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Arylammonium-Assisted Reduction of the Open-Circuit Voltage Deficit in Wide-Bandgap Perovskite Solar Cells: The Role of Suppressed Ion Migration

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III Metrics & More



ABSTRACT: Surface treatment using large alkyl/aryl ammonium cations has demonstrated reduced open-circuit voltage (V_{OC}) deficits in perovskite solar cells (PSCs), but the origin of the improvements has been vaguely attributed to defect passivation. Here, we combine microscopic probing of the local electrical properties, thermal admittance spectroscopic analysis, and firstprinciples calculations to elucidate the critical role of arylammonium interface layers in suppressing ion migration in wide-bandgap (WBG) PSCs. Our results reveal that arylammonium surface treatment using phenethylammonium iodide increases the activation energy barrier for ion migration on the surface, which suppresses the accumulation of charge defects at surface and grain boundaries, leading to a reduced dark saturation current density in WBG PSCs. With device optimization, our champion 1.73 eV PSC delivers a power conversion efficiency of 19.07% with a V_{OC} of 1.25 V, achieving a V_{OC} deficit of 0.48 V.



erovskite solar cells (PSCs) have attracted a tremendous amount of attention in the past decade because of the superb photovoltaic properties of metal halide perovskites and the high certified power conversion efficiency (PCE) of single-junction devices that has already reached 25.2%.¹ Beyond single-junction PSCs, the bandgap tunability of perovskite materials ranging from \sim 1.2 to 3 eV enables the realization of perovskite-based tandem solar cells, which have the potential to surpass the Shockley–Queisser (S-Q)thermodynamic limit of single absorber solar cells.²⁻⁵ Perovskite-based tandem solar cells have made considerable progress in recent years.⁶⁻¹⁸ Impressively, a variety of perovskite– silicon (Si),^{6,15-17} perovskite–copper indium gallium dis-elenide (CIGS),^{9,11} and perovskite–perovskite tandem solar cells have demonstrated PCEs of ~25% or higher.^{13,14} These achievements show the enormous potential of perovskite-based tandem solar cells in the future.⁵ Notably, all of the tandem cells share a common component that is a top cell based on a wide-bandgap (WBG) (~1.7-1.9 eV) perovskite absorber layer,^{19–27} which plays a critical role in highly efficient tandem solar cells.

The performance of WBG PSCs has always been limited by a high open-circuit voltage ($V_{\rm OC}$) deficit, which is defined as $\frac{E_g}{q} - V_{\rm OC}$, where E_g is the bandgap of the absorber layer and qis the unit charge. PSCs based on WBG perovskites with a bandgap of >1.72 eV typically exhibit $V_{\rm OC}$ deficits (>0.5 V) that are larger than those of their lower-bandgap counterparts (Figure S1 and Table S1). While the origins of the large $V_{\rm OC}$ deficit in WBG PSCs are still under debate, it is certain that the shortfall is related to the composition of perovskites with a relatively high content of Br and Cs, which typically results in phase segregation and a relatively high defect density.^{28,29} In particular, the aggregation of I-rich and Br-rich domains lowers the optical bandgap of WBG perovskites (that is primarily

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determined by the lower bandgap of the domains in the material),^{30–32} severely limiting the $V_{\rm OC}$ and thus the PCE of WBG PSCs. Therefore, strategies for mitigating large $V_{\rm OC}$ deficits in WBG PSCs are urgently needed to advance perovskite tandem solar cells.

Over the past few years, many approaches, such as compositional, additive, solvent, processing, and interface engineering techniques, have been employed to fabricate high-quality WBG perovskite films and devices.^{19-27,33-36} Among them, bulk incorporation or surface treatment using large alkyl/aryl ammonium cations has been demonstrated to be most effective in reducing $V_{\rm OC}$ deficits of PSCs regardless of the perovskite composition. Despite the advances, the underlying mechanism of the alkyl/aryl ammonium treatment has always been attributed vaguely to a reduced defect density and increased carrier lifetime. In particular, little is known about the subtle differences in how the alkyl/aryl ammonium surface passivation affects WBG (>1.7 eV) and mediumbandgap (1.5-1.7 eV) iodine-based perovskites differently. Further efforts are needed to understand the origins and mechanisms of the large $V_{\rm OC}$ deficit in WBG PSCs and to explore effective strategies for mitigating this issue.

Very recently, we demonstrated an approach for probing the activation energy of ion migration in the perovskite absorber using a capacitance-based measurement,³⁷ which enables the PSC device performance analysis from the perspective of the ionic behavior in the perovskite absorber. Here, we combine the microscopic probing of localized electrical properties, thermal admittance spectroscopy (TAS) measurements, and first-principles calculations of defect migration to elucidate the primary factors limiting the V_{OC} in WBG PSCs. Our results reveal that, in contrast to the passivated grain boundaries (GBs) in the pure iodine-based perovskite, the nature of the relatively more conductive GBs than grain interiors (GIs) in WBG perovskite films fundamentally limits the V_{OC} of WBG PSCs. Our measurements and calculation consistently show that an arylammonium surface formed by phenethylammonium iodide (PEAI) increases the activation energy barrier for ion diffusion and suppresses the accumulation of ionic defects on the perovskite surface and at GBs. Consequently, inverted 1.73 eV WBG PSCs show the $V_{\rm OC}$ improved from 1.16 to 1.25 V, yielding a $V_{\rm OC}$ deficit of <0.5 V. Using the arylammonium surface treatment, we obtained champion PCEs of 19.1% and 24.1% for single-junction WBG PSCs and four-terminal (4-T) all-perovskite tandem solar cells. Our work provides a better understanding of how arylammonium cations suppress ion migration in WBG perovskites and its importance in reducing large V_{OC} deficits and improving the performance of WBG PSCs.

To identify the primary limiting factors for the large V_{OC} deficit in WBG PSCs, conductive atomic force microscopy (c-AFM) was employed to analyze the microscopic electrical properties of our benchmark $FA_{0.8}Cs_{0.2}Pb(I_{0.7}Br_{0.3})_3$ WBG perovskite films deposited on poly(triarylamine) (PTAA)/ indium tin oxide (ITO)/glass substrates. Note that Pb(SCN)₂ was incorporated into our WBG perovskite films as an additive to promote perovskite grain growth, as reported previously.²⁰ Figure 1a shows a c-AFM map of a control WBG perovskite film, which exhibits nonuniform grain sizes with a heterogeneous current distribution over different grains, indicating the formation of polycrystalline domains with different chemical phases and electrical conductivities. All of the c-AFM images in Figure 1 and the Supporting Information were taken with the



Figure 1. c-AFM images of (a) the control and (c) PEAI-treated WBG perovskite films. The scale bar is 500 nm. The images were flattened to show the best contrast. Schematic illustrations of current paths in (b) the control and (d) PEAI-treated WBG PSCs. (e) Line profiles of local current flow on the black and red lines in the c-AFM images of WBG perovskite films. (f) Histograms of the current distribution in the c-AFM images. (g) Light J-V curves of WBG PSCs without and with the PEAI treatment. (h) Contour plot of the theoretical $V_{\rm OC}$ as a function of dark saturation current densities and ideality factor. The triangle and star represent PSCs without and with the PEAI treatment, respectively.

same sample bias voltage (V_S) of +0.6 V to enable a reliable comparison. The segregation of I-rich and Br-rich (with respect to the 7:3 I:Br stoichiometry) domains leads to a distinct difference in the local electrical properties. The AFM tip (Pt-coated Si probe) forms primarily a junctionlike structure with the underlaying perovskite film. Dark saturation current J_0 of the structure is affected mainly by the perovskite bandgap. A larger current under the $V_{\rm S}$ indicates a larger J_0 caused by a smaller bandgap. The large grains, corresponding to the higher-contrast (brighter) grains in the c-AFM image (Figure 1a), are expected to be more conductive because their bandgaps are narrower than those with higher Br:I ratios and, therefore, allow higher local current flow $(J_{GL H})$ through GIs. In contrast, the perovskite grains with a higher Br content tend to form smaller grains because Br accelerates the nucleation process, leading to a large number of small grains.¹⁹ The Brrich small grains, corresponding to the lower-contrast (darker) grains, are more electrically resistive, demonstrating lower current flow $(J_{GI, L})$ through GIs. Therefore, the I-rich perovskite grains contribute larger dark currents (Figure 1b).

A remarkable heterogeneity in microscopic electrical behavior is discerned at the GBs of the WBG perovskite film in Figure 1a. The current signals at GBs (I_{GB}) are much higher than the current flows through GIs (J_{GI}) , making GBs contribute to the increase in the leakage current in the WBG perovskites, as illustrated in Figure 1b. For comparison, we measured a conventional 1.55 eV MAPbI₃ perovskite film prepared using the same approach. In contrast to the WBG perovskite, the MAPbI₃ film (Figure S2) exhibits mostly resistive GBs, which indicates passivated GBs because of the PbI₂ passivation introduced by the addition of Pb(SCN)₂.³⁸ However, incorporating Pb(SCN)₂ into the WBG perovskites shows no efficacy in passivating GBs. For the FA/Cs-based WBG perovskite films, the dynamic of perovskite formation is greatly accelerated due to the presence of significant amounts of Cs and Br (20 and 30 mol % with respect to the monovalent cations and halide anions, respectively) in the precursor solution, leading to a higher density of defects.¹⁹ The aggregation of the active ionic defects at GBs increases not only the electrical conductivity but also the extent of ion migration at the GBs.³⁹⁻⁴² Because Br has a higher vapor pressure and escapes more easily from GBs of perovskite, it is likely that mostly positively charged ions, such as halide vacancies and lead interstitials, accumulate on the surface and at GBs, introducing detrimental defect states and making GBs more electrically conductive.43,44

The ambiguity of the impact of conductive GBs or regions near GBs has been discussed in the literature^{39,45-48} but deserves to be discussed further. The local current probed by c-AFM should be determined by two factors: the equivalent resistance of the probe-sample contact and the material resistivity of the local volume underneath the probe. If the contact resistance over the sample surface is uniform, the current contrast is determined by the local resistivity of the sample. A high J_{GB} is sometimes attributed to improved charge transport properties at the GBs, which can be beneficial for series resistance in a solar cell.^{47,48} However, a current contrast in a c-AFM image is often dominated by the nonuniform electrical characteristics of the probe-sample contact. A substantially high J_{GB} value is typically detrimental because of the likelihood of concomitant high reverse leakage current in finished devices. The defective GB and defective surface and subsurface material would cause a higher current flow because of the increased J_0 of the probe-sample contact, which also results in an inferior leaking junction when the device is completed. Moreover, highly conductive GBs may indicate defective GBs without proper passivation, behaving as nonradiative recombination centers, significantly increasing the level of Shockley-Read-Hall (SRH) recombination. Therefore, the high current flows through the defective GBs, as probed by c-AFM, can substantially increase the macroscopic dark saturation current in a solar cell device, fundamentally limiting the photovoltaic performance of a device, particularly the $V_{\rm OC}$. It is worth noting that some defective GBs show conductivities that are higher than those of the relatively conductive GIs that are formed due to the I-Br phase segregation, indicating that the defective GBs are likely to be the most critical factor contributing to the J_0 of a device.

To reduce the detrimental defects at the GBs of WBG perovskite films, we applied an arylammonium surface treatment using PEAI, which is known to be an effective two-dimensional perovskite passivation agent that has been demonstrated in some state-of-the-art PSCs.^{33,49,50} We spincoated 2 mg/mL PEAI in an isopropanol solution on asprepared WBG perovskite films and performed the c-AFM measurement to identify the impact of PEAI on the microscopic electrical properties of the film (Figure 1c). Compared with the control film, the current flow through the perovskite grains is reduced by almost 1 order of magnitude, and the spatial distribution of microscopic conductivity becomes more uniform. Furthermore, there is an insignificant conductivity contrast between the GBs and GIs of the PEAItreated film, indicating that J_{GB} is significantly reduced and comparable to J_{GI} (Figure 1d). Therefore, current flow through the perovskite film can be uniformly distributed across the GIs and GBs. The impacts of PEAI passivation on GIs and GBs are clearly displayed in the c-AFM line profile comparison in Figure 1e, where the PEAI treatment shows a marked effect in reducing the leakage current through both GBs (I_{GB}) and the grain interior (I_{GI}) . Figure 1f compares the histograms of the microscopic current distribution in the control and PEAItreated WBG perovskite films. The control WBG perovskite film exhibits two distinct local conductivity behaviors, including highly conductive GBs and GIs $(J_{GB} \text{ and } J_{GL H})$ and less conductive GIs $(J_{GI, L})$. In marked contrast to the control film, the film with the PEAI treatment shows a narrow distribution with a greatly suppressed average current of 26 pA, almost 1 order of magnitude lower than the average c-AFM current of 135 pA for the control film. Because the probeperovskite contact in the c-AFM imaging qualitatively reflects the electrical aspect of the electron transport layer (ETL)perovskite contact in a real solar cell, the microscopic current distribution in WBG perovskite films determines the macroscopic current flow in the corresponding devices. Suppressed local leaking current at GBs and the defective subsurface region of GIs is beneficial for reducing the overall dark saturation current density in the devices.

To reveal the influence of microscopic electrical properties on the macroscopic device performance of WBG PSCs, we fabricated solar cells with a glass/ITO/PTAA/FA_{0.8}Cs_{0.2}Pb-(I_{0.7}Br_{0.3})₃/C₆₀/bathocuproine (BCP)/Ag structure (Figure S3). Figure 1g shows representative current density–voltage (*J*-*V*) curves of PSCs based on the control and PEAI-treated perovskite absorbers. With the PEAI treatment, *V*_{OC} increases significantly from 1.16 to 1.25 V, leading to an improvement in the PCE from 17.5% to 18.6%. To further understand the *V*_{OC} enhancement as a result of the PEAI treatment, in Figure 1f, we plot a *V*_{OC} contour of a general solar cell using the diode equation $V_{OC} = \frac{nkT}{q} \ln \left(\frac{J_L}{J_0} + 1\right)$, where *n* is the ideality factor, *k* is the Boltzmann constant, *T* is the temperature of a solar cell, and *J*_L and *J*₀ are the light and dark saturation current densities, respectively.

On the basis of the contour plot, for a solar cell with a given absorber layer bandgap and device operational temperature, V_{OC} is determined only by the combination of n and J_0 . Note that n is not an independent variable but is strongly influenced by J_0 . In reality, a small increase in n would typically lead to a significant increase in J_0 and, thus, a decreased V_{OC} . Therefore, from the perspective of device analysis, J_0 is an extremely critical parameter that determines the V_{OC} of a solar cell. A lower J_0 is desired to achieve a higher V_{OC} of a solar cell.

The light intensity-dependent device analysis shows the ideality factor n decreases from 1.69 for the control to 1.45 for



Figure 2. Admittance spectra of WBG PSCs (a) without (the control) and (b) with the PEAI treatment, measured in a temperature range of 250-300 K with a step size of 10 K. Derivatives of the admittance spectra of (c) the control device and (d) the device with the PEAI treatment. (e) Arrhenius plots of the characteristic transition frequencies derived from the admittance spectra. (f) Schematic of the energy barrier for ion movement in the control and the device with PEAI treatment.

the device with the PEAI treatment (Figure S4). As discussed above, a lower *n* value is typically accompanied by a reduced J_{0} , which in turn increases the $V_{\rm OC}$ of a solar cell. In a good agreement, the detailed J-V analysis confirms that J_0 is reduced from $\sim 10^{-10}$ to 10^{-13} mA/cm² with the PEAI treatment (Figure S5). The decreases in J_0 and n contribute to the improvement in V_{OC} , consistent with the prediction (the triangle to star route) in Figure 1h. This decrease in the J_0 and n of the devices after the PEAI treatment is ascribed to the reduction in the microscopic leaking current in GIs and GBs of the WBG perovskite films. The defective GB and defective subsurface region without the PEAI passivation form a poor junction, causing the photoexcited carriers to be transported over the junction via these defects to some degree instead of the desired diffusion process, which subsequently causes energy loss of the charge carriers and reduces the voltage output of the device. It is worth noting that the reduced microscopic leaking current also leads to increased shunt resistance and series resistance (Table S2). However, the change in series resistance has a stronger impact on fill factor (FF) than shunt resistance, leading to a reduced FF. Therefore, the decreased J_0 is the primary reason for the improved performance of PSCs with PEAI treatment.

To further elucidate the interplay between the microscopic and macroscopic currents in the perovskite films and devices, we conducted TAS measurements on the WBG PSCs without and with the PEAI treatment. We have demonstrated in our recent work that the low-frequency capacitance measured by the TAS technique can be used to estimate the activation energy (E_a) of ionic movement in perovskite absorber layers.³⁷ Panels a and b of Figure 2 display the TAS spectra of PSCs without and with the PEAI treatment, respectively, measured from 250 to 300 K in the dark. The characteristic transition frequency values (ω_{peak}) were obtained from the derivative of the capacitance-frequency spectra, as shown in panels c and d of Figure 2. Figure 2e shows E_a values calculated by fitting the corresponding Arrhenius plots using the relation $\omega_{\text{peak}} = \beta T^2 \exp\left(-\frac{E_a}{kT}\right)$, where β is a temperature-related prefactor.⁵¹ The device with the PEAI treatment exhibits an E_a of 0.905 eV, higher than that of 0.680 eV for the control device. The substantially higher E_a indicates that the ion migration in the perovskite layer is suppressed significantly after the PEAI treatment (Figure 2f). The suppression of mobile ionic defects is also expected to reduce the extent of formation of charge defects that can act as nonradiative recombination centers. We measured the steady-state photoluminescence (PL) and time-resolved photoluminescence (TRPL) of WBG perovskite films without and with the PEAI treatment (Figure S6). The film with the PEAI treatment



Figure 3. (a) Top view, (b) side view, and (c) energy barrier of the diffusion of the I interstitial on a pristine perovskite surface. Arrow A represents the diffusion path to its nearest site. (d) Top view, (e) side view, and (f) energy barrier of the diffusion of the I interstitial on a PEA-modified perovskite surface. Arrow B represents the diffusion path to the second-nearest site. The purple sphere represents an I atom, and the gray, green, cyan, brown, and white spheres represent Pb, Cs, N, C, and H atoms, respectively. The interstitial I atoms are highlighted.



Figure 4. (a) J-V curves of the champion WBG PSC measured under different scan directions. The inset exhibits the stabilized efficiency for the device. (b) EQE spectra of the champion device before and after the deposition of a MgF₂ ARC. (c) J-V curves and (d) EQE spectra of a 4-T all-perovskite tandem cell.

exhibits a more intense PL emission and a longer carrier lifetime compared to those of the control film, demonstrating that PEAI can effectively decrease the rate of nonradiative recombination in WBG perovskite films.

To understand how PEAI can suppress ion migration in perovskites, we performed first-principles calculations to study the behaviors of mobile ionic defects on the surface of perovskite films. It is known that the diffusion and exchange of mobile ions at GBs and on the surface are detrimental to the device performance. Compared to the diffusion in bulk, ions have smaller diffusion barriers on the surface due to smaller steric hindrance. Panels a and b of Figure 3 illustrate the diffusion path of an I interstitial defect loosely bound on the pristine surface. The diffusion of the I interstitial is

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accompanied by relatively small geometric distortions, and hance the diffusion barrier. The ion diffusion barrier is calculated to be 0.68 eV (Figure 3c). On the PEA-modified surface, due to the hindrance of PEA, the I interstitial is forced to squeeze into the surface, forming a Pb-I-Pb-I loop (Figure 3d,e), which is similar to the defect structure of an I interstitial in a bulk perovskite (Figure S7). The diffusion barrier of an I interstitial on the PEA-modified surface is increased to 0.96 eV (Figure 3f), suggesting that PEA may help mitigate halide ion migration on the surface. It is worth noting that the finding from the theoretical calculation is in good agreement with the results of TAS measurement. Although the atomic model for the calculation is based on the surfaces of perovskite films, the agreement with the measured diffusion barrier heights indicates that the ETL layer on top of the perovskite film in the devices may have a negligible or minor effect on ion diffusion. Furthermore, the molecular orbital diagram and partial density of states (PDOS) calculations of a PEAI-treated perovskite film (Figure S8) show that an I interstitial introduces a shallow defect level above the valence band maximum, which is similar to the same defect structure on the pristine surface. Therefore, the PEAI treatment does not affect the I interstitial being an innocuous defect.

The aforementioned results combining microscopic conductivity analysis, TAS device analysis, and theoretical calculations indicate that the PEAI surface treatment can suppress ion migration on the surface of perovskite films and prevent the accumulation of ionic defects at GBs. The suppressed ion migration and reduced defective GBs in the near junction region lead to a reduction in the macroscopic J_0 . Consequently, the $V_{\rm OC}$ of WBG PSCs increases after the PEAI surface treatment.

Once we understood the effect of PEAI on reducing ion migration and improving the V_{OC} of WBG PSCs, we further analyzed the impact of PEAI concentration on the structural and optical properties of perovskite films and the performance of PSCs. Details are summarized in the Supporting Information (the optimization of PEAI concentration and Figures S9-S15). The optimized PEAI concentration was found to be 2 mg/mL. To further improve the PCE of WBG PSCs, we deposited an antireflection coating (ARC) of MgF_2 to reduce the reflectance of the glass substrate and improve the $J_{\rm SC}$. Figure 4a shows the J-V curves of the best-performing device with a MgF₂ ARC. The cells show negligible hysteresis and a stabilized efficiency of 18.78%. The J_{SC} gain of ~0.5 mA cm^{-2} due to the MgF₂ ARC is confirmed by the EQE spectra shown in Figure 4b. The increased J_{SC} leads to an improvement in PCE in WBG PSCs from 18.64% to 19.07% (Table S3). To the best of our knowledge, a PCE exceeding 19% is among the highest reported PCEs for inverted WBG PSCs with a bandgap of >1.72 eV (Table S1). The V_{OC} of 1.25 V is remarkable for inverted WBG PSCs. We also fabricated WBG PSCs using a transparent ITO back electrode, yielding a PCE of 16.3% (Figure S16a and Table S4). In addition, the high transmittance beyond 720 nm (Figure S16b) makes it feasible to fabricate efficient perovskite tandem solar cells. As a proof of concept, we combined semitransparent WBG PSCs with a typical 1.25 eV low-bandgap mixed Sn-Pb PSC⁴⁶ to construct a 4-T all-perovskite tandem solar cell following a reported approach, 52 demonstrating a PCE of 24.1% (Figure 4c) with complementary spectral responses in both subcells (Figure 4d). This advance shows the promise of high-efficiency all-perovskite tandem solar cells.

In summary, we examined the microscopic and macroscopic origins for the large $V_{\rm OC}$ deficit in the WBG perovskite films and devices and identified that the leaking current of the junction caused by the accumulation of charge defects is one of the major factors limiting the photovoltaic performance of WBG PSCs. We applied an arylammonium surface treatment to suppress ion diffusion to reduce the extent of formation of charge defects on the surface and at GBs. This surface passivation strategy leads to an improvement in the $V_{\rm OC}$ and PCE of WBG PSCs. With electrical and optical optimizations, we demonstrated WBG PSCs with a PCE of 19.07% and a $V_{\rm OC}$ of ~1.25 V, corresponding to a $V_{\rm OC}$ deficit of <0.5 V for a 1.73 eV WBG perovskite absorber layer. Semitransparent WBG cells using an ITO back electrode enabled the creation of 4-T all-perovskite tandem solar cells with PCEs of >24%. This advance in understanding the importance and control of ion migration in WBG perovskites will benefit the development of perovskite tandem solar cells.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsenergylett.0c01350.

Experimental section, optimization of the PEAI concentration, reported V_{OC} and PCE values for WBG PSCs, c-AFM of a MAPbI₃ film, cross-sectional SEM image of a WBG cell, $V_{\rm OC}$ -light intensity plot for WBG cells, dark saturation current density analysis, PL and TRPL of WBG perovskite films, defect structure of the PEAmodified surface and bulk, molecular orbital diagram and PDOS, SEM images of WBG perovskite films treated with PEAI, AFM topographies of WBG perovskite films, XRD patterns of WBG perovskite films, cross-sectional SEM images of WBG cells, Tauc plots and ultraviolet-visible absorption spectra, I-V and EQE plots for WBG PSCs, statistic distributions of PV parameters, J-V, absorption, and reflection spectra of transparent WBG PSCs, PV parameters of PSCs with and without the PEAI treatment, statistics of PV parameters of WBG cells, summary of PV parameters of the best performing cells, PV parameters of cells with and without MgF₂, and PV parameters of transparent PSCs with and without MgF_2 (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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