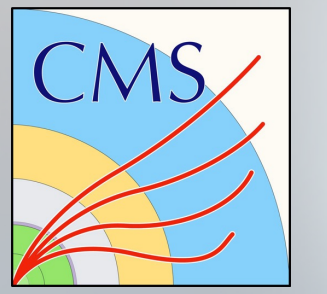
Observation of Toponium from ATLAS and CMS



Haifeng Li

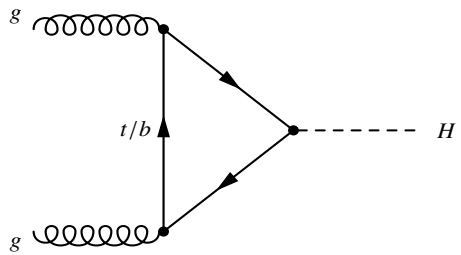
Shandong University

CEPC2025, Nov 6-10, 2025, Guangzhou, China

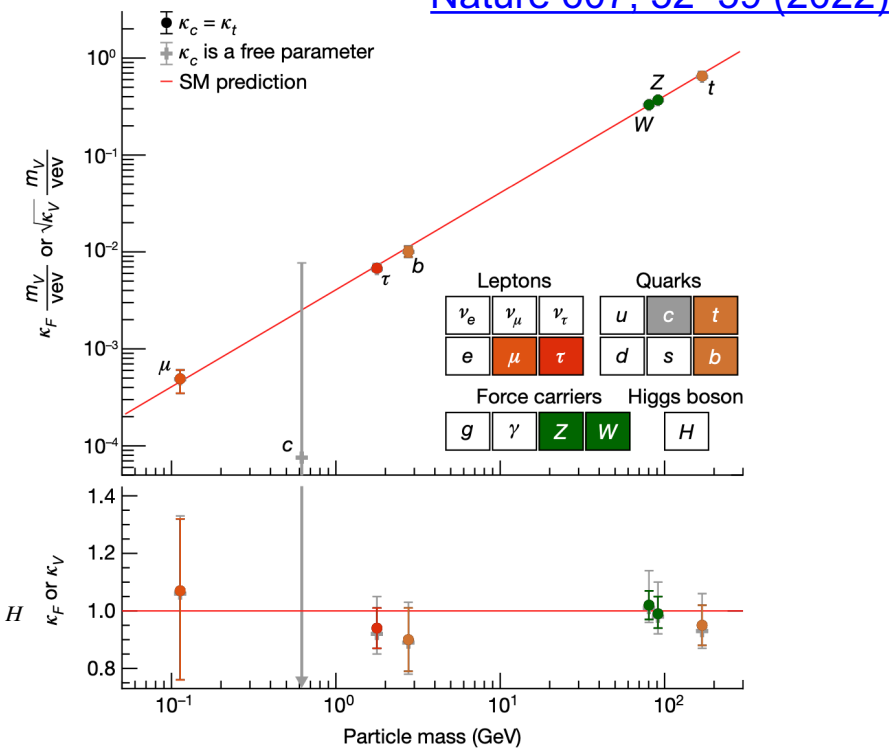
Introduction

- Top quark is very special. Heaviest quark in the SM. Has largest Yukawa coupling to the Higgs field ($y_t \sim 1$)
- Very short life time → decays before forming any real hadron → access to 'bare' quark

$$\underbrace{\frac{1}{m_t}}_{\text{production}\ 10^{-27}\ \text{s}} < \underbrace{\frac{1}{\Gamma_t}}_{\text{lifetime}\ 10^{-25}\ \text{s}} < \underbrace{\frac{1}{\Lambda_{QCD}}}_{\text{hadronization}\ 10^{-24}\ \text{s}} < \underbrace{\frac{m_t}{\Lambda^2}}_{\text{spin-flip}\ 10^{-21}\ \text{s}}$$



Nature 607, 52–59 (2022)



30th anniversary of the top-quark discovery

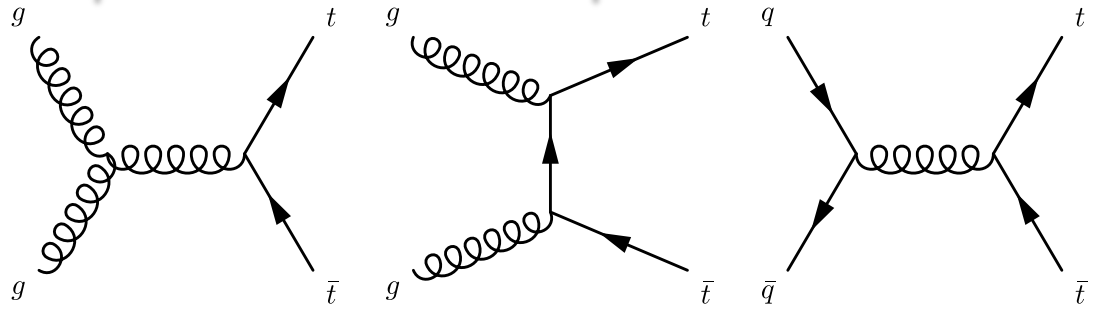
- Precision measurements of top quark: important for testing the SM and looking for new physics beyond SM

LHC is a top quark factory

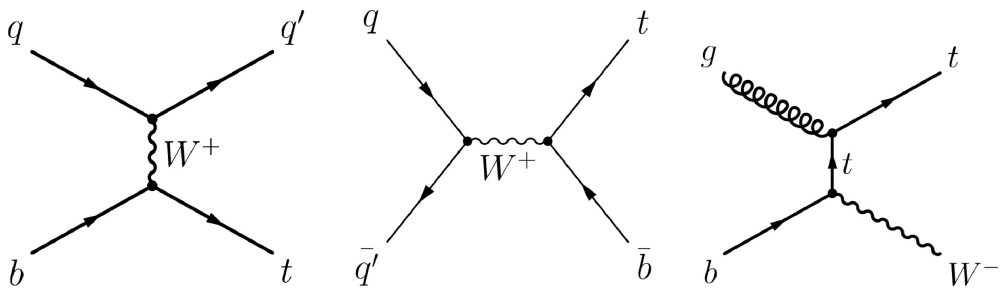
- LHC is a $t\bar{t}$ factory
  - $\sigma_{t\bar{t}} = 834$ pb at LHC Run 2
  - 0.83M $t\bar{t}$ events per fb^{-1}
  - Due to the short life time, can measurement $t\bar{t}$ spin correlations
- With those huge amount of $t\bar{t}$ data, ATLAS has carried out precision measurements in top quark physics
- Thanks to the advanced MC generators and high-order QCD/EW calculations

$t\bar{t}$ production (QCD)

Dominant

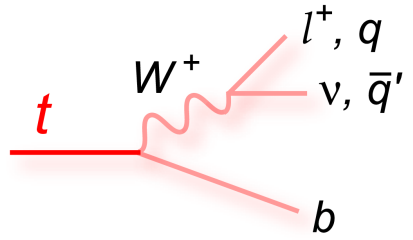


Single top production (EW)



t-channel s-channel tW

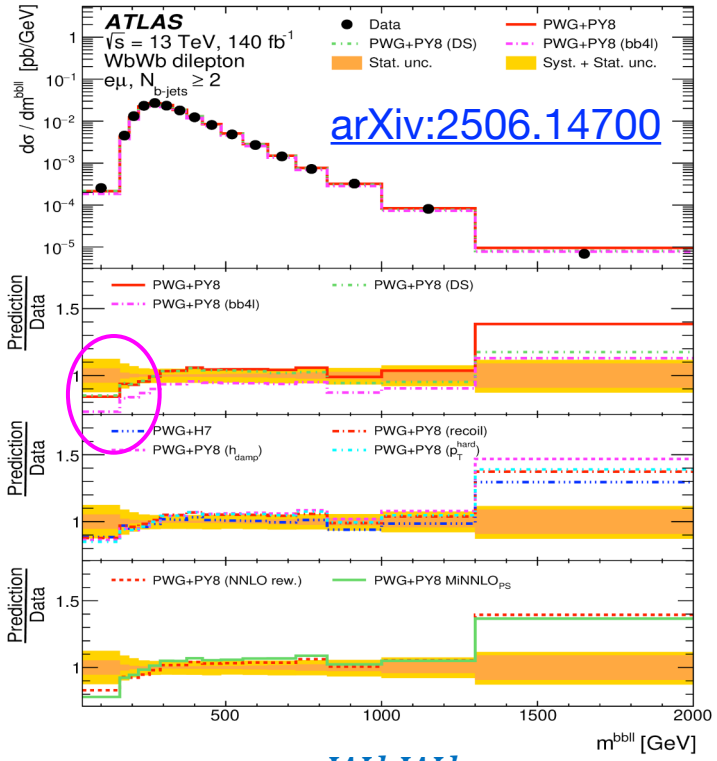
Top decays (EW): almost 100% with



Threshold Region Measurement is Challenging

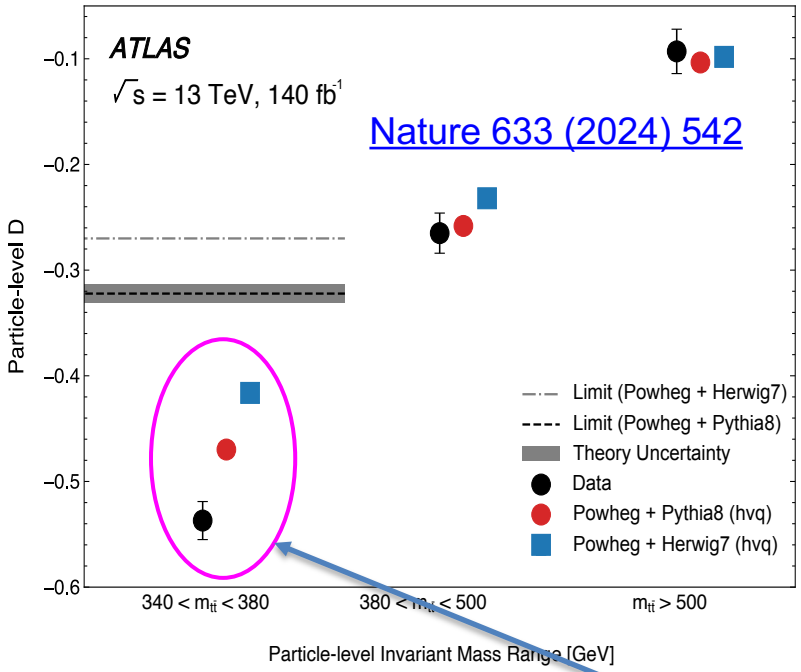
Experimentally very challenging: modelling of $t\bar{t}$ close to threshold region; tiny effect of quasi-bound state

Previous hints



$pp \to WbWb$

First Quantum Entanglement (QE) measurement using $t\bar{t}$ at LHC



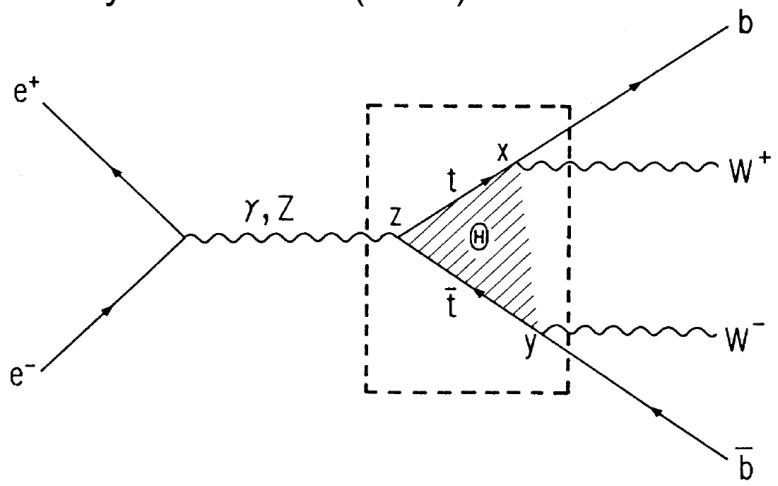
Stronger QE in data than MC.
Missing toponium contributions?

Threshold region has received a lot of attention recently in the context of quantum entanglement

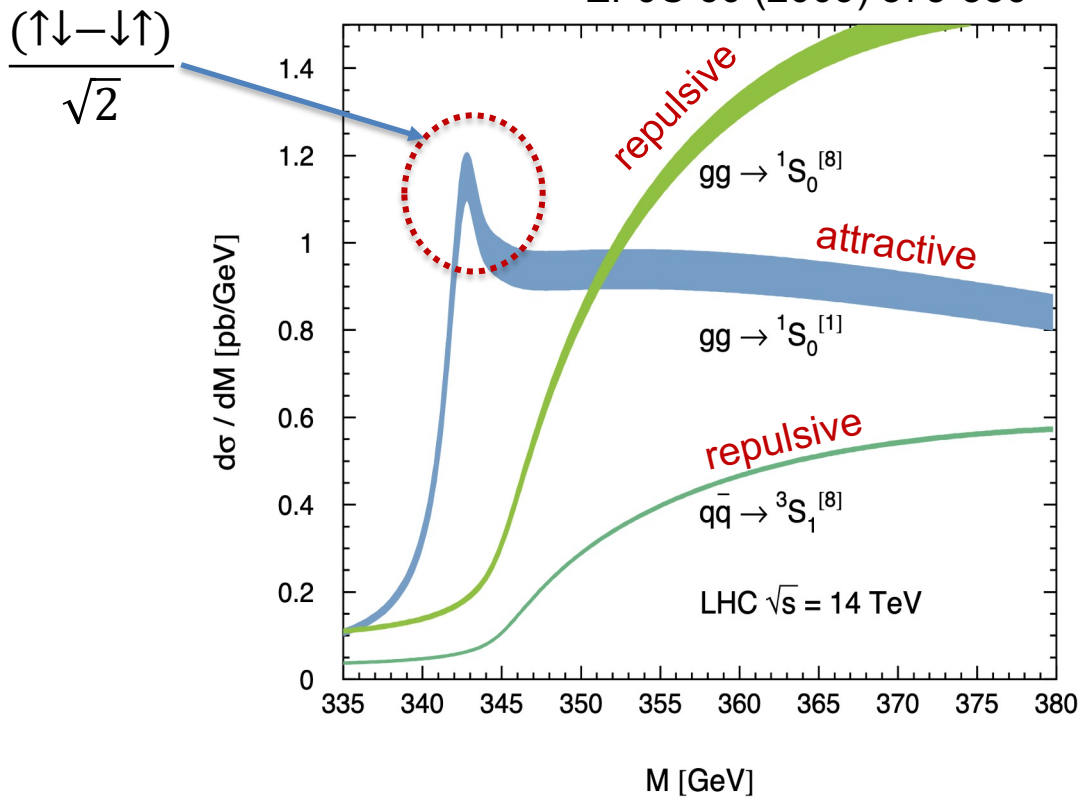
Top quark and $t\bar{t}$ Threshold Region

QCD predicts a quasi-bound state close to the threshold for low momentum top quarks (the prediction was made even before the top quark discovery)

Phys. Rev. D 47 (1993) 56



EPJC 60 (2009) 375-386

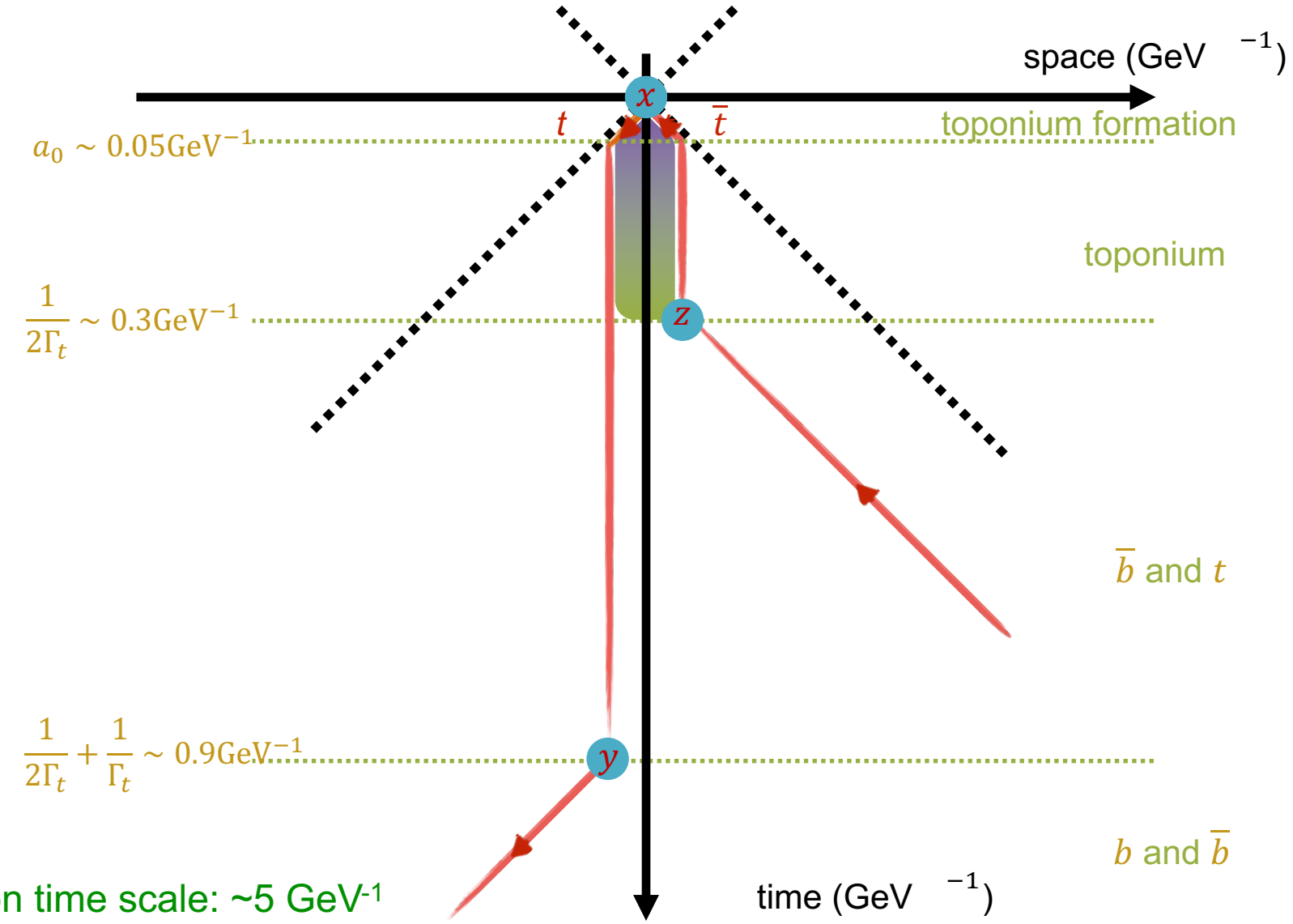


Theory papers (selected):
V.S. Fadin and V.A. Khoze, JETP Lett. 46 (1987) 525
Y. Sumino *et al.*, Phys. Rev. D 47 (1993) 56
W.-L. Ju *et al.*, JHEP 06 (2020) 158

ATLAS Results

Top-antitop production near threshold

From B. Fuks



Hadronization time scale: ~5 GeV^{-1}

The toponium Green's function

From B. Fuks

$$K_{abcd}(x,y,z) = \left\langle 0 \left| T\{ t_c(y)\bar{t}_d(z) : \bar{t}_a(x) t_b(x) : \} \right| 0 \right\rangle$$

$$= \frac{(1+\gamma^0)_{ca}}{2} \frac{(1-\gamma^0)_{bd}}{2} \int \mathrm{d}^3 r \left[K_1\left(y; (z^0, \vec{r})\right) K_2(z^0, \vec{r}, \vec{z}; x^0, \vec{x}, \vec{x}) + K_1\left(z; (y^0, \vec{r})\right) K_2(y^0, \vec{y}, \vec{r}; x^0, \vec{x}, \vec{x}) \right]$$

Antitop-decay first

Top-decay first

Non-relativistic spin projection operators

1-particle-state and 2-particle-state propagators

The toponium Green's function

- Solution to the Lippmann-Schwinger equation
  - Fourier transform of the QCD potential
  - S-wave contributions
- To be solved numerically

$$\widetilde{G}(E;p) = \widetilde{G}_0(E;p) + \int \frac{\mathrm{d}^3 q}{(2\pi)^3} \widetilde{V}_{\mathrm{QCD}}(\vec{p}-\vec{q})\, \widetilde{G}(E;q)$$

Free Green's function

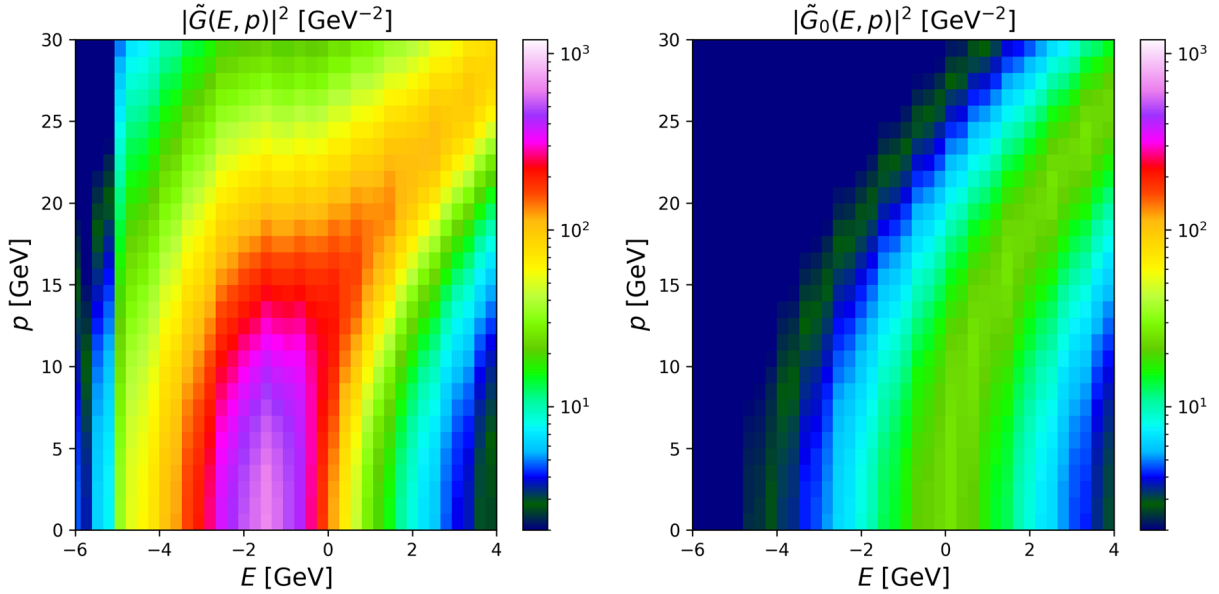
Quasi-bound State from NRQCD

- *S*-wave, color-singlet state with Green's function of non-relativistic (NR) QCD by Eur. Phys. J. C 85 (2025) 157（B. Fuks, K. Hagiwara, K. Ma, Y.-J. Zheng）
- Generate $gg \to tt \to b\ell\nu b\ell\nu$ with MG5_aMC. Spin correlations included
- Reweight matrix element with QCD Green's functions

$$|\mathcal{M}|^2 \quad \to \quad |\mathcal{M}|^2 \left| \frac{\tilde{G}(E; p^*)}{\tilde{G}_0(E; p^*)} \right|^2$$

$\tilde{G}$: Green's function considering QCD potential

$\tilde{G}_0$: Free Green's function



This model includes NRQCD calculations. More complete w.r.t. previous simplified models (using scalar/pseudoscalar as an effective model)

Background Modelling

Extremely challenging measurement: need precise modelling of the $t\bar{t}$ threshold region

- $t\bar{t}$: main background. Powheg v2 hvq + Pythia8, using narrow-width approximation (NWA), with approximate spin correlation
  - 2D reweighting in (cosθ*, M($t\bar{t}$)) to NNLO QCD (from MATRIX) and NLO EW (HATHOR)
  - θ*: angle between the momentum of the top quark in the $t\bar{t}$ center-of-mass frame and the momentum of the $t\bar{t}$ system in the lab. frame
- $t\bar{t}$: alternative MC sample (for syst.), Powheg v2 bb4l + Pythia8
  - Simulate $pp \to b\ell\nu b\ell\nu$ including off-shell, non-resonant contributions, and exact spin correlations at NLO

Advanced MC generators and state-of-art high-order QCD/EW calculations play crucial rules in this search

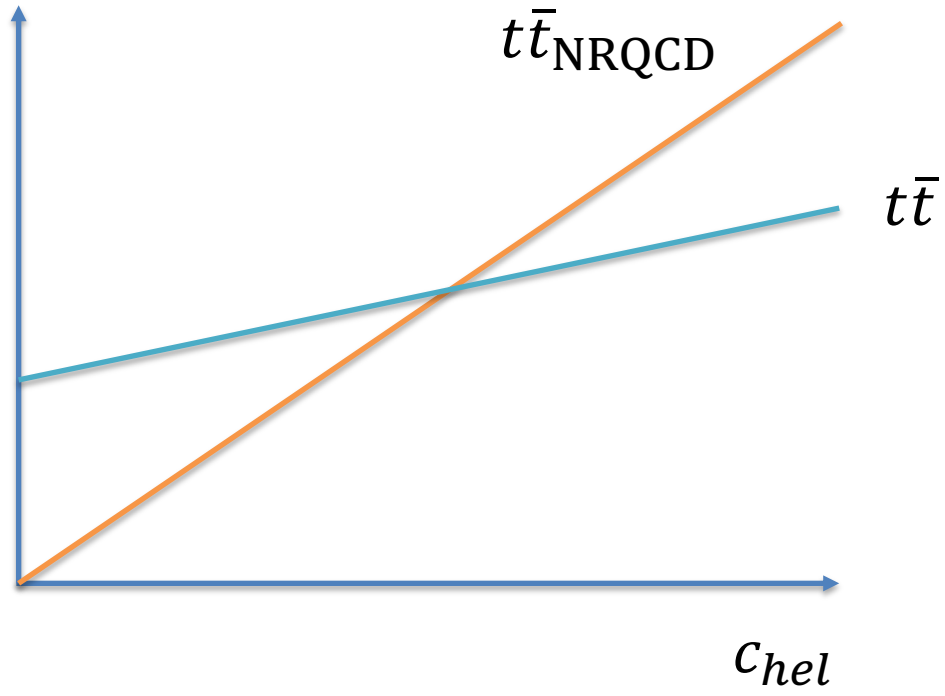
Event Categorization

SR events are categorized into 9 regions based on two observables: c_{hel} and c_{han}

$$c_{hel} = \vec{\ell}_+ \cdot \vec{\ell}_- ,$$

where the $\vec{\ell}_\pm$ are the lepton directions in $t\bar{t}$ center-of-mass frame, and then in turn boosted into t and $\bar{t}$ frames. This distribution has a maximum slope for a spin-singlet state

c_{han}: flip the $\vec{\ell}$ in t direction. This distribution has a maximum slope for a spin-triplet state



c_{hel} is useful to separate pseudoscalar from other contributions

Event Categorization and Fitting

	$-1 < c_{hel} < -\frac{1}{3}$	$-\frac{1}{3} < c_{hel} < \frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3} < c_{hel} < 1$
$-1 < c_{han} < -\frac{1}{3}$	SR1	SR2	SR3
$-\frac{1}{3} < c_{han} < \frac{1}{3}$	SR4	SR5	SR6
$\frac{1}{3} < c_{han} < 1$	SR7	SR8	SR9

CR-Fakes ee	CR-Fakes $e\mu$	CR-Fakes $\mu\mu$

CR-Z

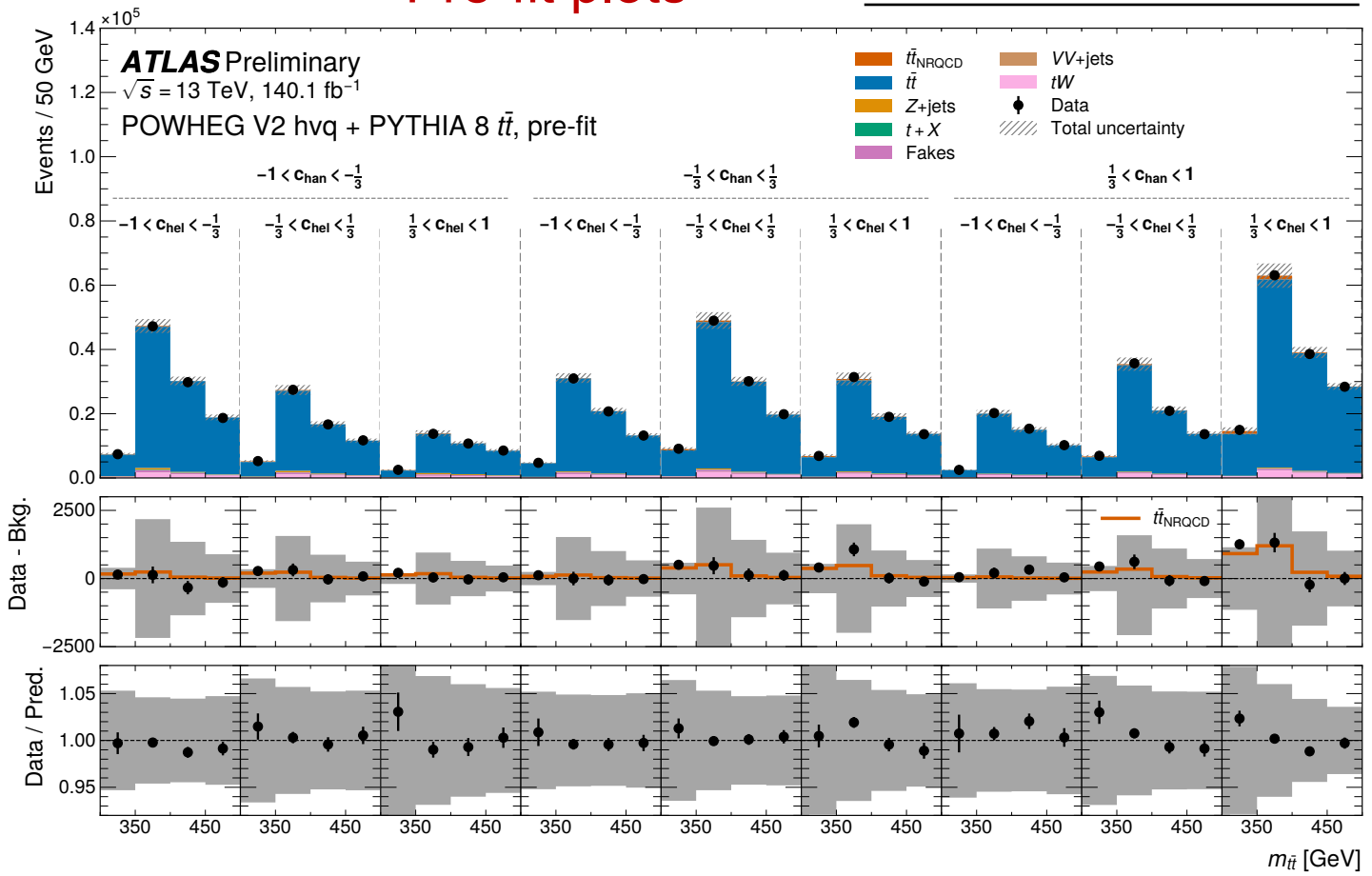
Simultaneous fitting to $m_{t\bar{t}}$ with 13 categories with profile likelihood method

Background Estimations

- $t\bar{t}$: with a free-floating scale factor (SF); tW: estimation from MC
- Z+jets: get some contributions from Z→$\tau\tau$. Use the CR-Z to normalize the Z+b process
- fake / non-prompt leptons: Fakes represent 1.5% of SR yields. Data-driven estimation with 3 CR-Fakes

Pre-fit plots

ATLAS-CONF-2025-008

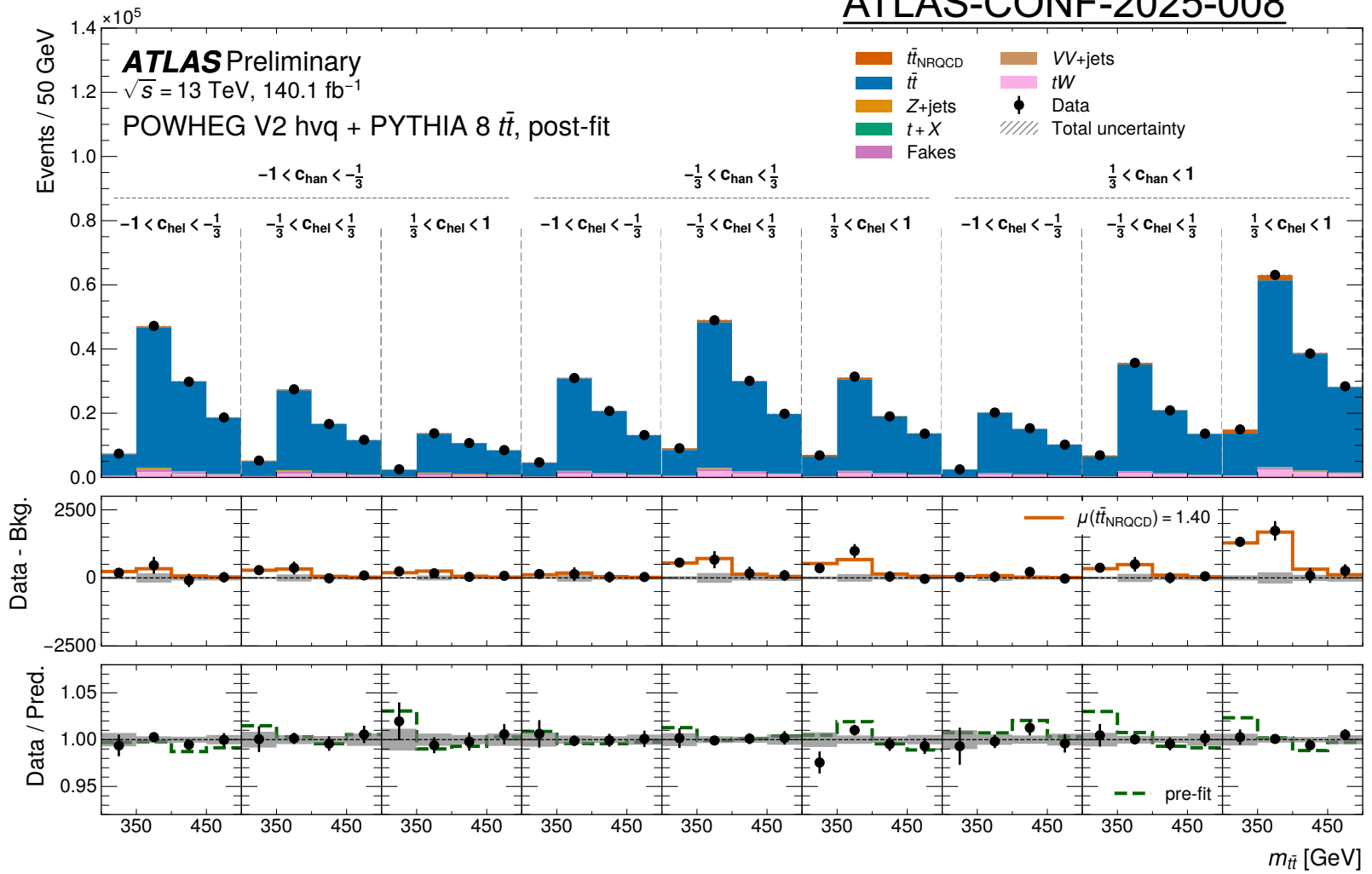


Results: baseline $t\bar{t}$ + quasi-bound state (NRQCD)

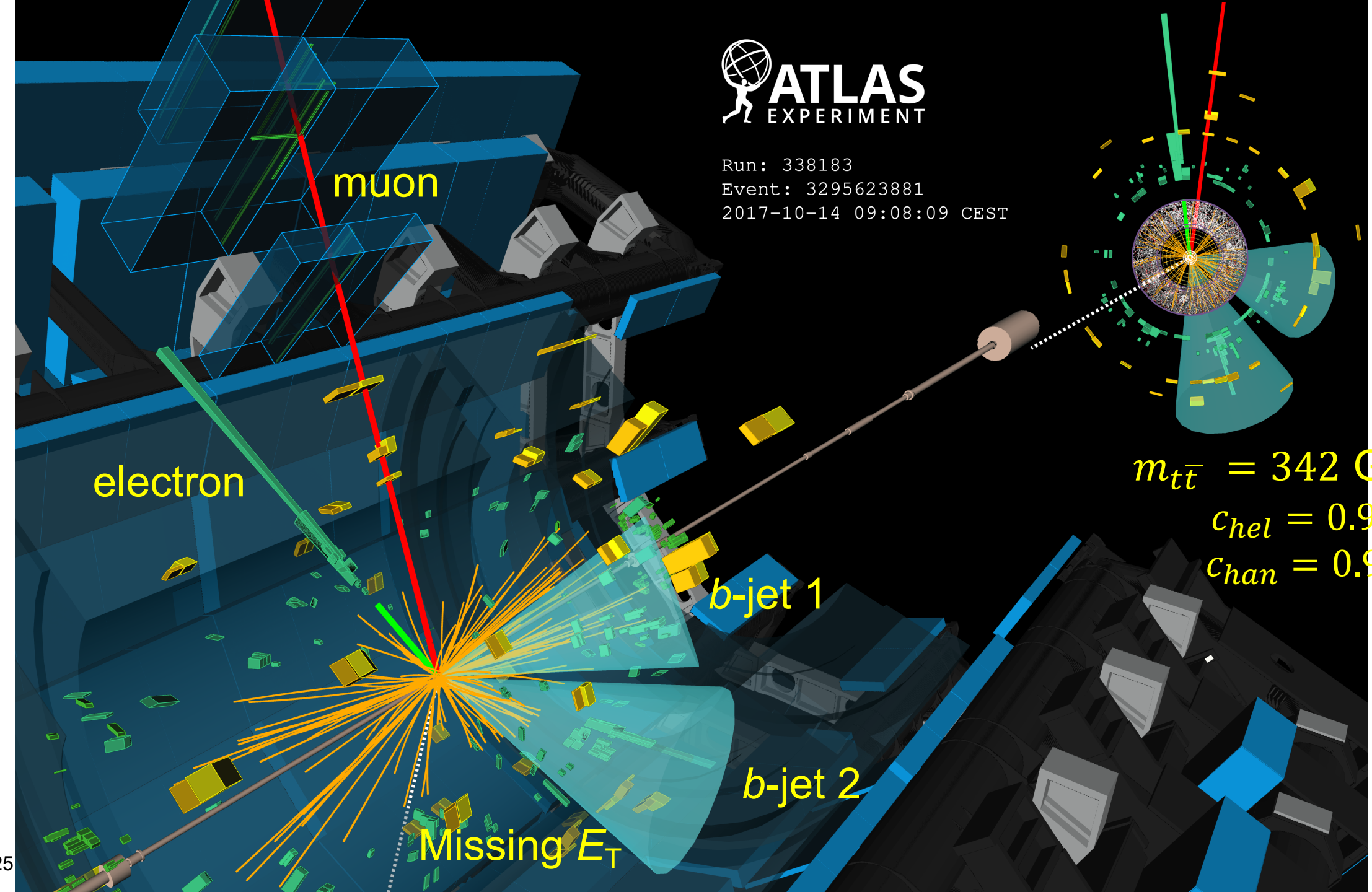
ATLAS-CONF-2025-008

Observed (expected) significance: 7.7σ (5.7σ)

Goodness-of-Fit: 0.93



$$\sigma(t\bar{t}_{\mathrm{NRQCD}}) = 9.0 \pm 1.3\ \mathrm{pb} = 9.0 \pm 1.2\ (\mathrm{stat.}) \pm 0.6\ (\mathrm{syst.})\ \mathrm{pb}$$

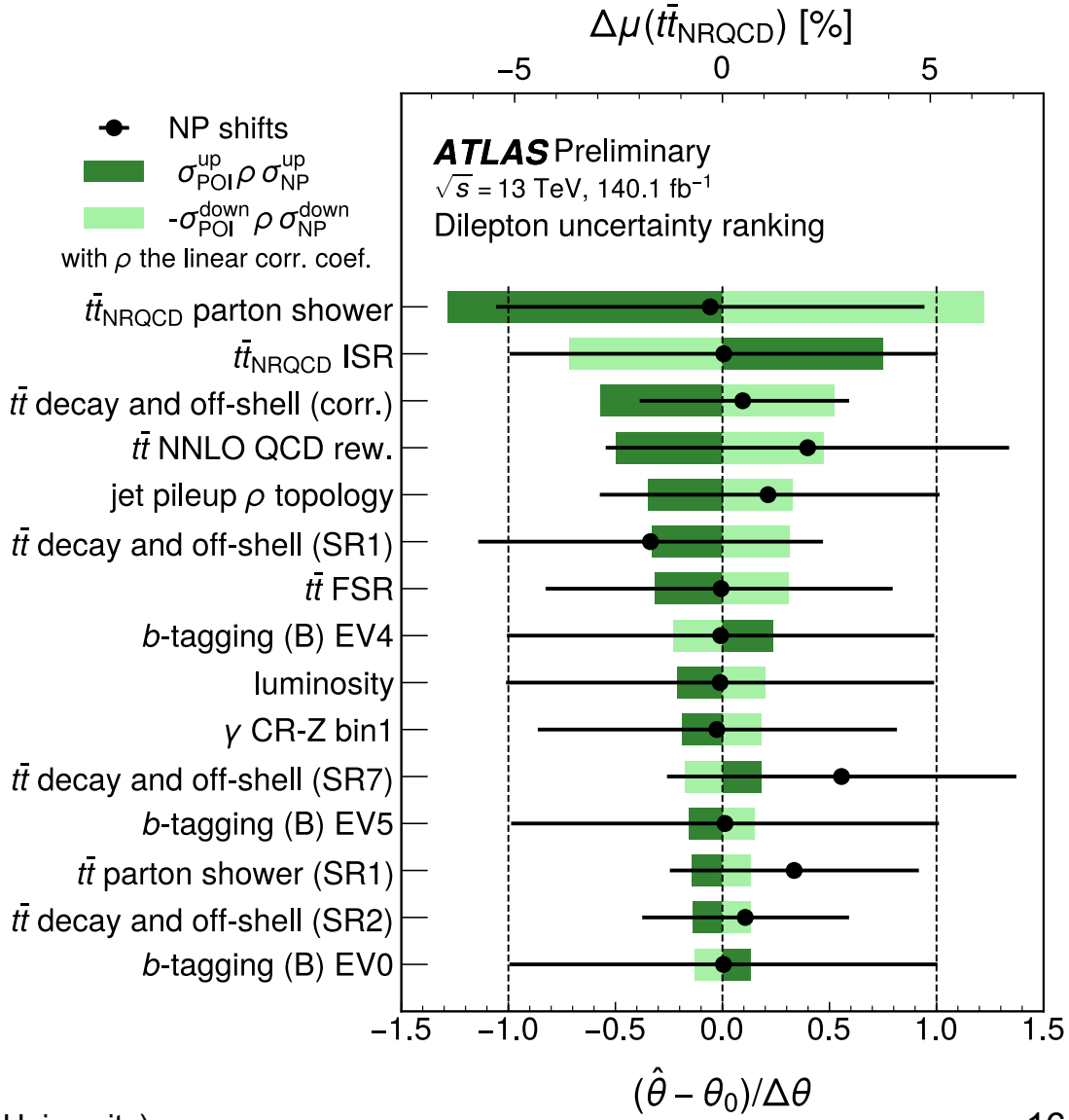

ATLAS
EXPERIMENT
Run: 338183
Event: 3295623881
2017-10-14 09:08:09 CEST
muon
electron
b-jet 1
b-jet 2
Missing E_T
$m_{t\bar{t}} = 342$ GeV
$c_{hel} = 0.97$
$c_{han} = 0.94$

Impacts of Systematics

- Quasi-bound state modelling: Parton shower [Herwig7]
- $t\bar{t}$ decay and off-shell [comparison to bb4l]
- NNLO QCD rew.: NNLO QCD scale variations

- No strong pulls or constraints
- Largest effects from toponium modelling and off-shell effect modelling

ATLAS-CONF-2025-008

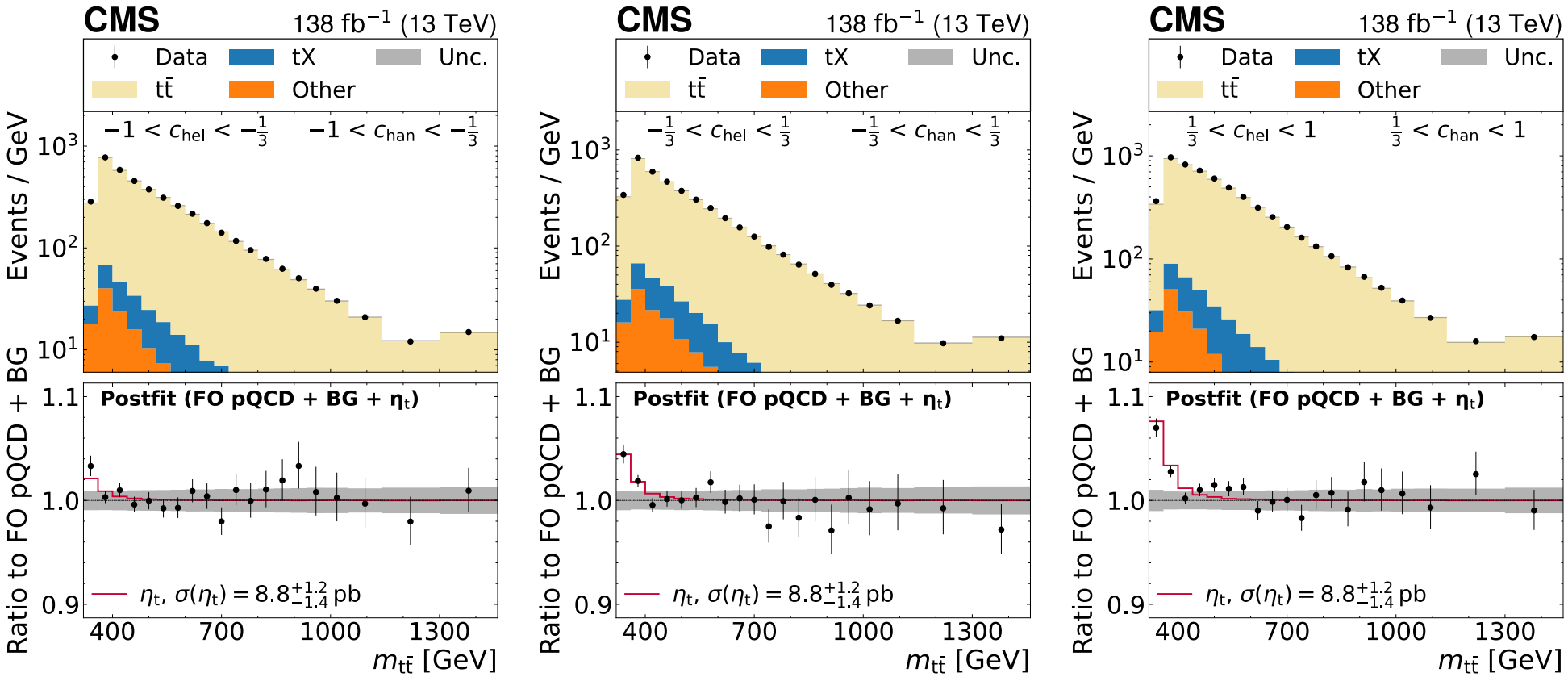


CMS Results

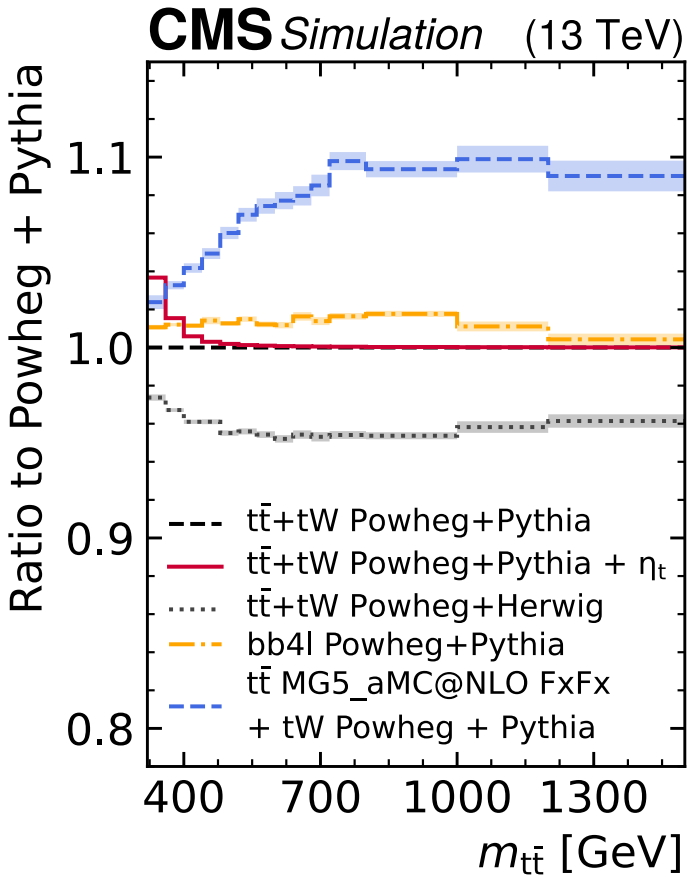
CMS Results

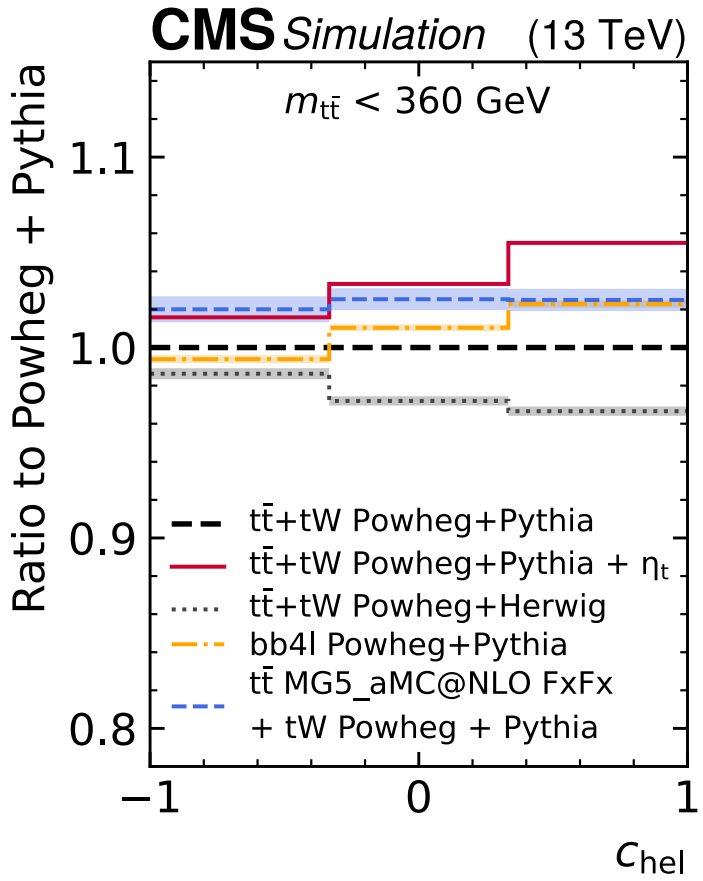
- arXiv:2503.22382, Rep. Prog. Phys. 88 (2025) 087801
- Use very similar analysis method compared with ATLAS
- Use toy model for signal

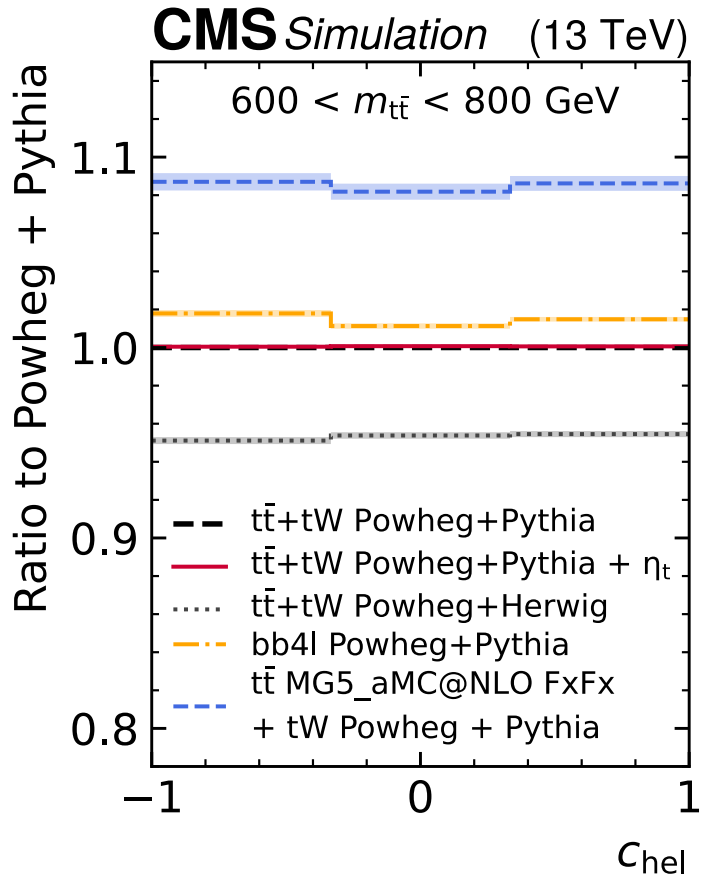
Significance: more than 5σ



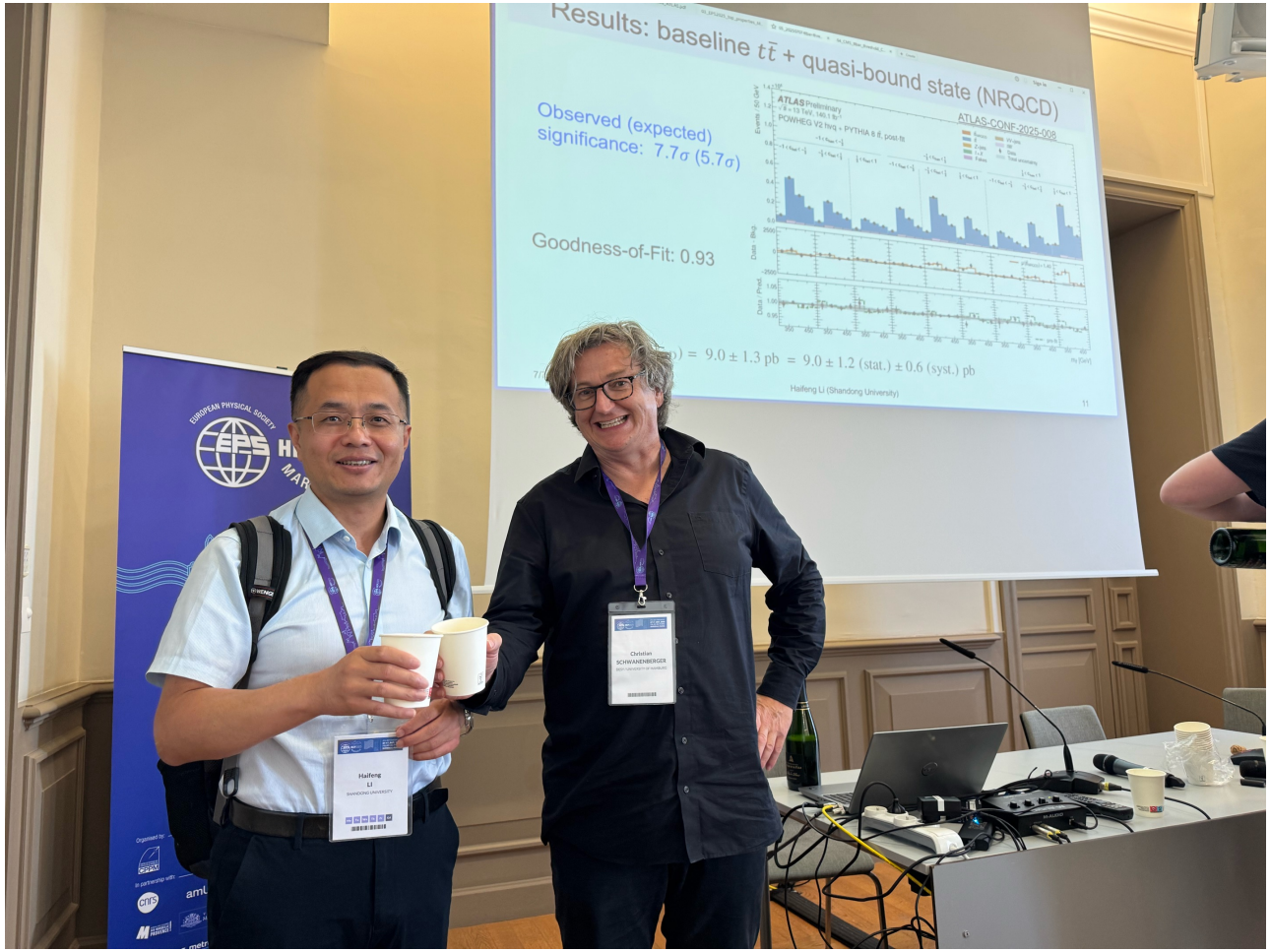
Comparison of different models







- First report about ATLAS results in EPS-HEP2025 in Marseille, France
- Celebration after toponium talks from ATLAS and CMS
- All the ATLAS&CMS management who attended EPS-HEP2025 listened the two talks
- Was one of the highlights for EPS-HEP2025

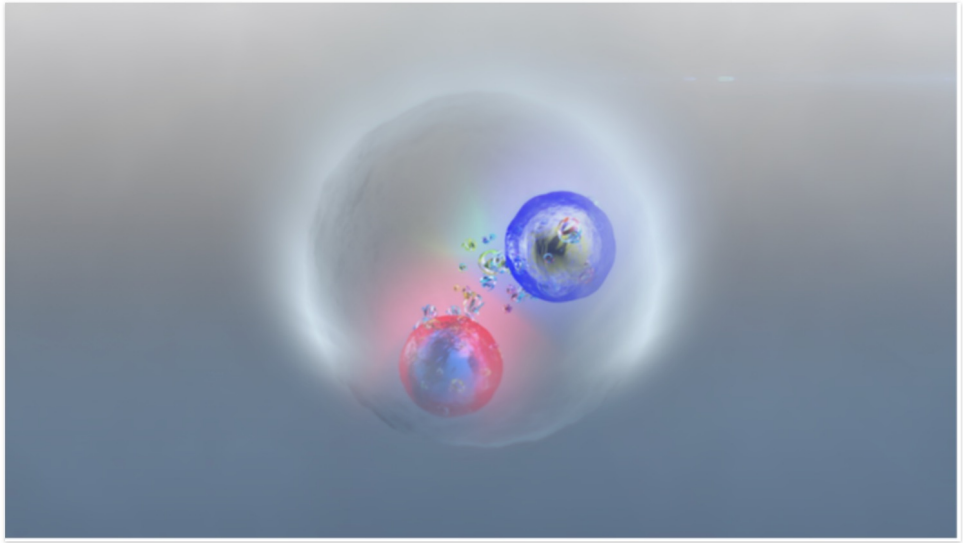


CERN Press Release after the ATLAS talk in EPS-HEP2025

Elusive romance of top-quark pairs observed at the LHC

The CMS and ATLAS experiments at CERN's Large Hadron Collider have observed an unforeseen feature in the behaviour of top quarks that suggests that these heaviest of all elementary particles form a fleeting union

8 JULY, 2025



Artist's impression of the short-lived union of a top quark and a top antiquark formed by the exchange of gluons. (Image: D. Dominguez/CERN)

An unforeseen feature in proton-proton collisions previously observed by the CMS experiment at CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC) has now been confirmed by its sister experiment ATLAS. The result, reported yesterday at the European Physical Society's High-Energy Physics conference in Marseille, suggests that top quarks – the heaviest and shortest-lived of all the elementary particles – can momentarily pair up with their antimatter counterparts to produce a "quasi-bound-state" called toponium. Further input based on complex theoretical calculations of the strong nuclear force -- called quantum chromodynamics (QCD) -- will enable physicists to understand the true nature of this elusive dance.

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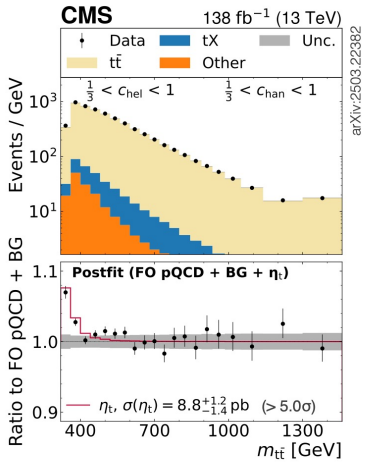
Andreas Hoecker - EPS-HEP2025 Summary

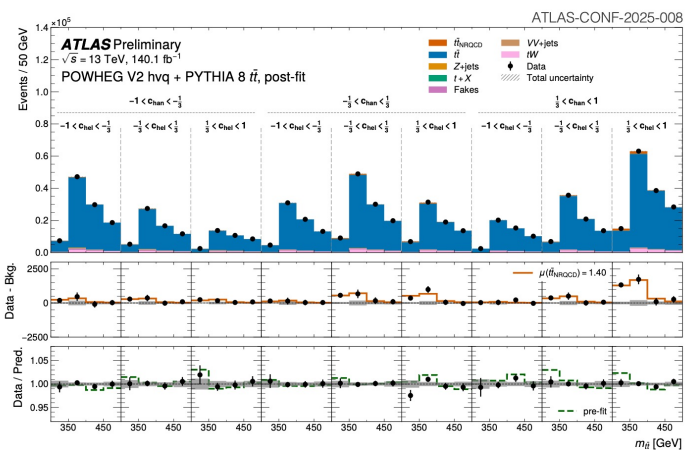
Top–antitop production at threshold

Josh Bendavid, Fabio Cerutti, Haifeng Li, Roberto Salerno, Christian Schwanenberger

CMS observed enhancement near $t\bar{t}$ production threshold — observation confirmed by ATLAS at this conference

Strong interaction predicts highly compact, colour-singlet quasi-bound pseudoscalar $t\bar{t}$ states (negligible self-annihilation, top decays before)
The 'toponium' effect can be computed in non-relativistic QCD (NRQCD)

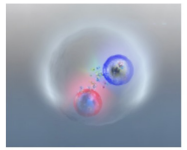




ATLAS used NRQCD model for threshold contribution (also alternative models studied)

Observed significance of 7.7σ for a cross section of 9.0 ±1.3 pb

(With CMS signal model ATLAS finds: 13.4 ±1.9 pb)



Elusive attraction among top-quark pairs

24

CERN Courier

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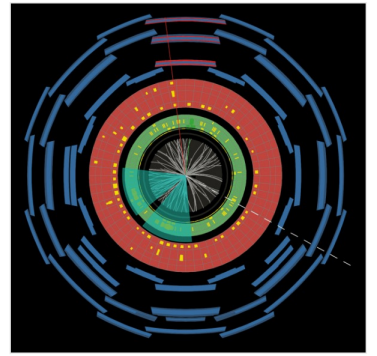
STRONG INTERACTIONS | NEWS

ATLAS confirms top–antitop excess

9 September 2025



Quasi-bound candidate An event display of an interaction consistent with the formation of toponium in the ATLAS detector. The final state

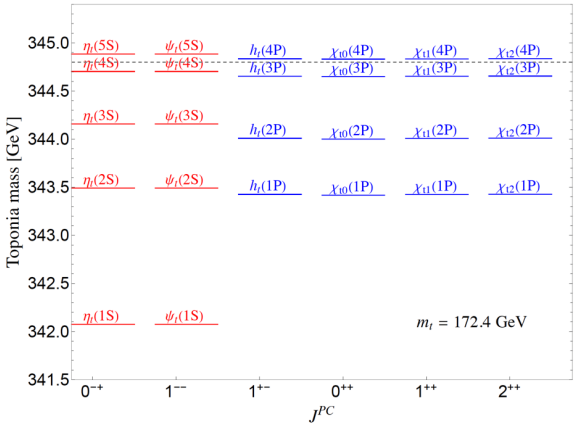
At the LHC, almost all top–antitop pairs are produced in a smooth invariant-mass spectrum described by perturbative QCD. In March, the CMS collaboration announced the discovery of an additional 1% localised near the energy threshold to produce a top quark and its antiquark (*CERN Courier* May/June 2025 p7). The ATLAS collaboration has now confirmed this observation.

"The measurement was challenging due to the small cross section and the limited

Conclusions

- An excess of events is observed over the NNLO perturbative QCD prediction, with **7.7σ observed (5.7σ expected)** near the $t\bar{t}$ production threshold by ATLAS with LHC Run 2 data. [ATLAS-CONF-2025-008], [ATLAS Physics Briefing]
- This excess is consistent with **color-singlet, S-wave, quasi-bound $t\bar{t}$ states** predicted by NRQCD with cross-section of 9.0 ± 1.3 pb
- A more complete model from NRQCD calculation is used by ATLAS. Important advantage compared with recent CMS results (Rep. Prog. Phys. 88 (2025) 087801)
- **Observation of toponium** opens a new field to study NRQCD with top quarks

Possible to do "hadron spectroscopy" with top quarks



arXiv:2506.14552

Backup

ATLAS Event Selections

Target for dilepton channel $tt \to b\ell\nu b\ell\nu$

SR: Signal Region; CR: Control Region

140 fb^{-1} LHC Run 2 pp data

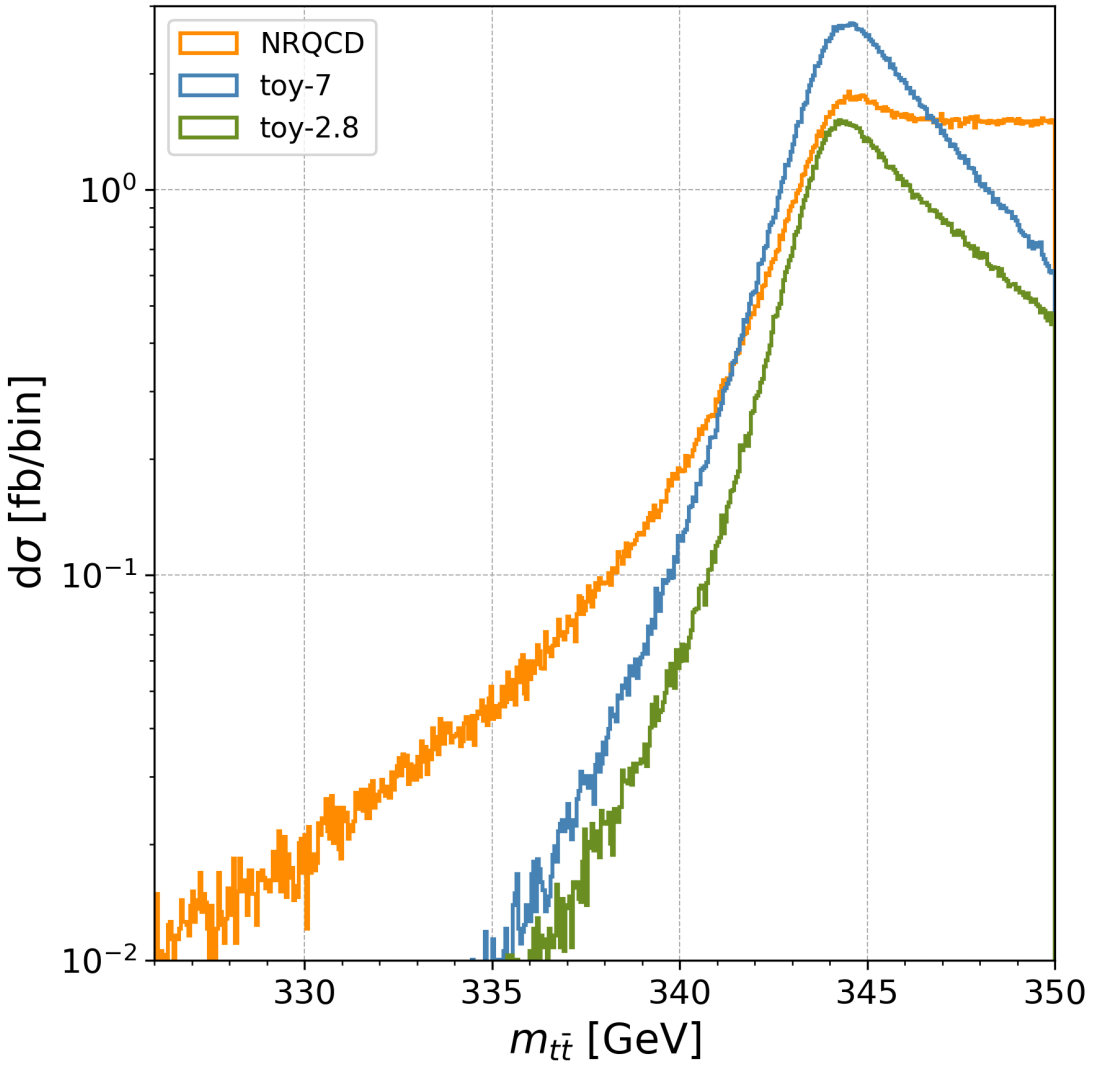
OSSF: opposite-sign, same-flavor

SRs	CR-Z	CR-Fakes
$= 2\ell$ with $p_{\mathrm{T}}(\ell) \geq 10$ GeV ≥ 1 trigger-matched lepton with $p_{\mathrm{T}} \geq 25/27/28$ GeV ≥ 2 jets with $p_{\mathrm{T}} \geq 25$ GeV ≥ 1 b-tagged jet (70% efficiency WP) $m_{\ell\ell} \geq 15$ GeV $m_{t\bar{t}} \leq 500$ GeV		
$E_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}} \geq 60$ GeV for OSSF events		—
$\ell^{\pm}\ell'^{\mp}$ $\lvert m_{\ell\ell} - m_Z \rvert \geq 10$ GeV	$e^{\pm}e^{\mp}/\mu^{\pm}\mu^{\mp}$ $\lvert m_{\ell\ell} - m_Z \rvert \leq 10$ GeV	$\ell^{\pm}\ell'^{\pm}$ $\lvert m_{\ell\ell} - m_Z \rvert \geq 10$ GeV

CRs are for correcting Z+jets and Fakes normalization in fit

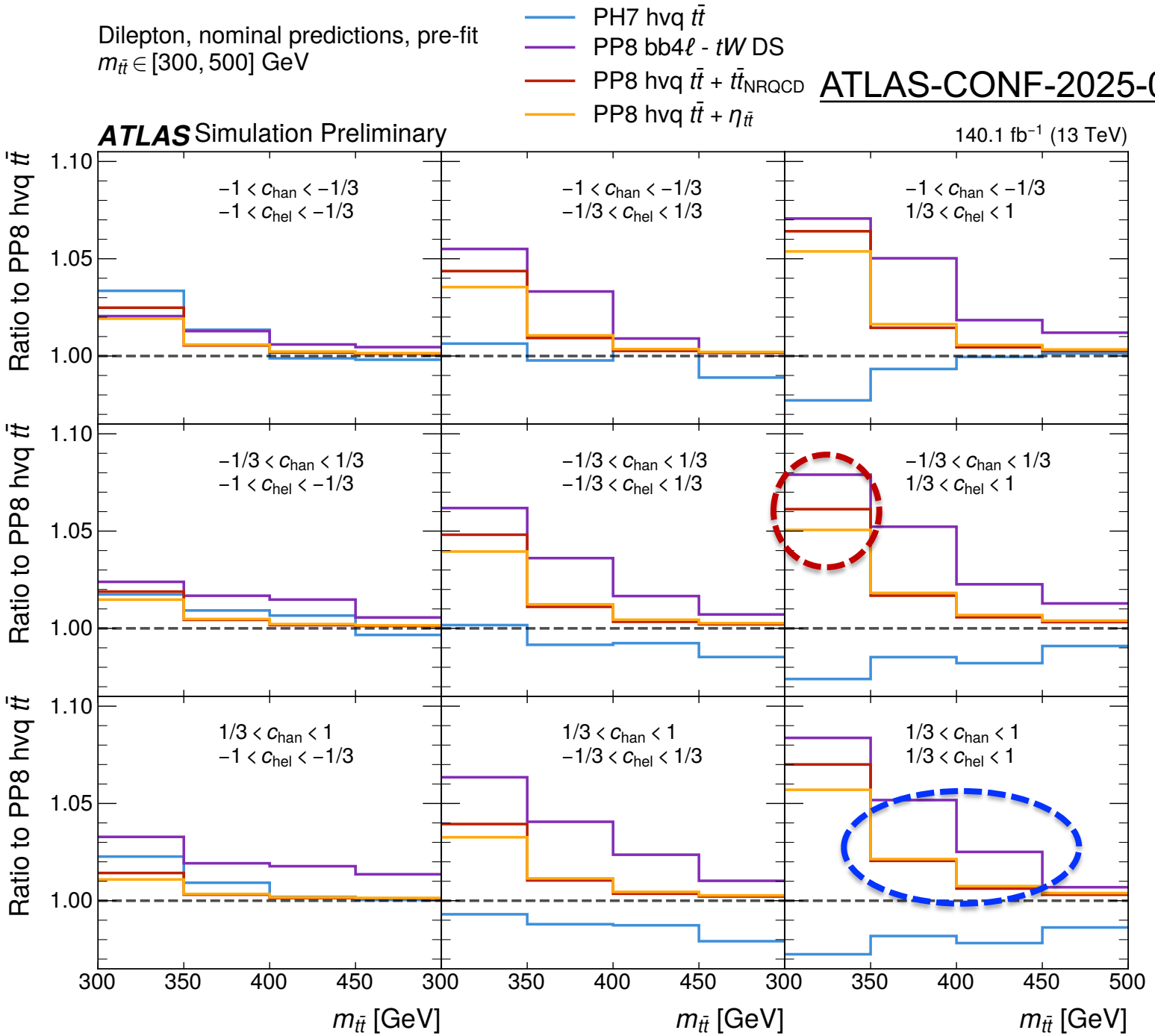
比较ATLAS和CMS的signal model

LHC Top WG meeting 4-6 June 2025, CERN



Ratios of the pre-fit distributions for $t\bar{t}$ MC models vs. baseline Powheg hvq

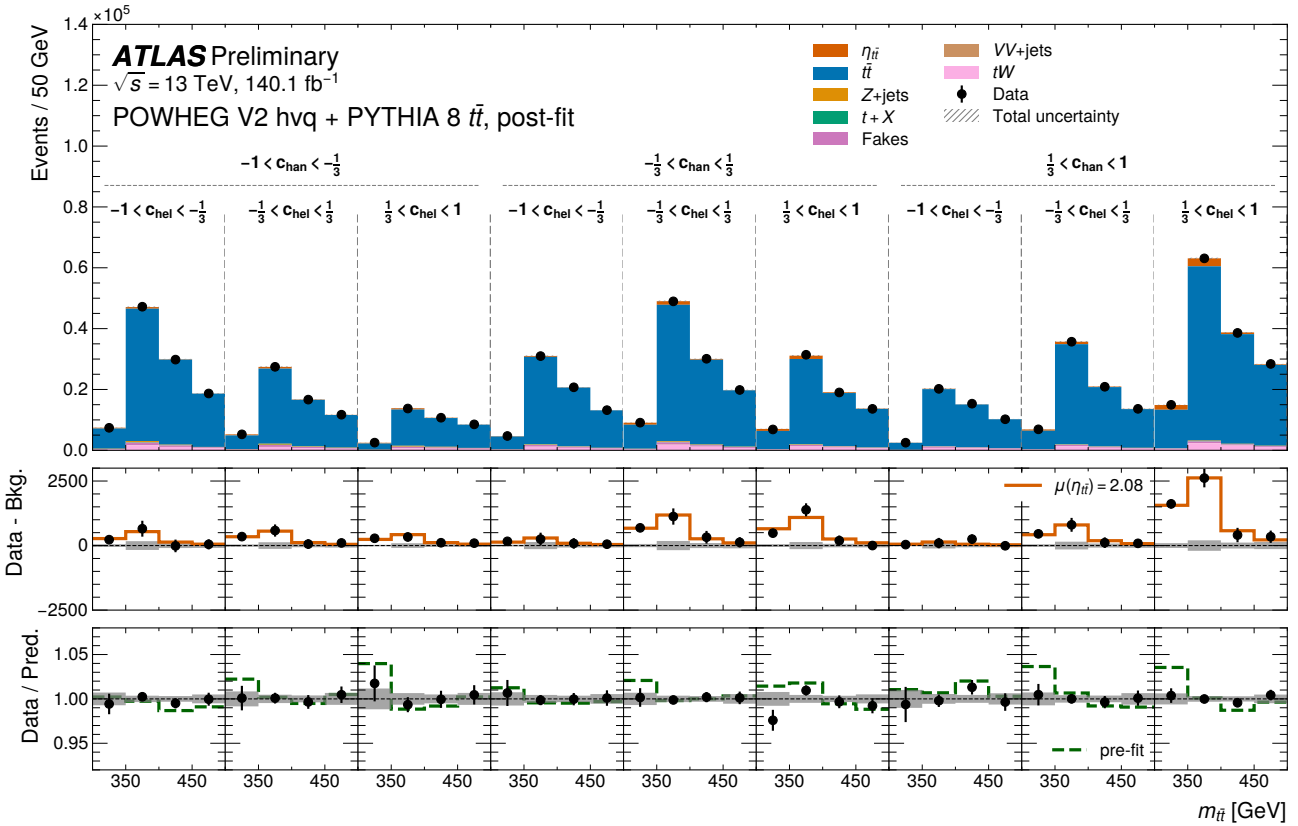
- Low $m_{t\bar{t}}$ region: bb4l is more similar to hvq+toponium than hvq only
- High $m_{t\bar{t}}$ region: bb4l differs from hvq+toponium model



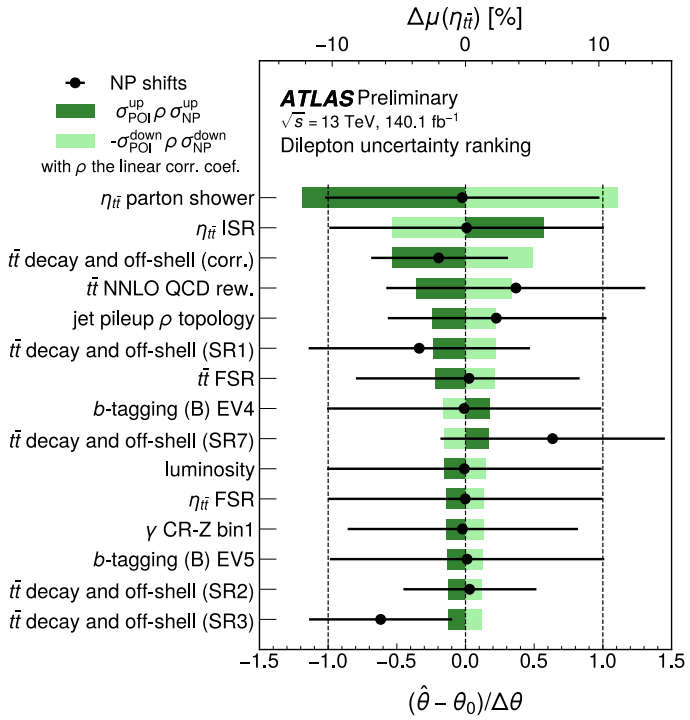
Alternative fit: Powheg hvq + simplified model of toponium

Observed (expected) significance of 7.8σ (4.0σ)

Goodness-of-Fit: 0.95



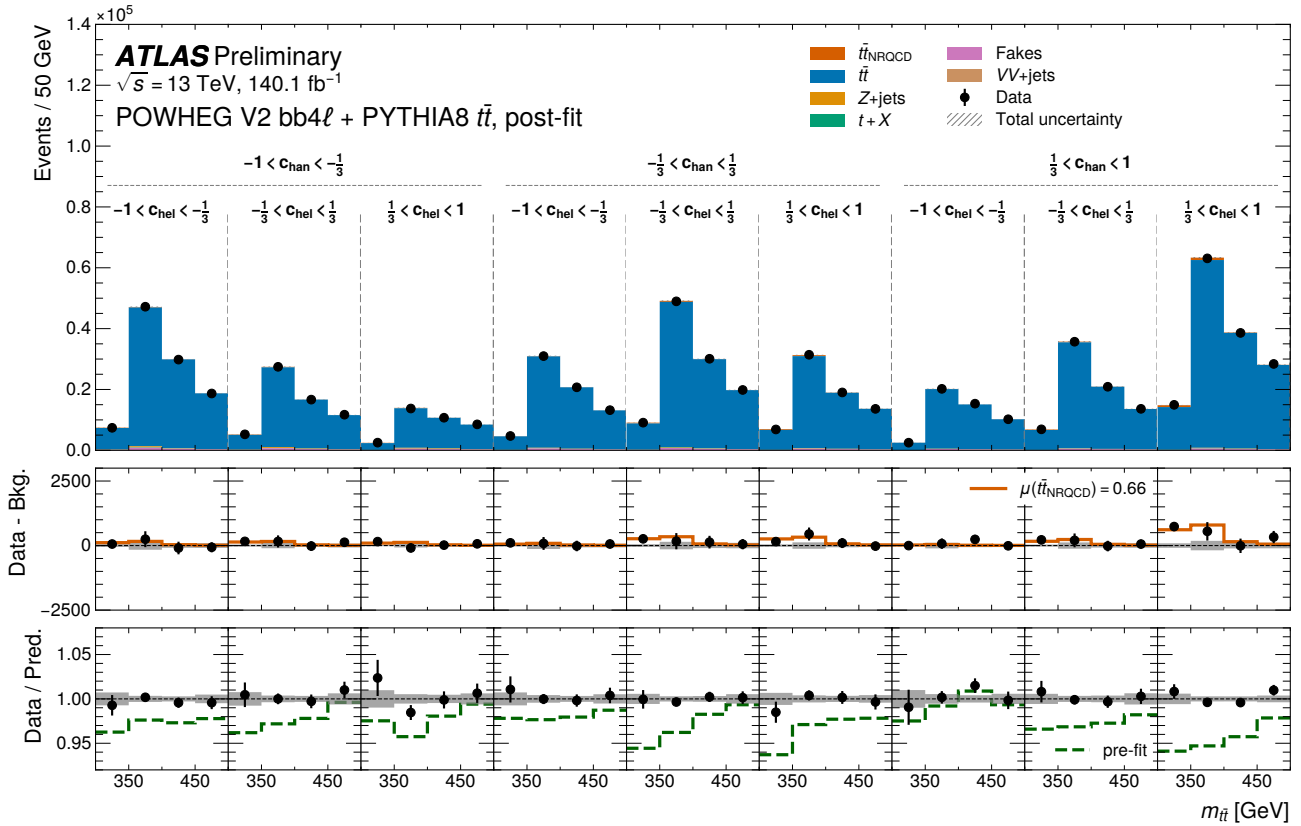
ATLAS-CONF-2025-008



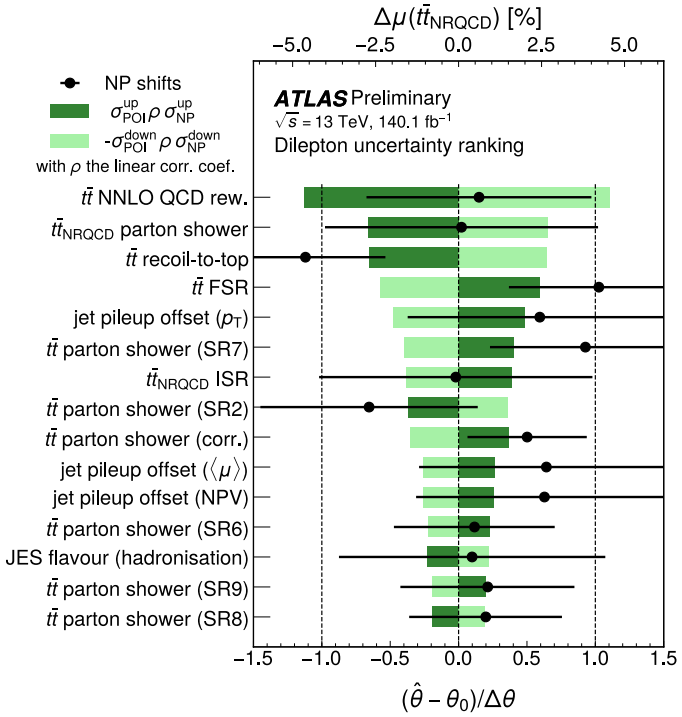
Alternative fit: Powheg bb4l + quasi-bound state (NRQCD)

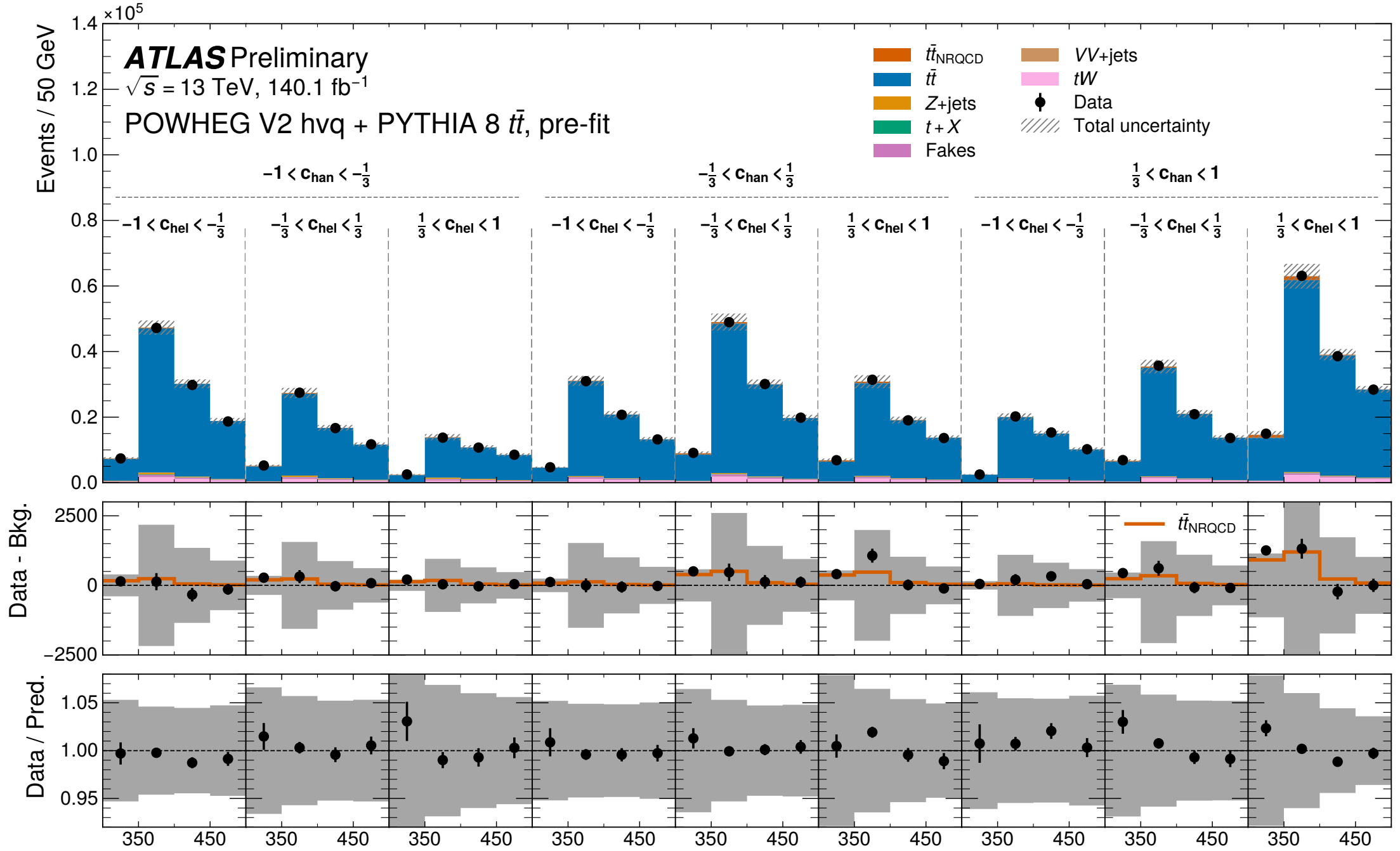
Observed (expected) significance of 4.3σ (6.3σ)

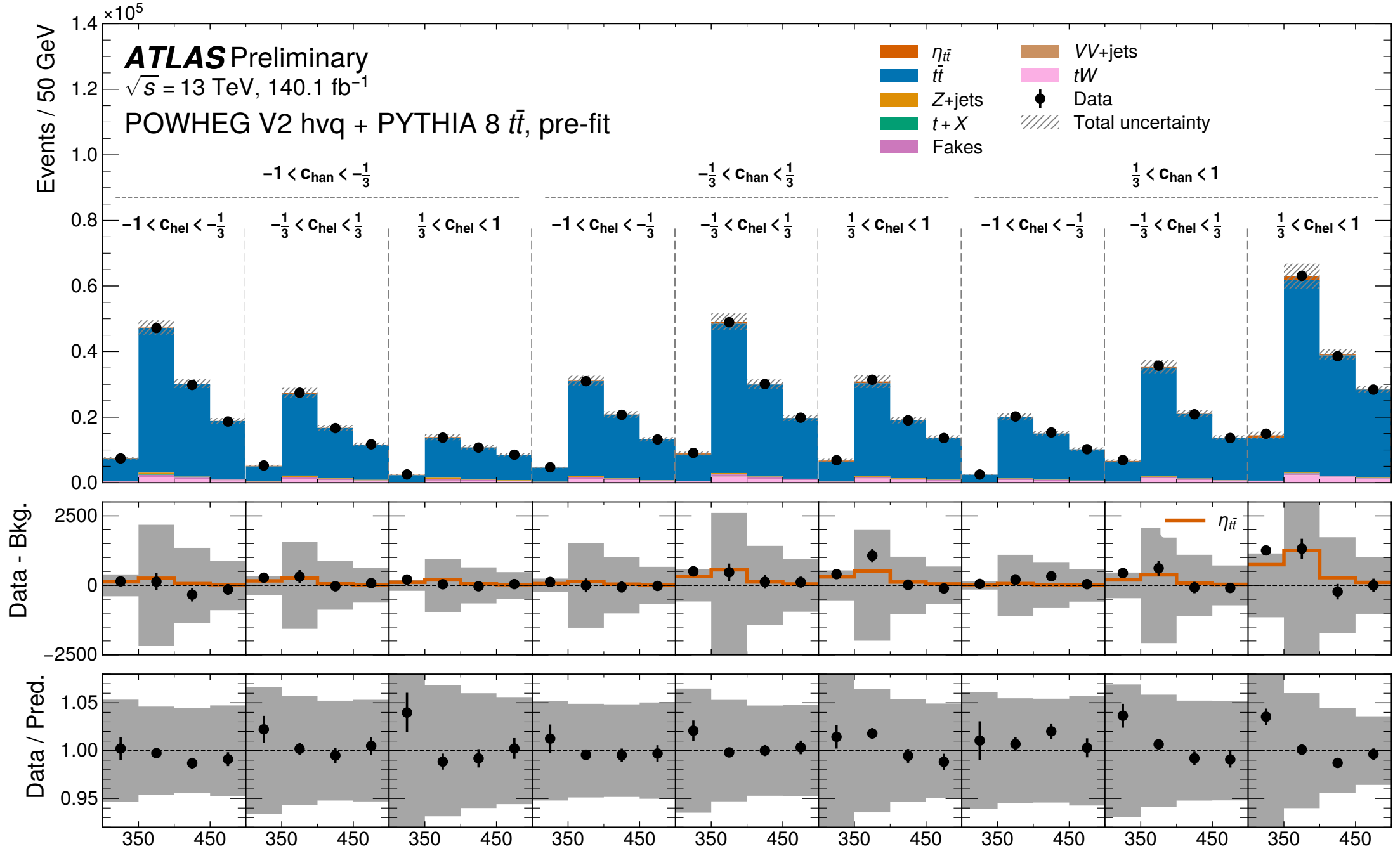
Goodness-of-Fit: 0.54



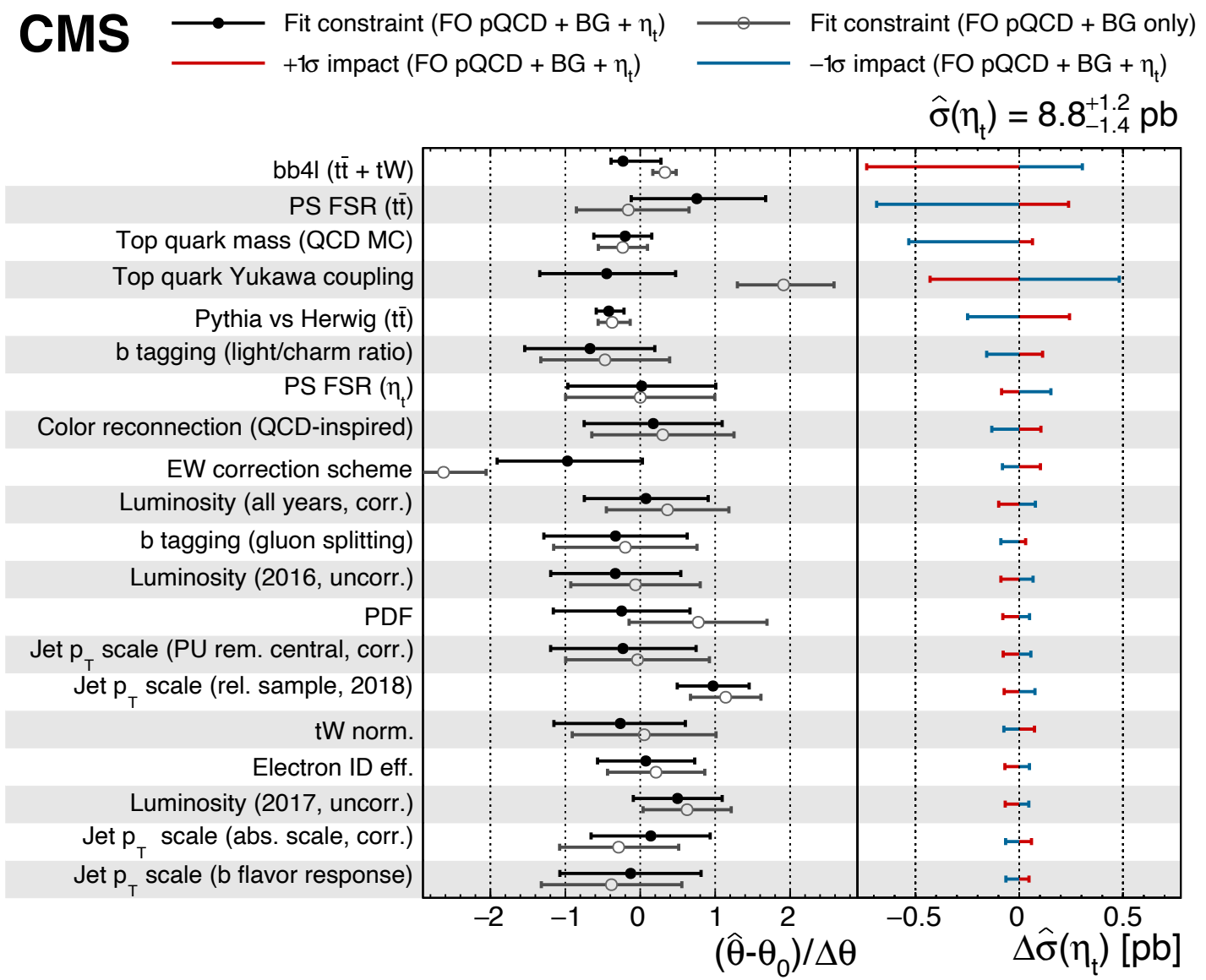
ATLAS-CONF-2025-008




ATLAS Preliminary
√s = 13 TeV, 140.1 fb⁻¹
POWHEG V2 hvq + PYTHIA 8 tt̄, pre-fit
tt̄NRQCD
tt̄
Z+jets
t + X
Fakes
VV+jets
tW
Data
Total uncertainty
−1 < c_han < −1/3
−1/3 < c_han < 1/3
1/3 < c_han < 1
Events / 50 GeV
Data - Bkg.
Data / Pred.
m_tt̄ [GeV]


ATLAS Preliminary
√s = 13 TeV, 140.1 fb⁻¹
POWHEG V2 hvq + PYTHIA 8 tt̄, pre-fit
ηtt̄
tt̄
Z+jets
t + X
Fakes
VV+jets
tW
Data
Total uncertainty
−1 < c_han < −1/3
−1/3 < c_han < 1/3
1/3 < c_han < 1
−1 < c_hel < −1/3
−1/3 < c_hel < 1/3
1/3 < c_hel < 1
Events / 50 GeV
×10^5
Data - Bkg.
Data / Pred.
mtt̄ [GeV]

CMS Systematics



Links to the ATLAS/CMS top quark results

ATLAS top quark results

CMS top quark results

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