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Ultrafast X-Ray Scattering Offers a Structural View of Excited State Charge Transfer

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Author Contributions: PMW, AK, and MPM directed the project. ML and SB performed x-ray alignment and data collection. SC, JSR, and MPM performed laser alignment. JEK provided software support during the experiment. WD and YC performed record keeping during the experiment. HY, XX, JMR, BS performed analysis on the experimental data. HY and AMC performed ab-initio calculations and scattering pattern simulations. HY, XX, JMR, BS, AMC, NZ, DB, WD, NG, YC, AK and PMW interpreted the results. HY, AK and PMW wrote the manuscript, in consultation with all other authors.

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Keywords: ultrafast dynamics, femtosecond X-ray scattering, charge transfer, excited state

1 **Abstract:** Intramolecular charge transfer and the associated changes in molecular structure in
2 N,N'-dimethylpiperazine (DMP) are tracked using femtosecond gas-phase X-ray scattering. The
3 molecules are optically excited to the 3p state at 200 nm. Following rapid relaxation to the 3s state,
4 distinct charge-localized and charge-delocalized species related by charge transfer are observed.
5 The experiment determines the molecular structure of the two species, with the redistribution of
6 electron density accounted for by a scattering correction factor. The initially dominant charge-
7 localized state has a weakened carbon-carbon bond and re-orientates one methyl group compared to
8 the ground state. Subsequent charge transfer to the charge-delocalized state elongates the carbon-
9 carbon bond further, creating an extended 1.634 Å bond, and re-orientates also the second methyl
10 group. At the same time, the bond lengths between the nitrogen and the ring-carbon atoms contract
11 from an average of 1.505 Å to 1.465 Å. The experiment determines the overall charge transfer
12 time constant for approaching the equilibrium between charge-localized and charge-delocalized
13 species to 3.0 ps.

14
15 **Significance Statement:** Charge transfer plays a fundamental role in many areas of chemistry,
16 physics, biology and materials science. The spatial redistribution of electrons is typically
17 associated with changes in the molecular geometry. A comprehensive understanding of this
18 process requires atomic spatial resolution and femtosecond temporal resolution. Here, we exploit
19 an X-ray Free-Electron Laser to determine the excited state structures during charge transfer with
20 sub-Ångström resolution. Important behaviors such as bond elongations and contractions, and re-
21 orientations of functional groups during the charge transfer are discovered, demonstrating the
22 substantial information on excited state molecular structures that becomes accessible through
23 ultrafast x-ray scattering measurements.

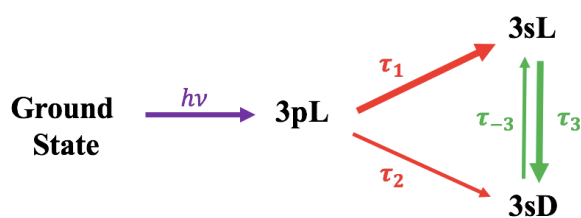
1 Introduction

2 Understanding the dynamic process of photoinduced charge transfer is expected to lead to many
3 practical applications, including efficient photovoltaic systems, the development of photocatalysts,
4 and better materials for energy storage^{1,2,3}. Charge transfer redistributes the electrons in a molecule
5 and is typically associated with changes in the molecular geometry². On the fastest time scale,
6 electrons move so rapidly that the nuclei appear frozen, a phenomenon known as charge
7 migration^{4,5,6,7,8,9,10}. When time scales approach the typical vibrational motions of molecules, *i.e.*
8 tens of femtoseconds (10^{-14} s), the nuclei can adjust their positions, often resulting in localization
9 of electronic charge and permanent changes in molecular geometry¹¹. While exhibiting a rich
10 phenomenology on different time scales, it is evident that electron charge transfer and nuclear
11 dynamics are intrinsically coupled^{12,13,14,15,16,17}. An accurate determination of the changes in
12 molecular structure during charge transfer is therefore of great interest from both applied and
13 fundamental perspectives.

14
15 New scientific technologies, in particular X-ray Free Electron Lasers (XFEL)^{18,19} and MeV
16 ultrafast electron diffraction²⁰, have made it possible to study structural dynamics in the ultrafast
17 regime. Recent femtosecond gas-phase scattering experiments have successfully tracked structural
18 changes during chemical reactions^{21,22,23,24,25,26} and probed specific signatures of excited electronic
19 states^{27,28}. Given the emerging ability of ultrafast gas-phase scattering to record both nuclear and
20 electronic structure^{25,27,28}, we use time-resolved gas-phase X-ray scattering to study the
21 photoinduced intramolecular charge transfer in an organic molecule, N,N'-dimethylpiperazine
22 (DMP, $C_6H_{14}N_2$), shown in Fig. 1. In its ground electronic state, DMP has C_{2h} symmetry with two
23 equivalent ionization centers, one on each nitrogen atom. Valence ionization, or in the present case

1 excitation to an electronic Rydberg state²⁹, opens for charge transfer between the two nitrogen
2 atoms, making DMP a prototype for exploring electron lone pair interactions and charge
3 transfer^{30,31,32}.

4
5 Previously, energy relaxation pathways and charge transfer in electronically excited DMP was
6 explored using Rydberg fingerprint spectroscopy³³, a form of photoelectron spectroscopy. As
7 depicted in Scheme 1, the investigations by Deb *et al.* found that optical excitation at 207 nm
8 prepares the molecule in a 3p Rydberg state, creating a state with a localized charge in the
9 molecular core (3pL). Internal conversion to 3s then leads to charge-localized (3sL) and charge-
10 delocalized (3sD) conformers with 230 fs and 480 fs time constants, respectively. The charge
11 transfer process manifests as the molecules explore the 3s potential energy surface. An equilibrium
12 between 3sL and 3sD structures is eventually established with an overall time constant of 2.65 ps,
13 with the forward and backward first-order kinetic time constants for the transformation 3.4 ps and
14 12.0 ps, respectively³³.

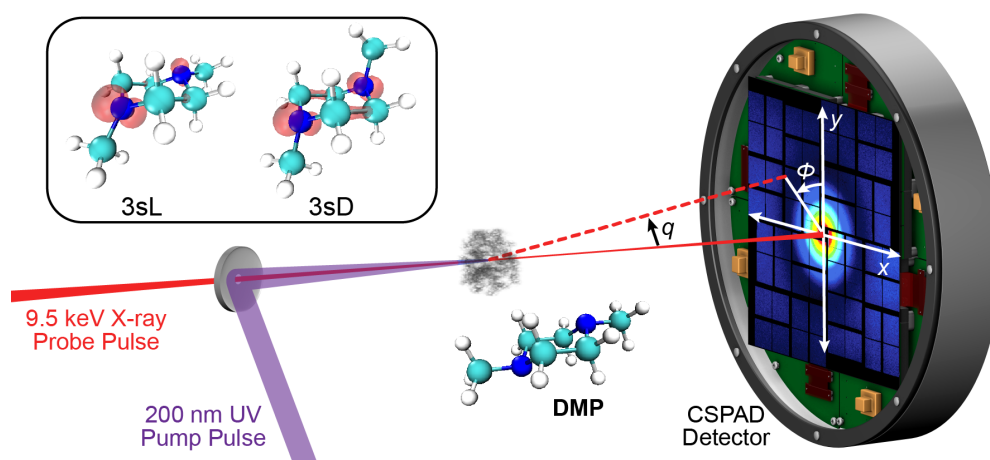


16 **Scheme 1.** Reaction pathway for Rydberg-excited DMP as determined previously³³.

17
18 An limitation in the prior spectroscopic work is that the photoelectron peaks are assigned by
19 comparing measured binding energies to computational results and that the molecular structures
20 that underlie the calculations cannot not be independently determined in the experiments. This is
21 compounded by the fact that theoretical calculation of charge localized and charge delocalized

1 excited states is challenging. Widely used computational methods sometimes give unsatisfactory
2 results³⁴, and even results from high-level computations can be controversial^{35,36,37}. This has led
3 to interesting discussions on whether a stable charge-localized structure exists in the DMP cation
4 at all, and the feasibility of different exchange functionals within density functional theory to study
5 the charge-localization in DMP molecules³⁴. Considering the general experimental and theoretical
6 interest in this system, direct structural measurements would be invaluable. The current study uses
7 ultrafast time-resolved X-ray scattering to observe the structural relaxation dynamics in DMP. This
8 provides a wealth of information, making it possible to test key assumptions of the photoelectron
9 study. Most importantly, we determine the molecular structures of the charge localized and
10 delocalized excited states.

11



12

13 **Figure 1.** A schematic illustration of the experimental setup. The ground-state molecules (DMP)
14 were excited by 200 nm UV pump pulses and the transient structures were probed by 9.5 keV X-
15 ray pulses at variable time delays. The scattering signals were recorded on a CSPAD detector. The
16 inset shows the calculated spin density, which gives the difference in density of electrons with
17 spin-up and spin-down, of the charge-localized DMP (3sL) and charge-delocalized DMP (3sD) in
18 the 3s Rydberg states at isovalues of 0.1 electron/Å⁻³.

1

2 **Results**

3 The time-resolved X-ray scattering experiment is illustrated in Fig. 1. A 200 nm optical pump laser
 4 excites room temperature, gaseous DMP to the transient excited states. X-rays with 9.5 keV mean
 5 energy are generated at the Linac Coherent Light Source (LCLS) and scatter from the optically
 6 excited molecules. The optical laser and the X-rays propagate collinearly, with their linear
 7 polarizations perpendicular to each other. Single-shot scattering patterns are detected on a 2.3-
 8 megapixel Cornell-SLAC pixel array detector (CSPAD)³⁸ and binned according to the delay time
 9 between the pump laser and X-ray probe pulses. The time-dependent signals are expressed as
 10 percent differences^{39,21},

$$11 \quad \% \Delta I(q, \phi, t) = 100 \frac{I_{\text{on}}(q, \phi, t) - I_{\text{off}}(q, \phi)}{I_{\text{off}}(q, \phi)}, \quad (1)$$

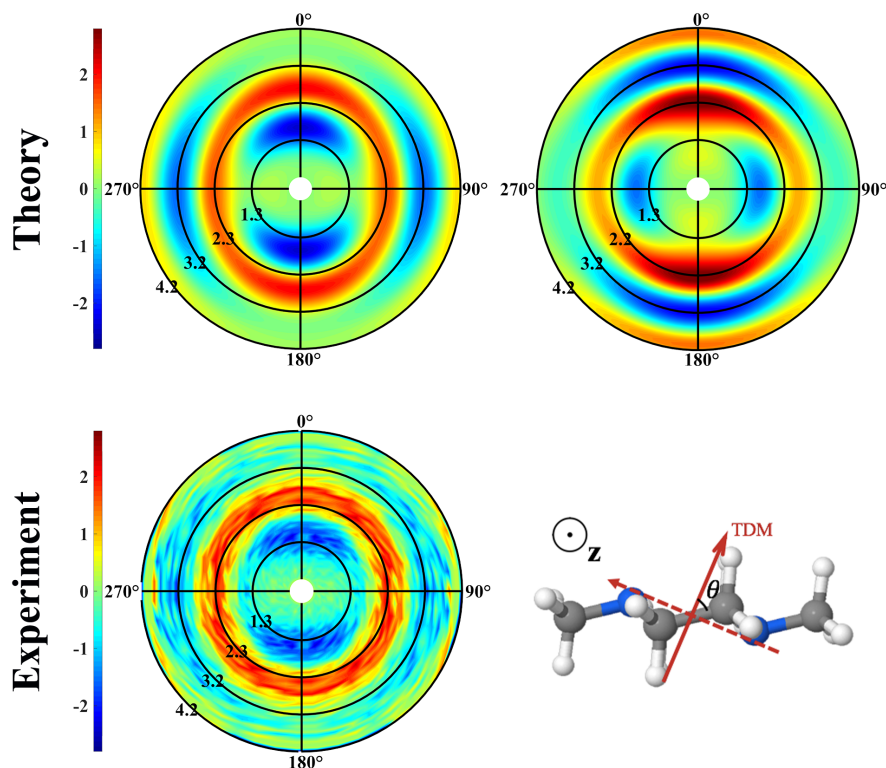
12 where ϕ is the azimuthal angle on the detector, q the magnitude of the momentum transfer vector,
 13 $I_{\text{on}}(q, \phi, t)$ the optical pump laser-on signal at delay time t , and $I_{\text{off}}(q, \phi)$ the laser-off reference
 14 signal. By using percent difference signals, poorly defined experimental parameters, *e.g.* pixel
 15 noise, background signals and gas pressure fluctuations, largely cancel out. The percent difference
 16 signal depends on the fraction of molecules that are optically excited, a scalar quantity that is
 17 determined during the experimental analysis. During the experiment, we keep the optical
 18 excitation laser intensity low to minimize multi-photon processes^{40,41,42}.

19

20 The first stage in the analysis is to decompose the two-dimensional, percent difference pump-probe
 21 scattering images into isotropic and anisotropic components using⁴³,

$$22 \quad \Delta I(\phi, q, t) = \frac{1}{2} \left(3 \left(\cos(\phi) \sqrt{1 - \left(\frac{\lambda q}{4\pi} \right)^2} \right)^2 - 1 \right) \Delta I_{\text{aniso}}(q, t) + \Delta I_{\text{iso}}(q, t), \quad (2)$$

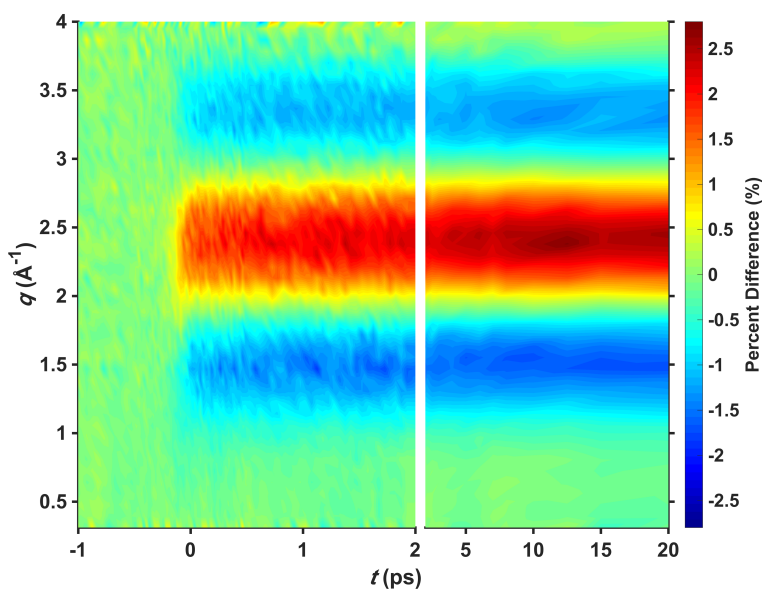
1 where ϕ is the azimuthal angle on the detector and q the magnitude of the momentum transfer
 2 vector, as before, and λ is the X-ray wavelength. The isotropic rotationally averaged percent
 3 difference signal $\Delta I_{\text{iso}}(q, t)$ contains all the intrinsic information in the molecular frame, while
 4 additional information about the transition dipole moment and the rotational alignment of the
 5 molecule in the laboratory frame are given by the anisotropic component⁴³, $\Delta I_{\text{aniso}}(q, t)$.



6
 7 **Figure 2.** The anisotropic pump-probe scattering patterns. Top: Computed patterns for transition
 8 dipole moments (TDM) parallel (top left, direction of red solid line) and perpendicular (top right,
 9 direction of red dashed line) to the optimal TDM direction in the σ_h plane. Bottom left:
 10 Experimental pattern at 10 fs. Bottom right: Direction of TDM illustrated in the mirror plane, with
 11 the z-axis aligned with the C_2 symmetry axis of the ground state DMP molecule.

12

1 We use the anisotropic signal to determine the orientation of the transition dipole moment (TDM)
2 of the initially excited 3p state in the molecular frame⁴³. The optical pump laser preferentially
3 excites molecules with the TDM oriented parallel to the linear polarization of the optical pump
4 pulse in the laboratory frame, giving rise to a marked anisotropy in the experimental percent
5 difference scattering image recorded at 10 fs delay time shown in Fig. 2. Comparison of theoretical
6 and experimental patterns shows that the TDM vector cannot be aligned with the C_2 symmetry
7 axis (the z axis shown in Fig. 2) of the molecule, as this would yield scattering images with the
8 opposite orientation. This is consistent with the general fact that the TDM cannot be perpendicular
9 to a mirror plane. To experimentally determine the orientation of the TDM, theoretical scattering
10 images are calculated for TDM directions from 0 to 180 degrees in the σ_h symmetry molecular
11 plane and compared to the experimentally observed pattern. The best-fit theoretical pattern is
12 shown in Fig. 2 top left and is found to have a TDM direction with an angle θ of $53^\circ \pm 3^\circ$ to the
13 direction of central C-C bond (the direction of red solid arrow in Fig. 2). For contrast, the
14 theoretical scattering pattern corresponding to a TDM orientation perpendicular to the optimal
15 TDM direction is also included in Fig.2 (top right, with the direction indicated a red dashed arrow).
16



1
 2 **Figure 3.** The isotropic component, $\Delta I_{\text{iso}}(q, t)$ (see Eq. 2), of the experimental percent difference
 3 scattering signal as a function of delay time t (ps) and the magnitude of the momentum transfer
 4 vector q (\AA^{-1}), with the value of the percent difference indicated by the color bar. Note the change
 5 of scale in the time axis at 2 ps.

6
 7 We now focus the analysis on the time-dependent isotropic percent difference signal, shown in
 8 Fig. 3, to unveil the kinetics and structural dynamics of DMP following laser excitation. We adopt
 9 the same overall reaction scheme to model the kinetics as the previous photoelectron study³³ shown
 10 in Scheme 1, which leads to charge-localized (3sL) and charge-delocalized (3sD) conformers,
 11 although our analysis makes no assumption regarding the nature of these conformers. An
 12 equilibrium is attained from the combination of forward (τ_3) and backward (τ_{-3}) reactions. Fitting
 13 the time dependence of the experimental data with this reaction model, taking the scattering signals
 14 of the individual conformers as adjustable parameters, results in an excellent fit as shown in Fig.
 15 4 and Supplementary Figure 2. The fit equation is⁴⁴,

1
$$\Delta I_{iso}(q, t) = \gamma \left(\sum_{\alpha} S_{\alpha}(q) F_{\alpha}(t) \right) * g(t), \quad (3)$$

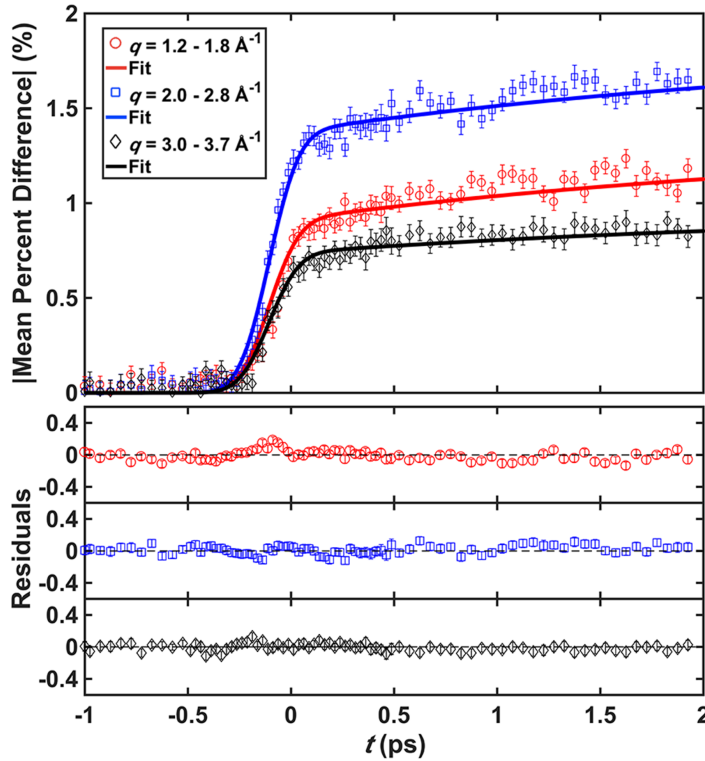
2 where $S_{\alpha}(q)$ is the fitted isotropic scattering pattern of transient structure α , while $F_{\alpha}(t)$ is the
3 corresponding time-dependent population as determined by the kinetic scheme. The scalar γ
4 represents the excitation probability and $g(t)$ is a Gaussian function that characterizes the
5 instrument response. The kinetic parameters extracted from this fit, shown in Table 1, are in
6 reasonable agreement with the spectroscopic values obtained in the previous study, even though
7 the excitation wavelengths are slightly different (200 nm in the current and 207 nm in the previous
8 study). The differences in the kinetic parameters are mostly within the respective error bars in both
9 experiments, with other small discrepancies possibly arising from the difference in excitation
10 wavelengths. The x-ray scattering results indicate a charge transfer process with a time constant
11 of 3.6 ps for charge delocalization, and a time constant of 19.0 ps for charge relocalization, making
12 for an overall approach of the equilibrium with a $\left(\frac{1}{\tau_3} + \frac{1}{\tau_{-3}} \right)^{-1} = 3.0$ ps time constant. This is in
13 excellent agreement with the previously determined 2.65 ps time constant from photoelectron
14 spectra by Deb *et al.*³³ (see Supplementary Note 1 for details of the kinetic fits). **One should note**
15 **that Table 1 designates the forward reaction as the charge delocalization process and the backward**
16 **reaction as the charge relocalization. A further evaluation of this assignment is discussed later in**
17 **this article.**

18
19
20

1 Table 1. Time constants with 1σ uncertainties according to Scheme 1 obtained in a global fit of all
 2 time-dependent X-ray scattering data and the comparable values from previous photoelectron
 3 spectra.

	X-Ray Scattering (this work)	Spectroscopic Results ³³
τ_1 (fs)	80 ± 40	230 ± 30
τ_2 (fs)	630 ± 190	480 ± 70
τ_3 (ps)	3.6 ± 0.3	3.4 ± 0.1
τ_{-3} (ps)	19.0 ± 2.7	12.0 ± 0.8

4

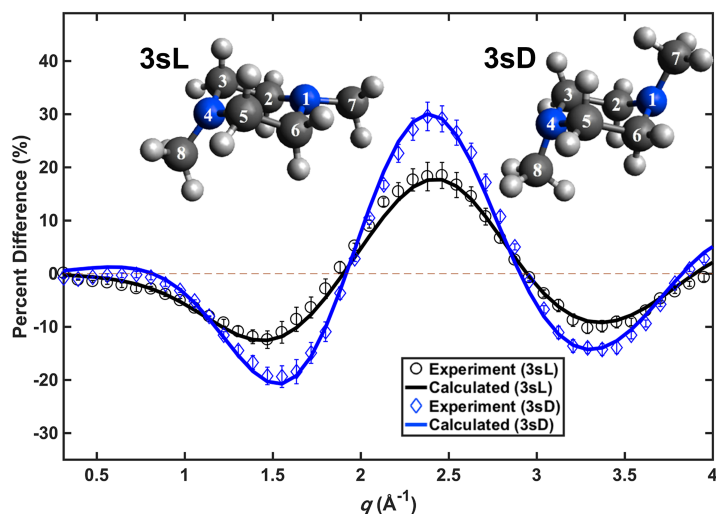


5

6 **Figure 4.** Absolute values of the percent difference isotropic scattering signals $\Delta I_{\text{iso}}(q, t)$
 7 averaged over three different q ranges. Shown are the experimental data with 1σ error bars (red
 8 circles, blue squares and black diamonds) and the kinetic fits (solid lines). The lower panel shows
 9 the residuals, *i.e.* the difference between the experimental values and the fit.

10

1 The kinetic fits described above yield the q -dependent scattering signals of the two individual
2 reaction products. These are shown in Fig. 5. The difference patterns correspond to the difference
3 between the ground state and the excited state transient species (see Eqs. (4-5) in *Methods*). Since
4 the ground state structure is well known, the percent difference patterns reflect the deviation of the
5 excited state molecular structures from the ground state. Each of the species in Scheme 1 differs
6 from the ground state molecule in their molecular geometry and in their electron density
7 distribution, and the differences lead to changes in the scattering corresponding to the net change
8 in electron density. The changes in molecular geometry often dominate the percent difference
9 scattering signal, but accounting for the redistribution of the electron density due to specific
10 electronic states is important for the retrieval of correct molecular structures.^{25,27}



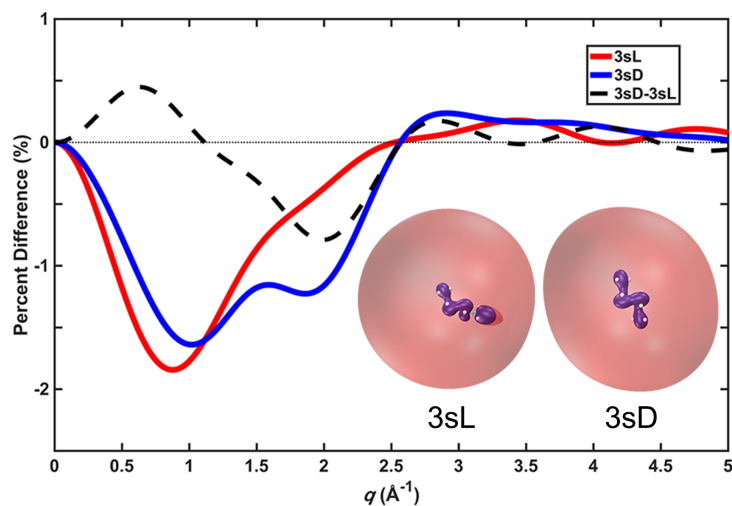
11
12 **Figure 5.** Experimental and calculated percent difference isotropic scattering patterns and
13 molecular structures of DMP in the charge-localized 3sL and the charge-delocalized 3sD
14 conformers. The experimental results (circles and diamonds) are extracted from the kinetics fit
15 with 3σ error bars and divided by the excitation fraction γ determined from the fit. Calculated
16 scattering patterns (solid lines) are for the experimentally determined optimal structural parameters
17 with electronic contributions included. Inset: representative geometries of 3sL and 3sD.

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A key assumption in the previous photoelectron studies³³ is the assignment of observed binding energy peaks to the localized and delocalized molecular forms. In order to test this assumption our analysis ignores, but only in the first step, the change in electron density distributions upon optical excitation. In this initial treatment the molecular scattering patterns are calculated using the independent atom model (IAM)⁴⁵. Two million structures are created from a Wigner distribution^{46,47} using calculated vibrational normal modes for the charge-localized and charge-delocalized molecules, respectively, (see Methods for details) and their IAM scattering patterns are compared to the experimentally determined patterns in Fig. 5. These structures sample a large conformational space that is confined to energetically allowed conformations that could potentially be accessed by the molecule in 3sL and 3sD states. By comparing each experimentally derived pattern with IAM patterns computed from these sampled structures, the least squares fitting errors of all theoretical patterns from the pool were obtained for each of two experimental curves in Fig. 5. These errors are then plotted against each structural parameter such as the interatomic distances and the bond angles. In general, the least-squares error varies as a function of any given structural parameter in a normal-like distribution^{47,25}. The peak centers of these distributions were thus taken to represent the best-fitting structural parameters. This procedure works for any pool of structures that is sufficiently expansive and dense to contain structures in the vicinity of the correct structure⁴⁷, and the choice of the Wigner distribution is a matter of convenience.

The analysis reveals unambiguously that the photoelectron spectroscopy assignment is correct: the scattering pattern with the smaller modulation depth (black circles in Fig. 5) is associated with an asymmetric 3sL structure where one of the amine groups is nearly planar while the other remains

1 sp^3 hybridized; and the larger amplitude pattern (blue diamonds in Fig. 5) is from the symmetric
2 3sD structure where both amine groups are nearly planar (see full results in Supplementary Note
3 2). The pump-probe X-ray experiment is therefore able to determine the identity of the species in
4 Scheme 1 without reference to electronic structure calculations.



5
6 **Figure 6.** Calculated percent difference scattering patterns caused by electronic structure changes,
7 assuming 100% excitation. The 3sL (red solid line) and 3sD (blue solid line) curves are the
8 electronic contribution difference between the charge-localized structure in the 3s and electronic
9 ground states, and between the charge-delocalized structure in the 3s and electronic ground states,
10 respectively. The black dashed line shows the difference between the 3sD and 3sL curves. The
11 inset shows calculated 3sL and 3sD Rydberg orbitals, respectively, rendered at $0.0005 \text{ \AA}^{-3/2}$
12 isovalues.

13
14 Having confirmed the assignment of the scattering patterns in Fig. 5, we proceeded to further refine
15 the molecular structures. In this second step, we account for the change in electron density for the
16 charge-localized and -delocalized states as shown in Fig. 6 compared to the electronic ground state.
17 Since this effect is solely due to the electron density redistribution in the excited electronic state,

1 we refer to it as the electronic contribution (see Eq. 5 in Methods) to the overall percent difference
2 scattering pattern.²⁷ The calculations, which include elastic and inelastic scattering contributions,
3 are described in detail in the Method section. From Fig. 6 we notice that the electronic structure
4 changes contribute at most a -2% percent difference, which is dwarfed by the total change which
5 spans -20% to 30% for the delocalized 3sD signal shown in Fig. 5. Nevertheless, at $q \approx 1 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$,
6 where the electronic contributions are significant, they constitute almost a quarter of the overall -
7 a 8% difference. The electronic contributions therefore cannot be neglected. This is consistent with
8 the recent finding that in order to reproduce the structure of excited molecules correctly, the
9 changes in electron density must be accounted for when analyzing the X-ray scattering data^{27,25}.
10 As shown previously, the electronic contribution for excited states with Rydberg character depends
11 weakly on the molecular geometry and can be approximated by a constant correction term²⁵. In
12 the present case, we find that the electronic contributions for 3sL and 3sD are sufficiently different
13 that they must be included in the treatment explicitly. Inspecting the Rydberg orbitals of 3sL and
14 3sD in Fig. 6, we propose that the reason for this is that the positive charge in the core region
15 redistributes to both nitrogen atoms during charge delocalization, with an associated adjustment
16 of the Rydberg orbital. This is consistent with the calculated spin density as illustrated in Figure 1
17 insert. The charge is localized dominantly on the planar nitrogen in 3sL while equally distributed
18 in both two nitrogen atoms in 3sD. Furthermore, there is some net spin density in the molecular
19 core distributed thorough carbon-carbon bonds further indicating a delocalized character in 3sD.
20
21 Based on these considerations, we add the 3sL electronic correction to the localized geometry
22 structures in the structure pool and likewise the 3sD correction to the delocalized structures. Using
23 the IAM for the geometrical structure, we re-calculate corrected theoretical scattering patterns for

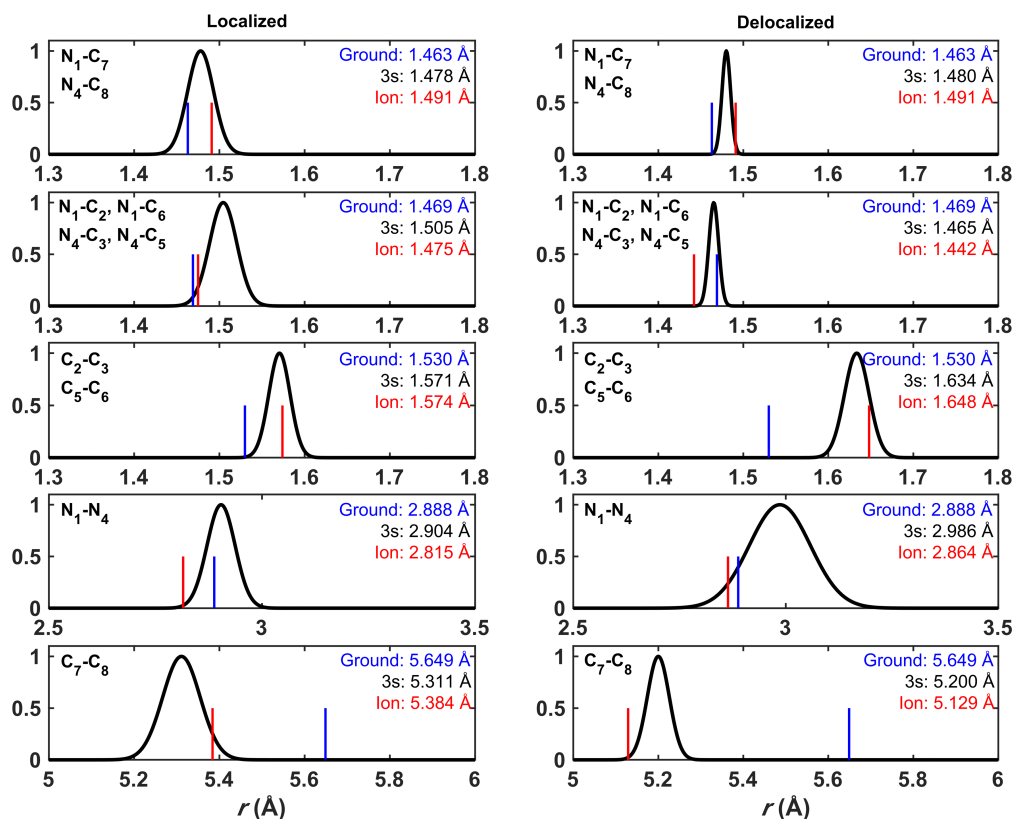
1 all 2 million structures contained in the pool. The structural analysis is then repeated with the
2 improved theoretical patterns, resulting in excellent agreement between the calculated scattering
3 patterns (black and blue solid lines in Fig. 5) and the experimental signals. The small discrepancy
4 for the charge-localized curves around 2.2 \AA^{-1} could originate from the broadening of the nuclear
5 distributions in the 3sL state reported by Deb *et al.*³³ This analysis yields the excitation fraction
6 with 1σ uncertainty according to Eq. (3) as $9.4 \pm 0.3 \%$. This is sufficiently low to suggest that
7 multiphoton excitation or ionization processes are not likely to adversely affect our results (see
8 Supplementary Note 1 for more discussion).

9
10 The analysis above yields precise excited state structures that are largely derived from
11 experimental observations. The structures can therefore serve as experimental benchmarks for
12 further excited state structure calculations. The structural parameters for all bond lengths and two
13 characteristic non-bonded interatomic distances in 3sL and 3sD are shown in Fig. 7. Representative
14 three-dimensional molecular renderings corresponding to these parameters, obtained as the best fit
15 to the 28 non-hydrogenic interatomic distances, are shown in Fig. 5 with the Cartesian coordinates
16 given in Supplementary Table 3.

17
18 To put the structural parameters of the Rydberg-excited molecules into context, Fig. 7 compares
19 them to optimized structures of the charge-localized cation and the charge-delocalized cation
20 calculated from high level complete active space self-consistent field theory (CASSCF) as reported
21 by Gałyńska *et al.*³⁷ Although the ion structures are not necessarily identical to the structures in
22 the 3s Rydberg state, they are likely rather similar^{34,25}. Indeed, Fig. 7 shows good agreement. Our
23 analysis for extracting the excited state structures does not intrinsically constrain the molecular

1 symmetry. Even so, atom-atom distances related by symmetry are found to be equal within the
 2 stated uncertainties, further supporting the validity of the experiment and the analysis method.

3
 4



5
 6 **Figure 7.** Experimental determined structural parameters for the Rydberg-excited charge-localized

7 (left column) and charge-delocalized (right column) species, compared to computed values for the

8 molecular ion and the molecular ground state. Black curve: Gaussian function $e^{-\frac{1}{2}\left(\frac{x-\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2}$ where μ
 9 is the experimentally determined interatomic distance in the 3s electronic state, averaged over

10 symmetry equivalent distances as listed in the left legend of each panel, and σ is the error as listed
 11 in Supplementary Table 1 (propagated when there are several symmetry-equivalent distances).

12 Red line: distances calculated at the DMRG-CASSCF(19,20)/aug-cc-pVDZ level of theory for the

1 ionic localized and ionic delocalized ground states³⁷. Blue line: Ground-state structure calculated
2 from CCSD/aug-cc-pVDZ reported by Cheng *et al.*³⁴. (Full interatomic distances and characteristic
3 angles are given in Supplementary Table 1).

4
5 Analyzing the changes in geometry and examining the results in Fig. 7, Supplementary Table 1
6 and the structures in Fig. 5, it is apparent that the most significant difference between the localized
7 and the delocalized excited state structures relates to the position of the methyl groups. In the
8 ground electronic state, the amine groups are sp^3 hybridized, but the excitation of an electron from
9 the lone pair orbital of the nitrogen atom to the diffuse Rydberg orbital changes it to favor sp^2
10 hybridization. Indeed, the N_1 atom with the localized charge assumes an angle of 165° (averaged
11 over two equivalent angles), whereas N_4 remains at 93° . This causes a shortened C_7-C_8 distance of
12 5.311 \AA compared to 5.649 \AA for ground-state structure. Once the charge delocalizes, the two
13 nitrogen atoms share one charge, causing them to assume equal angles of 89° (averaged over four
14 equivalent angles) and to shorten the C_7-C_8 distance to 5.200 \AA . The computational results for the
15 molecular ion are quite similar, even though the exact angles are slightly different. Since the N-C
16 bonds for the two nitrogen atoms in the localized structure are not equivalent their measurement
17 uncertainty is larger than in the delocalized structure (see first two rows of Fig. 7).

18
19 Both the experimental results for Rydberg excitation and the computational results for the ion
20 suggest that the central C-C bond weakens upon excitation. While the bond length is 1.530 \AA in
21 the ground electronic state, it stretches to 1.571 \AA in the charge-localized species (averaged over
22 two equivalent bonds). This is in almost perfect agreement with the ion calculation, which gives
23 1.574 \AA . The charge transfer to the delocalized state weakens this bond even further, to 1.634 \AA ,

1 a very long distance for a C-C bond. This leads to an elongation of the N₁-N₄ distance from 2.888
2 Å in the ground electronic state to 2.904 Å in charge-localized 3s state and a further elongation to
3 2.986 Å in the charge-delocalized 3s state as shown in Fig. 7. Conversely, the distances between
4 the nitrogen atoms and the ring-carbon atoms contract during the charge transfer from an average
5 of 1.505 Å to 1.465 Å (averaged over four bonds), *i.e.* by 0.040 Å. This is again in excellent
6 agreement with the ion calculations, where the bond contraction upon delocalization is 0.033 Å.
7 These findings prove the effect of charge delocalization on the molecular structure and the
8 importance of structural dynamics in the full characterization of charge transfer processes.

9

10 **Discussion**

11 The advent of XFELs with their outstanding brightness and ultrashort pulse durations heralds a
12 new age of molecular structure determination. It is now possible to experimentally determine the
13 structure of short-lived optically excited states with a precision that approaches traditional ground
14 state measurements. Accurate interpretation of experimental scattering patterns requires
15 corrections to account for the changes in electron density distributions upon excitation. Those
16 corrections are obtained from electronic structure calculations. As the computational input appears
17 as a correction term, the X-ray structures are largely experimentally determined. **Direct inversion**
18 **of a scattering pattern from an isotropic gas-phase sample is not possible. We thus determine**
19 **molecular structures by comparing simulated scattering patterns from a pool of structures to**
20 **experimentally measured signals.** With the upcoming improvements in XFEL technology⁴⁸ and
21 the ongoing development of robust methods for scattering data analysis^{49,50}, we anticipate that both
22 electronic and nuclear structural dynamics during chemical reactions will be directly determined
23 from X-ray scattering experiments, providing a comprehensive view of the coupled electron and

1 nuclear motions in chemical dynamics. Moreover, it is possible to extract scattering patterns
2 corresponding to transient species because the time-dependent scattering signals are comprised of
3 orthogonal contributions⁵¹, with the time-dependence following the kinetic process and the q -
4 dependence arising from the patterns of the individual transient species.

5
6 We have applied this recent methodology to the photoinduced charge transfer of N,N'-
7 dimethylpiperazine, revealing kinetic time scales that are in close agreement with previous
8 photoelectron spectroscopy results. **Importantly, we are able to determine the orientation of the**
9 **transition dipole moment in the molecular frame, determine the full molecular structures of the**
10 **charge-localized and charge-delocalized species, and confirm the redistribution of charge. We find**
11 **that the delocalization of charge with a time constant of 3.6 ps is associated with a weakening of**
12 **the C-C bond by 0.063 Å to 1.634 Å.** The most significant difference between the localized and
13 the delocalized excited state structures relates to the position of the methyl groups. These
14 experimentally determined excited state structures provide valuable benchmarks for the ongoing
15 refinement of the computational chemistry methods and bring new insight into the detailed
16 dynamics of charge transfer in polyatomic molecules.

17 **Methods**

18 **Experimental details.** The time-resolved gas-phase X-ray scattering setup has been introduced
19 previously^{40,52}. The optical pump laser uses the fourth harmonic of a 120 Hz Ti:Sapphire laser
20 operating at 800 nm, generating pulses at 200 nm with ~80 fs pulse duration and ~1 μ J/pulse energy
21 on target. The gaseous DMP sample pressure at the interaction region is approximately 5 Torr,
22 controlled by a piezoelectric needle valve. Both pump pulse energy and gas pressure are optimized
23

1 to reduce background signal and achieve less than 10% excitation probability. The X-ray probe
2 pulses contains $\sim 10^{12}$ photons/pulse at 9.5 keV photon energy, with ~ 30 fs pulse duration and 120
3 Hz repetition rate. The pump and probe pulses are focused collinearly into the scattering cell, with
4 approximate spot sizes (full width at half maximum) of $30\ \mu\text{m}$ for the X-rays and $50\ \mu\text{m}$ for the
5 laser. The interaction length is kept small at 2.4 mm to prevent excessive absorption attenuation
6 of the UV beam at the downstream end of the interaction region. The gas cell and the detector were
7 in vacuum, with an average background pressure outside the scattering cell of 1.4×10^{-4} Torr,
8 mostly comprised of DMP that flowed out of the windowless scattering cell⁴⁰. The time delay
9 between the pump and probe pulses is controlled by an electronic delay stage, with the timing jitter
10 monitored by a spectrally encoded cross correlator achieving a 30 fs time resolution.⁵³ In order to
11 achieve the desired noise level ($<0.1\%$), the X-ray intensity of each shot is measured by a
12 photodiode downstream of the scattering cell. A 2.3-megapixel Cornell-SLAC pixel array detector
13 (CSPAD) is used to detect shot-to-shot scattered X-rays. Details of the detector distance calibration,
14 the error analysis of the measured scattering signals and the decomposition into isotropic and
15 anisotropic signals have been discussed previously^{40,54}.

16
17 **Structural analysis.** The concept of the structure determination method for extracting
18 experimentally determined structural parameters from time-resolved x-ray scattering patterns has
19 been discussed in detail previously.⁴⁷ A pool of molecular structures that is sufficiently large to
20 likely contain the sought molecular structure is important. Because the nuclear geometry of DMP-
21 L^+ and DMP- D^+ are relatively close to the structures of 3sL and 3sD, we sample a large pool of
22 possible structures by displacing their geometries starting from the DMP- L^+ and DMP- D^+
23 structures. Specifically, to sample the structural pools of 3sL and 3sD properly, we calculated the

1 vibrational normal modes of DMP at the ion minimum-energy localized structure and delocalized
2 structure, respectively, using *ab initio* electronic structure calculations at the UMP2/aug-cc-pVDZ
3 level of theory in the Molpro software⁵⁵. An ensemble of one million geometries is sampled from
4 a quantum Wigner distribution at 1000 K using SHARC software⁵⁶ based on the calculated
5 vibrational normal modes of DMP-L⁺ to represent a large range of charge-localized structural
6 space that could potentially be accessed by the molecule in the 3sL state. We use a relatively large
7 scaling temperature (1000 K) to make sure the displaced geometries are expansive enough to
8 include the target structures⁴⁷. Similarly, another ensemble of one million geometries was sampled
9 for the 3sD state. Considering that the C-H bond lengths are well known and do not vary much,
10 and that X-ray signals are not very sensitive towards the positions of hydrogen atoms⁵⁷, we fix the
11 C-H bond lengths of all sampled geometries at 1.09 Å to largely reduce molecular degrees of
12 freedom in structural analysis. To obtain representative structures corresponding to the best-fit
13 structural parameters, the structures in the pool that gave the smallest fit errors across the 28 non-
14 hydrogenic interatomic distances were chosen to represent the 3sL and 3sD geometries, with their
15 ball-stick structures shown in the Fig. 5 inset of the main text. The complete set of coordinates is
16 given in the Supplementary Table 3. The absolute differences between the interatomic distances
17 calculated from the representative structures and corresponding best-fit structural parameters are
18 given as uncertainties in Supplementary Table 1, reflecting the uncertainty due to the discrete
19 sampling of the structural space. A comprehensive investigation of various uncertainties when
20 using the structural analysis method was reported in a previous publication⁴⁷.

21
22 **Calculation of electronic excited states.** Prior studies have shown that self-interaction corrected
23 density functional theory (SIC-DFT) is well suited for the calculations of Rydberg excited states⁵⁸,

1 including charge-localized and charge-delocalized 3s states of DMP³⁴. To obtain accurate excited
2 state electron densities for the electronic scattering pattern corrections, we performed excited state
3 calculations for the 3sL and 3sD states using the SIC-DFT method. Since the potential energy
4 surfaces of Rydberg states generally track the potential energy surfaces of the ionic states^{34,25}, the
5 structures of the charge-localized cation and the charge-delocalized cation optimized using
6 DMRG-CASSCF(19,20)/aug-cc-pVDZ level of theory were adopted as 3sL and 3sD structures
7 during the SIC-DFT calculations³⁷. The selected structural parameters for these structures are also
8 included as theoretical results in Fig. 7 and Supplementary Table 1 for comparison to
9 experimentally determined Rydberg structures.

10

11 The SIC-DFT calculations were carried out using the GPAW program⁵⁹ with a uniform, real space
12 grid representation of the wavefunctions. The Rydberg state calculations were carried out with
13 SIC-DFT using the LDA functional⁶⁰ and a cubic cell with 25 Å sides and 0.15 Å grid spacing. To
14 calculate the electron densities and the binding energies, the Rydberg orbitals were first obtained
15 using SIC-DFT for the ground state. The total energy of the Rydberg excited state was calculated
16 using SIC-DFT and the Delta Self-Consistent Field method⁶¹ where one electron was removed
17 from the highest occupied molecular orbital and placed in the desired Rydberg orbital. The all-
18 electron densities of 3sL and 3sD state were then extracted using the `get_all_electron_density` class
19 implemented in GPAW. The binding energy of the Rydberg state was calculated by subtracting
20 the total energy of the Rydberg excited state from that of the ion. The SIC-DFT calculated binding
21 energies are given in Supplementary Table 2 and are in excellent agreement with previous
22 experimental values measured by photoelectron spectroscopy³⁴. The spin densities and Rydberg

1 orbitals calculated using SIC-DFT are shown in the inset of Fig. 1 and Fig. 6 of the main text,
 2 respectively.

3

4 **Decomposition of the percent difference scattering signal.** The theoretical percent difference
 5 scattering signal, assuming 100% excitation, is calculated by²⁷

$$6 \quad \Delta S_{\text{theory}}(q, \mathbf{R}') = 100 \frac{I_{\text{exc}}(q, \mathbf{R}') - I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_0)}{I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_0)}, \quad (4)$$

7 where $I_{\text{exc}}(q, \mathbf{R})$ is the excited state scattering intensity and $I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R})$ the ground state scattering,
 8 with q the momentum transfer amplitude and \mathbf{R} the molecular geometry. In Eq. (4), \mathbf{R}' represent
 9 the nuclear geometry of the molecule in the excited state at pump-probe delay t and \mathbf{R}_0 the
 10 ground-state equilibrium structure before laser excitation. It has been shown previously that it is
 11 conceptually useful to insert a null contribution, $0 = I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}') - I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}')$, in order to rewrite Eq.
 12 (4) as²⁷

$$13 \quad \Delta S_{\text{theory}}(q, \mathbf{R}') = 100 \frac{I_{\text{exc}}(q, \mathbf{R}') - I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}')}{I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_0)} + 100 \frac{I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}') - I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_0)}{I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_0)}, \quad (5)$$

14 where the first term is the *electronic* contribution reflecting the difference in scattering from the
 15 excited and ground electronic states at a given geometry \mathbf{R}' , while the second term is the *nuclear*
 16 contribution indicating solely the difference in scattering from changes in the molecular geometry.
 17 The rotationally averaged elastic scattering intensities are obtained numerically from calculated
 18 electron density $\rho(\mathbf{r})$ based on Waller-Hartree theory.⁵⁰ Here, $\rho(\mathbf{r})$ is a three-dimensional array
 19 extracted directly from the `get_all_electron_density` class implemented in GPAW as described in
 20 the previous section. The inelastic contribution to scattering is approximated by tabulated atomic
 21 form factors.⁴⁵ To calculate the electronic contributions for 3sL and 3sD as shown in Fig. 6 of the
 22 main text, we calculate the scattering patterns $I_{3\text{s}}(q, \mathbf{R}_{3\text{sL}})$, $I_{3\text{s}}(q, \mathbf{R}_{3\text{sD}})$, $I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_{3\text{sL}})$, $I_{\text{X}}(q, \mathbf{R}_{3\text{sD}})$

1 and $I_X(q, \mathbf{R}_0)$ from the electron densities generated by GPAW and use the first term in Eq. (5). In
2 order to ensure an accurate ground-state scattering pattern as a reference, we adopt the ground-
3 state DMP structure optimized using high-level *ab initio* calculation (CCSD/aug-cc-pVDZ)
4 reported in ref. 34.

5
6 **Data availability.** All study data are included in the article and SI.

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