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http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevD.90.033002

American Physical Society

Final published version

Sun Apr 24 13:52:46 EDT 2016

http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/88670

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Global analysis of parity-violating asymmetry data for elastic electron scattering

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(Received 20 March 2014; published 1 August 2014)

We perform a statistical analysis of the full set of parity-violating asymmetry data for elastic electron scattering including the most recent high precision measurement from $Q$-weak. Given the basis of the present analysis, our estimates appear to favor nonzero vector strangeness, specifically, positive (negative) values for the electric (magnetic) strange form factors. We also provide an accurate estimate of the axial-vector nucleon form factor at zero momentum transfer, $G_A^{s}(0)$. Our study shows $G_A^{s}(0)$ to be importantly reduced with respect to the currently accepted value. We also find our analysis of data to be compatible with the Standard Model values for the weak charges of the proton and neutron.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevD.90.033002 PACS numbers: 12.15.-y, 14.20.Dh, 14.65.Bt, 25.30.Bf

Over the years parity-violating (PV) electron scattering has provided a great deal of precise information on the structure of the nucleon. A variety of experiments running on different targets, from hydrogen to heavier systems with emphasis on deuterium and helium, have added strong constraints on the electroweak form factors. Moreover, the high precision reached by the most recent experiments [1,2] will serve as a test of the Standard Model (SM) providing a significant constraint on non-perturbative QCD effects.

The $Q$-weak Collaboration has recently determined the weak charge of the proton corresponding to the analysis of approximately 4% of the data collected in the experiment [2]. The main objective of the $Q$-weak experiment is to provide a value of $\sin^2 \theta_W$ with a 0.3% precision, that is, the weak charge of the proton to 4%. This extremely small uncertainty will provide a significant test of the SM. In [2] a global fit of data taken for hydrogen, deuterium and helium targets up to $|Q^2| = 0.6 \text{ (GeV/c)}^2$ was also done providing some estimates for the weak neutral current (WNC) couplings. These results are compatible with the ones obtained in previous analyses performed by Young and collaborators [3,4]. However, the use data only up to $|Q^2| = 0.6 \text{ (GeV/c)}^2$ [in the case of [3] only data for $|Q^2| < 0.3 \text{ (GeV/c)}^2$ were considered], in addition to particular assumptions for the $Q^2$ expansion of the form factors, have convinced us of the necessity of a new and more complete analysis of the process. Moreover, when such high levels of precision are the goal, mixing data for elastic scattering on the proton and $^4$He with those corresponding to the quasielastic (QE) process, make it difficult to disentangle effects due to the nucleon structure from others directly linked to final state interactions, off-shell effects, few-body nuclear structure, etc. Accordingly, in this work we restrict ourselves to elastic electron scattering processes, and make use of all available data in the literature with no restriction on the $Q^2$ range considered.

The PV asymmetry ($A_{PV}^{'E}$) in the case of elastic electron-proton (ep) scattering may be written as follows [5]:

$$A_{PV}^{'E} = \frac{A_0}{2G} [a_A (e G_E^p \tilde{G}_E^p + \tau G_M^p \tilde{G}_M^p) - a_V \sqrt{1 - e^2 \sqrt{(1 + \tau) G_M^p G_A^{EP}}}],$$

where $\tau = |Q^2|/(4M^2)$ and $G \equiv e(G_E^p)^2 + \tau (G_M^p)^2$ with $M$ the nucleon mass and $G_{E,M}$ the electromagnetic (EM) form factors of the proton. The term $A_0$ determines the scale of the PV asymmetry and is given by $A_0 = G_F |Q^2|/(2\sqrt{2}\pi\alpha)$ with $G_F$ the Fermi coupling and $\alpha$ the fine structure constant. Finally, $a_V = -1 + 4 \sin^2 \theta_W$ and $a_A = -1$ are the vector and axial-vector WNC electron couplings, and we have introduced the kinematical factor $\epsilon = [1 + 2\tau (1 + \tau) \tan^2 \theta_e/2]^{-1}$ which depends on the scattering angle $\theta_e$.

Assuming charge symmetry, the WNC form factors can be written as follows:

$$\tilde{G}_{E,M}^p(Q^2) = \xi_E G_{E,M}^p + \xi_M G_{E,M}^n + \xi_V G_{E,M}^{(0)}$$
$$G_A^{EP}(Q^2) = \xi_A G_A^3 + \xi_A G_A^8 + \xi_A^{(0)} G_A^{(0)},$$

where $G_{E,M}^p$ are the electric (E) and magnetic (M) strange form factors and $G_A^{3,8}$ are the isovector (3), isoscalar (8) and strange (s) contributions to the axial-vector form factor of the proton ($G_A^{EP}$). The $\xi$ coefficients represent the WNC effective coupling constants that are given in terms of the weak mixing angle ($\theta_W$) and radiative corrections (see [5,6] for explicit expressions).

In this work we also consider the data obtained by the HAPPEX Collaboration on elastic e-$^4$He scattering. In this
case the PV asymmetry involves the ratio of the two nuclear monopole form factors: the EM and the WNC ones. Hence, nuclear effects also play a role in the description of the process—for discussions of how such effects arise, see [7–9]. It can be shown that the use of one-body operators (leading-order approximation) and the assumption that isospin mixing can be ignored for the 4He ground state yield for the ratio of nuclear form factors simply a ratio of single-nucleon form factors. The latter point was first discussed in [7] and then revisited in a later study [10] (see, especially, Fig. 2 in that reference). Within the context of isospin mixing can be ignored for the 4He were typically found to be more than an order of magnitude smaller than the effects from strange-nuclei [8,9]. This issue is not completely closed, however, as other approaches find somewhat larger effects from isospin mixing [11]. In future experimental studies, preferably at low momentum transfers, using a variety of projectiles, it should be possible to address this problem more definitively; for this study we continue to make the above assumptions, in which case the PV elastic asymmetry can be written in the form [6]

$$A_{PV}^{4He} = -\frac{A_0}{2} \left( (\xi^p_v + \xi^p_n) + 2 \frac{\xi^{(0)}_v G^s_E}{G^p_E + G^s_E} \right).$$

(2)

Thus, these data are also sensitive to the WNC nucleon structure, and they give information that complements what is obtained through elastic ep scattering.

In a recent study [5] we showed that at $|Q^2| = 1$ (GeV/c)$^2$ (the current limit for asymmetry data) the dispersion in $A_{PV}^{4He}$ due to the use of different prescriptions for the EM form factors (some of them accounting for two-photon exchange contributions) was $\sim 3\%$ in the very forward limit ($\theta_e = 5^\circ$) getting much smaller for larger angles and lower $|Q^2|$. The impact of these uncertainties at the particular $Q$-weak kinematical conditions has been explored in detail in [5]. Therefore, in the present work we neglect the uncertainties associated with the particular description of the EM nucleon form factors. On the contrary, $A_{PV}$ is highly sensitive to the electric and magnetic strange form factors $G^s_{E,M}(Q^2)$ and to the axial-vector one $G^p_A(Q^2)$. In the latter radiative corrections can introduce very strong effects. In this work we perform a global fit of the five parameters: $\xi^p_v, \xi^p_n, \rho^p_s, \mu_s$ (these two linked to the electric and magnetic strange form factors [6]) and the axial-vector form factor at zero momentum transfer: $G^p_A(0) \equiv G^p_A(0)$. Our predictions, based on a statistical analysis of the full set of PV asymmetry data for elastic ep scattering (SAMPLE [12], HAPPEX [13–16], PVA4 [17–19], G0 [20,21] and Q-weak [2]) as well as the two PV elastic e-4He data (HAPPEX [15,22]), are compared with all previous analyses presented in the literature.

Assuming the radiative corrections (RC) to be mildly dependent on the energy, namely, on the particular kinematics selected, the results of our analysis could serve as a test of their strength. Thus the dispersion found in the values of $\xi^p_v$ and $\xi^p_n$ with respect to the corresponding tree-level results (see [6] for details) could provide information on $R^p_E$ and $R^p_V$. Similarly, the deviation in $G^p_A(0)$ would constrain the RC contributions in the axial current as well as possible effects linked to the anapole moment [23–25]. Recently a large amount of theoretical work has been carried out regarding the energy-dependent $\gamma Z$-box correction [26–29]. Obviously, the results of any global analysis of data are affected by the correction associated with the $\gamma Z$ box. However, at present this correction can only be applied to a limited set of data: very forward scattering angles. Hence in this work we do not introduce such corrections, so that all data are treated consistently in the global analysis. Our present analysis for the weak charges of the proton and neutron, with their uncertainties linked to the parameters that have been estimated, is consistent with the study reported by the Q-weak Collaboration [2], where the $\gamma Z$-box energy-dependent correction was applied. However, some caution should be drawn concerning this outcome because of the present limited analysis of Q-weak data (only 4% of data have been considered). Once the analysis is extended to the 100% of the Q-weak data, and taking into account that $\xi^p_v$ is basically not constrained by any other data, the $\gamma Z$-box correction to the Q-weak data will become crucial.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of the results, a general comment on the fit procedure should be made. Specifically, the currently accepted value of the axial-vector form factor at $Q^2 = 0$, namely, $G^p_A(0) = -1.04 \pm 0.44$ (see [30]), has been included as an additional experimental constraint in the global fit. Although a significant contribution to $G^p_A$ comes from $G^p_A(0) = 1.2695$ that is well determined from Gamow-Teller $\beta$-decay measurements, radiative corrections can introduce an important uncertainty in $G^p_A(Q^2)$ (see discussion in [5]). Hence there is still room in the global fit procedure for variation of the specific value of $G^p_A(Q^2)$. In summary, our analysis takes into account all 31 experimental data for the PV asymmetry available in the literature plus the restriction applied to $G^p_A(0)$.

The $Q^2$ dependence in the vector strange and axial-vector form factors has been taken in their usual form [5,6], namely, dipole (dipole times $r$) for $G^s_{E,M}$ ($G^p_E$) with a vector mass $M_V = 0.84$ GeV, and dipole shape for the axial form factor with the axial mass $M_A = 1.03$ GeV. The GKex prescription [31–33] has been used for the EM form factors. The fit procedure consists in minimizing the $\chi^2$ function:

$$\chi^2 = [\Lambda_{\text{exp}} - \Lambda_{\text{the}}]^T [V^{-1}] [\Lambda_{\text{exp}} - \Lambda_{\text{the}}],$$

(3)

where $\Lambda_{\text{exp}}$ contains all data and $\Lambda_{\text{the}}$ takes care of the corresponding theoretical predictions that depend on the five parameters considered: $\xi^p_v, \xi^p_n, \rho^p_s, \mu_s, G^p_A(0)$. The term $V$ represents the covariance error matrix defined as
Collaboration may lead to slightly different results. Finally, in spite of the significant errors associated with the uncertainty in the weak charge of the proton is not affected by the large corrections) as well as from alternative descriptions of effects coming from higher-order contributions (radiative results are affected by large errors that make the two cases. In [5] a global analysis of the full set of PV asymmetry experimental data for elastic electron scattering. The data are normalized by subtracting our theoretical asymmetry and dividing by \( A_0 \).
asymmetry data, including only ep scattering, was performed (28 data) taking only $\rho_s$ and $\mu_s$ as free parameters (see [5] for details). On the contrary, the red ellipse corresponds to the predictions obtained by simultaneously fitting five parameters. This larger number of free parameters explains the significant increase in the area. Note that the present analysis seems to favor positive (negative) values of $\rho_u = \mu_u = 0$, is still inside the 95% confidence level in our present analysis (red curve), and only slightly outside the region obtained from our previous study (blue).

We also compare our predictions with the statistical analyses of data performed by Liu et al. [30] (brown ellipse) and Young et al. [3] (green ellipse). Also shown for reference the theoretical predictions provided by Leinweber et al. [36,37] (black cross) and Doi et al. [38] (orange cross). The ellipses corresponding to the works [3,30] are the results of $\chi^2$ fits of the PV asymmetry data for electron scattering on helium, deuterium and hydrogen in the vicinity of $|Q^2| \approx 0.1$ (GeV/c)$^2$. In particular, in the work of Liu et al. [30] a total of 10 data in the range $0.091 \leq |Q^2| \leq 0.136$ (GeV/c)$^2$ were employed with only two free parameters: the electric and magnetic strange form factors, $G_E^s(|Q^2| = 0.1$ (GeV/c)$^2)$, $G_M^s(|Q^2| = 0.1$ (GeV/c)$^2)$. On the contrary, in [3] a total of 19 data in the range $0.038 \leq |Q^2| \leq 0.299$ (GeV/c)$^2$ were used. In this case, four free parameters were considered in the fit: the two vector strange form factors and the axial-vector form factor of the proton and neutron at zero momentum transferred, $G_A^V(0)$ and $G_A^{en}(0)$.

In Fig. 3 we present the 95% confidence level ellipse in the $(\mu_s, G_A^{en})$ plane. Results have been extrapolated to the kinematical situation $|Q^2| = 0.1$ (GeV/c)$^2$. Our prediction (red ellipse) is compared with the one of Young et al. [3] (green ellipse). As shown, our analysis improves significantly the previous prediction (important reduction in the area of the ellipse).

To conclude, we apply our analysis to the determination of the WNC effective couplings. Thus, we build the 95% confidence level contour in the plane $(C_{1u} - C_{1d}, C_{1u} + C_{1d})$. This is shown in Fig. 4 by the red ellipse. Our prediction is also compared with previous analyses given in the literature: blue ellipse [5], green filled ellipse [4], and brown ellipse [2]. The yellow one is the result of combining the constraints coming from our present analysis (red ellipse) with those from Atomic PV in Cesium (APV-Cs) experiments (magenta horizontal band, see [34,39,40] for details). Likewise, the cyan ellipse is the result of the combined analysis presented in [2].

This combined analysis allows us to get a more accurate determination of the WNC quark coupling constants: $C_{1u} = -0.186 \pm 0.006$, $C_{1d} = 0.338 \pm 0.006$ with a correlation coefficient $-0.966$. Similarly, the weak charges of the proton and neutron result: $\xi_V = 0.070 \pm 0.013$ and $\xi_V = -0.978 \pm 0.012$ with a correlation coefficient $-0.716$. Our results are in excellent agreement with the Standard Model predictions [34]: $\xi_V = 0.0710 \pm 0.0007$, $\xi_V = -0.9890 \pm 0.0007 \left[ C_{1u} = -0.1885 \pm 0.0002, C_{1d} = 0.3415 \pm 0.0002 \right]$. 

Summarizing, we have presented a complete statistical analysis of all PV asymmetry data available for elastic scattering [41] on the proton and on $^4$He. The $\chi^2$ test is based on the simultaneous fit of five free parameters that are shown to be strongly correlated in most of the cases. This result may indicate that some caution should be exercised when considering previous analyses that are based on a reduced number of parameters. Our new study seems to favor vector strangeness different from zero. This is consistent with our previous findings [5]. Moreover, a striking result in our analysis is the unexpectedly lower value for $G_A^{en}$. However, the axial-vector form factor is strongly correlated with the proton electric form factor. Thus, the determination of $G_A^{en}$ is not sensitive enough to favor the small correlation coefficient $-0.716$.
known to be highly sensitive to radiative corrections that could explain this result. In any case, more studies are needed and our prediction could simply be considered as a signal of possible alternative descriptions for the $Q^2$ dependence of $G_A^{eH}$. Finally, our results are in accordance with the weak charges of proton and neutron provided by the Standard Model.

This work was partially supported by DGI (Spain): FIS2011-28378-C02-01, by the Junta de Andalucía (FQM-160) and the Spanish Consolider-Ingenio 2000 programmed CPAN, and in part (T.W.D.) by U.S. Department of Energy under cooperative agreement DE-FC02-94ER40818. R.G.J. acknowledges financial help from VPPI-US (Universidad de Sevilla).

[41] Although not shown, we have checked with a simple model (static approximation) that the addition to the global analysis of the QE-deuteron data reported in [21,42] does not change the conclusions reached in this work. The specific values obtained for the free parameters are close to the ones shown in Table 1, being within the range shown by the errors.