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Singh, G., Guzman, R., Saiz, G. et al (2024). Stoichiometric control of electron mobility and 2D superconductivity at LaAlO<sub>3</sub>-SrTiO<sub>3</sub> interfaces. Communications Physics, 7(1).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s42005-024-01644-3>

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s42005-024-01644-3>

# Stoichiometric control of electron mobility and 2D superconductivity at $\text{LaAlO}_3$ - $\text{SrTiO}_3$ interfaces



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$\text{SrTiO}_3$ -based conducting interfaces, which exhibit coexistence of gate-tunable 2D superconductivity and strong Rashba spin-orbit coupling (RSOC), are candidates to host topological superconductive phases. Yet, superconductivity is usually in the dirty limit, which tends to suppress nonconventional pairing and therefore challenges these expectations. Here we report on  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  (LAO/STO) interfaces with large mobility and mean free paths comparable to the superconducting coherence length, approaching the clean limit for superconductivity. We further show that the carrier density, mobility, and formation of the superconducting condensate are controlled by the fine-tuning of La/Al chemical ratio in the LAO film. We find a region in the superconducting phase diagram where the critical temperature is not suppressed below the Lifshitz transition, at odds with previous experimental investigations. These findings point out the relevance of achieving a clean-limit regime to enhance the observation of unconventional pairing mechanisms in these systems.

The coexistence of two-dimensional (2D) superconductivity and spin-orbit coupling (SOC) is key for the development of novel device concepts for quantum technologies that exploit unconventional electron pairing in topological phases<sup>1,2</sup>. Boundaries and defects in topological superconductors can host zero-energy Majorana modes, offering applications in quantum computation<sup>3–8</sup>. Although seminal proposals focused on hybrid superconductor-semiconductor structures<sup>9,10</sup>, the simultaneous presence of superconductivity and large tunable SOC in  $\text{SrTiO}_3$  quasi-two dimensional electron gases (q-2DEGs) offers a particularly appealing platform to explore unconventional and topological superconductive phases<sup>11,12</sup>. Particularly, q-2DEGs at the  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  (LAO/STO) interface have been investigated intensively, where electrostatic gating allows to control the electron band filling within the  $t_{2g}$  manifold<sup>13–15</sup>, enabling the electric field modulation of the superconducting phase diagram<sup>16–22</sup> and Rashba SOC<sup>23–25</sup>. Interestingly, the multiband character of the LAO/STO q-2DEG together with large Rashba SOC promotes the appearance of singlet-triplet mixed pairings, which, in the presence of magnetic fields, could lead to nontrivial superconductive states<sup>26</sup>. However, while Anderson's theorem holds for singlet pairing<sup>27</sup>, disorder is expected to reduce triplet pairing, potentially

hindering the emergence of topological phases. It is therefore indispensable to approach a clean limit for superconductivity at the LAO/STO q-2DEGs to enhance the chances of detecting nontrivial topological features in these systems<sup>28</sup>.

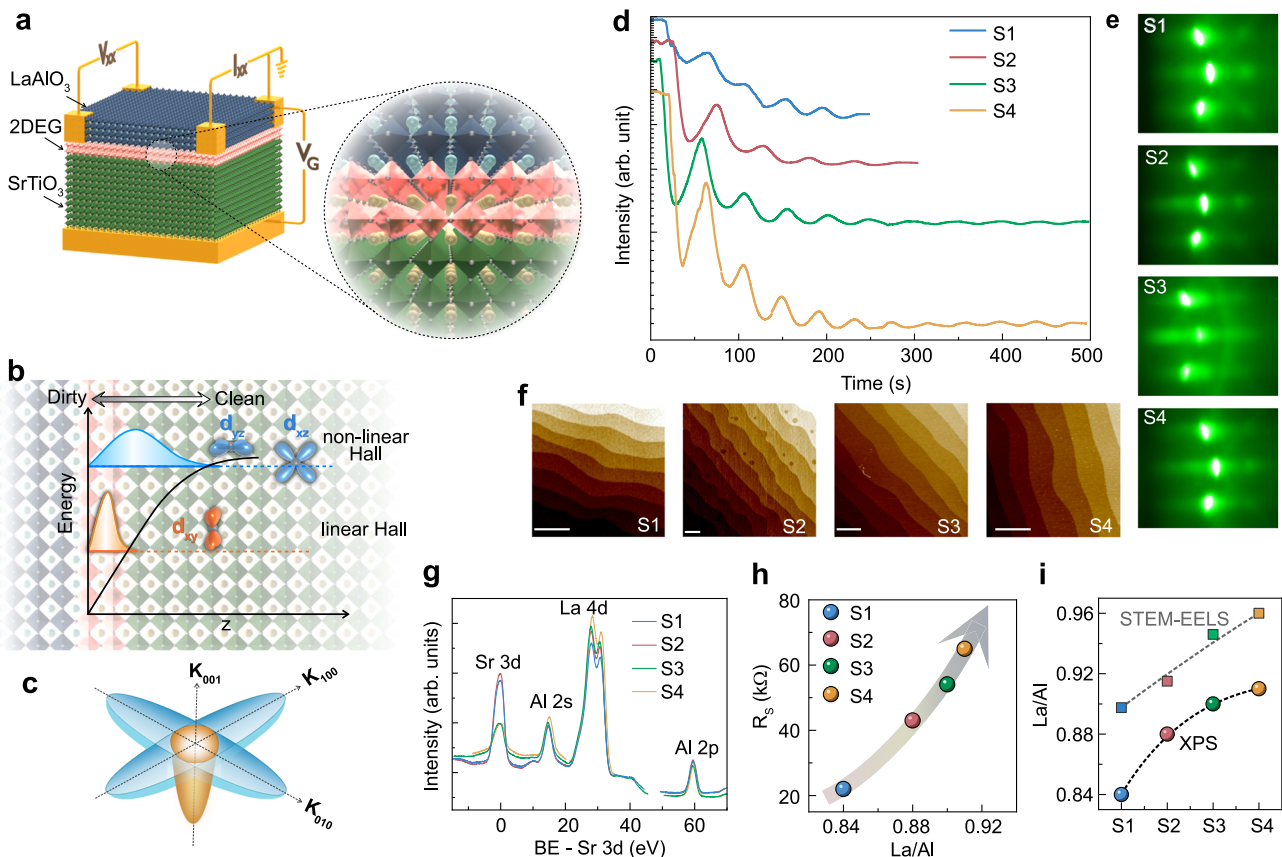
In this work, we report on LAO/STO q-2DEGs with exceptionally large mobilities, which allow for achieving mean free paths ( $l_{mfp}$ ) comparable to the superconductive coherence length ( $\xi$ ), approaching the clean limit even in the depletion regime. In LAO/STO interfaces the electronic conductivity is ensured by  $t_{2g}$  electrons in Ti ( $d_{xy}$ ,  $d_{xz}$ ,  $d_{yz}$ ) orbitals. The quantum confinement of the q-2DEG splits the energy levels of the 3d orbitals, whose splitting is dictated by the out-of-plane effective mass  $m^*$ , which depends on the degree of orbital wavefunctions overlapping along the confinement direction<sup>29</sup>. In conventional (001) oriented interfaces, the degenerated  $d_{xz/yz}$  orbitals lie at higher energies, and their wave function delocalizes deeper into STO with a dielectric constant similar to that of the bulk. Electrons occupying these subbands encounter less scattering, resulting in higher electronic mobilities. In contrast, electrons in  $d_{xy}$  orbitals lie at lower energies and are confined near the interface where the dielectric constant is reduced by the interfacial electric field and shows smaller electronic mobility due to the

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larger scattering caused by imperfections (Fig. 1b, c)<sup>30–32</sup>. The filling of these subbands can be precisely controlled with a gate voltage  $V_G$  by continuous and reversible doping of electrons at the quantum well and monitored by Hall effect<sup>32</sup>. The critical temperature  $T_c$  shows a dome-shaped phase diagram, first increasing at low doping in the depletion region and then going through a maximum  $T_c^{max}$  to subsequently reduce for further increasing  $V_G$  towards the overdoped region<sup>16,17,21</sup>. Attempts have been made to correlate this dome-shaped phase diagram with the filling of the subbands. It has been suggested that the superconducting order parameter emerges when electrons start filling  $d_{xz/yz}$  subbands, whereas it is strongly suppressed or even absent below the Lifshitz transition<sup>15,16,21,23,32–34</sup>. In line with this argument, only one superconducting gap has been reported so far in (001)-oriented interfaces, implying the absence of  $d_{xy}$  superconductivity for this orientation<sup>35</sup>. This has precluded the investigation of the superconductivity of the (001) LAO/STO quantum well in the dilute regime, where one single band is occupied. We stress that in this region of phase diagram, the average electronic mobility for  $d_{xy}$  electrons usually reduces to  $\mu_{d_{xy}} < 50 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ , corresponding to a mean free path  $l_{mfp} < 1 \text{ nm}$ , which leads these systems to the extreme dirty limit<sup>15,21,23,32–34</sup>. As we discuss below, we reach mobilities around two orders of magnitude larger for  $d_{xy}$  electrons, which is crucial to observe superconductivity mediated by  $d_{xy}$  bands.

On the other hand, the origin of the 2DEG in LAO/STO interfaces has been discussed in terms of either oxygen vacancies<sup>36–38</sup> or polar

discontinuity<sup>39</sup>. The former mechanism depends on external doping, while the latter mechanism is supported in view of the observation of conducting interfaces only beyond a critical thickness for LAO<sup>40</sup>. A dependence of the interfacial conductivity on cation stoichiometry of the LAO layer was observed by Warusawithana et al.<sup>41</sup>, revealing that conductivity only appears in Al-rich LAO layers below a critical ratio  $\text{La}/\text{Al} < 0.97$ . However, how the variation of the  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  ratio affects fundamental parameters such as carrier density, mobility or the superconducting transition remains an open issue. In this work, we have investigated the transport properties of LAO/STO interfaces that show a consistent variation of  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  ratio and large mobilities  $\mu$  ranging between  $5 \times 10^2$ – $3 \times 10^3 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ , at low electrostatic doping (i.e., in the depletion region of the quantum well) and between  $5 \times 10^3$ – $2 \times 10^4 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$  at high doping (in the accumulation regime). These values are more than an order of magnitude larger than previously reported on superconducting interfaces<sup>15,21,23,32–34</sup>. We demonstrate that a small variation of the  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  ratio in Al-rich  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , as identified in X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) and scanning transmission electron microscopy coupled with electron energy-loss spectroscopy (STEM-EELS) measurements, provides an excellent degree of freedom, in addition to electrostatic doping, to consistently alter carrier densities, mobilities and, remarkably, the onset of superconductivity. In contrast to previous reports, where superconductivity is either absent or suppressed below the Lifshitz transition<sup>15,16,21,23,32–34</sup>, we observe a significant enhancement of  $T_c$  for



**Fig. 1 | Schematic of the band structure and estimation of  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  ratio using XPS.**

**a** Schematic illustration of  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  (LAO/STO) heterostructure with two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG) at the interface. The zoomed-in view highlights the interfacial region of the crystal structure where the 2DEG exists. **b**, **c** Sketch of the quantum well in real and momentum space, respectively. Three non-degenerate  $t_{2g}$  orbitals split due to the confinement potential: the  $d_{xz/yz}$  orbitals (blue) are shifted higher in energy compared to the  $d_{xy}$  orbitals (red). The conduction electrons, corresponding to  $d_{xy}$  orbitals, are closer to the interface, exhibiting lower electron mobility compared to the mobility for  $d_{xz/yz}$  orbitals, which extend deeper into the STO. **d** The reflection high-energy electron diffraction (RHEED) intensity as a

function of time, depicting a layer-by-layer growth, from which thickness can be inferred for the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  layer. **e** RHEED patterns obtained during the pulsed laser deposition (PLD) growth show a smooth film deposition. **f** Atomic force microscopy (AFM) topography images of a film. The well-aligned terraces indicate the surface smoothness. Scale bar: 500 nm. **g** The XPS spectra for all films. **h** The modulation of sheet resistance at room temperature as a function of the ratio of  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  extracted from XPS spectra. **i**  $\text{La}/\text{Al}$  ratio in different samples extracted from scanning transmission electron microscopy coupled with electron energy-loss spectroscopy (STEM-EELS) and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) analysis.

electrostatic doping below the Lifshitz transition. We attribute this result to the large mobility, which allows the mean free path (at low doping) to be comparable to the superconducting coherence length (i.e.  $l_{mf} \sim \xi$ ), which is key to achieving  $d_{xy}$ -superconductivity.

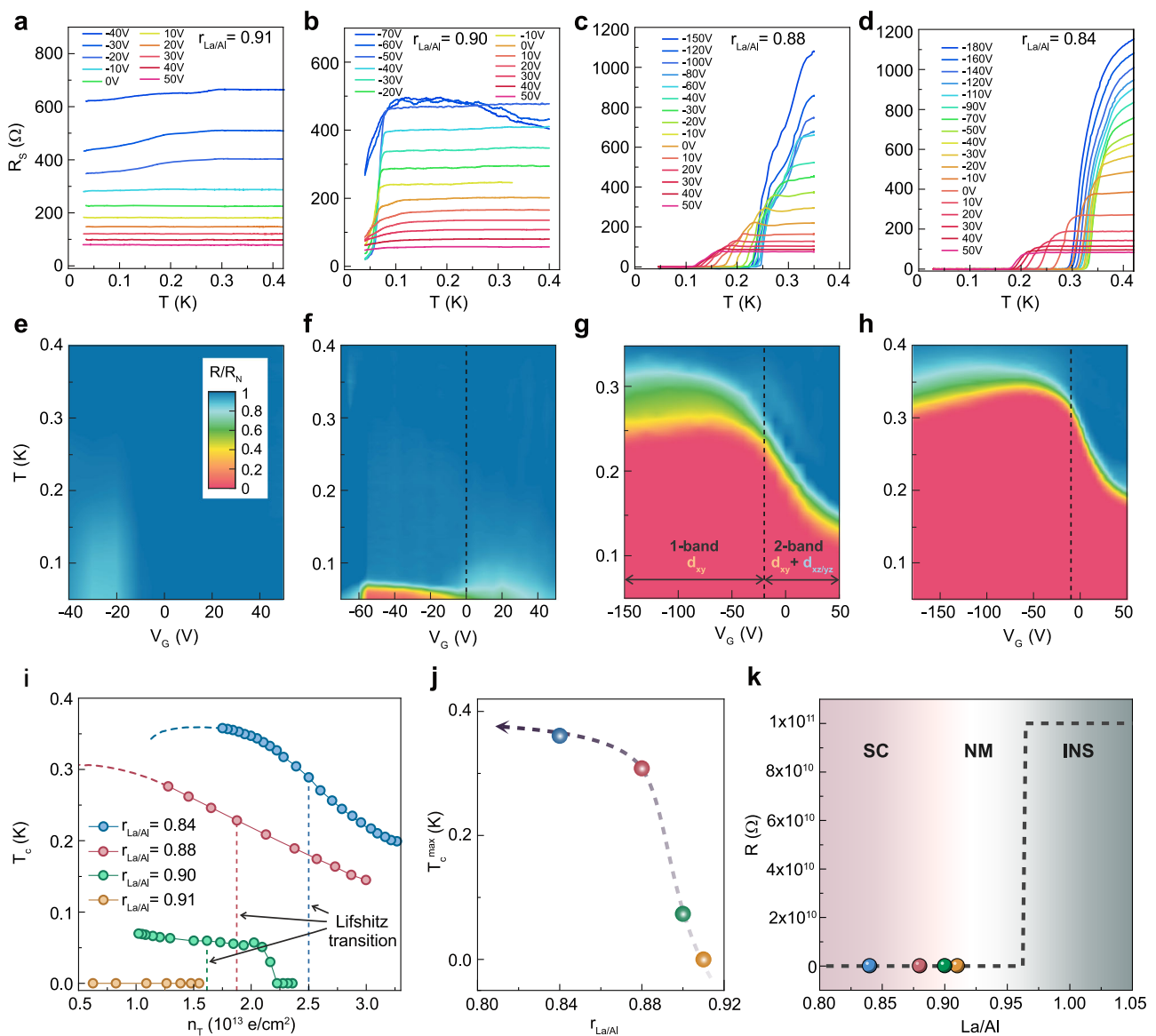
## Results

### Film growth and characterization

Thin LAO films were grown by pulsed laser deposition (PLD) on top of (001) oriented  $\text{TiO}_2$ -terminated STO substrates (methods for growth process details). The epitaxial layer-by-layer growth of the films was confirmed by intensity oscillations of reflection high-energy electron diffraction (RHEED), as shown in Fig. 1d, e. Films were investigated by Atomic Force Microscopy (Fig. 1f), which showed a smooth surface with single-unit cell steps. The film composition of La/Al ratio was investigated using X-ray photoemission spectroscopy (XPS). Here, we present results for two 5-unit cell (uc) (S1 and S2), one 10 uc thick (S3) and one 11 uc (S4) thick film.

Figure 1g shows XPS spectra of Sr 3d, La 4d, Al 2s, and Al 2p peaks for all samples. As expected, thicker films have much weaker intensity of substrate peaks (Ti and Sr). From the areas of La 4d and Al 2p peaks, we estimated the ratio between La and Al, assuming relative sensitivity factors of 6.52 and 0.54, correspondingly and with an error of about  $\sim \pm 1\%$  (methods for more details). Due to charging effects, the analysis required an alignment of the core levels to the position of the Sr 3d peak. The results show that all films are La deficient (Fig. 1i), in agreement with previously published results on films grown by PLD and MBE (Fig. 2k)<sup>41</sup>. The variation in the LAO film stoichiometry is likely due to the laser energy density during the film growth (Supplementary Fig. 1). More details about the influence of growth parameters on the film composition are discussed in supplementary note 1.

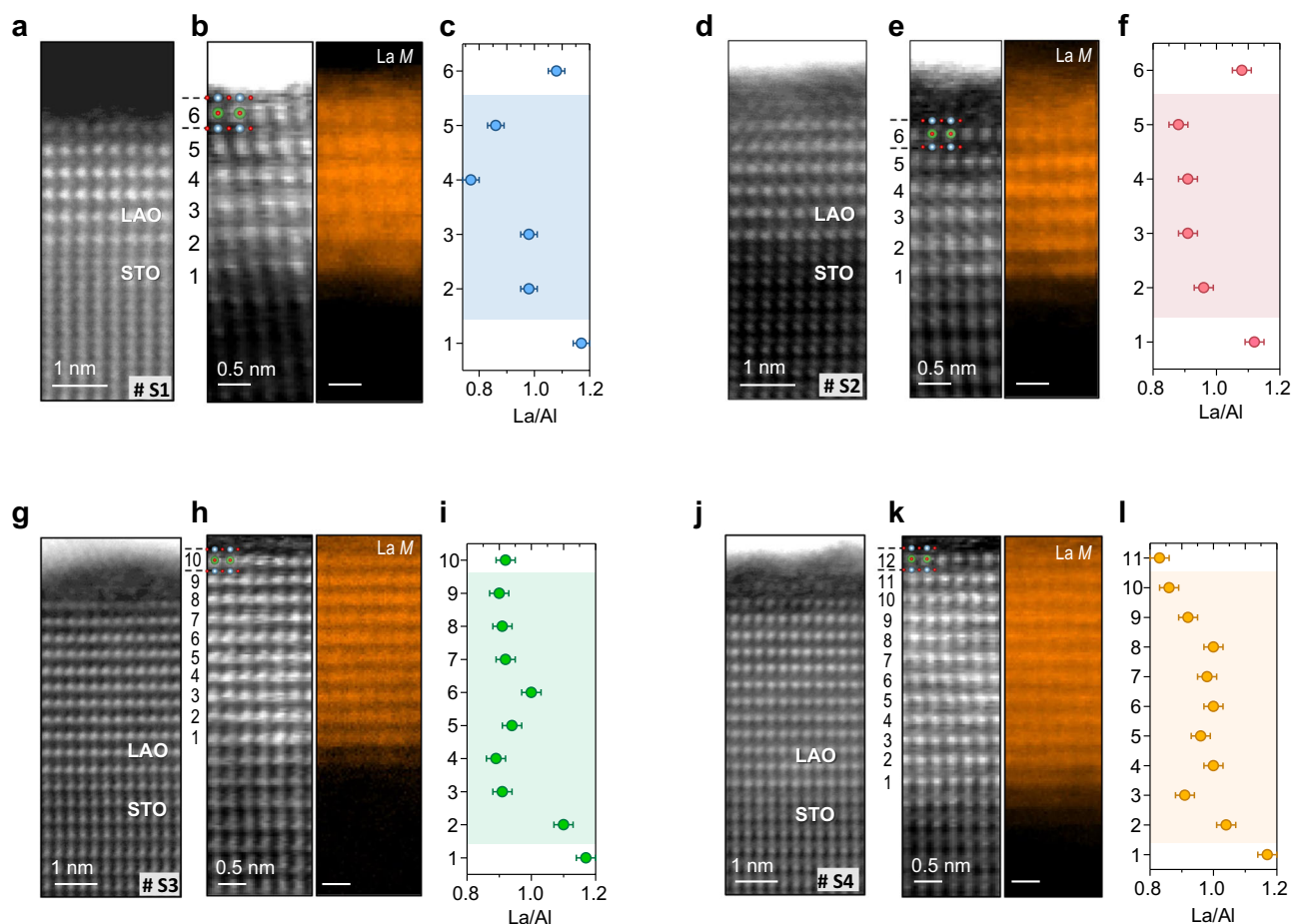
Figure 3 shows the high-angle annular dark field (HAADF) atomic resolution images (Fig. 3a, d, g, and j) of LAO/STO heterostructures along with the La M elemental maps (Fig. 3b, e, h, and k) and the resulting averaged La/Al ratios for each atomic plane (Fig. 3c, f, i, and l) obtained using



**Fig. 2 | Superconducting phase diagram.** a–d Resistance vs temperature curves measured between 0.4 K – 0.03 K at different gate voltage ( $V_g$ ) for samples with  $r_{\text{La/Al}} = 0.91, 0.90, 0.88, 0.84$ . e–h The corresponding color plot of normalized resistance as a function of temperature and  $V_g$ . The color scale is the same for all panels. The dashed line in color plot represents  $V_g$  for Lifshitz transition. i The modulation of critical temperature  $T_c$  as a function of total carrier density  $n_T$ . Here the carrier density corresponding to the dashed line is extracted from polynomial extrapolation

of the data in Fig. 4i–l. j The variation of maximum of superconducting  $T_c^{\max}$  with La/Al ratio. k The dashed line, adapted from ref. 41, indicates insulating-to-metallic transition as a function of La/Al ratio. The data points represented by circles correspond to the values of the La/Al ratio in our samples, as estimated from XPS analysis. The phase diagram is divided into three different regions: superconducting (SC), normal metal (NM), and insulating (INS) based on the outcome of our result.





**Fig. 3 | Estimation of La/Al ratio using STEM-EELS.** The high-angle annular dark field (HAADF) atomic resolution image of LAO/STO interface, simultaneous ADF signal together with La elemental map and lateral averaged La/Al ratio of sample S1 (a, b and c), S2 (d, e and f), S3 (g, h and i) and S4 (j, k and l), respectively. The shaded region in c, f, i, l represents an area for which the average value of La/Al ratio is

estimated. The error bars are estimated from the standard deviation with respect to the quantification fitting window parameters obtained from reference bulk LAO. The inset in b, e, h, and k shows the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  structure viewed along the [110] crystallographic direction, with La in green, Al in blue, and O in red.

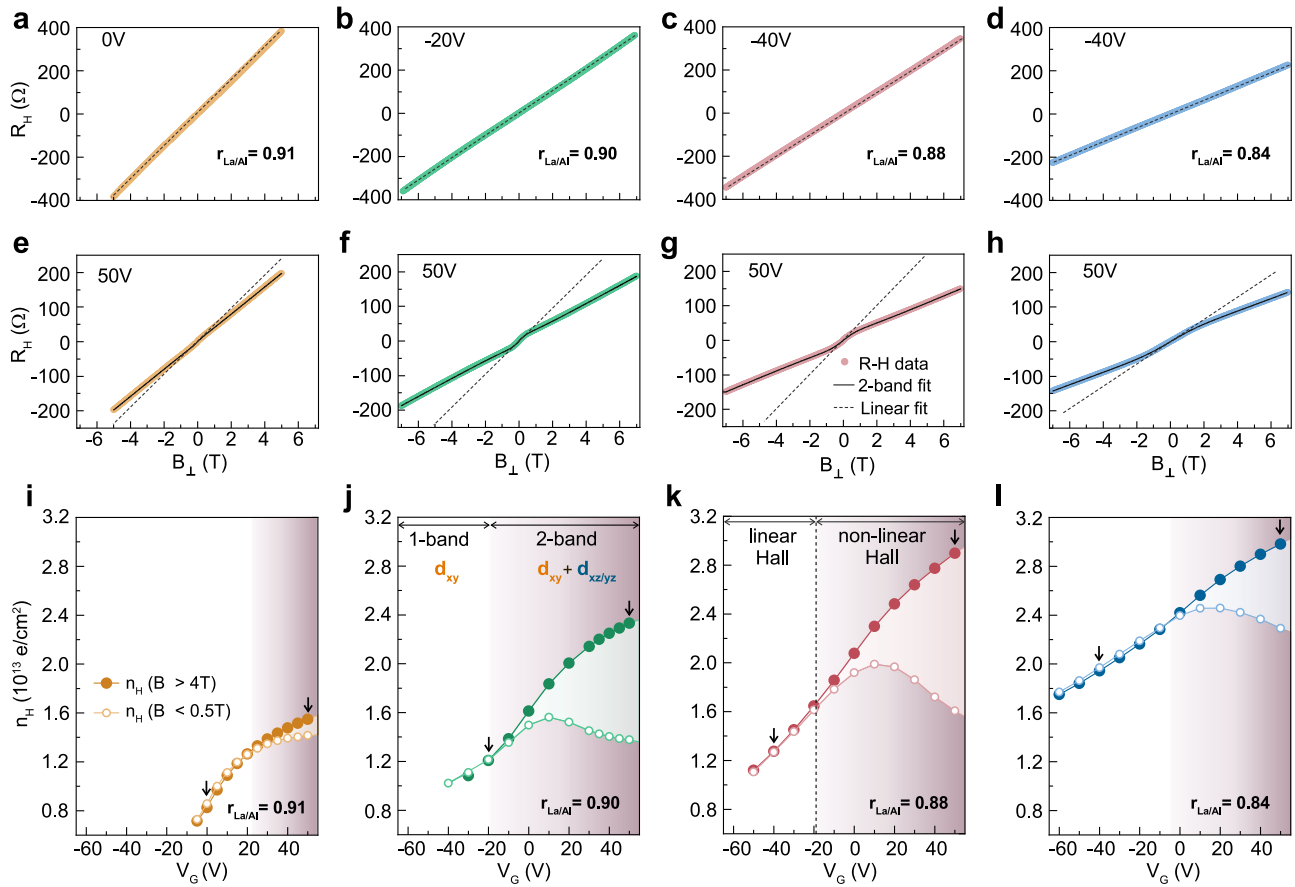
EEL spectroscopy. These data indicate an inhomogeneous distribution of chemical composition, with a higher concentration of La near the interface in all samples, and at the uppermost plane of the 5 u.c thick LAO films of S1 and S2. The inhomogeneous distribution of La and Al near the interface can be caused by interdiffusion, which is evident from atomic-resolution elemental maps of all elements, including oxygen, see Supplementary Fig. 2. In particular, the Ti L-edge elemental maps show that Ti is substituting Al within the first LAO layer in all samples. The colored regions of the averaged La/Al ratio in Fig. 3c, f, i, and l show the atomic planes having a moderate deviation of the La/Al ratio. Figure 1i provides a depiction of the average La/Al ratio derived from the EEL spectrum images and compares it with XPS spectra. While the values obtained through EEL differ somewhat from those obtained via XPS, they exhibit a consistent overall trend. This disparity could be attributed to the fact that all the samples exhibit a heightened concentration of La at the interface, a phenomenon that XPS may not be sensitive enough to detect.

### Electrical transport in normal state

The sheet resistance at  $T = 300$  K decreases for smaller La/Al ratios (Fig. 1h), indicating a correlation between electrical transport and stoichiometry. Since it is well-established that the electrical resistivity of the properly annealed crystalline LAO/STO interface does not depend on the thickness of the LAO overlayer<sup>42–44</sup>, thus the variation in electrical resistivity in our samples can be attributed to the difference in the La/Al ratio. We emphasize that all samples show a metallic behavior in all the analyzed

range of temperatures (2K–300K), with little sign of an increase in resistance at low temperatures (see Supplementary Fig. 3), indicating the absence of weak localization effects<sup>45</sup>. As discussed below, this agrees with the remarkably large values of the electronic mobility observed in all samples. In addition, carrier density is almost temperature independent in the interval 2K–300 K (Supplementary Fig. 4) in contrast to the majority of reports where a large reduction of carrier density was observed at low temperatures attributed to charge freeze out on charged crystal defects such as oxygen vacancies<sup>46</sup>. This again proves the high quality of interfaces studied in this work.

We investigated the effect of the La/Al ratio ( $r_{\text{La/Al}}$ ) on the evolution of carrier density at 2K as a function of back gate voltages  $V_G$ . In the depleted regime, corresponding to negative or low positive  $V_G$ , we found a linear response of the transverse Hall resistance  $R_H$  as a function of the applied out-of-plane magnetic field ( $B_\perp$ ) in all samples (Fig. 4a–d). In contrast, in the overdoped regime, corresponding to large positive  $V_G$ , we observed non-linear  $R_H(B_\perp)$ , indicating that a second band is filled (Fig. 4e–h) as the  $V_G$  is increased. The transition from the linear to non-linear  $R_H(B_\perp)$  is usually ascribed to a Lifshitz transition from  $d_{xy}$  single-band to  $d_{xy} + d_{xz/yz}$  two-band transport regimes when the  $d_{xz/yz}$  subband is occupied at higher  $V_G$  (see Fig. 1b, c for sketch of band structure). The transition can be better observed by obtaining the Hall carrier density  $n_H = B_\perp / eR_H$  through linear fits of  $R_H(B_\perp)$  in the limits  $B_\perp < 0.5$  T and  $B_\perp > 4$  T, respectively (Fig. 4i–l). The  $n_H$  overlap at low  $V_G$  in the linear regime (comparatively depleted region), in agreement with the single-band transport. In contrast, above the



**Fig. 4 | Gate voltage-dependent Hall carrier density.** The Hall resistance as a function out-of-plane magnetic field,  $R_H(B_{\perp})$ , for LAO/STO samples S4, S3, S2, and S1 with  $r_{La/Al} = 0.91$  (a, e), 0.90 (b, f), 0.88 (c, g), and 0.84 (d, h) respectively. This is within the low gate voltage ( $V_G$ ) region of the phase diagram with linear dependence in  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  (a–d), and at 50V where  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  display nonlinear dependence (e–h). The black-dashed line indicates a linear fit of  $R_H(B_{\perp})$ . The black solid line is a fit of the two-band model (eq 1 presented in methods). i–l The evolution of carrier density as a function of  $V_G$  extracted from the linear fit of  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  for  $B_{\perp} < 0.5T$  (open circle) and

$B_{\perp} > 4T$  (solid circle). The shaded area indicates the region of  $V_G$  where  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  is nonlinear i.e. two bands regime. In the shaded region,  $n(B_{\perp} < 0.5T)$  vs.  $V_G$  curve is not representing the true value of carrier density due to nonlinear  $R_H(B_{\perp})$ , whereas,  $n(B_{\perp} > 4T)$  is nearly equal to total carrier density  $n_T = n_{d_{xy}} + n_{d_{xz/yz}}$ . Two arrows are the selection of gate voltage for which  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  curves are shown. All measurements were performed at  $T = 2K$ .

Lifshitz transition at larger  $V_G$ , the two values of the  $n_H$  deviate from each other.

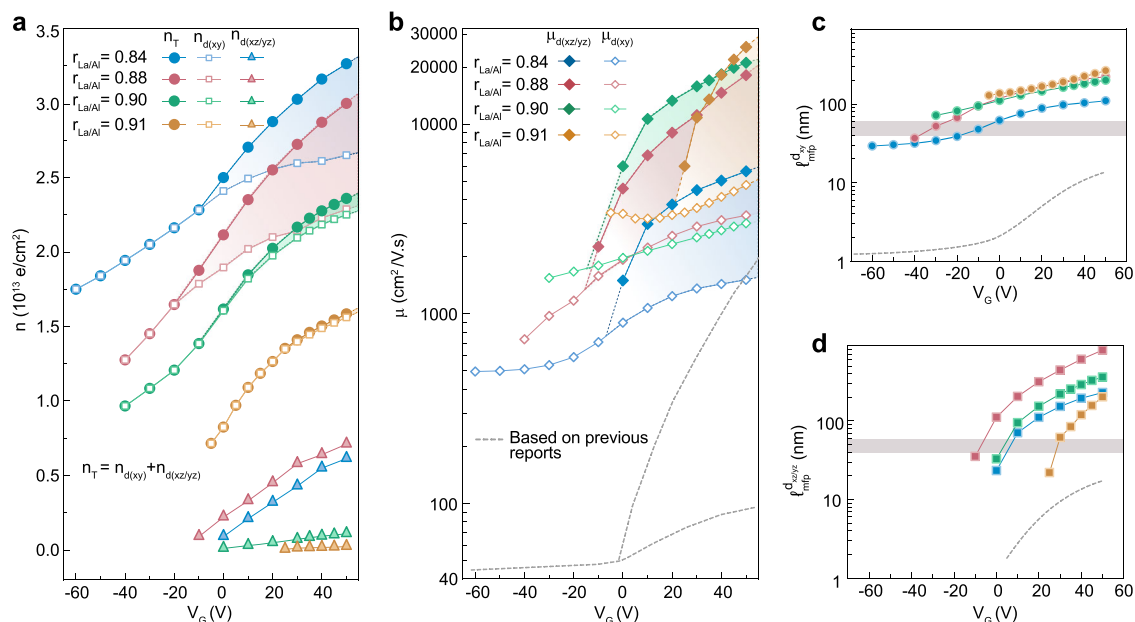
In our samples, the nonlinearity is observed at rather low magnetic fields  $B_{\perp} \leq 2T$ , as can be seen in Fig. 4e–h. This is in contrast to previous reports that showed nonlinear behavior in  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  extending for magnetic fields  $B_{\perp} > 5T$ <sup>21,23,32,33</sup>. We can attribute this to the distinct values of the electronic mobility in our samples, which are one order of magnitude larger than in previous reports. This is supported by the quantitative analysis of carrier densities and mobilities for each 3d-subbands using two-band model fit (see methods for details).

Figure 5a displays the  $V_G$  dependence of the total carrier density  $n_T$  and the carrier densities  $n_{d_{xy}}$  and  $n_{d_{xz/yz}}$  for electrons occupying  $d_{xy}$  and  $d_{xz/yz}$  subbands, respectively. Similarly, Fig. 5b shows the data for the electronic mobilities  $\mu_{d_{xy}}$  and  $\mu_{d_{xz/yz}}$  as a function of  $V_G$ . In agreement with previous reports, we find that the majority of carriers are populating the lower energy  $d_{xy}$  orbitals ( $n_{d_{xy}} \gg n_{d_{xz/yz}}$ )<sup>21,23,32,33</sup>. However,  $n_{d_{xy}}(\mu_{d_{xy}})$  and  $n_{d_{xz/yz}}(\mu_{d_{xz/yz}})$  display a systematic increase (decrease) with the reduction of the  $r_{La/Al}$  ratio (Fig. 5a, b). The values of  $\mu_{d_{xy}}$  and  $\mu_{d_{xz/yz}}$  obtained in our samples are about 15 times larger than in previous reports<sup>21,23,32,33</sup>. This can be attributed to the cleaner interfaces obtained in the present case. In addition, the values of the carrier density in the  $d_{xz/yz}$  band are significantly larger than those reported previously. For instance, in our samples with  $r_{La/Al} = 0.88$  and 0.84, the fraction of carriers in  $d_{xz/yz}$  bands exceeds 20%, as compared to less than 2% observed in previous works<sup>23,32,33</sup>. This implies that a small variation of the

$r_{La/Al}$  ratio strongly affects carrier densities and mobilities in both bands, providing an additional degree of freedom to electrostatic gating, where the range of doping is limited by dielectric properties of SrTiO<sub>3</sub>.

### Superconducting properties

To investigate superconductivity, we measured the temperature dependence of the sheet resistance  $R_S(T)$  between 0.03 and 0.45 K for different  $V_G$ . Figure 2a–d show  $R_S(T)$  curves at different  $V_G$  and Fig. 2e–h display the corresponding color plot of normalized resistance as a function of  $T$  and  $V_G$ . It is evident that the  $r_{La/Al}$  has also a strong effect on the formation of superconducting ground state. The maximum of superconducting critical temperature  $T_C^{max}$ , extracted from  $T_C$ - $V_G$  phase diagram, increases with reducing  $r_{La/Al}$  as shown in the Fig. 2j. For  $r_{La/Al} = 0.91$ , the interface does not display any evidence of superconducting transition for any  $V_G$  (Fig. 2a, e) despite being metallic down to the lowest temperature of 30 mK. A weak superconducting transition is observed for  $r_{La/Al} = 0.90$  with a  $T_C^{max} \approx 0.08 K$  at  $V_G \approx -60 V$  (Fig. 2b, f). In this sample,  $R_S$  saturates to a residual resistance at low temperature, suggesting the presence of non-percolating superconducting regions in the sample, as shown in Supplementary Fig. 5 where superconducting regions embedded in a metallic matrix are sketched. On the other hand, a clear zero-resistance state with  $T_C^{max} \approx 0.25 K$  at  $V_G < -50 V$  is achieved in the  $r_{La/Al} = 0.88$  sample (Fig. 2c, g), where  $R_S(T)$  displays a broad superconducting transition suggesting a competition between superconducting and metallic regions (Supplementary Fig. 5). Interestingly,



**Fig. 5 | Estimation of carrier density and mobility in each  $t_{2g}$  band. a** The evolution of total carrier density  $n_T$  (solid circle) and carrier density for electrons occupied in lower energy  $d_{xy}$  band,  $n_{d(xy)}$  (open square) and upper  $d_{xz/yz}$  band,  $n_{d(xz/yz)}$  (solid triangle), as a function of  $V_G$ , extracted from two-band model fit. **b** The extracted values of corresponding electron mobility  $\mu_{d(xy)}$  and  $\mu_{d(xz/yz)}$  as a function of  $V_G$ . The

shaded area represents two-band region in the phase diagram. **c, d** The estimated value of mean free path for  $d_{xy}$  electrons  $l_{mfp}^{d_{xy}}$  and  $d_{xz/yz}$  electrons  $l_{mfp}^{d_{xz/yz}}$  respectively. The shaded gray area is the estimated value of coherence length adapted from ref. 15.

confirming a systematic trend, a sharp superconducting transition is observed in the samples with the lowest  $r_{La/Al} = 0.84$ , with  $T_C^{max} \approx 0.35 \text{ K}$  at gate voltages  $V_G \approx -50 \text{ V}$  (Fig. 2d, h).

## Discussion

Our results provide important insights into the nature of superconductivity in the oxide q-2DEGs. According to the conventional Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer (BCS) scenario, pairing through  $d_{xz/yz}$  rather than  $d_{xy}$  bands is more favorable for superconductivity due to the larger density of states of the former<sup>47</sup>. In line with this, both experimental and theoretical studies show either the absence or strong suppression of superconductivity in single  $d_{xy}$ -band 2DEGs, in a region of the phase diagram where the electronic mobility lies below  $\mu_{d_{xy}} < 50 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V.s}$ <sup>15,21,23,32–34</sup>. In striking contrast, the critical temperature  $T_C$  of the samples analyzed in this work is not suppressed below the Lifshitz transition. As shown in the phase diagram in Fig. 2g and h, for samples with  $r_{La/Al} = 0.88$  and  $0.84$ , the  $T_C$  increases substantially already below the Lifshitz transition, rising to  $>15\%$  at maximum  $T_C$ , and further suppressed for higher doping. We attribute this remarkable observation to the large mobility of electrons in the  $d_{xy}$  band, with values  $\mu_{d_{xy}} > 600 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}$  (Fig. 5b), i.e., more than an order of magnitude larger than usually reported elsewhere. Strikingly, as inferred from data displayed in Fig. 2i, the Lifshitz transition does not appear at a universal carrier density as suggested in previous observations<sup>21</sup>, indicating that the formation of the quantum well may evolve differently for different samples. These observations demonstrate that superconductivity at the  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  interface can be achieved in the clean limit, opposite to previous reports where it was only reported in the dirty limit<sup>22,33</sup>, characterized by a reduced mean free path to  $l_{mfp} < 1 \text{ nm}$  in the depleted region. Our data (Fig. 5c, d) show that the  $l_{mfp}$  in our samples is comparable to the  $\xi = 40\text{--}60 \text{ nm}$ . This observation is important for the search of theoretically predicted topological superconductivity in these systems, as it should minimize drastically the detrimental effect of disorder on non-conventional electron pairing<sup>12,20,26</sup>. We also note that our results may allow studying pairing mechanism in single  $d_{xy}$ -band superconductivity in (001)-oriented  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  interfaces in the dilute limit mediated by ferroelectric fluctuations

through soft transverse optical phonons<sup>48–54</sup>. This is in line with recent observations of enhanced transition temperatures near the ferroelectric quantum critical point of  $\text{SrTiO}_3$ <sup>55–59</sup>, and the possible co-existence of ferroelectricity and superconductivity<sup>59,60</sup>. Similar mechanisms have been proposed for the recently found superconductive  $\text{KTaO}_3$  interfaces, in which pairing occurs in 5d instead of 3d orbitals<sup>61</sup>. In particular, a soft optical mode induced by the inversion-breaking at the interface has been suggested for inter-orbital pairing, a mechanism that could be general for quantum paraelectric interfaces<sup>62</sup>. Finally, we also show that both electrical transport and superconductivity in the  $\text{LaAlO}_3/\text{SrTiO}_3$  q-2DEG are systematically correlated with cation stoichiometry of the LAO film. While the exact mechanism of this effect cannot be elucidated from the existing data, it may be related to the intrinsic charge compensation by defects<sup>41</sup>. Remarkably, our sample with the highest La/Al ratio ( $r_{La/Al} = 0.91$ , S4) has striking similarity with previously reported  $\text{SrCuO}_2$ -capped q-2DEG showing temperature-independent carrier concentration and very high electron mobilities of up to  $4 \times 10^4 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V.s}$ , but no superconducting transition<sup>46</sup>. This suggests that the electrical transport in the LAO/STO interface is determined both by oxygen exchange kinetics and cation stoichiometry of the LAO film.

## Methods

### Thin films growth

Thin LAO films were grown on  $5 \times 5 \text{ mm}^2$  large  $\text{TiO}_2$ -terminated STO substrates by pulsed laser deposition (PLD). The laser spot area on the target was set to  $2 \text{ mm}^2$ . The laser fluence was varied by changing the energy, which was measured after the focusing lens. The laser beam optics was adjusted to provide a true image of the laser aperture on the target. All films were deposited at an oxygen pressure of  $10^{-4} \text{ mbar}$  and a heater temperature of  $800^\circ\text{C}$ . The target-to-substrate distance was set to  $50 \text{ mm}$ . The laser repetition rate was  $1 \text{ Hz}$ , corresponding to the growth rate of  $40\text{--}50$  pulses per unit cell layer. After deposition, all samples were annealed to  $600^\circ\text{C}$  at the oxygen pressure of  $300 \text{ mbar}$  for one hour to eliminate oxygen vacancies that could be produced in the STO substrate during the deposition process.

## X-ray photoemission spectroscopy (XPS)

XPS measurements have been performed by using Al K $\alpha$  X-ray source ( $E = 1486.6$  eV) and Argus CU hemispherical electron spectrometer from Scienta Omicron AB, P.O. Box 15120, SE-750 15 Uppsala Sweden. Due to unavoidable charging effects, core level peaks in spectra for all samples have been aligned to the position of Sr 3d peak, see Fig. 1g. La/Al ratios of all samples were estimated from analysis of La 4d and Al 2p peak areas using Scofield database for relative sensitivity factors (RSF) for La and Al of 6.52 and 0.537, correspondingly [J. H. Scofield, Lawrence Livermore Lab. Rept 1973, UCRL-51326]. Each value of La/Al ratio is an average of 3 consecutive measurements. The corresponding error was estimated to be  $\pm 1\%$ .

## Scanning transmission electron microscopy - electron energy-loss spectroscopy (STEM-EELS)

STEM-EELS was performed along the [110] pseudocubic zone axis in an aberration-corrected Nion U-Hermes 100, operated at 60 kV, and equipped with Dectris ELA direct electron detector, which offers improved detective quantum efficiencies, narrower point spread functions, and superior signal-to-noise ratios. The convergence semi-angle was 32 mrad, the probe current 20 pA, and the collection semi-angle 75 mrad. The elemental maps were generated with Digital Micrograph's EELS quantification tool. We used a reference EEL spectrum acquired from a control sample, a commercial LAO substrate. The background in the spectra was removed using a power law fit, followed by integrating the La M $_4$ , 5 (830 eV) and Al K (1560 eV) edges intensity by using integration windows with energy range of 900–1000 eV and 1575–1690 eV, respectively, excluding the near-edge fine structure in both cases. The fitting parameters were adjusted to obtain a La/Al elemental quantification of the control sample. The La/Al ratio of LAO thin films was calculated using the same procedure, and to neglect the influence of thickness and plural scattering in the quantification of all spectra in this work (including the reference) were acquired in regions with the same sample thickness (20 nm).

## Hall carrier density and two-band model

The gate voltage-dependent Hall effect measurements were performed in Quantum Design PPMS system in Van der Pauw geometry. The Hall resistance ( $R_H = V_H/I$ ) was measured as a function of out-of-plane magnetic field, swept between  $\pm 7$  T. The carrier density  $n_H = B/eR_H$ , reported in Fig. 4 of the main text, is extracted from  $R_H$  in the magnetic field limit of  $B < 1$  T and  $B > 4$  T.

In the two-band regime analysis, reported in Fig. 5 of main text, the Hall resistance can be defined as

$$R_H = \frac{B}{e} \frac{\frac{n_{d_{xy}} \mu_{d_{xy}}^2}{1 + \mu_{d_{xy}}^2 B^2} + \frac{n_{d_{xz/yz}} \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}^2}{1 + \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}^2 B^2}}{\left[ \frac{n_{d_{xy}} \mu_{d_{xy}}}{1 + \mu_{d_{xy}}^2 B^2} + \frac{n_{d_{xz/yz}} \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}}{1 + \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}^2 B^2} \right] + \left[ \frac{n_{d_{xy}} \mu_{d_{xy}}^2 B}{1 + \mu_{d_{xy}}^2 B^2} + \frac{n_{d_{xz/yz}} \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}^2 B}{1 + \mu_{d_{xz/yz}}^2 B^2} \right]^2} \quad (1)$$

Where,  $n_{d_{xy}}$ ,  $n_{d_{xz/yz}}$  and  $\mu_{d_{xy}}$ ,  $\mu_{d_{xz/yz}}$  are carrier densities and mobilities related to  $d_{xy}$  and  $d_{xz/yz}$  bands which are obtained by fitting  $R_H(B_{\perp})$  using constraints for total carrier density  $n_T = n_{d_{xy}} + n_{d_{xz/yz}}$  and longitudinal resistance  $\frac{1}{R_s} = e(n_{d_{xy}} \mu_{d_{xy}} + n_{d_{xz/yz}} \mu_{d_{xz/yz}})$ .

## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Code availability

The code that supports the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Received: 28 November 2023; Accepted: 23 April 2024;

Published online: 09 May 2024

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## Acknowledgements

The authors thank Kyle Shen and Jak Chakhalian for useful discussions. We acknowledge financial support from Projects No. PID2020-118479RB-I00, Severo Ochoa FUNFUTURE (No. CEX2019-000917-S) of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (Grant No. MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033), project TED2021-129857B-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by the European Union "NextGenerationEU"/PRTR and financial support by the Generalitat de Catalunya (2021 SGR00445). We also acknowledge support from the Swedish infrastructure for micro- and nanofabrication - MyFab. G.S. acknowledges financial support from the Beatriz de Pinós Programme with research Grant No. 2019 BP 00207 from the Secretariat for Universities and Research of the Department of Business and Knowledge of the Generalitat de Catalunya, and the support of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie program COFUND (BP3, contract no. 801370) of the H2020 programme. N.B. acknowledges the funding received by the ANR PRC (QUANTOP), by the QuantERA ERA-NET Cofund in Quantum Technologies (Grant Agreement N. 731473) implemented within the European Union's Horizon 2020 Program (QUANTOX), and by the French ANR PRC (SURIKAT ANR-23-CE30-0036).

The ICN2 is funded by the CERCA program/Generalitat de Catalunya. The ICN2 is supported by the Severo Ochoa Centres of Excellence programme, Grant CEX2021-001214-S, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039.501100011 033. R.G. & W.Z. acknowledge financial support from National Key RD Program of China (2018YFA0305800), and the Beijing Outstanding Young Scientist Program (BJJWZYJH01201914430039).

### Author contributions

G.Si. & A.K. conceived and directed the research. A.K. fabricated the samples and measured and analyzed XPS data. G.Si., G.S. and N.B. performed the transport measurements. G.Si. carried out the analysis of the transport results. R.G. and W.Z. performed and analyzed STEM-EELS data with the help of J.G. G.Si, G.H. and A.K. wrote the manuscript with the contribution of R.G., J.G., N.B., F.M., J.F., W.Z., T.C. and D.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

### Additional information

**Supplementary information** The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42005-024-01644-3>.

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**Peer review information** *Communications Physics* thanks the anonymous reviewers for their contribution to the peer review of this work. A peer review file is available.

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