Electric Field Tuning of Interlayer Coupling in Noncentrosymmetric 3R-MoS2 with an Electric Double Layer Interface

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ABSTRACT: Interlayer coupling in two-dimensional (2D) layered materials plays an important role in controlling their properties. 2H- and 3R-MoS2 with different stacking orders and the resulting interlayer coupling have been recently discovered to have different band structures and a contrast behavior in valley physics. However, the role of carrier doping in interlayer coupling in 2D materials remains elusive. Here, based on the electric double layer interface, we demonstrated the experimental observation of carrier doping-enhanced interlayer coupling in 3R-MoS2. A remarkable tuning of interlayer Raman modes can be observed by changing the stacking sequence and carrier doping near their monolayer limit. The modulated interlayer vibration modes originated from the interlayer coupling show a doping-induced blue shift and are supposed to be associated with the interlayer coupling enhancement, which is further verified using our first-principles calculations. Such an electrical control of interlayer coupling of layered materials in an electrical gating geometry provides a new degree of freedom to modify the physical properties in 2D materials.

KEYWORDS: 3R-MoS2, van der Waals, interlayer coupling, electric double layer interface, low-frequency Raman

INTRODUCTION
The stacking order in two-dimensional (2D) transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs) brings different structural symmetries and interlayer couplings, which provide a powerful way to tune their electronic and optical properties.1−10 Taking MoS2 as an example, even though the monolayers of 2H- and 3R-MoS2 are identical, stacking order plays a key role in determining the electronic band structures and physical properties on their bilayer and thicker flakes. For instance, the out-of-plane spin polarization in the valence band at the K and K′ points can only be observed in the 3R-MoS2 crystal due to the noncentrosymmetric stacking pattern of layers, which in contrast is absent in the 2H-MoS2 crystal.7 The recent precise tuning of the twisted angle in bilayer-stacked MoS2 has shown the powerful capability of tuning the interlayer coupling and realizing emergent electron correlation phenomena.2,2,4,11 Carrier doping generally has a direct effect on tuning the position of the Fermi level and subsequent electronic behavior, but its role on the interlayer coupling of MoS2 has not yet been revealed.

In this work, we employed Raman spectroscopy to probe the interlayer coupling and demonstrated the electric-field controlling effect on MoS2 with 3R and 2H stacking sequences. By utilizing the electric double layer (EDL) gating technique, we observed clear red/blue shifts in the intralayer/interlayer Raman modes on increasing the doping levels within the ionic liquid gated MoS2 devices. The blue shift of the interlayer Raman modes directly indicates the enhanced interlayer coupling in the doped system. Based on the first-principles calculations, on increasing the carrier doping, the electron cloud of the doping charge carriers starts to gradually extend into the van der Waals gap. Finally, it forms a three-dimension-like distribution of the doped charges with higher doping levels inside the crystal, implying closer packing between neighboring layers and further enhancement of the interlayer coupling. Our results provide a comprehensive understanding of the doping effect on the interlayer coupling of TMDCs and further guidance for related device design.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a powerful nondamaged method to investigate lattice vibrations, Raman spectroscopy is widely used to investigate the intralayer and interlayer vibration modes and the layer coupling in 2D materials.\textsuperscript{12–15} The interlayer vibration modes, including the in-plane shear (S) mode and the out-of-plane layer breathing (LB) mode, have been known to be strongly dependent on the thickness and stacking sequence of materials, which provide abundant information about the interlayer coupling.\textsuperscript{16–18} Figure 1a and b shows the schematic diagram for the layer stacking sequence of 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2} and their layer displacements of the Raman vibration modes. One can see that the interlayer S and LB modes correspond to layer-layer vibrations when each layer moves as a whole unit. In contrast, the atoms in each layer show different motion directions in the intralayer E\textsubscript{2g} and A\textsubscript{1g} vibration modes. Therefore, the interlayer and intralayer modes of MoS\textsubscript{2} can serve as fingerprint features for understanding the layer coupling details by Raman spectroscopy. As shown in the Raman spectra of bulk 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2} in Figure 1c, the E\textsubscript{2g} and A\textsubscript{1g} vibration modes at around 384.1 and 408.7 cm\textsuperscript{-1} can be observed in the spectra of both 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2} flakes. The S mode appears only in the 2H polytype at 32 cm\textsuperscript{-1}, while it is too weak in the 3R structure and the signal is merged into the background of the Rayleigh line.

Figure 1d and e shows the thickness-dependent Raman spectra of the intralayer modes (E\textsubscript{2g} and A\textsubscript{1g}) in 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2}, respectively. These two modes show a contrast thickness-dependent behavior in both 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2}: with increasing thickness, the A\textsubscript{1g} mode becomes stiffened, while the E\textsubscript{2g} mode becomes softened. The way to understand this phenomenon is that the interlayer van der Waals force suppresses the atom vibration in the MoS\textsubscript{2} lattice and further leads to a higher intralayer force constant as the layer number increases. As a direct result, both the E\textsubscript{2g} and A\textsubscript{1g} modes are theoretically supposed to be stiffening (blue shift in the spectra). In our case, the observed blue shift of the A\textsubscript{1g} peak with the increasing layer number becomes stiffer as expected, whereas the E\textsubscript{2g} peak shows a red shift. This unexpected softening of the E\textsubscript{2g} mode can be explained by the decrease of the long-range Coulombic interaction between the effective charges with the increasing layer number, which is related to the enhancement of the dielectric screening. As a result, the restoring force between the Mo and S atoms is less than that in the monolayer case, which further makes the E\textsubscript{2g} mode to become more softened.\textsuperscript{19,20}

The low-frequency interlayer S and LB modes of 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2} are shown in Figure 1f and g, respectively. One can see that both the interlayer S and LB modes exhibit an obvious dependence on the detailed stacking information, including the stacking order and the number of stacking layers. For the LB mode, the Raman frequency of both polytypes shows a similar red shift as the number of stacking layers increases. In contrast, the S mode of 2H- and 3R-MoS\textsubscript{2} evolves oppositely,
accompanied by a blue shift in 2H-MoS$_2$ and a red shift in 3R-MoS$_2$ on increasing the number of stacking layers. Actually, there are $(n-1)$ doubly degenerate S and LB modes for the $n$-layer isotropic MoS$_2$. Since the peak intensity of most doubly degenerate S and LB modes is very weak, we mainly focus on the strongest S and LB modes as a function of the number of stacking layers marked in Figure 1f and g. Figure 2a shows the comparison of the low-frequency Raman spectra between 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ with the same number of stacking layers from monolayer to five layers. Obviously, there is no S or LB mode in monolayer MoS$_2$ since there is no interlayer vibration. When the MoS$_2$ monolayers are vertically stacked to form bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ flakes, the S and LB Raman modes are observed at almost the same frequency. In the trilayer case, the S and LB modes overlap into one peak in 2H-MoS$_2$, while there are still two independent peaks in 3R-MoS$_2$. As the number of stacking layers increases, the S and LB modes of both 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ exhibit two independent peaks. Note that the frequency of the LB mode is very close between 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$, but that of the S mode is very different for all number of stacking layers. The reason for this phenomenon is that the S modes in 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ belong to different vibration modes ($S_1$ and $S_{2g}$, respectively), while the LB modes therein come from the same vibration mode ($LB_{1g}$), as shown in Figure S3. The difference in the Raman-active modes between 2H and 3R-MoS$_2$ is caused by the different symmetries directly associated with the stacking sequence, which is further discussed in part 3 of the Supporting Information.

The detailed peak positions of interlayer and intralayer modes as a function of the number of stacking layers are shown in Figure 2b and c. We find that the frequency of the LB mode in 2H-MoS$_2$ is higher than that in 3R-MoS$_2$, implying the stronger interlayer coupling in 2H-MoS$_2$ consistent with a previous report. Meanwhile, the frequency difference $\Delta \omega_1 = \omega(A_{1g}) - \omega(E_{2g})$ of 2H-MoS$_2$ is slightly smaller than that of 3R-MoS$_2$. 

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Frequency evolutions in few-layer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$. (a) Comparison of the low-frequency Raman spectra from monolayer to five-layer MoS$_2$ using a 532 nm laser line. The blue dashed line, blue dotted line, red dashed line, and red dotted line indicate the frequency evolution trends of the S mode of 2H-MoS$_2$, the LB mode of 2H-MoS$_2$, the S mode of 3R-MoS$_2$, and the LB mode of 3R-MoS$_2$, respectively. The polytypes of the sample and the sample thickness are labeled. (b) Frequency evolutions of the LB and S modes. The polytypes and the vibration modes ($S_{2g,2H}$, $LB_{2H}$, and $LB_{3R}$) are labeled, and the colors of the labels are the same as the corresponding curves. (c) Frequency evolutions of the $E_{2g,2H}$ and $A_{1g}$ modes. The polytypes and the vibration modes ($E_{2g,2H}, A_{1g,2H}, E_{2g,3R}$, and $A_{1g,3R}$) are labeled, and the colors of the labels are the same as the corresponding curves. (d) Frequency difference $\Delta \omega_1 = \omega(A_{1g}) - \omega(E_{2g})$ of 2H-MoS$_2$ is slightly smaller than that of 3R-MoS$_2$. 

![Figure 3](image3.png)

**Figure 3.** Electric field tuning of the high-frequency Raman spectra in bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$. (a) Schematic diagram of the EDL device. (b, c) High-frequency Raman spectra of bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ at different gate voltages using a 532 nm laser line. The gray dotted and dashed lines indicate the frequency evolution trends of the $E_{2g,2H}$ and $A_{1g,2H}$ modes, respectively. The frequencies of the gate voltages are labeled. (d) Frequency of the $E_{2g,2H}$ and $A_{1g,2H}$ modes at different gate voltages. The vibration modes ($E_{2g,2H}, A_{1g,2H}, E_{2g,3R}$, and $A_{1g,3R}$) are labeled, and the colors of the labels are the same as the corresponding curves.
with the same number of layers, as shown in Figure 2d. As the high-frequency intralayer $E_{1g}$ and $A_{1g}$ modes involve vibrations stemming from the interlayer van der Waals force and the intralayer chemical bonds, the two following factors can affect the value of $\Delta \omega_1$ in 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$. First, the frequency of the intralayer phonon mode of MoS$_2$ with a certain thickness is mainly determined by the intralayer chemical bonds, which will be affected by doping, and hence, the $\Delta \omega_1$ value will be influenced. Second, the variation in the stacking sequence can generate a certain difference in the interlayer coupling, which further influences the value of $\Delta \omega_1$. As expected, the values of $\Delta \omega_1$ for 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ with the same thickness are related to the interlayer coupling under relatively ideal conditions with less doping: the larger the value of $\Delta \omega_1$, the stronger the interlayer coupling. Interestingly, $\Delta \omega_1$ in 2H-MoS$_2$ has consistently smaller values than that of 3R-MoS$_2$, even though the interlayer coupling of 2H-MoS$_2$ is slightly stronger than that of 3R-MoS$_2$, as exhibited in the result of the low-frequency Raman mode. As discussed above, this phenomenon can be explained with the experimental samples of 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ under different doping levels induced by the growing processes of the samples, and the slight doping will have a certain effect on the chemical bonds, indicating that the value of $\Delta \omega_1$ is more obviously affected by chemical bonds. The result is consistent with the fact that the frequency of the intralayer mode is mainly dominated by the strength of the intralayer chemical bonds since the chemical bonds are much stronger than the van der Waals force. In addition, the slight difference in frequency between monolayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ might come from the influence of the substrate or the doping level variation of the tested flakes.

In order to understand the electron doping effect on the vibration modes, we applied the EDL gating technique in 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ to engineer the interlayer coupling, as shown in the schematic diagram in Figure 3a. The EDL interface with ionic liquids as a gate dielectric has been well known as a powerful tool to modulate the electronic states in semiconductors. At the functionalized liquid/solid EDL interface, serving as a nanogap capacitor with huge capacitance, charge carriers over a wide density range can be accumulated. Figure 3b and c shows the high-frequency Raman spectra of bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ under electrical control within an EDL interface. The frequency and the corresponding full width at half maximum (FWHM) of Raman spectra as a function of gate voltages ($V_g$) are plotted in Figure 3d and e. Two remarkable features need to be addressed here. First, as the $V_g$ increases, the softening of the $A_{1g}$ mode can gradually reach a level as high as 1.6 cm$^{-1}$ for 2H-MoS$_2$ and 2 cm$^{-1}$ for 3R-MoS$_2$, exhibiting the clear dependence on carrier doping. In comparison, the frequency shift of the $E_{1g}$ mode is smaller in both 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$. Second, the FWHM of the $A_{1g}$ mode increases significantly by 5 cm$^{-1}$ for the achieved maximum doping level in both 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$, whereas the FWHM of the $E_{2g}$ mode shows a minor change of only 0.7 cm$^{-1}$. These features are supposed to be associated with the electron–phonon coupling between the band-edge valley electrons and the $A_{1g}$ phonons when the occupation of the valley state is perturbed by carrier doping. In contrast, the electron–phonon coupling is weak between the band-edge valley electrons and the $E_{2g}$ phonons. Since electron doping and Fermi level tuning occur near the conduction band edge for 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$, the evolution of Raman vibration frequency in 3R-MoS$_2$ tuned by EDL geometry shows a similar trend to that in 2H-MoS$_2$, and the corresponding evolutions are consistent with the previous reports based on the electrochemical and chemical doping in 2H-MoS$_2$. However, these similarities are all about the $E_{1g}$ and $A_{1g}$ vibration modes, and both of them are intralayer vibration modes. These similarities are normal and inevitable since the two structures share exactly the same monolayer structure. In addition to the electric field tuning results in bilayer MoS$_2$, we also applied the EDL gating technique in 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ with different thicknesses, as shown in Figures S4 and S5. We find that, with increasing thickness, the gating tunability on the $E_{1g}$ and $A_{1g}$ modes gets weaker since the EDL gating effect is only a surface effect associated with electron accumulation with surface band bending. More details are given in part 4 of the Supporting Information.

To investigate the influence of the electron doping on the interlayer coupling, the $V_g$-dependent Raman spectra of bilayer 3R-MoS$_2$ in the low-frequency region are shown in Figure 4a.

![Figure 4](https://dx.doi.org/10.1021/acsami.0c12165)

**Figure 4.** Electric field tuning of the low-frequency Raman modes in bilayer 3R-MoS$_2$. (a) Low-frequency Raman spectra of bilayer 3R-MoS$_2$ at different gate voltages using a 532 nm laser line. The gray dotted and dashed lines indicate the frequency evolution trends of the LB and S modes, respectively. The green dotted and dashed lines indicate the vertical direction. The values of the gate voltages are labeled. (b) Frequency of the S and LB modes at different gate voltages. The vibration modes ($S_{3R}$ and LB$_{3R}$) are labeled, and the colors of the labels are the same as the corresponding curves.

We use the following method to confirm the frequency of the S and LB modes in 3R-MoS$_2$ [$\omega(S_{3R})$ and $\omega(LB_{3R})$], ensuring that the frequency is more accurate. Both the Stokes ($S_g$ and LB$_g$) and Anti-Stokes ($S_A$ and LB$_A$) S and LB modes are fitted using the Lorentz fitting. Then, we take $\omega(S_{3R}) = \frac{\omega(S_g) + \omega(S_A)}{2}$ and $\omega(LB_{3R}) = \frac{\omega(LB_g) + \omega(LB_A)}{2}$ as the frequencies of the S and LB modes in 3R-MoS$_2$. As the electron doping level increases ($V_g$ from 0 to 1.2 V), a monotonic increase of the frequency of both S and LB modes is clearly observed, which is more pronounced for the LB mode. Such a kind of electrical control on the low-frequency Raman spectra has never been reported before.

Three important characteristic features shown in Figure 4 can be addressed here. First, both S and LB modes show blue shifts with increasing $V_g$ showing the typical behavior of the enhanced interlayer coupling. Second, the frequency of the S mode stiffens by 0.3 cm$^{-1}$ with the increasing doping level, while the blue shift can occur more easily for the LB mode by 1.3 cm$^{-1}$ (Figure 4b). Third, the low-frequency Raman modes have less shift than the high-frequency ones under electrical control because the intralayer chemical bonds are more sensitive to electronic doping than the interlayer van der
Waals interactions, which is consistent with the above-mentioned discussion that the intralayer chemical bonds can be affected by doping.

To understand the physical mechanism of the doping-enhanced interlayer coupling, we performed the first-principles calculations for both 2H- and 3R-MoS2. We plotted the partial charge density in the energy range from \( E_{\text{CBM}} \) to \( E_F \) (\( E_F \) and \( E_{\text{CBM}} \) are the energy levels of the Fermi surface and conduction band minimum) as shown in Figure 5 to understand the distribution of the doped charges in the crystal structure under different doping levels. We chose several doping levels with the value of the energy ranging from \( E_{\text{CBM}} \) to \( E_F \) covering 0.04 eV (the calculated sheet carrier density is \( 2.27 \times 10^{14} \) cm\(^{-2} \)) to 0.22 eV (the calculated sheet carrier density is \( 6.65 \times 10^{14} \) cm\(^{-2} \)) to simulate the accumulated carrier doping achieved at the EDL interface in the liquid gating experiments. One can clearly see that, on increasing the doping level, the electron cloud of the doped carriers in each layer starts to have an extended distribution into the van der Waals gap and even tends to overlap with the electron cloud from its neighboring layers, implying a stronger interaction and closer stacking between the two adjacent layers.

Since such an enhanced interlayer interaction can also be associated with the doping-induced evolution of the interlayer lattice parameter of 3R-MoS2, we further calculated the interlayer binding energy \( E_{\text{binding}} \) under different doping levels, which corresponds to a certain magnitude of the applied electric field across the 3R-MoS2 slab. We defined \( E_{\text{binding}} = E_{\text{bi}} - 2E_{\text{moo}} \) as the interlayer binding energy, which is the amount of energy required to separate a monolayer from the system of bilayer 3R-MoS2. \( E_{\text{bi}} \) and \( E_{\text{moo}} \) are the total energy of bilayer and monolayer 3R-MoS2, respectively. As shown in Figure 5e, as the doping level increases (also the applied electric field becomes larger), the interlayer lattice parameter \( d_{\text{Mo-Mo}} \) (the distance between the Mo atom layers in two adjacent MoS2 layers) of 3R-MoS2 decreases and the absolute value of the interlayer binding energy increases, implying closer layer stacking and doping-enhanced interlayer coupling in 3R-MoS2. A similar evolution trend for both the interlayer lattice parameter and the interlayer binding energy with increasing doping level has also been observed in the 2H-MoS2 case, as shown in Figure S9, indicating that the phenomenon of interlayer coupling enhancement may also exist in 2H-MoS2. Compared with 3R-MoS2, quantitatively, more noticeable changes are observed in the interlayer binding energy and interlayer distance of 2H-MoS2, which may be ascribed to the symmetries of 2H- and 3R-MoS2. A dipole moment form when an electric field is applied to MoS2. The interaction between the dipoles with centrosymmetry may be stronger, which leads to the more evident changes in the interlayer binding energy and interlayer distance of centrosymmetrically stacked 2H-MoS2 than those of the noncentrosymmetrically stacked 3R-MoS2. The above calculation results, involving the decrease in the interlayer lattice parameter and the increase in the absolute value of interlayer binding energy for both 2H- and 3R-MoS2, imply that the doping-enhanced interlayer coupling might serve as a universal phenomenon that can be generally observed in 2D layered materials.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, we reported the interlayer coupling evolution in MoS2 with different stacking sequences and found out that the interlayer coupling in 3R-MoS2 is smaller than that in 2H-MoS2. The interlayer coupling can be experimentally tuned through electrostatic doping by reducing the interlayer lattice parameter. Such an approach to combine the EDL gating technique with Raman spectroscopy provides an effective way to understand the interlayer coupling in 2D materials.

**EXPERIMENTAL SECTION**

**Device Fabrication.** Ultrathin 2H- and 3R-MoS2 flakes were prepared using the mechanical exfoliation method onto a silicon wafer with a 300 nm thick silicon dioxide layer. The number of stacking layers of 2H- and 3R-MoS2 flakes was identified by both optical contrast and Raman spectroscopy. Electrical contacts in the EDL devices were fabricated using a standard electron beam lithography (EBL) process. In all devices, Ti (6 nm)/Au (50 nm) patterns were deposited as the electrodes using e-beam evaporation. Lift-off was carried out by immersing the sample into an acetone bath at 50 °C for about 30 min.

**Raman Measurements.** Raman measurements were performed using a confocal Raman spectrometer (WITec Alpha300). A signal was collected through a long working distance \( \times 50 \) objective lens, dispersed with a 1800 g/mm grating. An ionic liquid (DEME-TFSI) was drop-cast on top of the devices, covering both flakes and the gold metal pad for gating. Electrical measurements were carried out using a Keithley 2400 source meter. In order to protect the sample, all \( V_g \) dependent Raman measurements were performed in a nitrogen ambient environment.

**First-Principles Calculations.** The first-principles calculations were performed using the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP) \(^{27,30} \) and the generalized gradient approximation with the
Perdew—Burke—Ernzerhof (PBE) \cite{31,32} type exchange—correlation functional was adopted. The kinetic energy cutoff was fixed to 430 eV, and the correction of van der Waals coupling with the optB86b-vdw functional was employed, which was proved to be accurate in describing the structural properties of layered materials.\cite{33} The lattice constants of 2H-MoS$_2$ (a = 3.169 Å) and 3R-MoS$_2$ (a = 3.167 Å) were obtained through full relaxation with a total energy tolerance of $10^{-6}$ eV and a $\Gamma$-centered k-grid of $10 \times 10 \times 6$. For MoS$_2$ layers, the lattice constants were fixed with the bulk ones, and a 20 Å vacuum layer was used to eliminate the interaction between each layer and the electrons. We also calculated the atom position of bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$.

To simulate the accumulated carrier doping achieved in the liquid gating experiments, we calculated the partial charge density at different energy ranges from $E_{CBM}$ to $E_F$. We can see the distribution of increased charge density as the doping level increases (also the Fermi level increases). Thus, we assume that the partial charge density in the energy range from $E_{CBM}$ to $E_F$ is the charge density of the doped electrons. We also calculated the atom position of bilayer 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$ at different values of the electric field along the z axis with the EFIELD tag using which we obtained the distance between the two layers. We determined the carrier density by calculating the partial charge density in the energy range from $E_{CBM}$ to $E_F$ and integrated the whole volume to get the charge of a unit cell at different energy ranges from $E_{CBM}$ to $E_F$. We also obtained the binding energy between bilayers and each monolayer of 2H- and 3R-MoS$_2$. We defined $E_{binding} = E_B - 2E_{mon}$ where $E_{binding}$ is the interlayer binding energy that represents the amount of energy required to separate the monolayer from the system of bilayer 3R-MoS$_2$, and $E_B$ and $E_{mon}$ are the total energy of bilayer and monolayer 3R-MoS$_2$.

### ASSOCIATED CONTENT

#### Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsami.0c12165.

Resonance Raman spectra; comparison of the high-frequency Raman spectra; comparison of the low-frequency Raman modes; gate-dependent evolution of frequency difference; details of the peak position analysis; theoretical calculations of the deformation charge density; theoretical calculation details of the interlayer binding energy, interlayer distance, and phonon dispersion; partial charge density of 3R-MoS$_2$ from $E_F$ to $E_{VBM}$; and comparison of experimental and calculated results of the Raman vibration modes (PDF)

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The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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