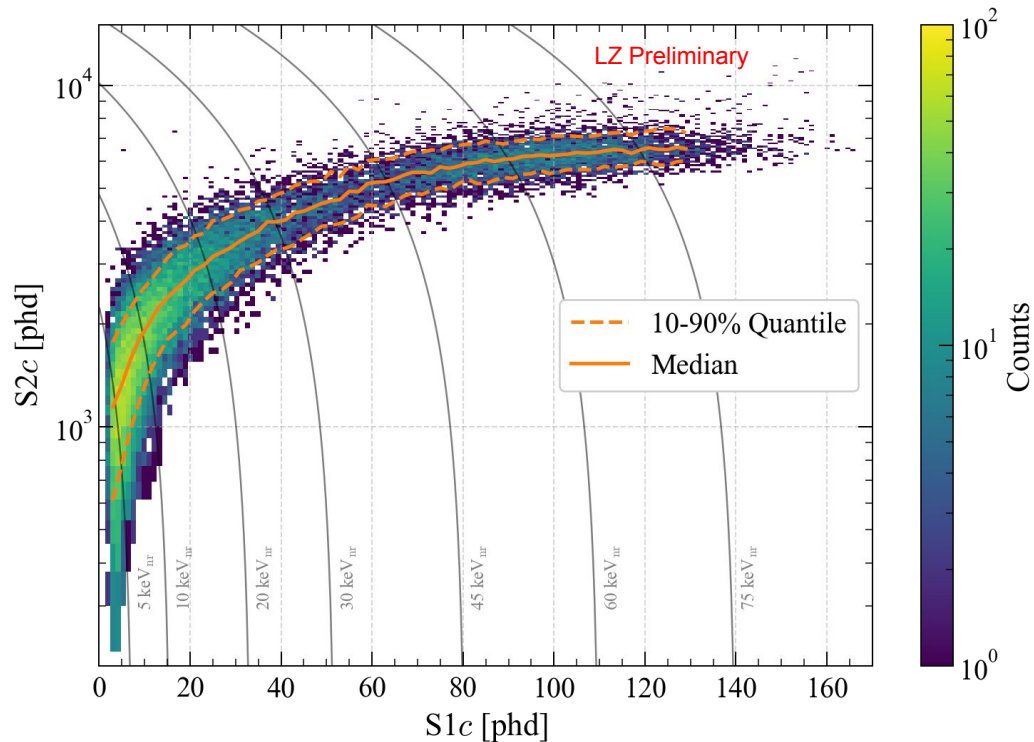
Inverted S1-S2 validation



DD spectra in LZ

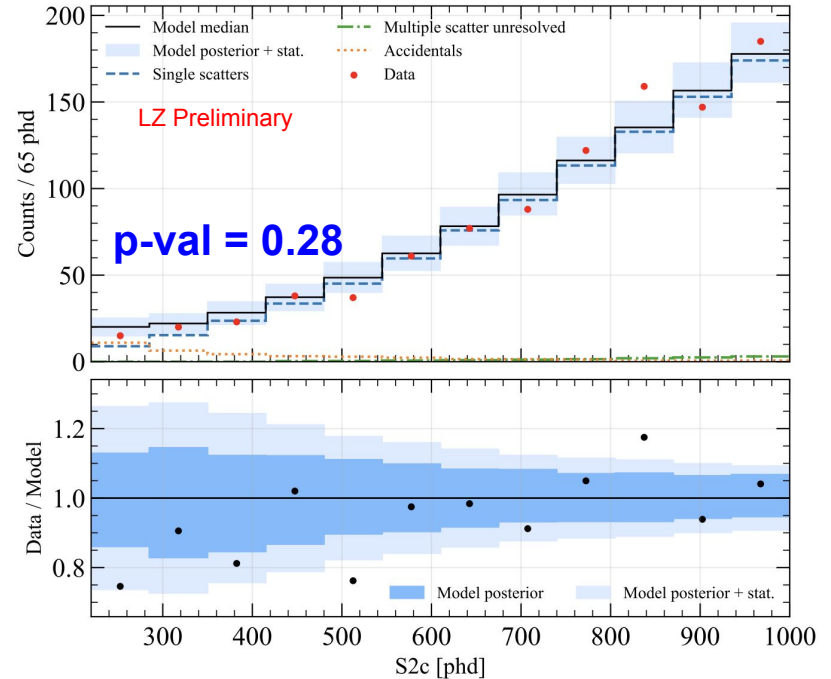
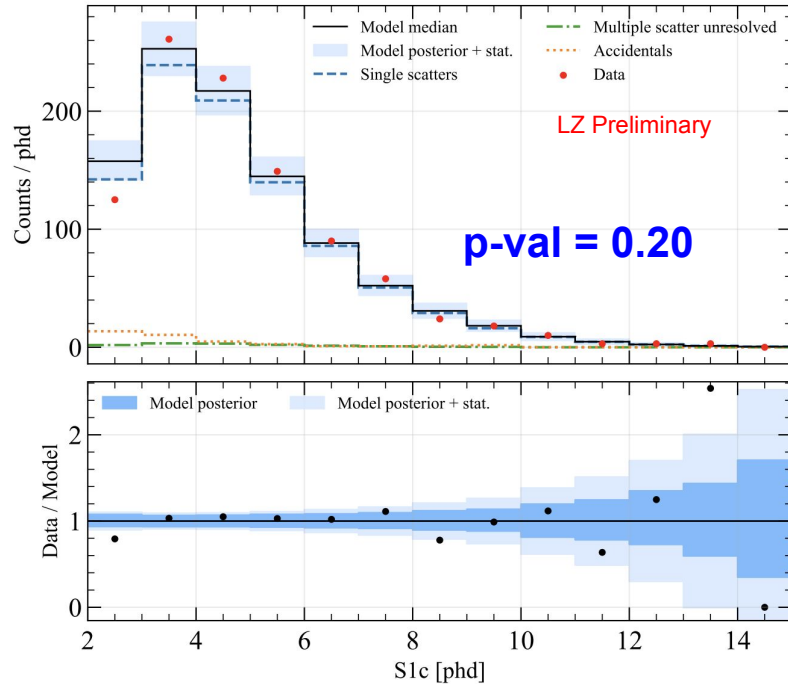


Single scatter position distribution of DD neutrons in the TPC. The x , y position is rotated 8 degrees to x' , y'



Single scatter nuclear recoil spectra of DD neutrons in the TPC

Best-fit nuclear recoil model

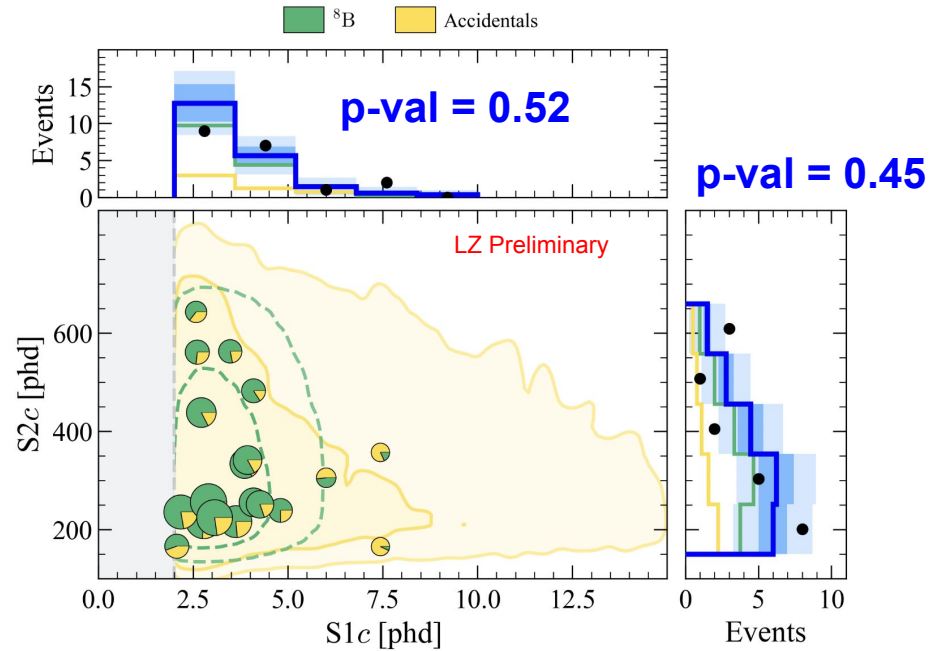


- Allow charge/light yield and photon/electron fluctuations to vary
- Consider different parameterization of recombination and fluctuation models

Background-only fit

^8B CE ν NS, Accidentals, and Neutrons are backgrounds in this model

- Negligible ER backgrounds in this ROI
- ^8B CE ν NS rate is **constrained** in fits
- Excellent data-model agreement!

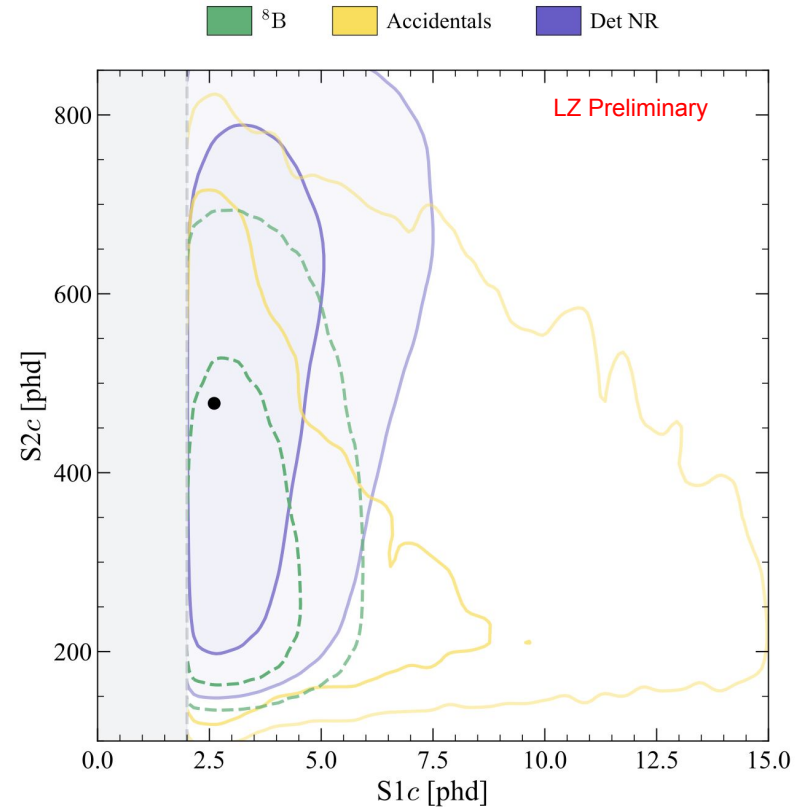


Components	Expectation	Background-Only Fit
Spin-Independent DM	-	-
^8B CE ν NS	$20.6^{+8.9}_{-6.8}$	$15.0^{+2.9}_{-2.5}$
Accidental coincidences	6.6 ± 0.3	6.5 ± 0.3
Detector neutrons	$0.04^{+0.25}_{-0.04}$	$0.1^{+0.2}_{-0.1}$
Total	$27.2^{+9.2}_{-6.7}$	$21.6^{+4.7}_{-3.8}$

Neutron-rich sideband

- Detector neutron rate constrained *in-situ* using dataset passing all selections except delayed OD/Skin veto
- ^8B CE ν NS and accidental coincidences leak into this dataset due to false veto rate (3%)

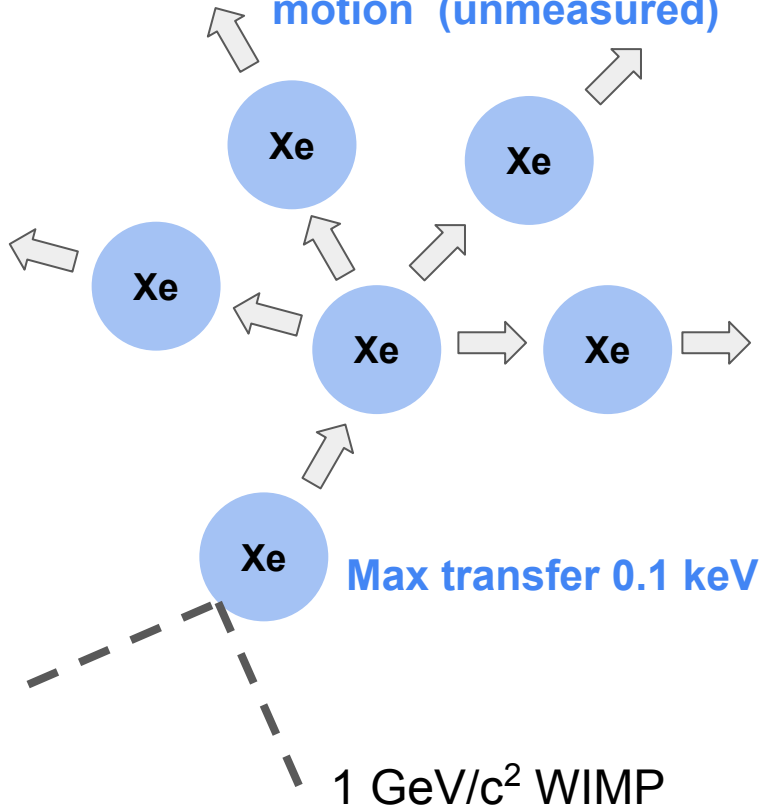
Neutron expectation in full exposure (5.7 tonne-years) is $0.04^{+0.25}_{-0.04}$ events



Liquid xenon (LXe)

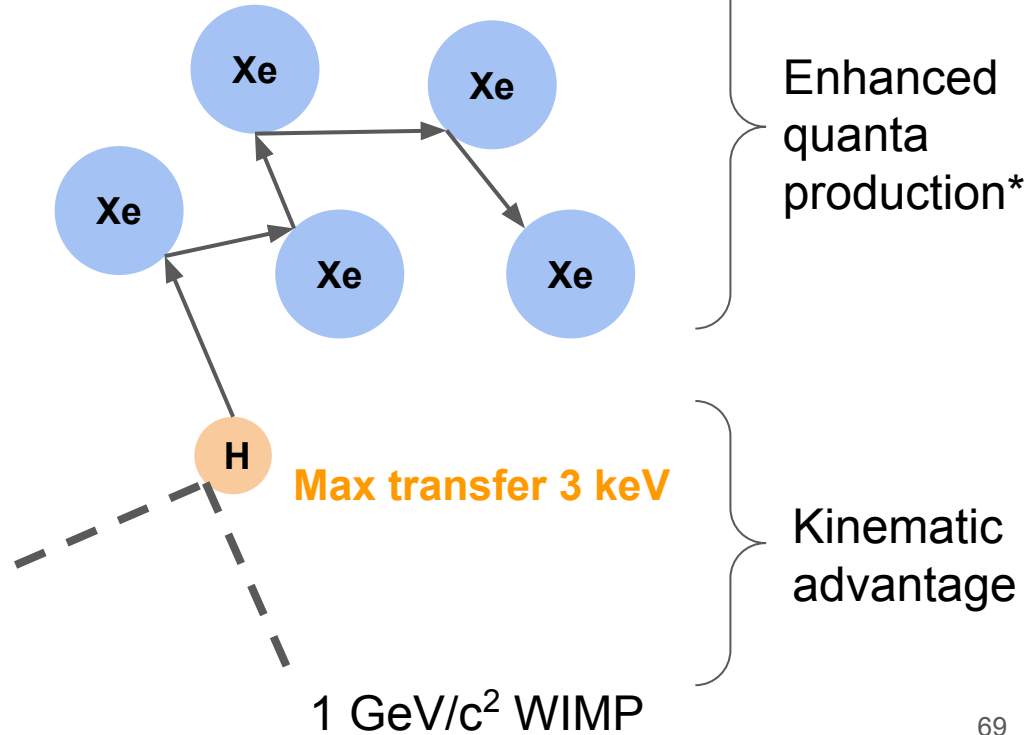
(LXe)

% energy \rightarrow atomic motion (unmeasured)

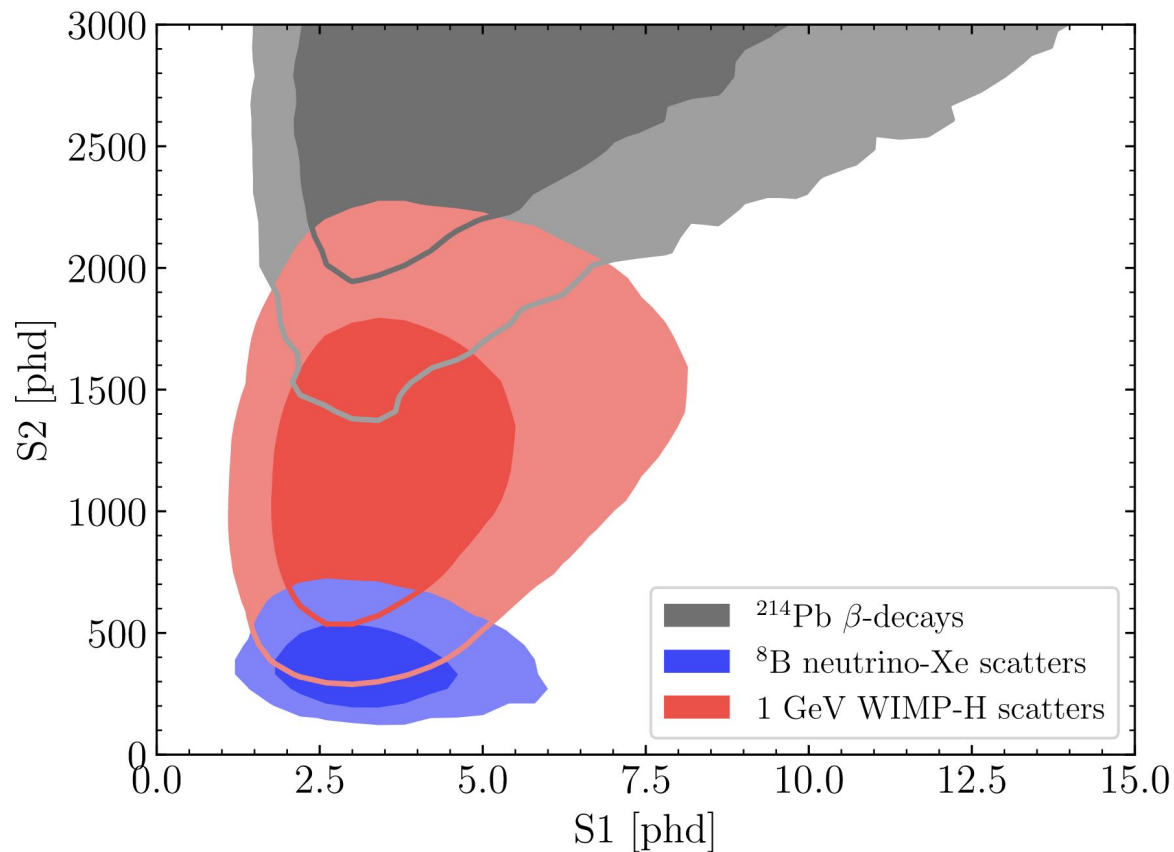


Hydrogen-doped LXe

$\sim 100\%$ energy \rightarrow excite/ionize



HydroX signal and background distributions



LZ-like background model
(from 1802.06039), 3-fold
coincidence

Take with a grain of salt –
Calibration of proton recoils
determines dominant
backgrounds

Accidental S1–S2
coincidences also not
included (LZ would see ~5
in 500 days)