Reversible Removal of Intermixed Shallow States by Light Soaking in Multi-Cation Mixed Halide Perovskite Films

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ABSTRACT

The highest reported efficiencies of metal halide perovskite (MHP) solar cells are all based on mixed perovskites, such as $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$. Despite demonstrated structural changes induced by light soaking, it is unclear how the charge carrier dynamics are affected across this entire material family. Here, various $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ perovskite films are light-soaked in nitrogen and changes in opto-electronic properties are investigated through time-resolved microwave conductivity (TRMC), optical and structural techniques. To fit the TRMC decay kinetics obtained for pristine $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ for various excitation densities, additional shallow states have to be included, which are not required for describing TRMC traces of single cation MHPs. These shallow states can, independently of x, be removed by light soaking, which leads to a reduction in the imbalance between the diffusional motion of electrons and holes. We interpret the shallow states as a result of initially well-intermixed halide distributions, which on light soaking segregate into domains with distinct bandgaps.

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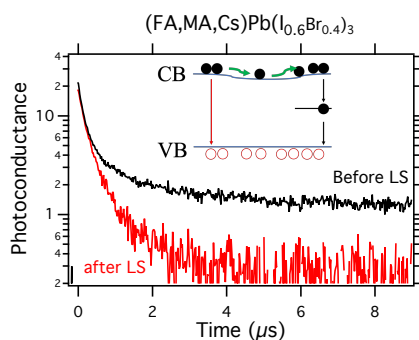
Perovskite solar cells have achieved the fastest increase in power-conversion efficiencies (PCEs) in the solar cell research history, exceeding now 24%.[1,2] The recent records of perovskite solar cells are all based on mixed cation mixed halide perovskites (MCMHPs).[2,3] The advantages of MCMHPs in comparison with single cation perovskites are the tunable bandgaps and more stable, black phase,[4,5] while the main drawback of these perovskites is related to light-induced phase segregation.[6,7] Several light-soaking studies on MCMHPs solar cells have been carried out which reveal a variety of changes in V_{oc}, I_{sc}, and FF.[4,8–14] To explain the changes in device performance, various groups studied structural and optical changes in bare MHP layers induced by light soaking. Initially phase segregation, which leads to I-rich and Br-rich domains, was reported in both $MAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ and $FAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ as determined by either photoluminescence (PL) emission,[7,15–17] differential-absorption-spectra[13] or by XRD.[18–20] The addition of Cs stabilizes $(FA,MA)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$[4] and increases the PCE output.[21] However, from the work by Tress et al.,[8] phase segregation still occurs in $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ as concluded from a wavelength shift in PL on light soaking. Recent work using micro- and nano focus- XRD techniques from Jones *et al.* revealed structural inhomogeneity in both MCMHP and $MAPbI_3$.[22] Tsai *et al.* found local lattice distortion in $(FA,MA,Cs)PbI_3$, and attributed the improvement in device performance on light soaking to interface modification and release of local distortion.[23]

The studies above relate structural inhomogeneity to the device performance. However, how the charge carriers in MCMHPs are affected by this structural change is less well studied. In this work, we use optical and time-resolved microwave conductivity (TRMC)[24–27] techniques to investigate the influence of light soaking on charge-carrier dynamics in various $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ with x ranging from 0 to 1. Surprisingly in contrast to

most other studied MHPs, mathematical analysis of the decay kinetics of the pristine layers with $0.2 \leq x \leq 0.8$ require the presence of shallow states.[28] We link these states to a mostly well intermixed halide distribution, leading to a varying energy landscape in the bulk. Interestingly, these shallow states are seemingly removed on light soaking which we attribute to the conversion of these states into distinct iodide rich, low bandgap domains. The fact that the layers return to their original structure after storage in the dark for over a week reveals that, for these MCMHPs, the presence of shallow states (*i.e.* well intermixed halide distributions) is thermodynamically the most stable conformation.

Throughout this work, we studied bare $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ films with x varying between 0 and 1 deposited by spin-coating on quartz substrates without any exposure to air or moisture. SEM images of these layers are provided in Figures S1, showing similar grain sizes for all values of x, in agreement with the reported better crystallization of MCMHPs than single cation analogues.[4] For a number of samples XRD spectra are provided in Figure S2, showing the specific features of the perovskite structure. Light soaking (LS) was accomplished by illumination for 30 minutes with a white light LED with an intensity equivalent to AM1.5 in N_2. To study the structural reorganization in $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ on LS, we first measured the absorptance spectra, as shown in **Figure 1**, and detailed band-edge information from photothermal deflection spectroscopy (PDS) (Figure S3a). In Figures 1b and 1c only a subtle shift of the band-edge to longer wavelengths for $x = 0.4$ and $x = 0.6$ on LS is visible, even if the LS treatment is prolonged to overnight exposure. The spectra of non-mixed halides $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbI_3$ and $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbBr_3$ (Figures 1a and 1d) do not show these optical changes, indicating no structural reorganization occurs on LS. In contrast, the substantial shift in absorption onset

of the single cation $MAPb(I_{0.6}Br_{0.4})_3$ shown in Figure S3b, supports the idea that the structural

reorganization in the triple cation perovskite on LS is significantly slower than in mono cation
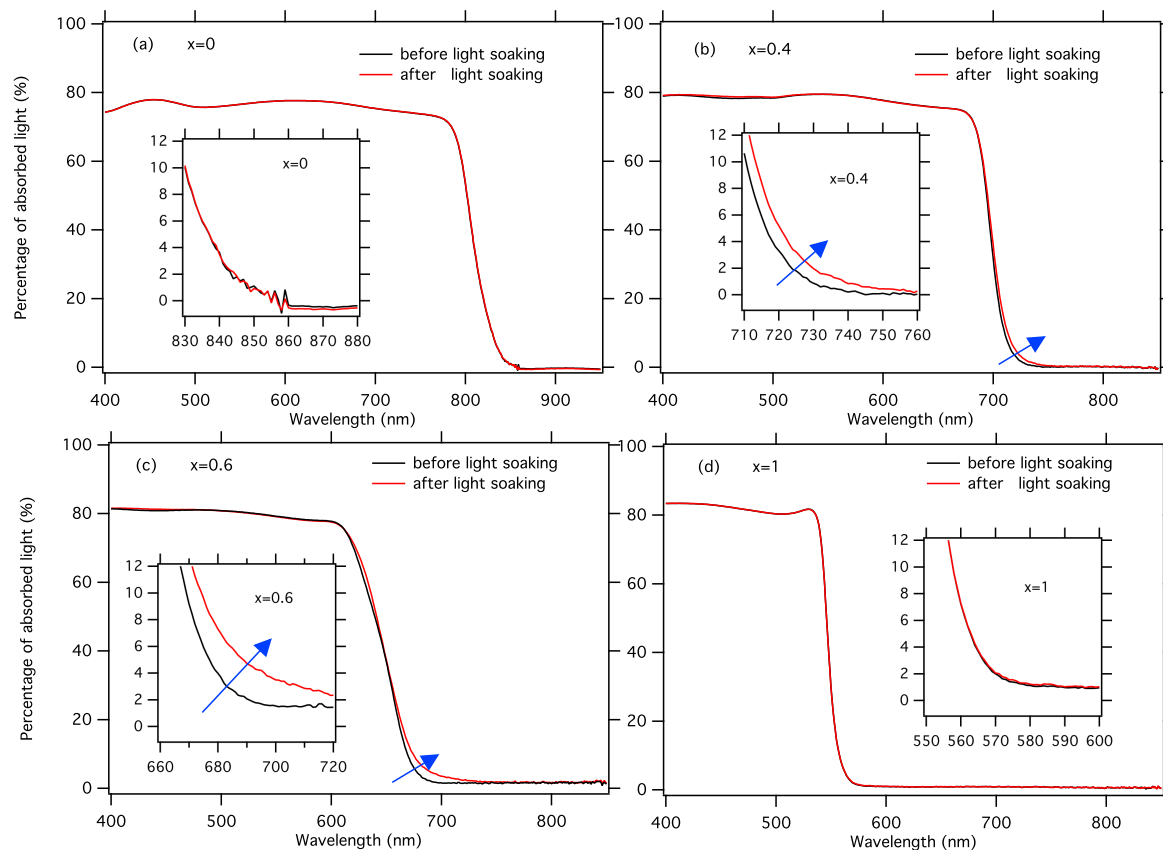
perovskites in line with previous observations.[29]

Figure 1. Absorptance spectra before and after light soaking in N_2 for

$(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ with x = 0, x = 0.4, x = 0.6, and x=1. The blue arrows indicate

the shift due to the LS. For comparison, the effect of LS on $MAPb(I_{0.6}Br_{0.4})_3$ is shown in

Figure S3b. The insets are magnifications to show the subtle shift due to the LS.

Figure 2 collects the corresponding PL spectra on 532 nm CW laser excitation for the

same set of MHPs. Figure 2b shows that the PL emission at 715 nm of

$(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})Pb(I_{0.6}Br_{0.4})_3$ gradually reduces and a second band appears at 760 nm on

LS. In Figure 2c similar gradual PL changes for x = 0.6 on LS are observed. Despite significant differences in the initial band-gaps of x = 0.4, 0.6 and 0.8 (Figure S4a) the PL emission wavelengths on LS are all close to that of x = 0.2 (Shown in Figure S4b), in agreement with previous studies on similar mixed MHPs. [16,17,30–33] Note, that this second PL emission wavelength is still ~50 nm blue shifted with respect to that of $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbI_3$ excluding the formation of bromide free regions (see Figure 2a). Interestingly, the total PL intensity of both PL bands remains within a factor two constant for x = 0.4 and x = 0.6, which is in large contrast with MHPs light soaked under humid conditions. [25,34] The observed PL changes are different to those of single cation MHPs like $MAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ and $FAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$. In $MAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$, with x = 0.4 or x = 0.6, a short illumination period leads to a clear PL shift in combination with formation of a shorter-wavelength peak, [7] which are attributed to I-rich and Br-enriched domains, respectively as reported previously.[18,33] In order to find out if our observed changes in MCMHP are driven by the presence of a mixture of iodide and bromide, we measured the PL of $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbI_3$ and $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbBr_3$ on LS, as shown in Figures 2a and 2d. The decrease in PL intensity is comparable to that observed in single cation MHPs.[35] However, since the maximum PL intensity for these mono cation MHPs remains at the same wavelength, we conclude that the structural reorganization is propelled by the halide mixture. However, from the profound changes between single cation and multi cation perovskite on LS, we conclude that the multi-cation system slows down the phase segregation tremendously in line with previous observations. [35]
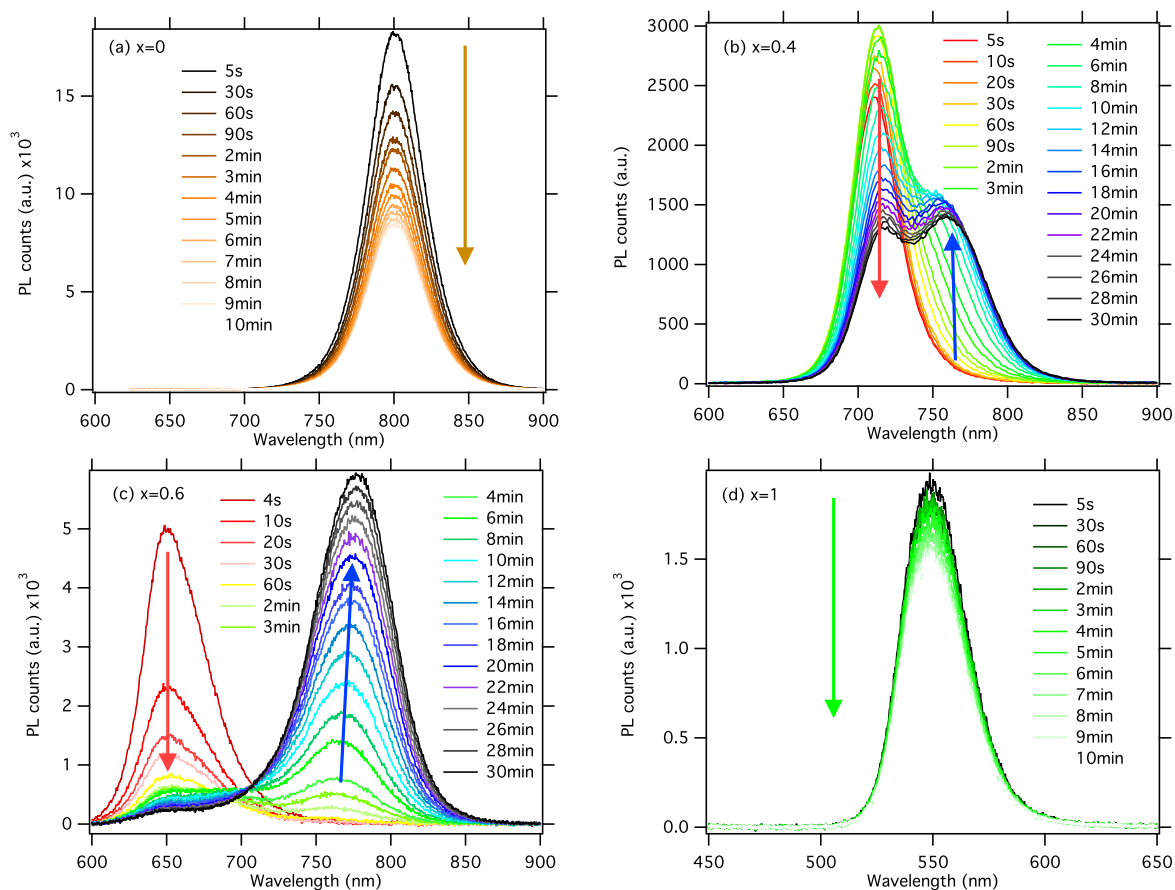
Figure 2. PL spectra of $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ with x =0, 0.4, 0.6 and 1 in time on light soaking in N_2 (532 nm laser, ~60 mW/cm^2)

To find out whether the bulk crystalline structure is affected by LS, we performed XRD measurements before and after LS of the x = 0.4 sample, shown in Figure S2. There are no shifts or additional peaks visible in the XRD pattern on LS confirming that the bulk crystalline structure is not affected and that the size and/or proportion of the iodide enriched domains are far lower and not detectable in these experiments in comparison to the bulk. The amount of PbI$_2$ is not affected by the LS, as evidenced in Figure S2. The change in XRD patterns reported for single cation mixed halide perovskites supports the idea that the MCMHPs are relatively more stable against LS. [33,36]

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To study the effect of LS on the charge carrier dynamics in $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ with $0 \leq x \leq 1$, we carried out TRMC measurements and recorded traces before and after the LS treatment, as shown in **Figure 3**. For comparison TRMC traces for a single cation perovskite i.e. $MAPb(I_{0.6}Br_{0.4})_3$ are also included. TRMC results for $x = 0.2$ and $x = 0.8$ are provided in Figure S5. The transients show a rapid rise due to formation of excess charge carriers by the laser pulse, while the decay of the signal represents how mobile carriers get immobilized or undergo recombination. The excitation densities range from 10^{14} to 10^{16} cm^{-3}, calculated from the laser intensity, the sample thickness and the fraction of absorbed light at the excitation wavelength. To facilitate comparison of traces acquired using different intensities, the photoconductance signals are normalized to the number of absorbed photons. First important observation is that on LS the charge carrier lifetimes become shorter for in particular the samples with $0.4 \leq x \leq 0.6$. For the latter samples and to a lesser extend $x = 0.2$ and $x = 0.8$ the TRMC tails exhibit the same slope independent of the laser intensity in this log lin representation. This feature is not observed for MHPs with only a single halide, *i.e.* $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbI_3$ and $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.16}Cs_{0.05})PbBr_3$ (Figures 3b and e, left panels), and also for MHPs with only a single cation, $MAPb(I_{0.6}Br_{0.4})_3$ (Figure 3a, left panel). This implies that the occurrence of these TRMC tails is somehow linked to the presence of both mixed cations and mixed halides. Interestingly, this behavior is absent after 30 minutes of LS as clearly visible in the right panels of Figure 3. Much longer LS treatments (17 hours) show essentially the same effect, as shown in Figure S6. The samples show almost complete recovery after storage in the glovebox in the dark for over a week, especially regarding the tails, as shown in Figure S7.

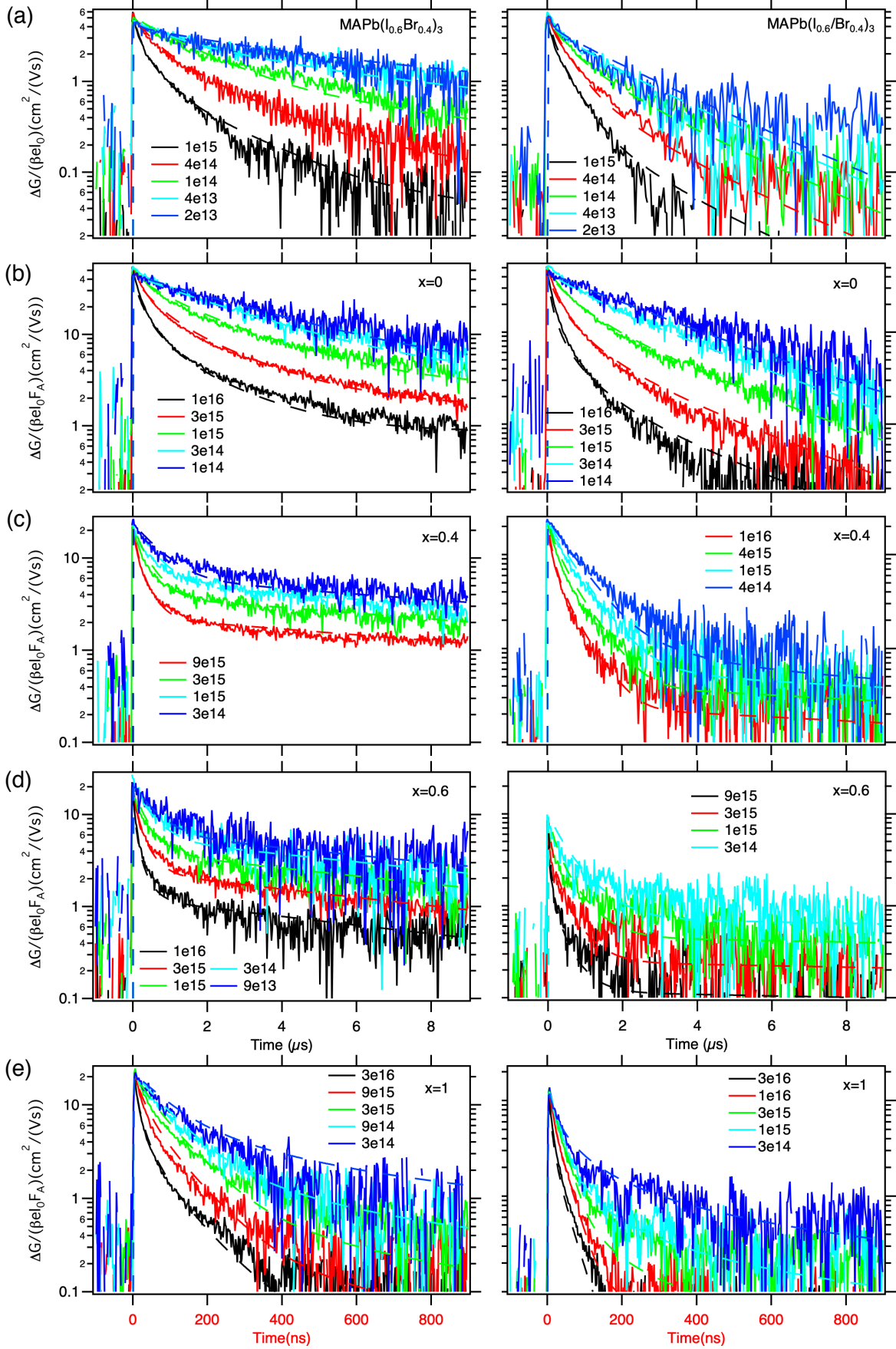Before Light Soaking

After Light Soaking

Figure 3. TRMC traces of MAPb(I$_{0.6}$Br$_{0.4}$)$_3$, (a) and (FA$_{0.79}$MA$_{0.15}$Cs$_{0.06}$)Pb(I$_{1-x}$Br$_x$)$_3$ for (b) x = 0, (c) x = 0.4 and (d) x = 0.6 and (e) x=1, respectively before (left panels) and after (right) light soaking. The analogues x=0.2 and x=0.8 are shown for comparison in Figure S5. Solid lines are the experimental traces and dashed lines are the results of the fits. Note that Figure (e) has a different timescale of 1 µs. The samples were all excited by laser pulses at 500nm with excitation intensities leading to charge carrier densities ranging from 10^{14} to 10^{16} cm^{-3}, and specific densities are given in the annotations.

In order to extract kinetic parameters from the TRMC results we apply a kinetic model recently reported by Hutter et al.[26] which successfully described the formation and decay of the light induced charge carriers in MAPbI$_3$ and other MHPs.[37–41] In that model two decay pathways for charge-carriers were included: band-to-band recombination, with rate constant k_2 and trap mediated recombination. However, that model was not capable to describe the kinetics of the pristine MHMCPs adequately, implying that at least one additional or different decay pathway is required. Previously, a similar transient behavior was observed for charge carriers in FAPbI$_3$ at low temperatures.[42] Moreover, Azulay and coworkers recently evoked the presence of shallow states to explain their scanning tunneling results.[28] Therefore, we included in our kinetic model an additional pathway, in which mobile charges are temporarily immobilized with a first order rate constant k_s, and thermally released with k_r as is depicted in **Figure 4**a. Note that, immobilized carriers[36] do not contribute to the conductance during the period they reside in these states. This additional pathway could be substantiated by shallow defect states but also by e.g. low crystalline domains in which carriers have a reduced mobility. The corresponding set of differential equations and a more complete description of our fitting procedure are provided in the supporting information (Equations S1-4). The

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occupancy of these shallow states is expected to be heavily temperature dependent. The lower

the temperature the more charges will reside in these shallow states preventing them from

recombining, which would translate into longer charge carrier lifetimes. Note that with

TRMC we probe both electrons and holes, weighed with their respective mobility. We

measured x = 0.4 at different temperatures as shown in **Figure 4**b, showing a gradually

smaller slope of the tails with lower temperatures. This is in line with the idea that with lower

temperatures one of the carriers remains trapped for longer and longer periods and with that

recombination to the ground state is reduced.

(a)

(b)
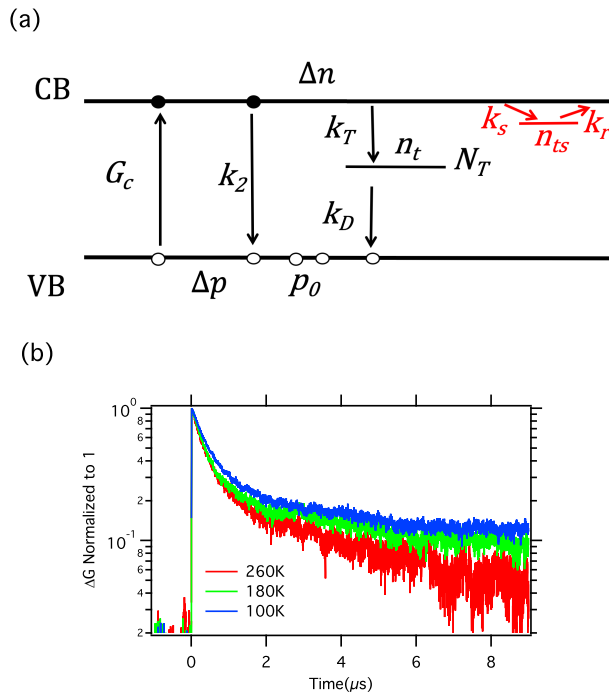
Figure 4. (a) The kinetic model describing the charge carrier dynamics in MHPs with

following decay pathways: band-to-band recombination with rate k_2; Deep trap assisted

recombination with trapping rate k_T and depopulation rate k_D; Immobilization in shallow

states with trapping rate k_s and thermal release rate k_r. (b) Temperature dependent TRMC

traces of sample x = 0.4 recorded at an excitation density of $5.4 \times 10^{14} cm^{-3}$.

We applied the modified model to fit all the TRMC traces and results are added to Figure 3 and Figure S5, showing excellent agreement between model and data (see also Figure S8 for different representations). The extracted kinetic parameters are listed in Table S1, and are also presented in **Figure 5** and S9. Figure 5a shows the sum of mobilities, which reduces gradually from around 66 cm^2/Vs for x = 0 to 33 cm^2/Vs for x = 1. This reduction on increasing Br content in $(FA_{0.79}MA_{0.15}Cs_{0.06})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ is in line with that reported for $(FA_{0.83}Cs_{0.17})Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$.[24,43] From Figure 5b, one can see that before LS, the band-to-band recombination rate, k_2, increases gradually with Br content, which is similar to that reported for $FAPb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ measurements.[15] On LS, k_2 remains approximately the same for x ≤ 0.4, while k_2 increases for 0.6 ≤ x ≤ 1. Figure 5c shows a gradual increase in trapping and release rates by shallow states with higher Br content. Most importantly, on LS both these rates decrease substantially which implies that both carriers remain now in the valence and conduction band and can recombine. The overall effect is that the charge carrier lifetimes reduce especially for higher intensities in combination with the disappearance of the parallel tails. Important to note here is that the gradual change of the dynamic parameters with x cannot be explained by the morphology of the MCMHP layers since the grain sizes are rather similar as is clear from the SEM images shown in Figure S1.
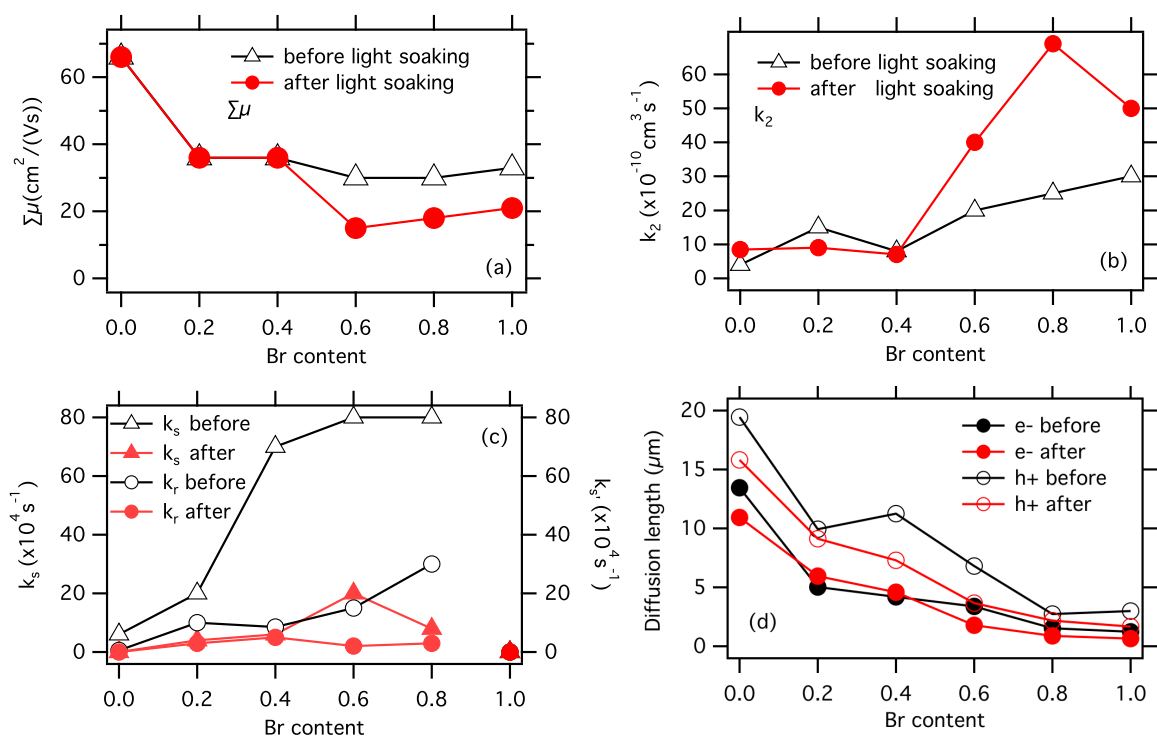
Figure 5. (a) The sum of charge carrier mobilities, $\sum \mu$ before (black hollow triangles) and after (red solid circles) light soaking versus Br fraction; (b) Band-to-band recombination rate, k_2; (c) Trapping and escaping rates, k_s and k_r of the shallow states; (d) Diffusion lengths of electrons and holes calculated from the lifetimes on excitation at 3×10^{14} cm^{-3} derived from Figure S10.

To picture the effect of the LS on the electronic properties of the MCMHPs, we calculated the charge carrier diffusion lengths before and after LS as shown in Figure 5d. We note here that we assume the material is unintentionally p-doped, however the opposite case is also possible.[44] These diffusion lengths are calculated on basis of the charge carrier mobilities given in Table S1 via the Einstein–Smoluchowski relation and the lifetimes derived from the rate constants as shown in Figure S10 using a laser intensity leading to an initial excitation

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density of 3×10^{14} cm^{-3}. In particular for (FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I$_{1-x}$Br$_x$)$_3$, with x = 0.4 there is an imbalance between the diffusion of electrons and holes since one of the carriers is temporarily immobilized. It can be expected that in solar cells this imbalance gives rise to additional space charge fields blocking efficient collection, and in LEDs this imbalance would be detrimental to the charge injection. On LS the shallow states vanish and the decay of electrons and holes becomes almost identical (See Figure S10), and hence the imbalance in diffusion lengths is largely diminished. However, apart from this halide redistribution in a complete cell also ion migration might occur on LS affecting the internal electric field in the device and with that its performance.[45]

To understand the origin of the shallow sub-bandgap states and the effect of the LS on the charge dynamics, we first consider the facts that those states require the presence of both mixed cations and mixed halides. We speculate that a non-uniform distribution of cations and halides leads to intermixed shallow states, in line with previous claims.[28] Consequently, a varying energy landscape is created with shallow levels close to the band edge. Correa-Baena et al. demonstrated recently that both cations and halides are not homogenously spread over MCMHP films.[46] Furthermore, Rehman et al. reported that FAPb(I$_{1-x}$Br$_x$)$_3$ with x between 0.3 to 0.5 is amorphous in nature and mobilities in those materials are lower than 2 cm^{2}V^{-1}s^{-1}. Temporal localization of excess charge carriers in such intermixed shallow states is fully consistent with the kinetic model shown in Figure 4a, by realizing that the long-lived TRMC signals originate from the mobile counter charges.

As has been argued previously by Hoke *et al.* LS leads to reorganization of the halides resulting in local higher concentrations of iodide atoms.[18] As suggested by Knight *et al.* [34]and Belisle *et al.* [36] the mechanism of this reorganization process is mediated by the localization of positive charges. Randomly moving iodide atoms cluster near the positive charges

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providing a thermodynamic driving force to form iodide rich domains. However, we conclude

that for our $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ films this occurs at the intermixed shallow states. As a

result, we suggest that the shallow states of intermixed halides convert into distinct iodide

rich, low band-gap domains as is evident from our TRMC and optical data. Hence this process

is different than that for the single cation mixed halide perovskites: although the formation of

iodide domains is accelerated by defects, these are appearing preferentially at the illuminated

site.[16,17] The conversion process induced by LS has different effects on the optoelectronic

properties depending on x: While for $0.2 \leq x \leq 0.4$ found μ and k_2 values remain constant,

for $0.6 \leq x \leq 0.8$ LS leads to a decrease of μ and increasing k_2 values. To explain these

observations, we note that these fitting parameters are the results of treating the materials as

homogenous media. This results in effective values for μ and k_2. However, the low band-gap,

iodide rich domains have a substantial energetic offset with respect to the bulk: close to 0.3

eV for x = 0.6 as deduced from the PL data. Hence on optical excitation of layers with $0.6 \leq$

$x \leq 0.8$ the segregated domains may mediate fast, higher order charge carrier decay as

excitations transfer to the lower gap iodide rich domains. Finally on prolonged storage in the

dark, the MCMHPs regain their original thermodynamically most favorable structure

probably due to entropic reasons.[47] Thus the shallow states corresponding to intermixed

halides are reformed, suggesting that no motion of the cations is involved in the LS process.

In this work, we studied how the dynamics of charge-carriers change on light soaking

in various $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ films by PL, optical absorption, XRD and TRMC. Firstly,

in such mixed cation and mixed halide perovskites, decay pathways of photo-excited charge-

carriers not only include recombination via band-to-band and deep traps but also

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immobilizing in, and thermally escaping from shallow states independent of x. We speculate that a non-uniform distribution of cations and halides in the $(FA,MA,Cs)Pb(I_{1-x}Br_x)_3$ films could lead to these intermixed shallow states. The shallow states cause imbalanced electron and hole diffusion lengths. Secondly by light soaking, these states convert into distinct iodide rich, low band-gap domains. For LS samples with $0.2 \leq x \leq 0.4$ the shallow states are virtually absent, while the bulk properties including the mobility and band-to-band recombination remain the same. Only for samples with $0.6 \leq x \leq 0.8$ these low band-gap domains lead to enhanced higher order recombination, which will negatively affect the PV performance. Finally, we suggest that by optimizing the constituent ratios, is possible to further improve the mixed perovskite solar cells by making the MCMHP film free of shallow states, which induce the halide segregation.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information. Additional optical and TRMC measurements. XRD patterns. Absolute values of the dynamic rates.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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