

Nuclear physics across energy scales

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Engineering shape of QGP droplets by comparing flow in small symmetric-asymmetric collisions

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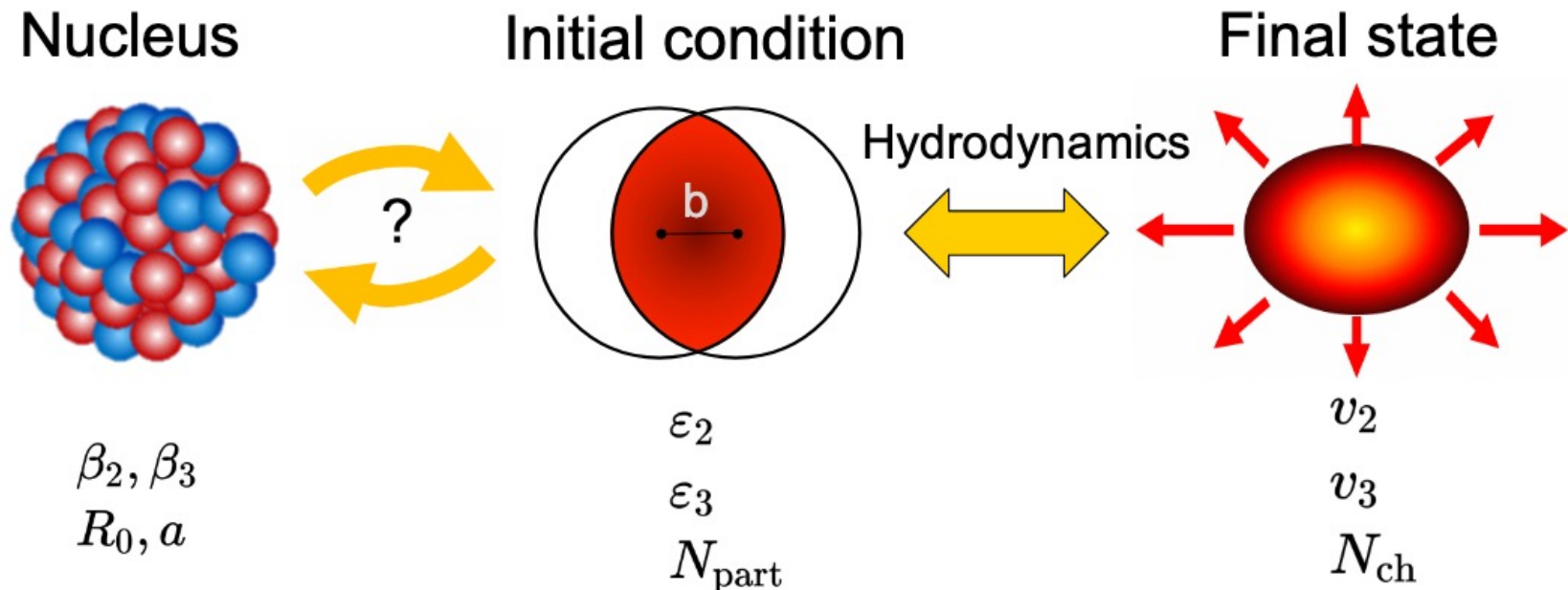
2507.16162 + STAR prelim data



Stony Brook University

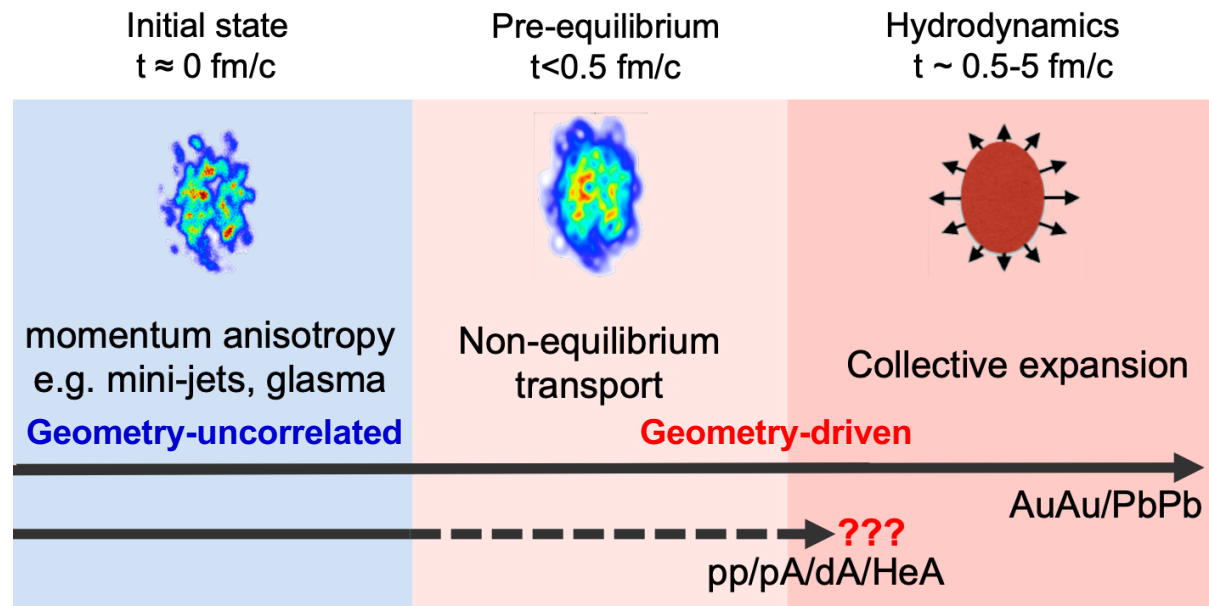
Wuhan September 19-21, 2025

Collectivity in heavy-ion collisions



- Flow is hydrodynamic response to initial conditions.
- Initial conditions is a snapshot of the nuclear structure

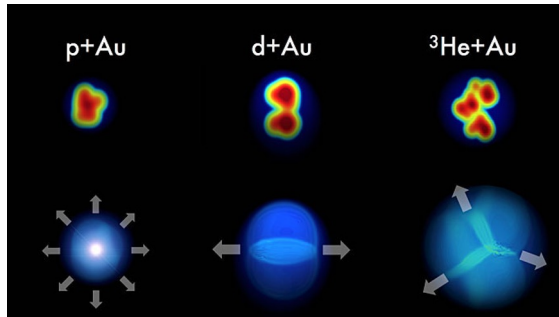
Collectivity in small systems



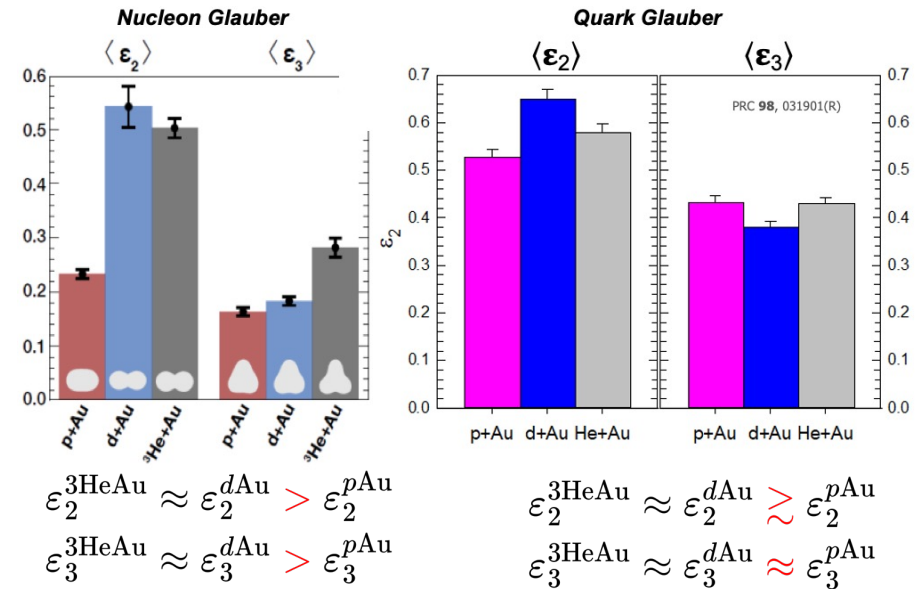
Cannot be turned off in small systems, seems driven by final-state response.
But hydrodynamics is not the unique explanation.

Geometry engineering in p/d/He+Au collisions

Strategy: Test final-state response by varying initial geometry strongly

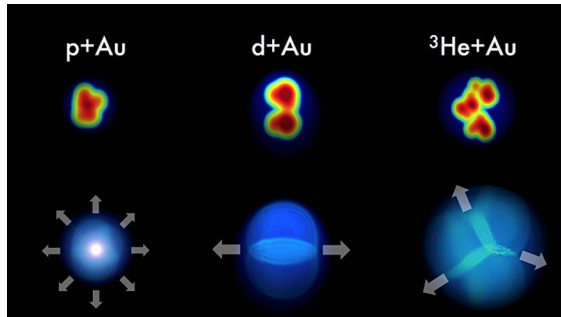


Asymmetric systems sensitive to both nuclear structure and subnucleon structure



Geometry engineering in p/d/He+Au collisions

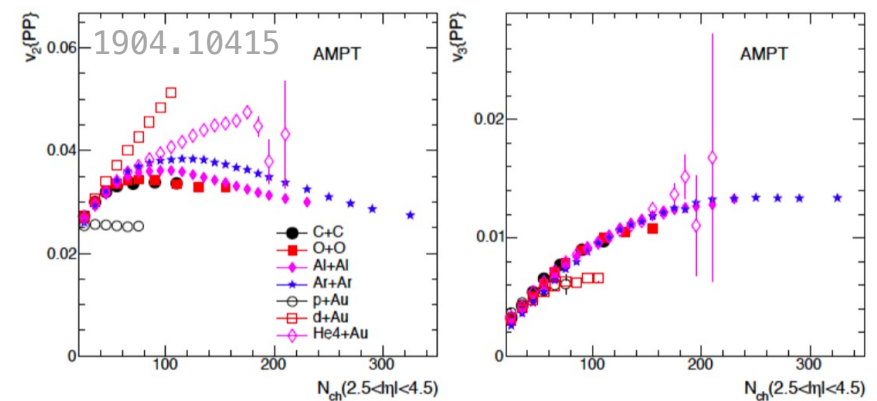
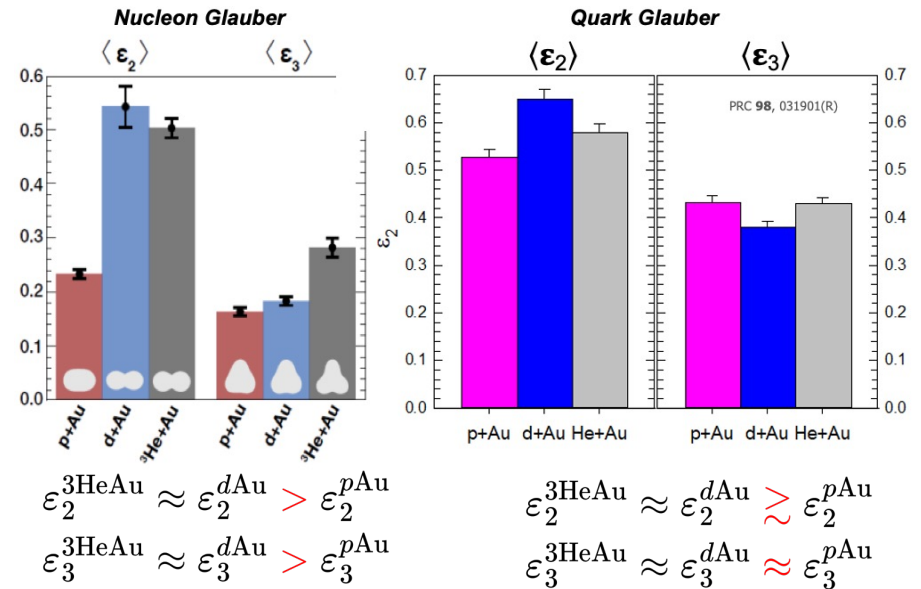
Strategy: Test final-state response by varying initial geometry strongly



Asymmetric systems sensitive to both nuclear structure and subnucleon structure

Disentangle two sources by comparing p+A with small symmetric systems, e.g. $^{16}\text{O}+^{16}\text{O}$

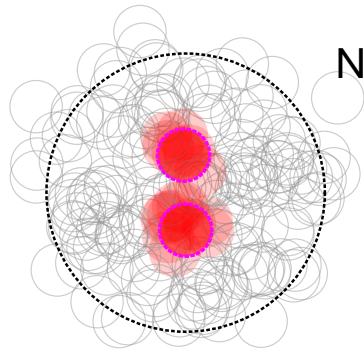
NB: Nuclear structures of small systems are well constrained from ab. Initio calculations.



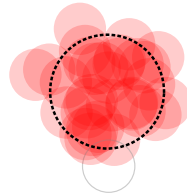
Case study: d+Au vs O+O

$$d_{\perp} = 1/\sqrt{[x^2][y^2]}$$

d + ^{197}Au



$^{16}\text{O} + ^{16}\text{O}$



Nucleon-Glauber

$$\varepsilon_2^{d\text{Au}} > \varepsilon_2^{\text{OO}}$$

$$\varepsilon_3^{d\text{Au}} < \varepsilon_3^{\text{OO}}$$

$$d_{\perp}^{d\text{Au}} > d_{\perp}^{\text{OO}}$$

dAu ε_2 dominated by positions of two nucleons:
large ε_2 in all evts \rightarrow narrow $p(\varepsilon_2) \rightarrow \varepsilon_2\{4\} \approx \varepsilon_2\{2\}$

dAu ε_3 and OO $\varepsilon_2 \varepsilon_3$ dominate by nucleon fluctuation,

dAu $d_{\perp} = 1/\text{area}$ is more compact,

\rightarrow more

radial flow in dAu.

Source distribution $p(N_s/\langle N_s \rangle)$ is broader in OO

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Nucleon-Glauber

$$\begin{aligned}\epsilon_2^{d\text{Au}} &> \epsilon_2^{\text{OO}} \\ \epsilon_3^{d\text{Au}} &< \epsilon_3^{\text{OO}} \\ d_{\perp}^{d\text{Au}} &> d_{\perp}^{\text{OO}}\end{aligned}$$

dAu ϵ_2 dominated by positions of two nucleons:
large ϵ_2 in all evts \rightarrow narrow $p(\epsilon_2) \rightarrow \epsilon_2\{4\} \approx \epsilon_2\{2\}$
not affected much by subnucleon fluctuations

dAu ϵ_3 and OO $\epsilon_2 \epsilon_3$ dominate by nucleon
fluctuation, and influences by subnucleon
fluctuations are more comparable.

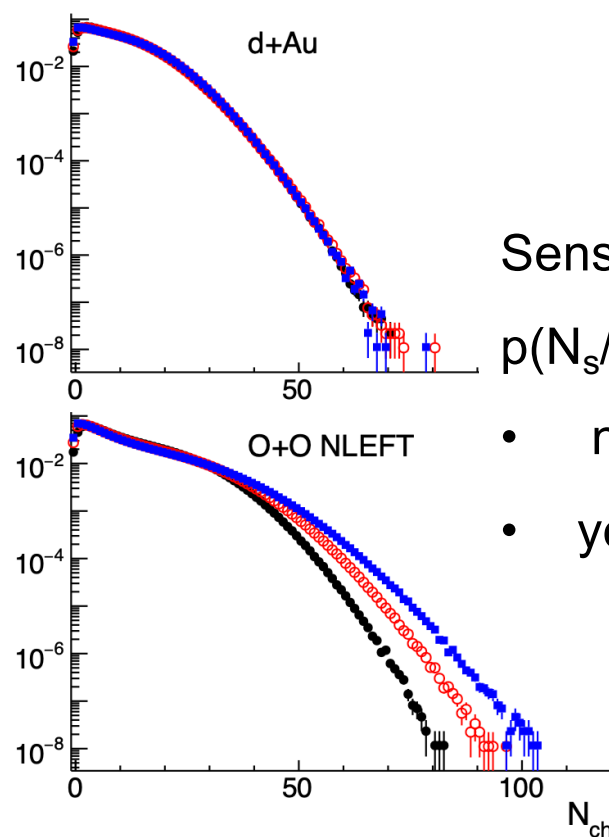
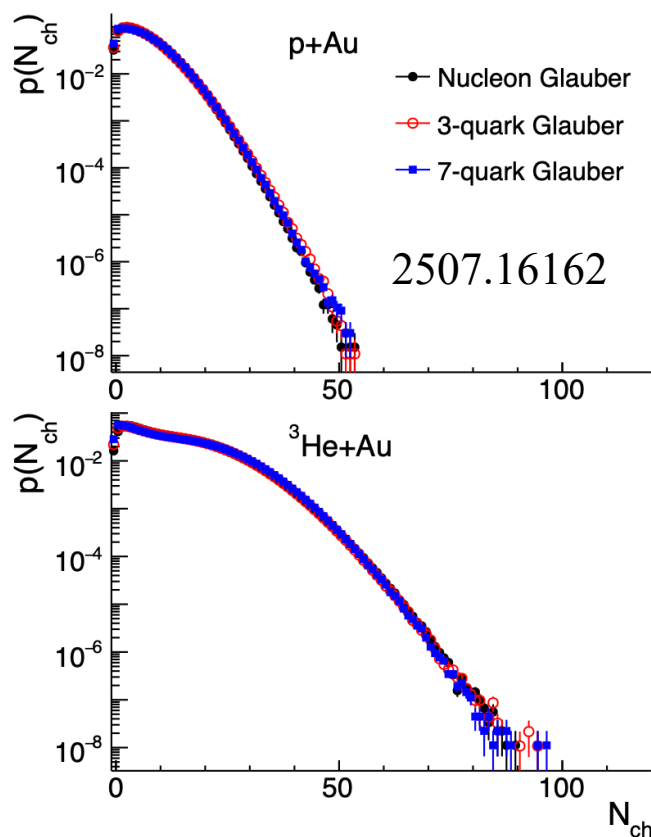
Quark-Glauber

$$\begin{aligned}\epsilon_2^{d\text{Au}} &> \epsilon_2^{\text{OO}} \\ \epsilon_3^{d\text{Au}} &\approx \epsilon_3^{\text{OO}} \\ d_{\perp}^{d\text{Au}} &> d_{\perp}^{\text{OO}}\end{aligned}$$

dAu $d_{\perp} = 1/\text{area}$ is more compact, even more
compact with subnucleon fluctuations \rightarrow more
radial flow in dAu and quark glauber.

Source distribution $p(N_s/\langle N_s \rangle)$ is broader in OO

Glauber model result



Sensitivity of distribution-shape $p(N_s/\langle N_s \rangle)$ to subnucleon structure:

- no in asymmetric collisions,
- yes in symmetric collisions

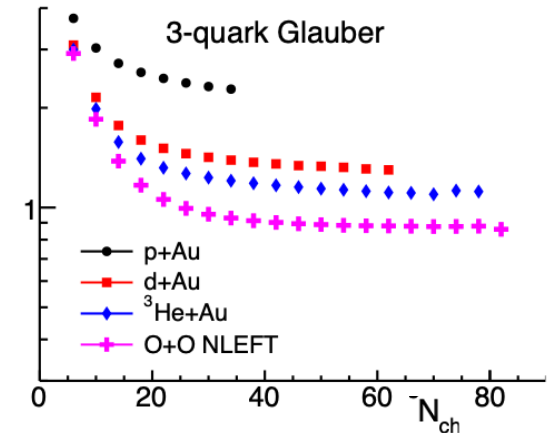
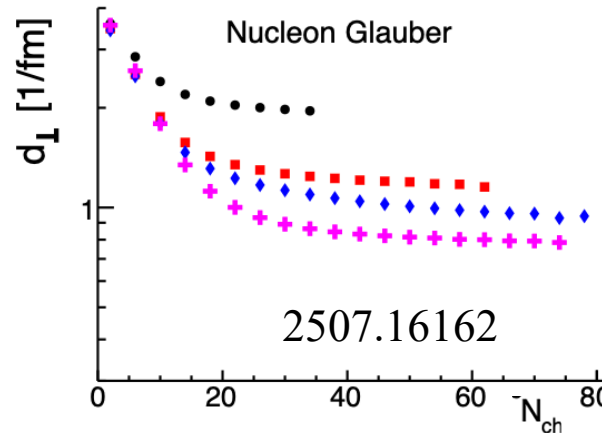
p/d/He+Au: shape determined by $p(\text{source})$ in Au, **insensitive** to subnucleon
 O+O: shape determined by $p(\text{source})$ in O, **sensitive** to subnucleon

Pressure gradient ($d_{\perp} = 1/\text{area}$) and its fluctuations

$$d_{\perp} = 1/\sqrt{[x^2][y^2]}$$

Mean:

Larger $\langle d_{\perp} \rangle \rightarrow$ Larger $\langle [p_T] \rangle$



Pressure gradient ($d_{\perp} = 1/\text{area}$) and its fluctuations

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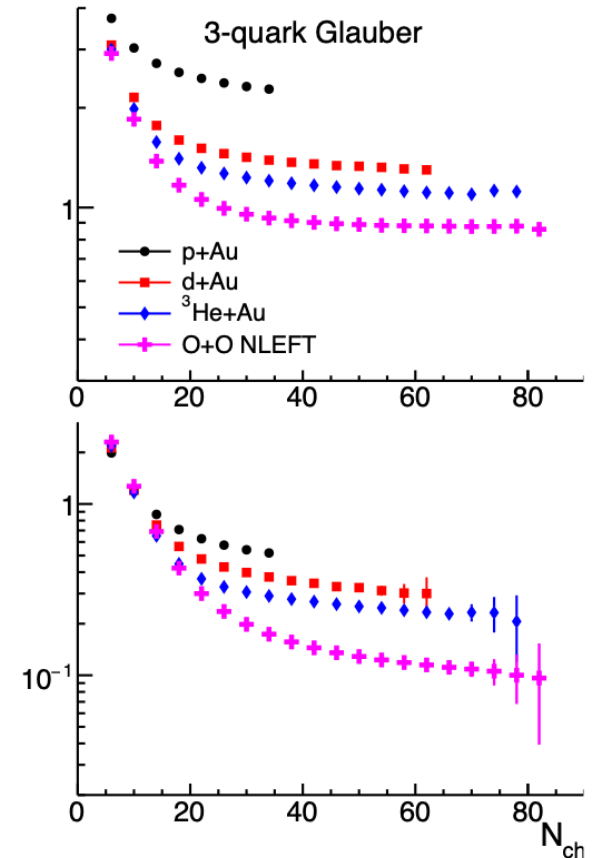
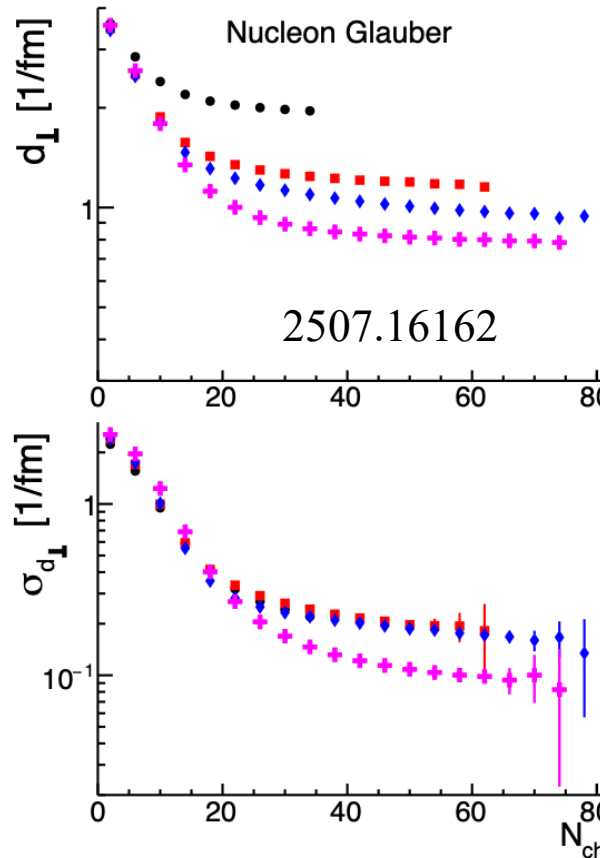
Mean:

Larger $\langle d_{\perp} \rangle \rightarrow$ Larger $\langle [p_T] \rangle$

Fluctuations:

$$\delta d_{\perp} \propto \delta [p_T]$$

$$\sigma_{d_{\perp}} = \sqrt{\langle (\delta d_{\perp})^2 \rangle} \propto \sqrt{\langle (\delta [p_T])^2 \rangle}$$



Expected p_T fluctuations \rightarrow

- nucleon-Glauber: p/d/He+Au agree but higher than OO
- quark-Glauber: clear ordering in all systems

ε_2 and fluctuations

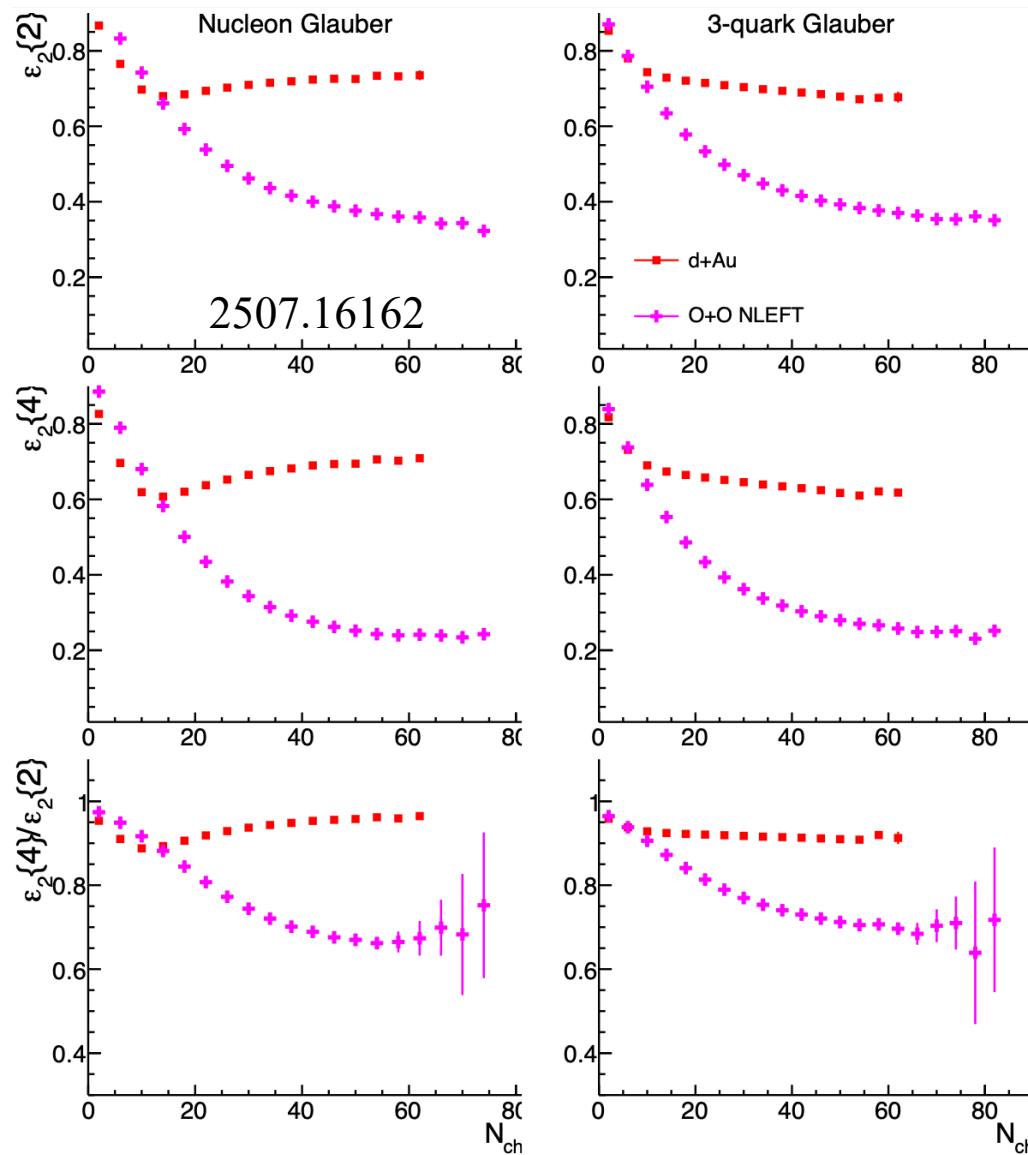
$$\varepsilon_2\{2\} = \sqrt{\langle \varepsilon_2^2 \rangle}$$

$$\varepsilon_2\{4\} = \sqrt[4]{2\langle \varepsilon_2^2 \rangle^2 - \langle \varepsilon_2^4 \rangle}$$

Indeed: $\varepsilon_2^{dAu} > \varepsilon_2^{OO}$

$$\varepsilon_2\{4\}^{dAu} \sim \varepsilon_2\{2\}^{dAu}$$

$$\varepsilon_2\{4\}^{OO} < \varepsilon_2\{2\}^{OO}$$



ε_2 and fluctuations

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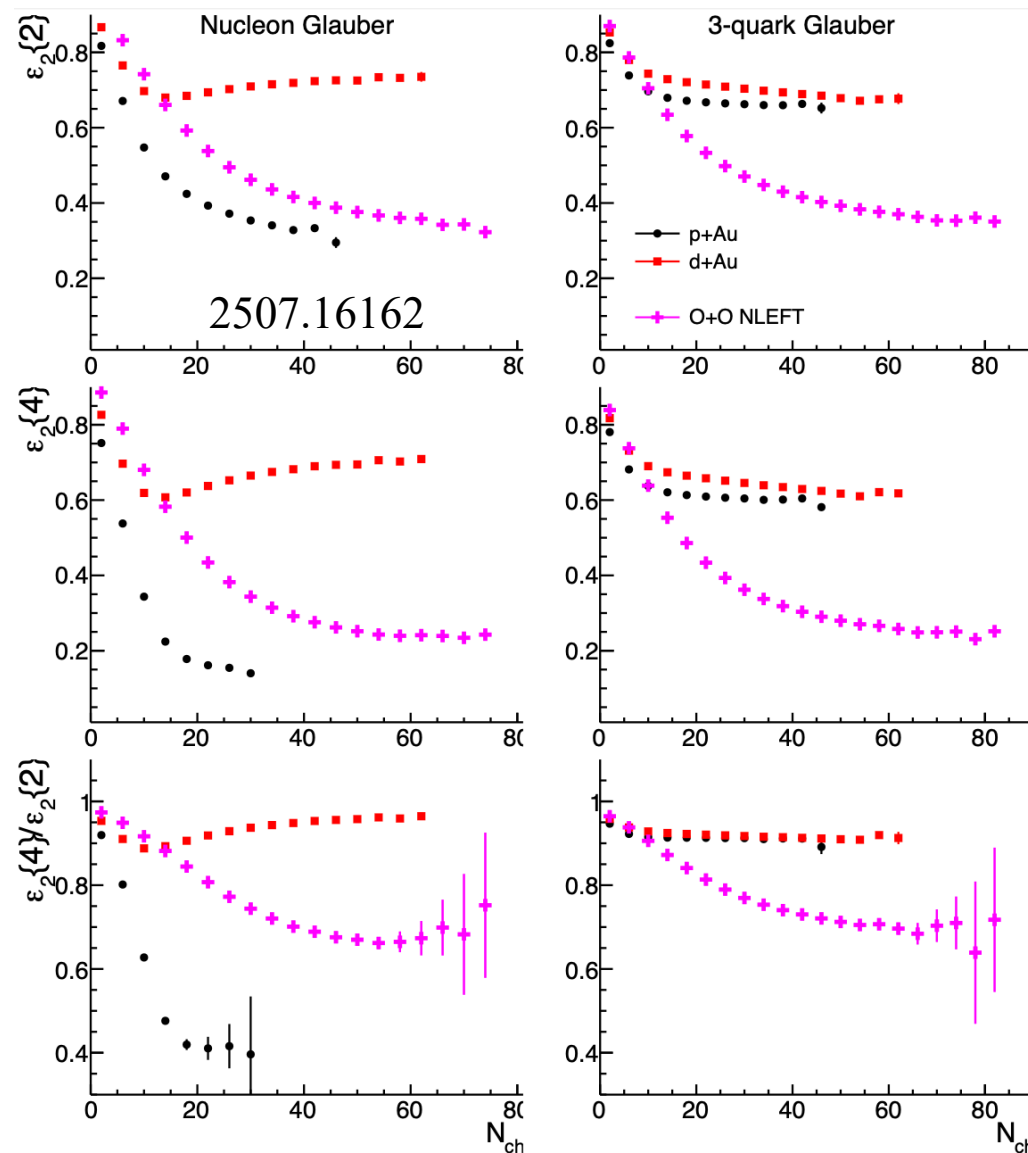
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- pAu is most sensitive to subnucleon fluctuations



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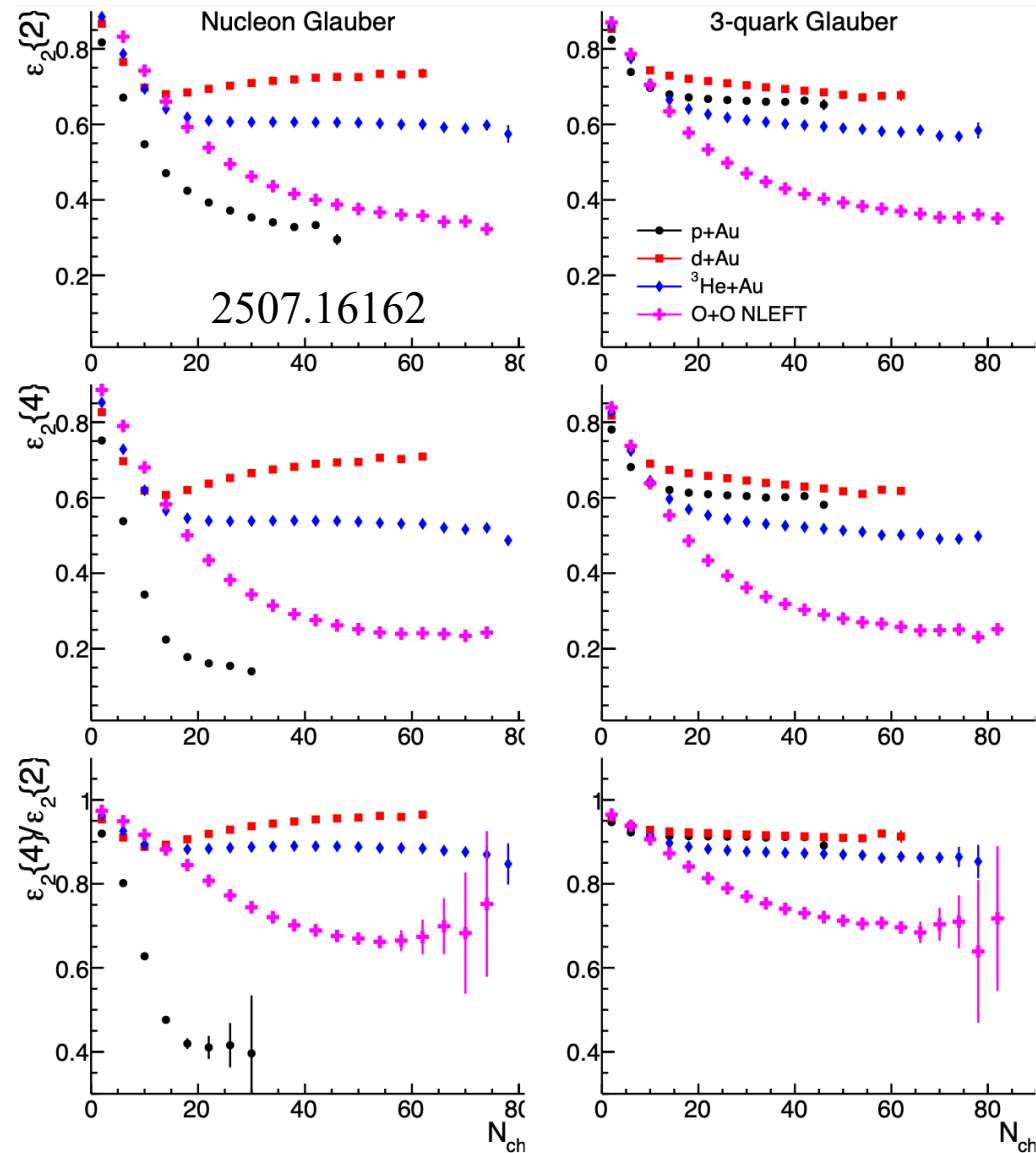
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$$\varepsilon_2\{4\}^{OO} < \varepsilon_2\{2\}^{OO}$$

- pAu is most sensitive to subnucleon fluctuations
- dAu, $^3\text{HeAu}$, OO have little sensitivity

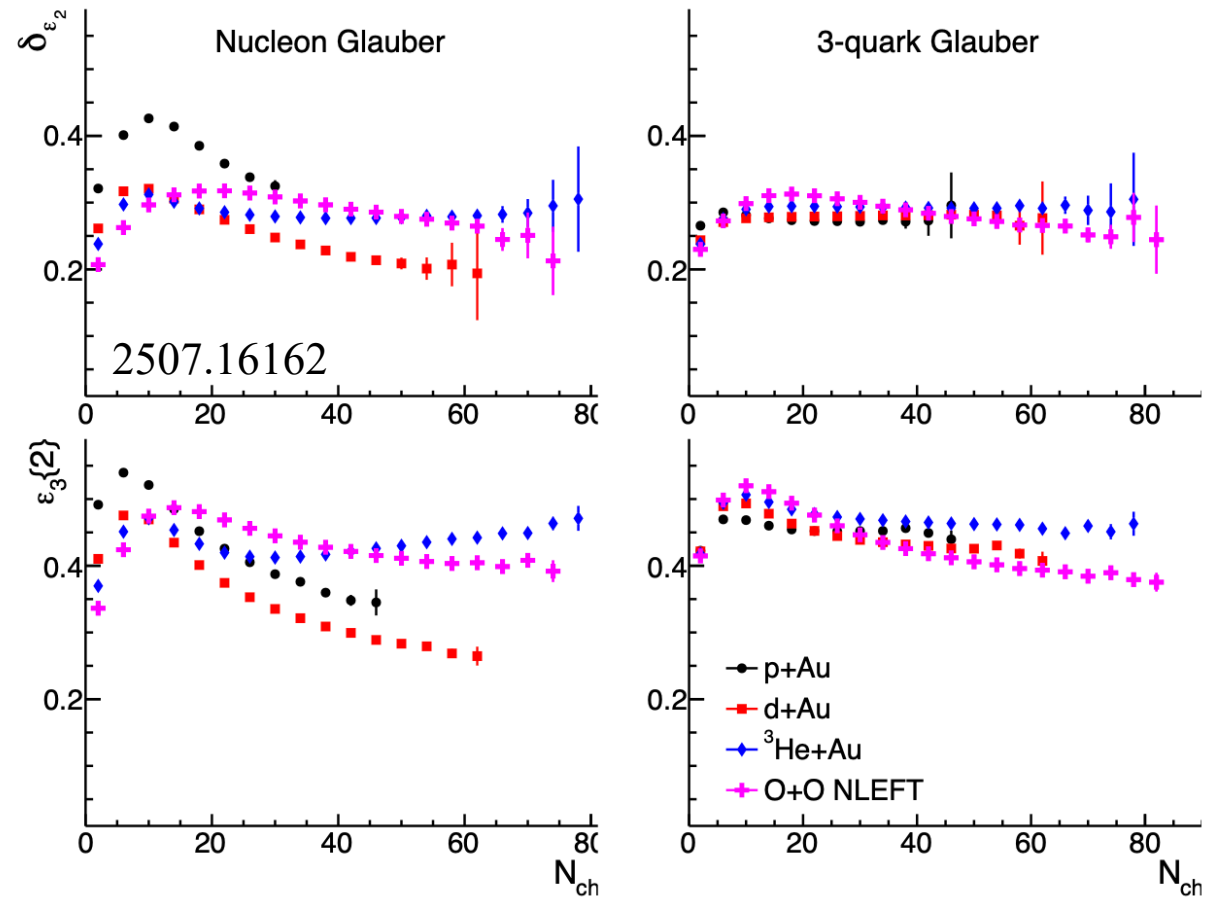


Scaling behavior of the fluctuation components

Isolate the fluctuation component of ϵ_2 :

$$\delta_{\epsilon_2}^2 = \epsilon_2\{2\}^2 - \epsilon_2\{4\}^2$$

and compared with $\epsilon_3\{2\}$, which is also dominated by fluctuations.



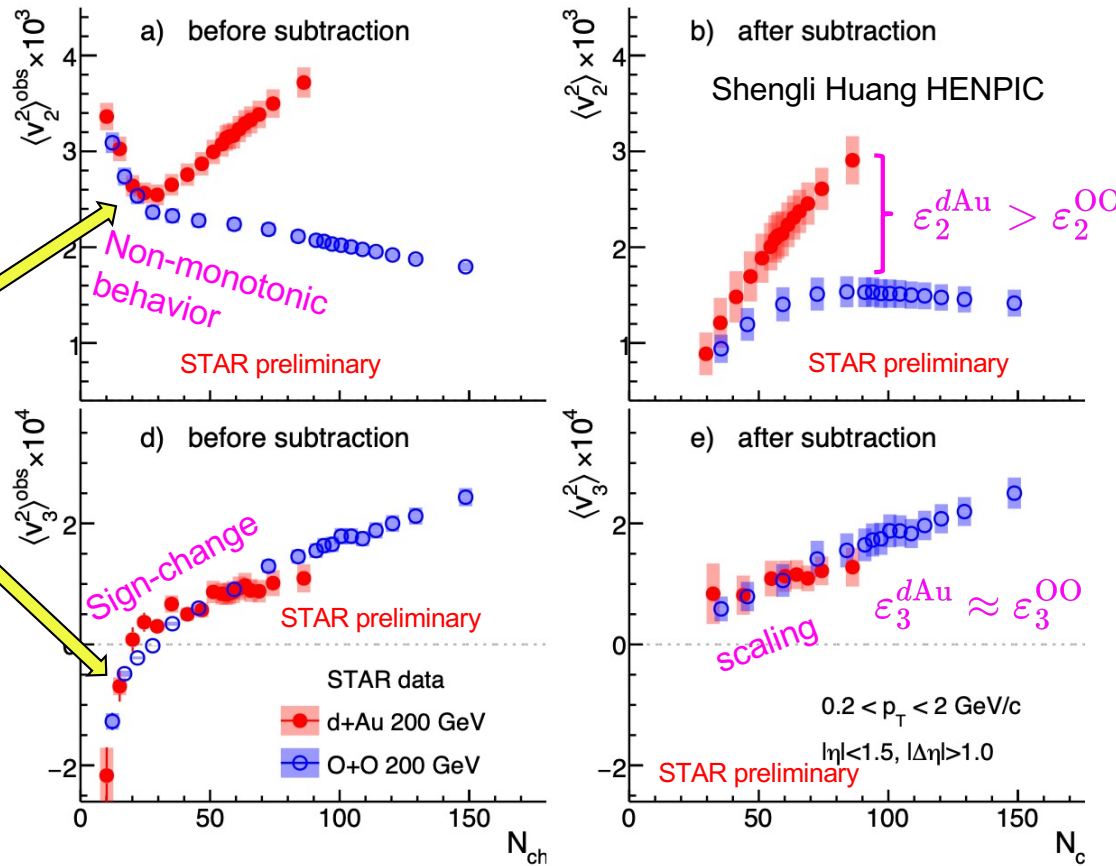
- Nucleon-Glauber: 20-30% level deviations observed.
- Quark-Glauber : Universal scaling among systems within 10%!

d+Au and O+O flow data

$$\langle v_n^2 \rangle = \langle v_n^2 \rangle^{\text{obs}} - f \times \langle v_n^2 \rangle^{\text{obs, LM}}$$

Non-flow subtraction

Clear interplay between
flow and non-flow



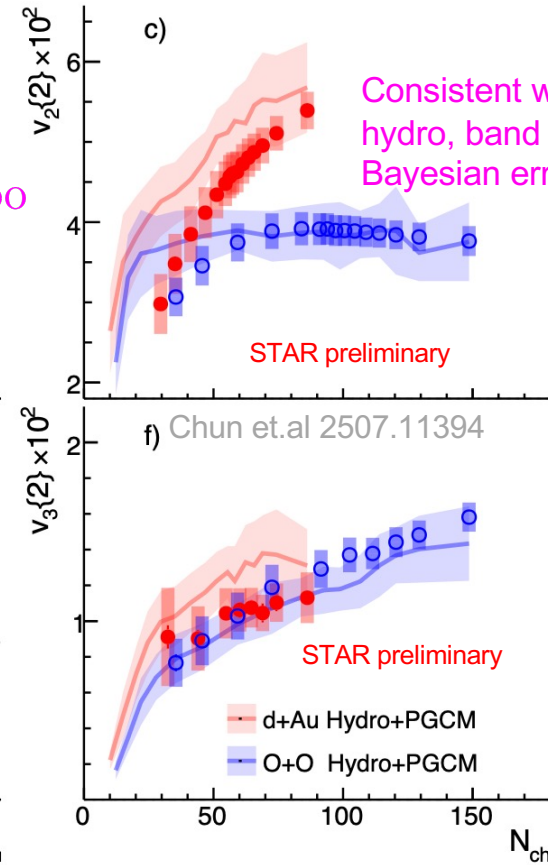
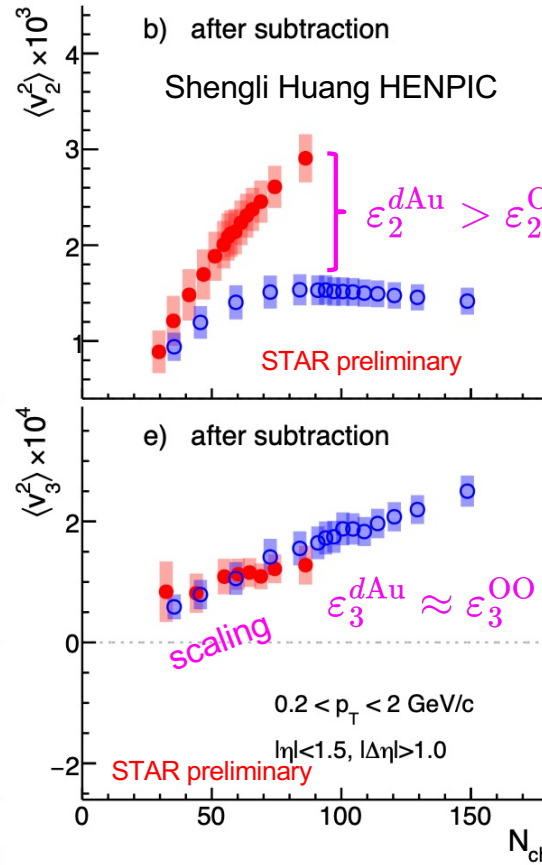
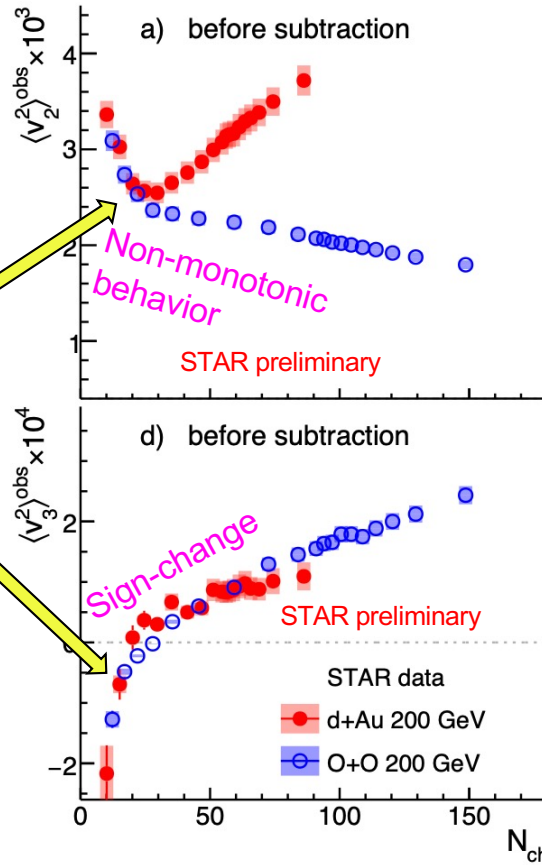
Rich behaviors consistent with our expectation from non-flow and eccentricities

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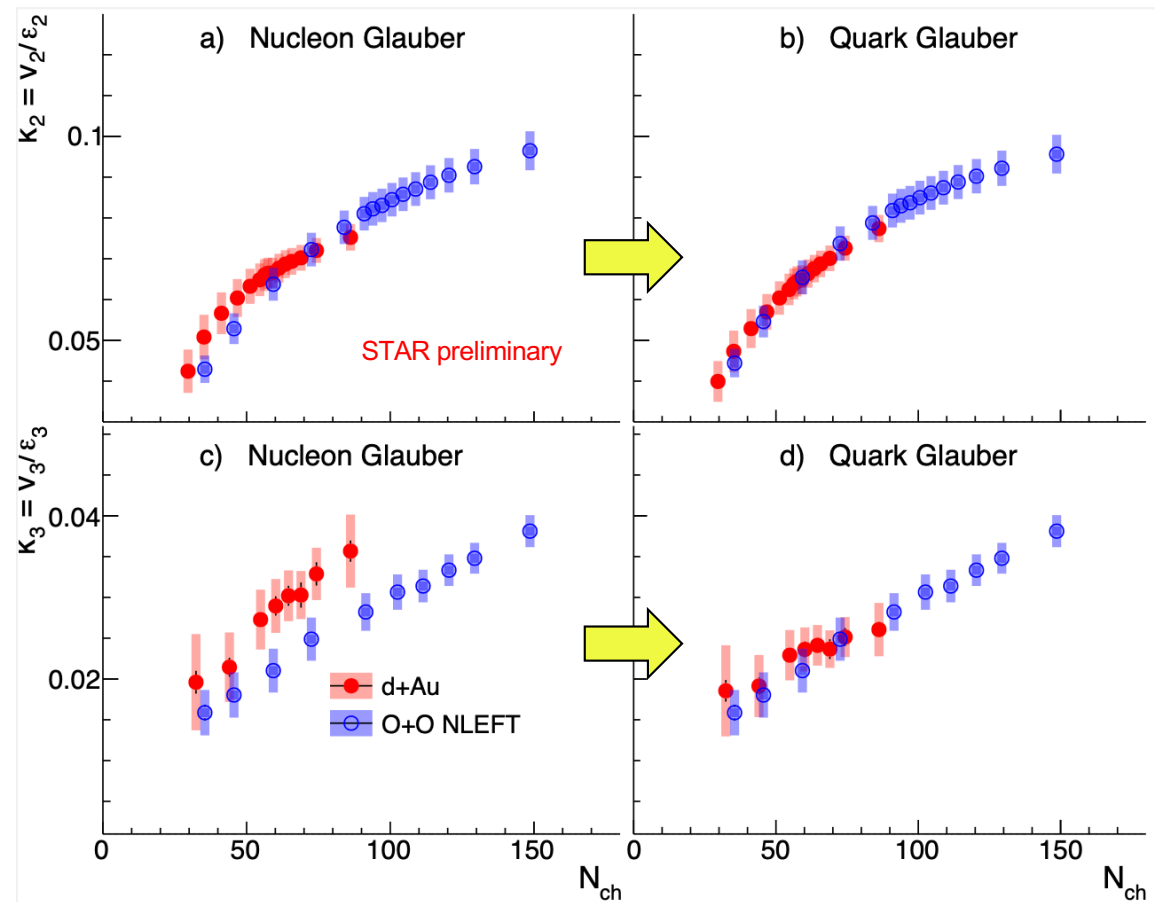
Rich behaviors consistent with our expectation from non-flow and eccentricities
Agreement with 3D-Glauber+Music+UrQMD hydro model tuned to AuAu data

Final-state response coefficients

$k_n = v_n/\epsilon_n$ represents the ability of medium to generate flow

Controlled largely by N_{ch} .

dAu and OO share common scaling when considering subnucleon fluctuations



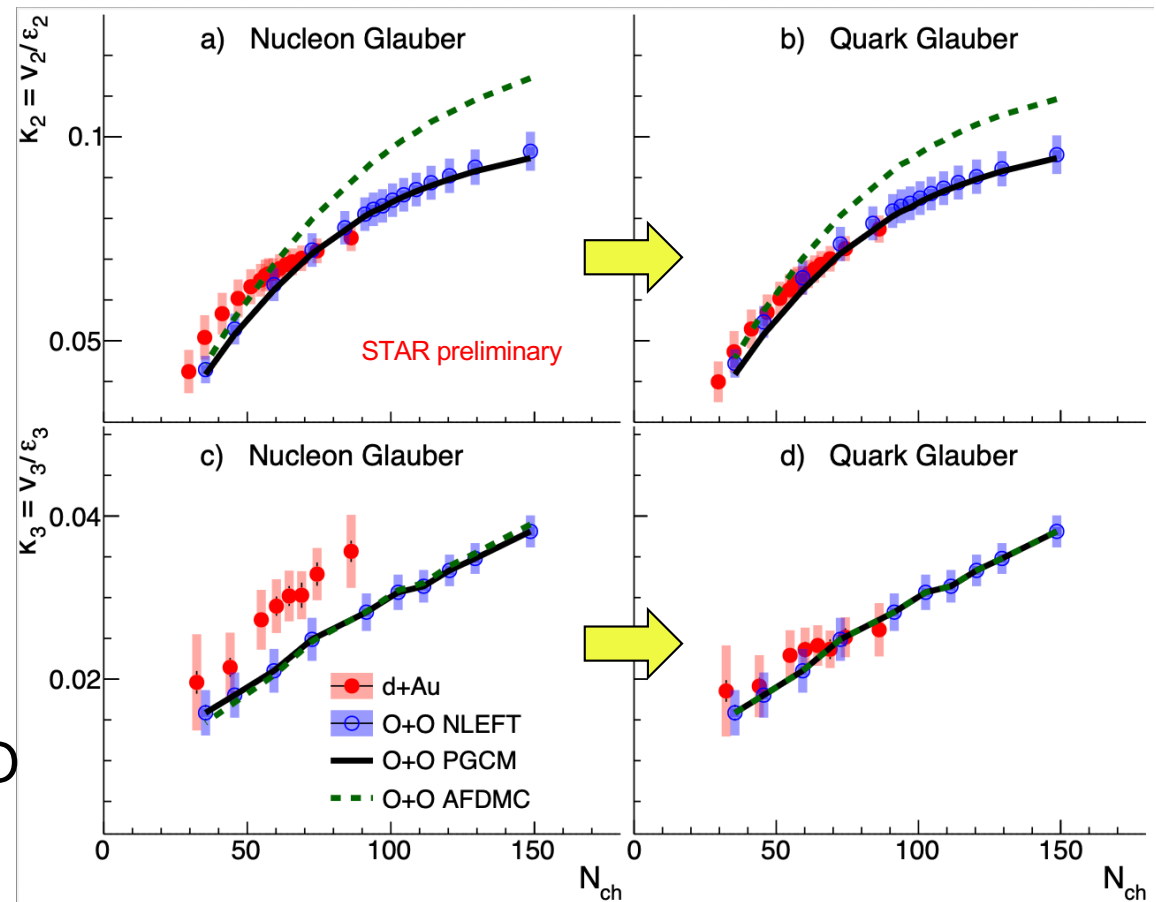
Final-state response coefficients

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Some sensitivity to ab.initio models for nucleon configs of ^{16}O
NLEFT, PGCM, AFDMC.



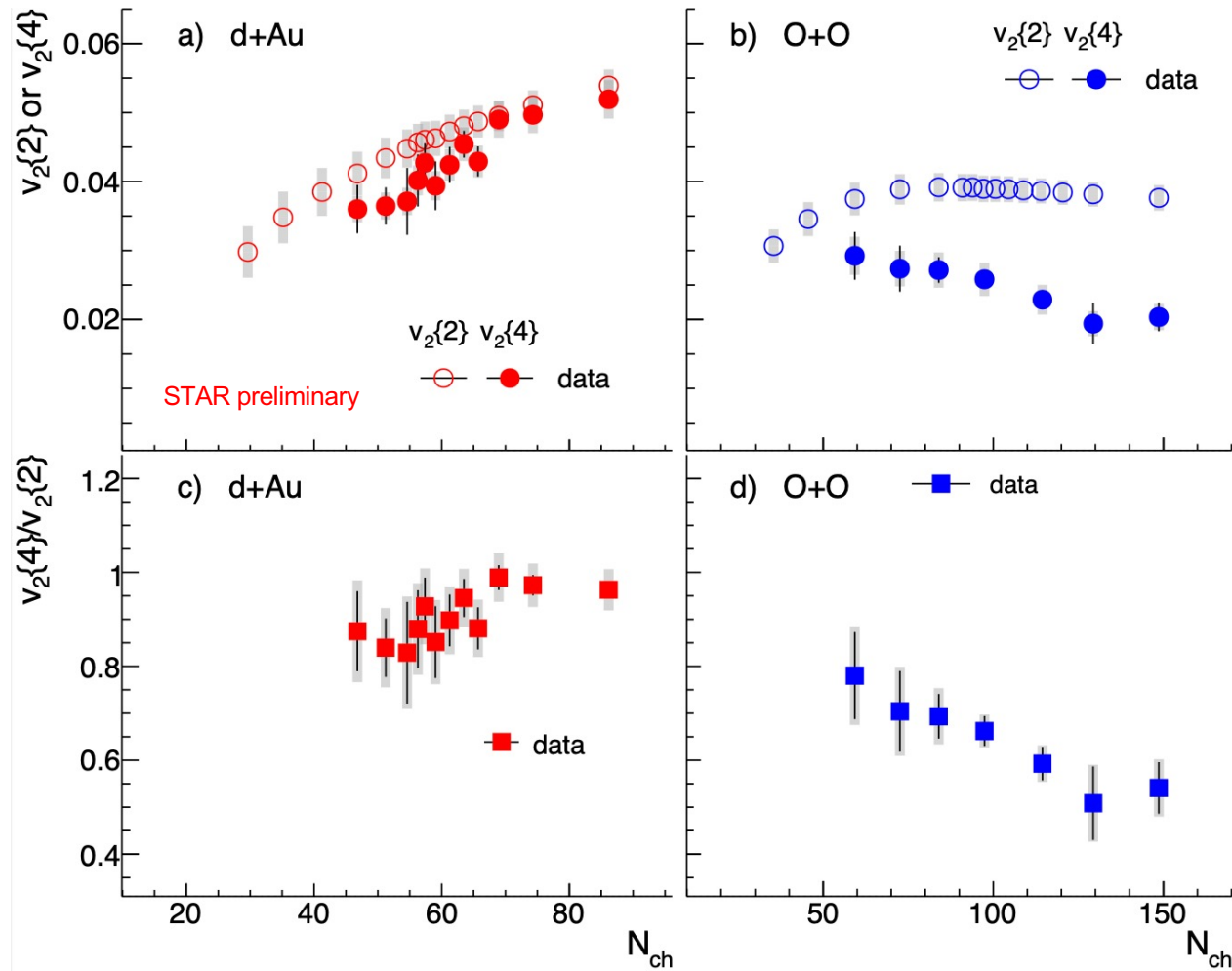
Elliptic flow fluctuations

$$v_2^{dAu}\{4\} \lesssim v_2^{dAu}\{2\} \text{ reflects} \\ \epsilon_2^{dAu}\{4\} \lesssim \epsilon_2^{dAu}\{2\} \quad \rightarrow$$

$$\frac{v_2^{dAu}\{4\}}{v_2^{dAu}\{2\}} \approx \frac{\epsilon_2^{dAu}\{4\}}{\epsilon_2^{dAu}\{2\}} \approx 0.9$$

$$v_2^{OO}\{4\} < v_2^{OO}\{2\} \text{ reflects} \\ \epsilon_2^{OO}\{4\} \lesssim \epsilon_2^{OO}\{2\} \quad \rightarrow$$

$$\frac{v_2^{OO}\{4\}}{v_2^{OO}\{2\}} \approx \frac{\epsilon_2^{OO}\{4\}}{\epsilon_2^{OO}\{2\}} \sim 0.6$$



Elliptic flow fluctuations

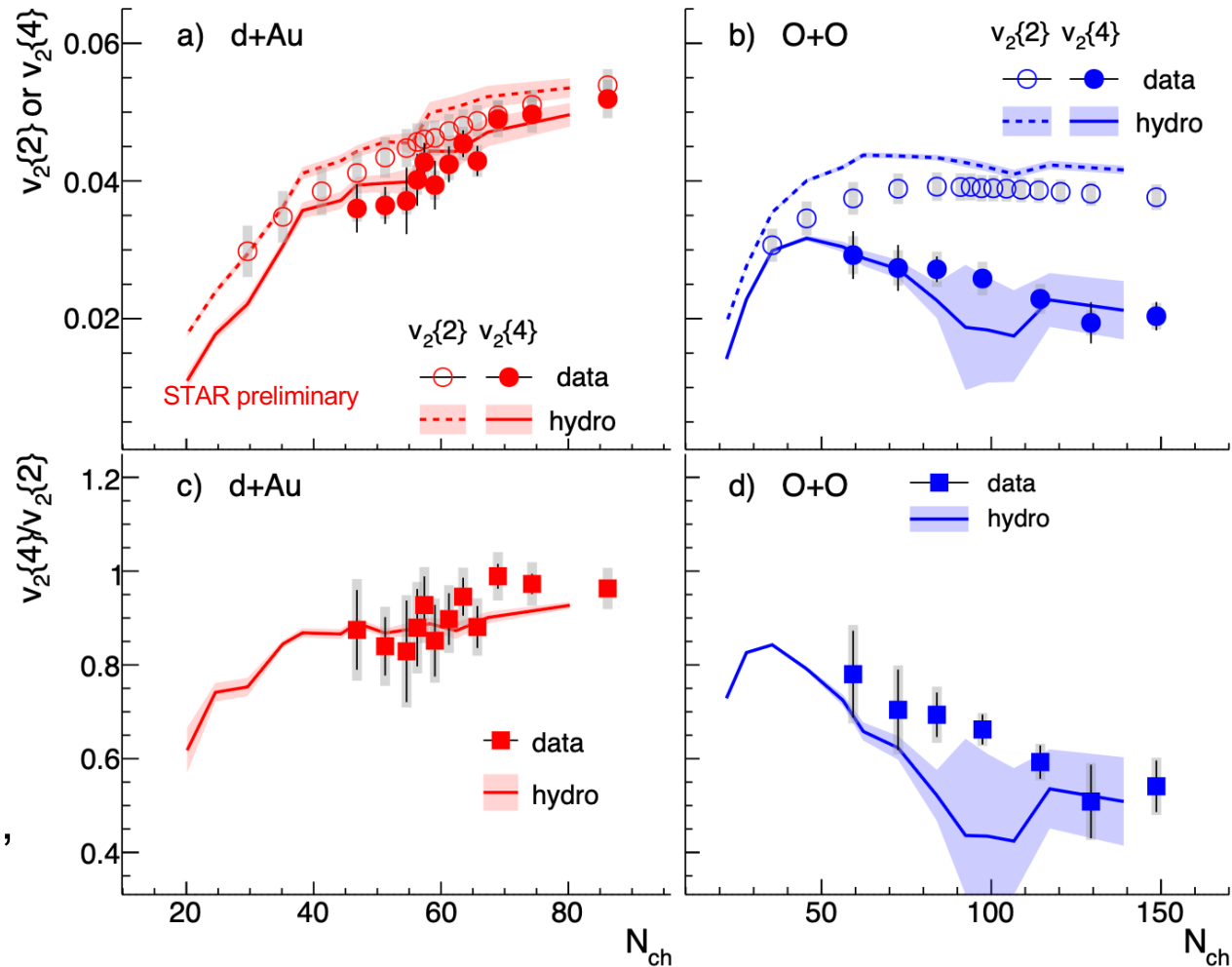
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Hydro model tuned to AuAu data can reproduce most of the trends, consistent with creation of QGP droplet in these systems



Elliptic flow fluctuations

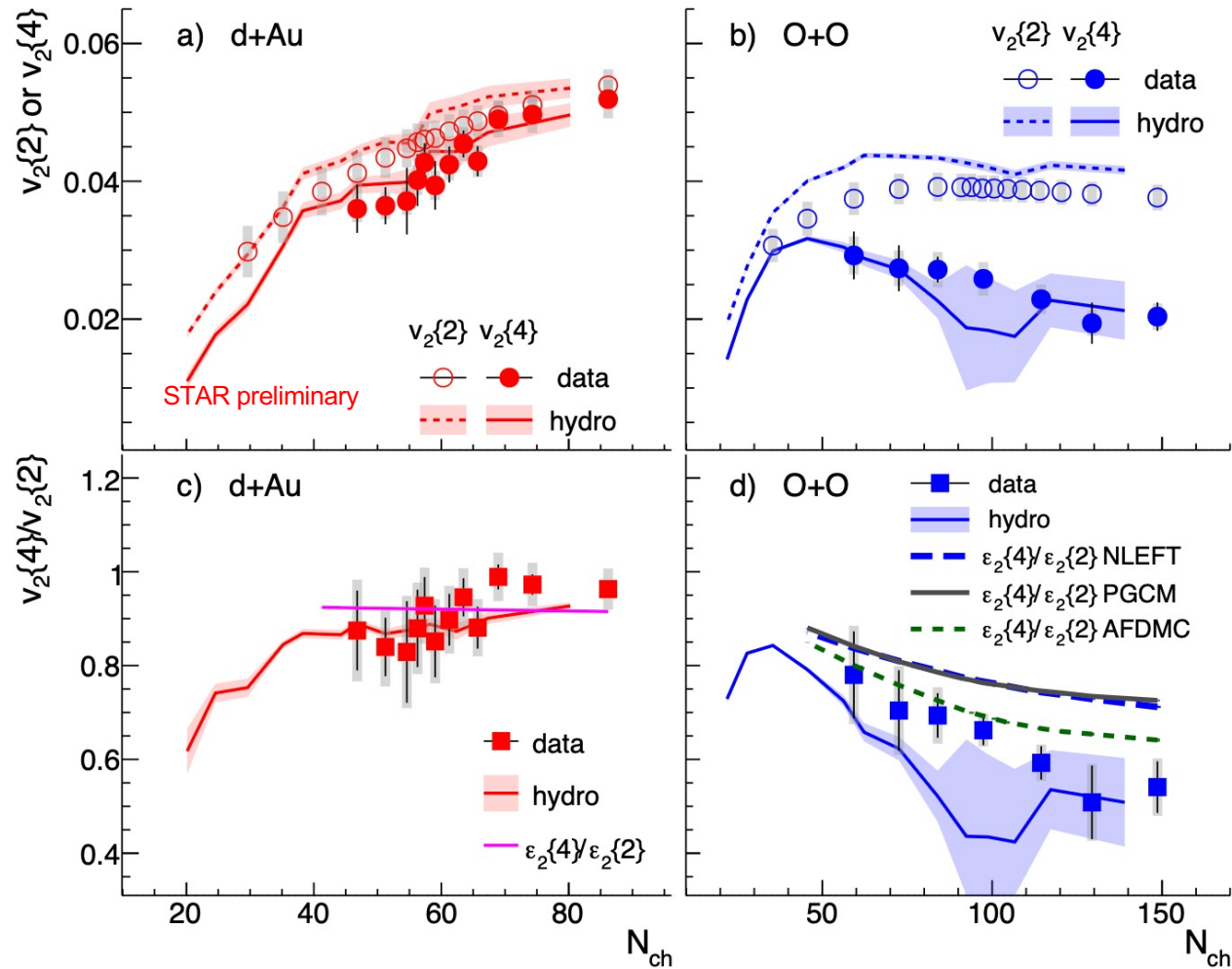
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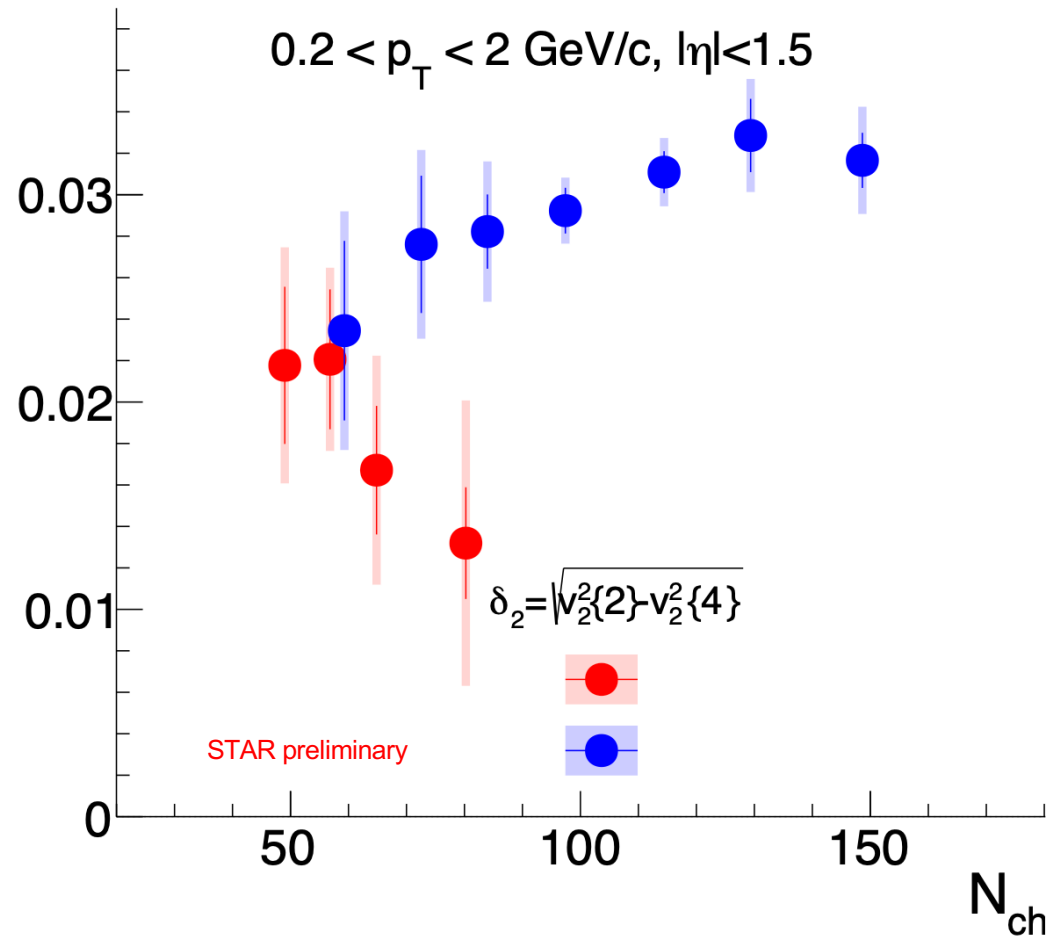
Ratio $\epsilon_2^{OO}\{4\}/\epsilon_2^{OO}\{2\}$ sensitive to
ab initio models, could survive
to $v_2^{dAu}\{4\}/v_2^{dAu}\{2\}$.



Scaling behavior of flow fluctuations

Isolate the fluctuation
component of v_2 : $\delta_{v_2}^2 = v_2\{2\}^2 - v_2\{4\}^2$

Within the large uncertainties, the
two systems are not very different



Scaling behavior of flow fluctuations

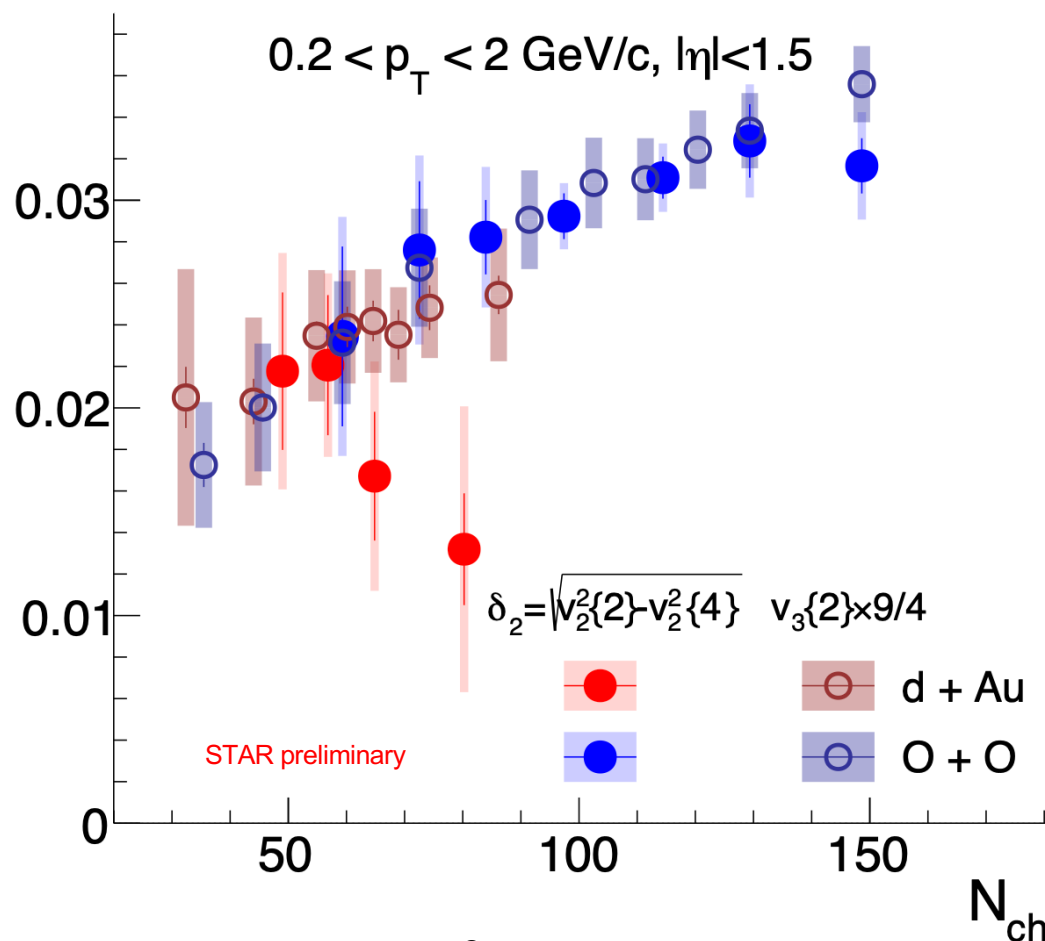
Isolate the fluctuation component of v_2 : $\delta_{v_2}^2 = v_2\{2\}^2 - v_2\{4\}^2$

Within the large uncertainties, the two systems are not very different

Similar N_{ch} dependence as $v_3\{2\}$, but differ by a factor of 9/4

Conformal scaling 1312.6770

Teaney& Yan 1206.1905: viscous correction for v_n scales as n^2 .



Summary

- Demonstrated the ability to engineer the shape of QGP droplets by comparing v_2 and v_3 in symmetric OO collisions with asymmetric dAu collisions.
 - Provide a lever arm to test the effects of nuclear structure and subnucleonic fluctuations on the initial geometry.
- $v_2^{\text{dAu}} > v_2^{\text{OO}}$ and $v_3^{\text{dAu}} \approx v_3^{\text{OO}}$ consistent with the expected ordering in eccentricities for quark Glauber model
- v_2 in OO has larger fluctuation than dAu, also are sensitive between different ab. Initio models.
- Both nuclear structure and subnucleonic fluctuations are required to explain the data
- Results are consistent with hydro-model tuned to Au+Au data, providing strong evidence that the droplets created in these small systems have properties similar to those in large systems.