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Open data from the first and second observing runs of Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo

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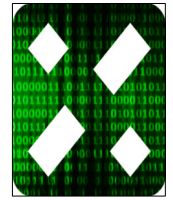
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Original software publication

Open data from the first and second observing runs of Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo



Rich Abbott¹, Thomas D. Abbott², Sheelu Abraham³, Fausto Acernese^{4,5}, Kendall Ackley⁶, Carl Adams⁷, Rana X. Adhikari¹, Vaishali B. Adya⁸, Christoph Affeldt^{9,10}, Michalis Agathos^{11,12}, Kazuhiro Agatsuma¹³, Nancy Aggarwal¹⁴, Odylio D. Aguiar¹⁵, Amit Aich¹⁶, Lorenzo Aiello^{17,18}, Anirban Ain³, Ajith Parameswaran¹⁹, Gabrielle Allen²⁰, Annalisa Allocca²¹, Paul A. Altin⁸, Alex Amato²², Shreya Anand¹, Alena Ananyeva¹, Stuart B. Anderson¹, Warren G. Anderson²³, Svetoslava V. Angelova²⁴, Stefano Ansoldi^{25,26}, Sarah Antier²⁷, Stephen Appert¹, Koji Arai¹, Melody C. Araya¹, Joseph S. Areeda²⁸, Marc Arène²⁷, Nicolas Arnaud^{29,30}, Scott M. Aronson³¹, Kg G. Arun³², Stefano Ascenzi^{17,33}, Gregory Ashton⁶, Stuart M. Aston⁷, Pia Astone³⁴, Florian Aubin³⁵, Peter Aufmuth¹⁰, Kellie AultONeal³⁶, Corey Austin², Valerie Avendano³⁷, Stanislav Babak²⁷, Philippe Bacon²⁷, Francesca Badaracco^{17,18}, Maria K.M. Bader³⁸, Sangwook Bae³⁹, Anne M. Baer⁴⁰, Jonathon Baird²⁷, Francesca Baldaccini^{41,42}, Giulio Ballardín³⁰, Stefan W. Ballmer⁴³, Anna-marie Bals³⁶, Alexander Balsamo⁴⁰, Gregory Baltus⁴⁴, Sharan Banagiri⁴⁵, Deepak Bankar³, Rameshwar S. Bankar³, Juan C. Barayoga¹, Claudio Barbieri^{46,47}, Barry C. Barish¹, David Barker⁴⁸, Kevin Barkett⁴⁹, Pablo Barneo⁵⁰, Fabrizio Barone^{51,5}, Bryan Barr⁵², Lisa Barsotti⁵³, Matteo Barsuglia²⁷, Daniel Barta⁵⁴, Jeffrey Bartlett⁴⁸, Imre Bartos³¹, Riccardo Bassiri⁵⁵, Andrea Basti^{56,21}, Mateusz Bawaj^{57,42}, Joseph C. Bayley⁵², Marco Bazzan^{58,59}, Bence Bécsy⁶⁰, Michal Bejger⁶¹, Imene Belahcene²⁹, Angus S. Bell⁵², Deeksha Beniwal⁶², Michael G. Benjamin³⁶, Joe D. Bentley¹³, Fabio Bergamin⁹, Beverly K. Berger⁵⁵, Gerald Bergmann^{9,10}, Sebastiano Bernuzzi¹¹, Christopher P.L. Berry¹⁴, Diego Bersanetti⁶³, Alessandro Bertolini³⁸, Joseph Betzwieser⁷, Rohan Bhandare⁶⁴, Ankit V. Bhandari³, Jeffrey Bidler²⁸, Edward Biggs²³, Igor A. Bilenko⁶⁵, Garilynn Billingsley¹, Ross Birney⁶⁶, Ofek Birnholtz^{67,68}, Sebastien Biscans^{1,53}, Matteo Bischì^{69,70}, Sylvia Biscoveanu⁵³, Aparna Bisht¹⁰, Guldauren Bissenbayeva¹⁶, Massimiliano Bitossi^{30,21}, Marieanne A. Bizouard⁷¹, Kent K. Blackburn¹, Jonathan Blackman⁴⁹, Carl D. Blair⁷, David G. Blair⁷², Ryan M. Blair⁴⁸, Fabrizio Bobba^{73,74}, Nina Bode^{9,10}, Michel Boer⁷¹, Yannick Boetzel⁷⁵, Gilles Bogaert⁷¹, Francois Bondu⁷⁶, Edgard Bonilla⁵⁵, Romain Bonnand³⁵, Phillip Booker^{9,10}, Boris A. Boom³⁸, Rolf Bork¹, Valerio Boschi²¹, Sukanta Bose³, Vladimir Bossilkov⁷², Joel Bosveld⁷², Yann Bouffanais^{58,59}, Antonella Bozzi³⁰, Carlo Bradaschia²¹, Patrick R. Brady²³, Alyssa Bramley⁷, Marica Branchesi^{17,18}, Jim E. Brau⁷⁷, Matteo Breschi¹¹, Tristan Briant⁷⁸, Joseph H. Briggs⁵², Francesco Brighenti^{69,70}, Alain Brillet⁷¹, Marc Brinkmann^{9,10}, Patrick Brockill²³, Aidan F. Brooks¹, Jonathan Brooks³⁰, Daniel D. Brown⁶², Sharon Brunett¹, Giacomo Bruno⁷⁹, Robert Bruntz⁴⁰, Aaron Buikema⁵³, Tomasz Bulik⁸⁰, Henk J. Bulten^{81,38}, Alessandra Buonanno^{82,83}, Damir Buskulic³⁵, Robert L. Byer⁵⁵,

E-mail addresses: lsc-spokesperson@ligo.org, virgo-spokesperson@ego-gw.it.

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Miriam Cabero^{9,10}, Laura Cadonati⁸⁴, Giampietro Cagnoli⁸⁵, Craig Cahillane¹, Juan Calderón Bustillo⁶, Jack D. Callaghan⁵², Thomas A. Callister¹, Enrico Calloni^{86,5}, Jordan B. Camp⁸⁷, Maurizio Canepa^{88,63}, Kipp C. Cannon⁸⁹, Huy-tuong Cao⁶², Junwei Cao⁹⁰, Giovanni Carapella^{73,74}, Franco Carbognani³⁰, Santiago Caride⁹¹, Matthew F. Carney¹⁴, Gregorio Carullo^{56,21}, Julia Casanueva Diaz²¹, Claudio Casentini^{92,33}, Javier Castañeda⁵⁰, Sarah Caudill³⁸, Marco Cavaglia⁹³, Fabien Cavalier²⁹, Roberto Cavalieri³⁰, Giancarlo Cella²¹, Pablo Cerdá-Durán⁹⁴, Elisabetta Cesarini^{95,33}, Oualid Chaibi⁷¹, Kabir Chakravarti³, Chiwai Chan⁸⁹, Manleong Chan⁵², Shiuh Chao⁹⁶, Philip Charlton⁹⁷, Eve A. Chase¹⁴, Eric Chassande-Mottin²⁷, Deep Chatterjee²³, Mayank Chaturvedi⁶⁴, Hsin-yu Y. Chen¹⁰⁰, Xu Chen⁷², Yanbei Chen⁴⁹, Hai-ping Cheng³¹, Chi-kit K. Cheong¹⁰¹, Hanyu Y. Chia³¹, Francesco Chiadini^{102,74}, Roberto Chierici¹⁰³, Andrea Chincarini⁶³, Antonino Chiummo³⁰, Gihyuk Cho¹⁰⁴, Heesuk S. Cho¹⁰⁵, Min-a Cho⁸³, Nelson Christensen⁷¹, Qi Chu⁷², Sheon Chua⁷⁸, Ka-wai W. Chung¹⁰¹, Shinkee Chung⁷², Giacomo Ciani^{58,59}, Pawel Cielcielag⁶¹, Marek Cieślak⁶¹, Alexei A. Ciobanu⁶², Riccardo Ciolfi^{106,59}, Francesco Cipriano⁷¹, Alessio Cirone^{88,63}, Filiberto Clara⁴⁸, James A. Clark⁸⁴, Patrick Clearwater¹⁰⁷, Sebastien Clesse⁷⁹, Frederic Cleva⁷¹, Eugenio Coccia^{17,18}, Pierre-francois Cohadon⁷⁸, David Cohen²⁹, Marta Colleoni¹⁰⁸, Christophe G. Collette¹⁰⁹, Christopher Collins¹³, Monica Colpi^{46,47}, Marcio Constancio Jr.¹⁵, Livia Conti⁵⁹, Sam J. Cooper¹³, Paul Corban⁷, Thomas R. Corbitt², Isabel Cordero-Carrión¹¹⁰, Silvia Corezzi^{41,42}, Kenneth R. Corley¹¹¹, Neil Cornish⁶⁰, David Corre²⁹, Alessandra Corsi⁹¹, Stefano Cortese³⁰, Cesar A. Costa¹⁵, Roberto Cotesta⁸², Michael W. Coughlin¹, Scott B. Coughlin^{112,14}, Jeanpierre Coulon⁷¹, Stefan T. Countryman¹¹¹, Peter Couvares¹, Pep B. Covas¹⁰⁸, David M. Coward⁷², Matthew J. Cowart⁷, Dennis C. Coyne¹, Robert Coyne¹¹³, Jolien D. E. Creighton²³, Teviet D. Creighton¹⁶, Jonathan Cripe², Michael Croquette⁷⁸, Sgwynne G. Crowder¹¹⁴, Jean-rene Cudell⁴⁴, Torrey J. Cullen², Alan Cumming⁵², Rebecca Cummings⁵², Liam Cunningham⁵², Elena Cuoco³⁰, Malgorzata Curylo⁸⁰, Tito Dal Canton⁸², Gergely Dálya¹¹⁵, Aykutlu Dana⁵⁵, Lara M. Daneshgaran-Bajastani¹¹⁶, Beatrice D'Angelo^{88,63}, Stefan L. Danilishin^{9,10}, Sabrina D'Antonio³³, Karsten Danzmann^{10,9}, Christian Darsow-Fromm¹¹⁷, Arnab Dasgupta¹¹⁸, Laurence E. H. Datrier⁵², Vincenzo Dattilo³⁰, Ishant Dave⁶⁴, Michel Davier²⁹, Gareth S. Davies¹¹⁹, Derek Davis⁴³, Edward J. Daw¹²⁰, Dan DeBra⁵⁵, Malathi Deenadayalan³, Jerome Degallaix²², Martina De Laurentis^{86,5}, Samuel Deléglise⁷⁸, Matthew Delfavero⁶⁷, Nicola De Lillo⁵², Walter Del Pozzo^{56,21}, Lindsay M. DeMarchi¹⁴, Virginia D'Emilio¹¹², Nicholas Demos⁵³, Thomas Dent¹¹⁹, Roberto De Pietri^{121,122}, Rosario De Rosa^{86,5}, Camilla De Rossi³⁰, Riccardo DeSalvo¹²³, Omar de Varona^{9,10}, Sanjeev Dhurandhar³, Mario C. Díaz¹⁶, Mauricio Diaz-Ortiz Jr.³¹, Tim Dietrich³⁸, Luciano Di Fiore⁵, Chiara Di Fronzo¹³, Cinzia Di Giorgio^{73,74}, Fabrizio Di Giovanni⁹⁴, Matteo Di Giovanni^{124,125}, Tristano Di Girolamo^{86,5}, Alberto Di Lieto^{56,21}, Binlei Ding¹⁰⁹, Sibilla Di Pace^{126,34}, Irene Di Palma^{126,34}, Francesco Di Renzo^{56,21}, Atul K. Divakarla³¹, Artemiy Dmitriev¹³, Zoheyr Doctor¹⁰⁰, Fred Donovan⁵³, Katherine L. Dooley¹¹², Suresh Doravari³, Iain Dorrington¹¹², Thomas P. Downes²³, Marco Drago^{17,18}, Jenne C. Driggers⁴⁸, Zhihui Du⁹⁰, Jean-gregoire Ducoin²⁹, Peter Dupej⁵², Ofelia Durante^{73,74}, Domenico D'Urso^{127,128}, Sheila E. Dwyer⁴⁸, Paul J. Easter⁶, Graeme Eddolls⁵², Bruce Edelman⁷⁷, Tega B. Edo¹²⁰, Oliver Edy¹²⁹, Anamaria Effler⁷, Phil Ehrens¹, Johannes Eichholz⁸, Stephen S. Eikenberry³¹, Marc Eisenmann³⁵, Robert A. Eisenstein⁵³, Aldo Ejlli¹¹², Lucianolucianikerrico Errico^{86,5}, Reed C. Essick¹⁰⁰, Hector Estelles¹⁰⁸, Dimitri Estevez³⁵, Zachariah B. Etienne¹³⁰, Todd Etzel¹, Matthew Evans⁵³, Tom M. Evans⁷, Rebecca E. Ewing¹³¹, Viviana Fafone^{92,33,17}, Stephen Fairhurst¹¹², Xilong Fan⁹⁰, Stefania Farinon⁶³, Benjamin Farr⁷⁷, Will M. Farr^{98,99}, Edward J. Fauchon-Jones¹¹², Marc Favata³⁷, Maxime Fays¹²⁰, Mariana Fazio¹³², Jon Feicht¹, Martin M. Fejer⁵⁵,

Fangchen Feng²⁷, Edit Fenyvesi^{54,133}, Deborah L. Ferguson⁸⁴,
 Alvaro Fernandez-Galiana⁵³, Isidoro Ferrante^{56,21}, Elvis C. Ferreira¹⁵, Tabata A. Ferreira¹⁵,
 Francesco Fidecaro^{56,21}, Irene Fiori³⁰, Donatella Fiorucci^{17,18}, Maya Fishbach¹⁰⁰,
 Ryan P. Fisher⁴⁰, Rosalba Fittipaldi^{134,74}, Margot Fitz-Axen⁴⁵, Vincenzo Fiumara^{135,74},
 Raffaele Flaminio^{35,136}, Erik Floden⁴⁵, Eric Flynn²⁸, Heather Fong⁸⁹, Antonio A. Font^{94,137},
 Perry Forsyth⁸, Jean-daniel Fournier⁷¹, Sergio Frasca^{126,34}, Franco Frasconi²¹,
 Zsolt Frei¹¹⁵, Andreas Freise¹³, Raymond Frey⁷⁷, Valentin Frey²⁹, Peter Fritschel⁵³,
 Valery V. Frolov⁷, Gabriele Fronzè¹³⁸, Paul Fulda³¹, Michael Fyffe⁷, Hunter A. Gabbard⁵²,
 Bhooshan U. Gadre⁸², Sebastian M. Gaebel¹³, Jonathan R. Gair⁸², Shanika Galaudage⁶,
 Dhruva Ganapathy⁵³, Sharad G. Gaonkar³, Cecilio García-Quirós¹⁰⁸, Fabio Garufi^{86,5},
 Bubba Gateley⁴⁸, Sergio Gaudio³⁶, Gayathri Gayathri¹³⁹, Gianluca Gemme⁶³,
 Eric Genin³⁰, Alberto Gennai²¹, Daniel George²⁰, Jogy George⁶⁴, Laszlo Gergely¹⁴⁰,
 Sudarshan Ghonge⁸⁴, Abhirup Ghosh⁸², Archisman Ghosh^{141,142,143,38}, Shaon Ghosh²³,
 Bruno Giacomazzo^{124,125}, Joe A. Giaime^{2,7}, Dwayne D. Giardina⁷, Des R. Gibson⁶⁶,
 Chalisa Gier²⁴, Kiranjyot Gill¹¹¹, Jane Glanzer², Jan Gniesmer¹¹⁷, Patrick Godwin¹³¹,
 Evan Goetz^{2,93}, Ryan Goetz³¹, Niklas Gohlke^{9,10}, Boris Goncharov⁶, Gabriela González²,
 Gopakumar Gopakumar¹⁴⁴, Sarah E. Gossan¹, Matthieu Gosselin^{30,56,21},
 Romain Gouaty³⁵, Benjamin Grace⁸, Aniello Grado^{145,5}, Massimo Granata²²,
 Alastair Grant⁵², Slawomir Gras⁵³, Philippe Grassia¹, Corey Gray⁴⁸, Rachel Gray⁵²,
 Giuseppe Greco^{69,70}, Anna C. Green³¹, Rhys Green¹¹², Elizabeth M. Gretarsson³⁶,
 Hannah L. Griggs⁸⁴, G. Grignani^{41,42}, Andrea Grimaldi^{124,125}, Stefan J. Grimm^{17,18},
 Hartmut Grote¹¹², Steffen Grunewald⁸², Pierre Gruning²⁹, Gianluca M. Guidi^{69,70},
 Andre R. Guimaraes², Gerard Guixé⁵⁰, Hitesh K. Gulati¹¹⁸, Yuefan Guo³⁸,
 Anuradha Gupta¹³¹, Anchal Gupta¹, Pawan Gupta³⁸, Eric K. Gustafson¹,
 Dick Gustafson¹⁴⁶, Leila Haegel¹⁰⁸, Odyse Halim^{18,17}, Evan D. Hall⁵³,
 Eleanor Z. Hamilton¹¹², Giles Hammond⁵², Maria Haney⁷⁵, Manuela M. Hanke^{9,10},
 Jonathan Hanks⁴⁸, Chad Hanna¹³¹, Mark D. Hannam¹¹², Otto A. Hannuksela¹⁰¹,
 Travis J. Hansen³⁶, Joe Hanson⁷, Thomas Harder⁷¹, Terra Hardwick², Haris Haris¹⁹,
 Jan Harms^{17,18}, Gregg M. Harry¹⁴⁷, Ian W. Harry¹²⁹, Raine K. Hasskew⁷,
 Carl-johan Haster⁵³, Karen Haughian⁵², Fergus J. Hayes⁵², James Healy⁶⁷,
 Antoine Heidmann⁷⁸, Matthew C. Heintze⁷, Joscha Heinze^{9,10}, Henrich Heitmann⁷¹,
 Frances Hellman¹⁴⁸, Patrice Hello²⁹, Gary Hemming³⁰, Martin Hendry⁵², Siong S. Heng⁵²,
 Eric Hennes³⁸, Jan-simon Hennig^{9,10}, Michele Heurs^{9,10}, Stefan Hild^{149,52},
 Tanja Hinderer^{143,38,141}, Sarah Y. Hoback^{28,147}, Sven Hochheim^{9,10}, Elyssa Hofgard⁵⁵,
 David Hofman²², Aaron M. Holgado²⁰, Nathan A. Holland⁸, Kathy Holt⁷,
 Daniel E. Holz¹⁰⁰, Paul Hopkins¹¹², Christian Horst²³, James Hough⁵², Eric J. Howell⁷²,
 Charlie G. Hoy¹¹², Yiwen Huang⁵³, Moritz T. Hübner⁶, Eliu A. Huerta²⁰,
 Dominique Huet²⁹, Brennan Hughey³⁶, Victor Hui³⁵, Sascha Husa¹⁰⁸,
 Sabina H. Huttner⁵², Rachael Huxford¹³¹, Tien Huynh-Dinh⁷, Bartosz Idzkowski⁸⁰,
 Alberto Iess^{92,33}, Henri Inchauspe³¹, Craig Ingram⁶², Giuseppe Intini^{126,34}, Jean M. Isac⁷⁸,
 Max Isi⁵³, Bala R. Iyer¹⁹, Thibaut Jacqmin⁷⁸, Sameer J. Jadhav¹⁵⁰, Shreejit P. Jadhav³,
 Alasdair L. James¹¹², Karan Jani⁸⁴, Nagaraj N. Janthapur¹⁵⁰, Piotr Jaranowski¹⁵¹,
 Deep Jariwala³¹, Rafel Jaume¹⁰⁸, Alex C. Jenkins¹⁵², Jun Jiang³¹, Grace R. Johns⁴⁰,
 Aaron W. Jones¹³, Ian I. Jones¹⁵³, Jeff D. Jones⁴⁸, Philip Jones¹³, Russell Jones⁵²,
 Reinier J. G. Jonker³⁸, Ju Ju⁷², Jonas Junker^{9,10}, Chinmay V. Kalaghatgi¹¹²,
 Vassiliki Kalogera¹⁴, Brittany Kamai¹, Shivaraj Kandhasamy³, Gungwon Kang³⁹,
 Jonah B. Kanner¹, Shasvath J. Kapadia¹⁹, Sudarshan Karki⁷⁷, Rahul Kashyap¹⁹,
 Marie Kasprzack¹, Wolfgang Kastaun^{9,10}, Stavros Katsanevas³⁰, Erik Katsavounidis⁵³,
 William Katzman⁷, Steffen Kaufer¹⁰, Keita Kawabe⁴⁸, Fabien Kéfélian⁷¹, David Keitel¹²⁹,
 Azadeh Keivani¹¹¹, Ross Kennedy¹²⁰, Joey S. Key¹⁵⁴, Sudiksha Khadka⁵⁵, Farit Y. Khalili⁶⁵,
 Imran Khan^{17,33}, Sebastian Khan^{9,10}, Zaki A. Khan⁹⁰, Efim A. Khazanov¹⁵⁵,
 Nandita Khetan^{17,18}, Mohammad Khursheed⁶⁴, Nutsinee Kijbunchoo⁸, Chunglee Kim¹⁵⁶,

Grace J. Kim⁸⁴, Jeongcho C. Kim¹⁵⁷, Kyungmin Kim¹⁰¹, Won Kim⁶², Whansun S. Kim¹⁵⁸, Young-min Kim¹⁵⁹, Charles Kimball¹⁴, Peter J. King⁴⁸, Maya Kinley-Hanlon⁵², Robin Kirchhoff^{9,10}, Jeffrey S. Kissel⁴⁸, Lisa Kleybolte¹¹⁷, Sergei Klimenko³¹, Tyler D. Knowles¹³⁰, Philip Koch^{9,10}, Sina M. Koehlenbeck^{9,10}, Gideon Koekoek^{38,149}, Soumen Koley³⁸, Veronica Kondrashov¹, Antonios Kontos¹⁶⁰, Nico Koper^{9,10}, Mikhail Korobko¹¹⁷, William Z. Korth¹, Manoj Kovalam⁷², Dan B. Kozak¹, Volker Kringel^{9,10}, Nv V. Krishnendu³², Andrzej Królak^{161,162}, Natalie Krupinski²³, Gerrit Kuehn^{9,10}, Anil Kumar¹⁵⁰, Prayush Kumar¹⁶³, Rahul Kumar⁴⁸, Rakesh Kumar¹¹⁸, Sumit Kumar¹⁹, Ling-chi Kuo⁹⁶, Adam Kutynia¹⁶¹, Benjamin D. Lackey⁸², Danny Laghi^{56,21}, Emile Lalande¹⁶⁴, Lam L. Lam¹⁰¹, Astrid Lamberts^{71,165}, Michael Landry⁴⁸, Benjamin B. Lane⁵³, Ryan N. Lang¹⁶⁶, Jacob Lange⁶⁷, Brian Lantz⁵⁵, Robert K. Lanza⁵³, Iuri La Rosa³⁵, Angelique Lartaux-Vollard²⁹, Paul D. Lasky⁶, Michael Laxen⁷, Albert Lazzarini¹, Claudia Lazzaro⁵⁹, Paola Leaci^{126,34}, Sean Leavey^{9,10}, Yannick K. Lecoeuche⁴⁸, Chang-hwan H. Lee¹⁰⁵, Hyung-mok M. Lee¹⁶⁷, Hyungwon W. Lee¹⁵⁷, Joongoo Lee¹⁰⁴, Kyung-ha Lee⁵⁵, Johannes Lehmann^{9,10}, Nicolas Leroy²⁹, Nicolas Letendre³⁵, Yuri Levin⁶, Alvin K. Y. Li¹⁰¹, Jin Li⁹⁰, Kaye li¹⁰¹, Tjonnie G. F. Li¹⁰¹, Xiang Li⁴⁹, Frank Linde^{168,38}, Seth D. Linker¹¹⁶, Jethro N. Linley⁵², Tyson B. Littenberg¹⁶⁹, Liu Liu^{9,10}, Xiaoshu Liu²³, Miquel Llorens-Monteagudo⁹⁴, Ka-lok Lo¹, Alexandra Lockwood¹⁷⁰, Lionel T. London⁵³, Alessandro Longo^{171,172}, Matteo Lorenzini^{17,18}, Vincent Loriette¹⁷³, Marc Lormand⁷, Giovanni Losurdo²¹, James D. Lough^{9,10}, Carlos O. Lousto⁶⁷, Geoffrey Lovelace²⁸, Harald Lück^{10,9}, Diana Lumaca^{92,33}, Andrew P. Lundgren¹²⁹, Ma Yiqiu⁴⁹, Ronaldas Macas¹¹², Sean Macfoy²⁴, Myron MacInnis⁵³, Duncan M. Macleod¹¹², Ian O. MacMillan¹⁴⁷, Adrian Macquet⁷¹, Ignacio Magaña Hernandez²³, Fabian Magaña-Sandoval³¹, Ryan M. Magee¹³¹, Ettore Majorana³⁴, Ivan Maksimovic¹⁷³, Asmita Malik⁶⁴, Catherine Man⁷¹, Vuk Mandic⁴⁵, Valentina Mangano^{52,126,34}, Georgia L. Mansell^{48,53}, Michael Manske²³, Maddalena Mantovani³⁰, Michela Mapelli^{58,59}, Fabio Marchesoni^{57,42,174}, Frederique Marion³⁵, Szabolcs Márka¹¹¹, Zsuzsanna Márka¹¹¹, Charalampos Markakis¹², Ashot S. Markosyan⁵⁵, Aaron Markowitz¹, Ed Maros¹, Antonio Marquina¹¹⁰, Sylvain Marsat²⁷, Filippo Martelli^{69,70}, Ian W. Martin⁵², Rodica M. Martin³⁷, Valerie Martinez⁸⁵, Denis V. Martynov¹³, Hossein Masalehdan¹¹⁷, Ken Mason⁵³, Elena Massera¹²⁰, Alain Masserot³⁵, Thomas J. Massinger⁵³, Mariela Masso-Reid⁵², Simone Mastrogiovanni²⁷, Andrew Matas⁸², Fabrice Matichard^{1,53}, Nergis Mavalvala⁵³, Emily Maynard², Joshua J. McCann⁷², Richard McCarthy⁴⁸, David E. McClelland⁸, Scott McCormick⁷, Lee McCuller⁵³, Stephen C. McGuire¹⁷⁵, Connor McIsaac¹²⁹, Jessica McIver¹, David J. McManus⁸, Terry McRae⁸, Sean T. McWilliams¹³⁰, Duncan Meacher²³, Grant D. Meadors⁶, Moritz Mehmet^{9,10}, Ajit K. Mehta¹⁹, Elena Mejuto Villa^{123,74}, Andrew Melatos¹⁰⁷, Gregory Mendell⁴⁸, Adam A. Mercer²³, Lorenzo Mereni²², Kara Merfeld⁷⁷, Edmond L. Merilh⁴⁸, Jonathan D. Merritt⁷⁷, Mourad Merzougui⁷¹, Syd Meshkov¹, Chris Messenger⁵², Cody Messick¹⁷⁶, Remi Metzdrorf⁷⁸, Patrick M. Meyers¹⁰⁷, Fabian Meylahn^{9,10}, Ashish Mhaske³, Andrea Miani^{124,125}, Haixing Miao¹³, Ioannis Michaloliakos³¹, Christophe Michel²², Hannah Middleton¹⁰⁷, Leopoldo Milano^{86,5}, Andrewlawrence L. Miller^{31,126,34}, Meg Millhouse¹⁰⁷, Joseph C. Mills¹¹², Edoardo Milotti^{177,26}, Michael C. Milovich-Goff¹¹⁶, Olivier Minazzoli^{71,178}, Yuri Minenkov³³, Alec Mishkin³¹, Chandra Mishra¹⁷⁹, Timesh Mistry¹²⁰, Sanjit Mitra³, Valery P. Mitrofanov⁶⁵, Guenakh Mitselmakher³¹, Richard Mittleman⁵³, Geoffrey Mo⁵³, Kentaro Mogushi⁹³, Satyanarayan R. P. Mohapatra⁵³, Siddharth R. Mohite²³, Manel Molina-Ruiz¹⁴⁸, Marina Mondin¹¹⁶, Matteo Montani^{69,70}, Christopher J. Moore¹³, Dan Moraru⁴⁸, Filip Morawski⁶¹, Gerardo Moreno⁴⁸, Soichiro Morisaki⁸⁹, Benoit Mours¹⁸⁰, Conor M. Mow-Lowry¹³, Simone Mozzon¹²⁹, Federico Muciaccia^{126,34},

Arunava Mukherjee⁵², Debnandini Mukherjee¹³¹, Soma Mukherjee¹⁶,
 Subroto Mukherjee¹¹⁸, Nikhil Mukund^{9,10}, Adam Mullavey⁷, Jesper Munch⁶²,
 Erik A. Muñiz⁴³, Peter G. Murray⁵², Alessandro Nagar^{95,138,181}, Ilaria Nardecchia^{92,33},
 Luca Naticchioni^{126,34}, Rajesh K. Nayak¹⁸², Benjamin F. Neil⁷², Joshua Neilson^{123,74},
 Gijs Nelemans^{183,38}, Timothy J. N. Nelson⁷, Marina Nery^{9,10}, Ansel Neunzert¹⁴⁶,
 Kwan-yeung Y. Ng⁵³, Sebastian Ng⁶², Catherine Nguyen²⁷, Philippe Nguyen⁷⁷,
 David Nichols^{143,38}, Shania A. Nichols², Samaya Nissanke^{143,38}, Flavio Nocera³⁰,
 Minkyun Noh⁵³, Chris North¹¹², Devon Nothard¹⁸⁴, Laura K. Nuttall¹²⁹, Jason Oberling⁴⁸,
 Brendan D. O'Brien³¹, Gor Oganessian^{17,18}, Greg H. Ogini¹⁸⁵, John J. Oh¹⁵⁸,
 Sanghoon H. Oh¹⁵⁸, Frank Ohme^{9,10}, Hiroaki Ohta⁸⁹, Marcos A. Okada¹⁵,
 Miquel Oliver¹⁰⁸, Christian Olivetto³⁰, Patrick Oppermann^{9,10}, Richard Oram⁷,
 Brian O'Reilly⁷, Rich G. Ormiston⁴⁵, Luis F. Ortega³¹, Richard O'Shaughnessy⁶⁷,
 Serguei Ossokine⁸², Charles Osthelder¹, David J. Ottaway⁶², Harry Overmier⁷,
 Ben J. Owen⁹¹, Alexander E. Pace¹³¹, Giulia Pagano^{56,21}, Michael A. Page⁷²,
 Giulia Pagliaroli^{17,18}, Archana Pai¹³⁹, Siddhesh A. Pai⁶⁴, Jordan R. Palamos⁷⁷,
 Oleg Palashov¹⁵⁵, Cristiano Palomba³⁴, Howard Pan⁹⁶, Pratap K. Panda¹⁵⁰,
 Tsun-ho Pang³⁸, Chris Pankow¹⁴, Francesco Pannarale^{126,34}, Brijesh C. Pant⁶⁴,
 Federico Paoletti²¹, Andrea Paoli³⁰, Abhishek Parida³, William Parker^{7,175},
 Daniela Pascucci^{52,38}, Antonio Pasqualetti³⁰, Roberto Passaquieti^{56,21}, Diego Passuello²¹,
 Barbara Patricelli^{56,21}, Ethan Payne⁶, Brynley L. Pearlstone⁵², Thida C. Pechsiri³¹,
 Ari J. Pedersen⁴³, Mike Pedraza¹, Arnaud Pele⁷, Steven Penn¹⁸⁶, Albino Perego^{124,125},
 Carlos J. Perez⁴⁸, Perigois Périgois³⁵, Antonio Perreca^{124,125}, Stephane Perriès¹⁰³,
 Jan Petermann¹¹⁷, Harald P. Pfeiffer⁸², Margot Phelps^{9,10}, Khun S. Phukon^{3,168,38},
 Ornella J. Piccinni^{126,34}, Mikhael Pichot⁷¹, Marco Piendibene^{56,21},
 Francesco Piergiovanni^{69,70}, Vincenzo Pierro^{123,74}, Gabriel Pillant³⁰, Laurent Pinard²²,
 Innocenzo M. Pinto^{123,74,95}, Krzysztof Piotrkowski⁷⁹, Marc Pirello⁴⁸, Matthew Pitkin¹⁸⁷,
 Wolfango Plastino^{171,172}, Rosa Poggiani^{56,21}, Yat-tung T. Pong¹⁰¹, Sarah Ponrathnam³,
 Pasquale Popolizio³⁰, Ed K. Porter²⁷, Jade Powell¹⁸⁸, Atul K. Prajapati¹¹⁸, Kiran Prasai⁵⁵,
 Raghurama Prasanna¹⁵⁰, Geraint Pratten¹³, Tanner Prestegard²³, Maria Principe^{123,95,74},
 Giovanni A. Prodi^{124,125}, Leonid Prokhorov¹³, Michele Punturo⁴², Paola Puppo³⁴,
 Michael Pürner⁸², Hong Qi¹¹², Volker Quetschke¹⁶, Pedro J. Quinonez³⁶, Fred J. Raab⁴⁸,
 Geert Raaijmakers^{143,38}, Hugh Radkins⁴⁸, Nicholas Radulesco⁷¹, Peter Raffai¹¹⁵,
 Hanna Rafferty¹⁸⁹, Sendhil Raja⁶⁴, Rajan Rajan⁶⁴, Binod Rajbhandari⁹¹,
 Malik Rakhmanov¹⁶, Karla E. Ramirez¹⁶, Antoni Ramos-Buades¹⁰⁸, Javed Rana³,
 Kaushik Rao¹⁴, Piero Rapagnani^{126,34}, Vivien Raymond¹¹², Massimiliano Razzano^{56,21},
 Jocelyn Read²⁸, Tania Regimbau³⁵, Luca Rei⁶³, Stuart Reid²⁴, David H. Reitze^{1,31},
 Piero Rettegno^{138,190}, Fulvio Ricci^{126,34}, Colter J. Richardson³⁶, Jonathan W. Richardson¹,
 Paul M. Ricker²⁰, Gunnar Riemenschneider^{190,138}, Keith Riles¹⁴⁶, Monica Rizzo¹⁴,
 Norna A. Robertson^{1,52}, Florent Robinet²⁹, Alessio Rocchi³³, Ramon D. Rodriguez-Soto³⁶,
 Loic Rolland³⁵, Jameson G. Rollins¹, Vincent J. Roma⁷⁷, Marco Romanelli⁷⁶,
 Rocco Romano^{4,5}, Chandra L. Romel⁴⁸, Isobel M. Romero-Shaw⁶, Janeen H. Romie⁷,
 Caitlin A. Rose²³, Dakota Rose²⁸, Kyle Rose¹⁸⁴, Dorota Rosińska⁸⁰, Shawn G. Rosofsky²⁰,
 Michael P. Ross¹⁷⁰, Sheila Rowan⁵², Samuel J. Rowlinson¹³, Palash K. Roy¹⁶,
 Santosh Roy³, Soumen Roy¹⁹¹, Paolo Ruggi³⁰, Guntis Rutins⁶⁶, Kyle Ryan⁴⁸,
 Surabhi Sachdev¹³¹, Travis Sadecki⁴⁸, Mairi Sakellariadou¹⁵², Om S. Salafia^{192,46,47},
 Livio Salconi³⁰, Muhammed Saleem³², Anuradha Samajdar³⁸, Eduardo J. Sanchez¹,
 Luis E. Sanchez¹, Nicolas Sanchis-Gual¹⁹³, Jaclyn R. Sanders¹⁹⁴, Kevin A. Santiago³⁷,
 Edison Santos⁷¹, Nikhil Sarin⁶, Benoit Sassolas²², B S. Sathyaprakash^{131,112},
 Orion Sauter³⁵, Richard L. Savage⁴⁸, Vaibhav Savant³, Disha Sawant¹³⁹, Sihem Sayah²²,
 Dean Schaetzl¹, Paul Schale⁷⁷, Mark Scheel⁴⁹, Jacob Scheuer¹⁴, Patricia Schmidt¹³,
 Roman Schnabel¹¹⁷, Robert M. S. Schofield⁷⁷, Axel Schönbeck¹¹⁷, Emil Schreiber^{9,10},
 Bernd W. Schulte^{9,10}, Bernard F. Schutz¹¹², Otto Schwarm¹⁸⁵, Eyal Schwartz⁷,

Jamie Scott⁵², Susan M. Scott⁸, Ed Seidel²⁰, Danny Sellers⁷, Anand S. Sengupta¹⁹¹, Noah Sennett⁸², Daniel Sentenac³⁰, Valeria Sequino⁶³, Alexander Sergeev¹⁵⁵, Yoshinta Setyawati^{9,10}, Daniel A. Shaddock⁸, Thomas Shaffer⁴⁸, Selim S. Shahriar¹⁴, A. Sharma^{17,18}, Priyanka Sharma⁶⁴, Peter Shawhan⁸³, Hongyu Shen²⁰, Minori Shikauchi⁸⁹, Rosalie Shink¹⁶⁴, David H. Shoemaker⁵³, Deirdre M. Shoemaker⁸⁴, Keerti Shukla¹⁴⁸, Shyamsundar ShyamSundar⁶⁴, Karelle Siellez⁸⁴, Magdalena Sieniawska⁶¹, Daniel Sigg⁴⁸, Leo P. Singer⁸⁷, Divya Singh¹³¹, Neha Singh⁸⁰, Ayatri Singha⁵², Akshat Singhal^{17,34}, Alicia M. Sintès¹⁰⁸, Valeria Sipala^{127,128}, Vasileios Skliris¹¹², Bram J. J. Slagmolen⁸, Teresa J. Slaven-Blair⁷², Jiri Smetana¹³, Joshua R. Smith²⁸, Rory J. E. Smith⁶, Surendranadh Somala¹⁹⁵, Edwin J. Son¹⁵⁸, Siddharth Soni², Borja Sorazu⁵², Viola Sordini¹⁰³, Fiodor Sorrentino⁶³, Tarun Souradeep³, Eric Sowell⁹¹, Andrew P. Spencer⁵², Mario Spera^{58,59}, Amit K. Srivastava¹¹⁸, Varun Srivastava⁴³, Kai Staats¹⁴, Cosmin Stachie⁷¹, Mark Standke^{9,10}, Daniele A. Steer²⁷, Michael Steinke^{9,10}, Jessica Steinlechner^{117,52}, Sebastian Steinlechner¹¹⁷, Daniel Steinmeyer^{9,10}, Dane Stocks⁵⁵, David J. Stops¹³, Madeline Stover¹⁸⁴, Ken A. Strain⁵², Giulia Stratta^{196,70}, Amber Strunk⁴⁸, Riccardo Sturani¹⁹⁷, Amber L. Stuver¹⁹⁸, Sudhagar Sudhagar³, Vivishek Sudhir⁵³, Tiffany Z. Summerscales¹⁹⁹, Ling Sun¹, Sunil Sunil¹¹⁸, Ankan Sur⁶¹, Jishnu Suresh⁸⁹, Patrick J. Sutton¹¹², Bas L. Swinkels³⁸, Marek J. Szczepańczyk³¹, Matteo Tacca³⁸, Simon C. Tait⁵², Colm Talbot⁶, Andres J. Tanasijczuk⁷⁹, David B. Tanner³¹, Duo Tao¹, Marton Tápai¹⁴⁰, Amauri Tapia²⁸, Enzo N. Tapia San Martin³⁸, Jay D. Tasson²⁰⁰, Robert Taylor¹, Rodrigo Tenorio¹⁰⁸, Lukas Terkowski¹¹⁷, Manasadevi P. Thirugnanasambandam³, Michael Thomas⁷, Patrick Thomas⁴⁸, Jonathan E. Thompson¹¹², Sivananda R. Thondapu⁶⁴, Keith A. Thorne⁷, Eric Thrane⁶, Calley L. Tinsman⁶, Saravanan R. Saravanan³, Shubhanshu Tiwari^{75,124,125}, Srishti Tiwari¹⁴⁴, Vaibhav Tiwari¹¹², Karl Toland⁵², Mauro Tonelli^{56,21}, Zeno Tornasi⁵², Alejandro Torres-Forné⁸², Calum I. Torrie¹, Iara Tosta e Melo^{127,128}, Daniel Töyrä⁸, Emily A. Trail², Flavio Travasso^{57,42}, Gary Traylor⁷, Maria C. Tringali⁸⁰, Aashish Tripathy¹⁴⁶, Agata Trovato²⁷, Randy J. Trudeau¹, Ka-wa W. Tsang³⁸, Maggie Tse⁵³, Rhondale Tso⁴⁹, Leo Tsukada⁸⁹, Daichi Tsuna⁸⁹, Takuya Tsutsui⁸⁹, Margherita Turconi⁷¹, Amit S. Ubhi¹³, Koh Ueno⁸⁹, Dennis Ugolini¹⁸⁹, Cs S. Unnikrishnan¹⁴⁴, Alexander L. Urban², Samantha A. Usman¹⁰⁰, Andrei C. Utina⁵², Henning Vahlbruch¹⁰, Gabriele Vajente¹, Guillermo Valdes², Michele Valentini^{124,125}, M. Vallisneri^{204,205}, Niels van Bakel³⁸, Martin van Beuzekom³⁸, Jo F. J. van den Brand^{81,149,38}, Chris Van Den Broeck^{38,201}, Daniel C. Vander-Hyde⁴³, Laura van der Schaaf³⁸, Joris V. Van Heijningen⁷², Marielle A. van Veggel⁵², Marco Vardaro^{58,59}, Vijay Varma⁴⁹, Steve Vass¹, Matyas Vasúth⁵⁴, Alberto Vecchio¹³, Gabriele Vedovato⁵⁹, John Veitch⁵², Peter J. Veitch⁶², Krishna Venkateswara¹⁷⁰, Gautam Venugopalan¹, Didier Verkindt³⁵, Doga Veske¹¹¹, Flavio Vetrano^{69,70}, Andrea Viceré^{69,70}, Aaron D. Viets²⁰², Serena Vinciguerra¹³, David J. Vine⁶⁶, Jeanyves Vinet⁷¹, Salvatore Vitale⁵³, Francisco Hernandez Vivanco⁶, Thomas Vo⁴³, Helios Vocca^{41,42}, Cheryl Vorvick⁴⁸, Sergey P. Vyatchanin⁶⁵, Andrew R. Wade⁸, Leslie E. Wade¹⁸⁴, Madeline Wade¹⁸⁴, Rob Walet³⁸, Marissa Walker²⁸, Gavin S. Wallace²⁴, Larry Wallace¹, Sinead Walsh²³, Jonathan Z. Wang¹⁴⁶, Sibbo Wang²⁰, Wenhui H. Wang¹⁶, Yifan F. Wang¹⁰¹, Robert L. Ward⁸, Zane A. Warden³⁶, Jim Warner⁴⁸, Michal Was³⁵, Jennifer Watchi¹⁰⁹, Betsy Weaver⁴⁸, Li-wei Wei^{9,10}, Michael Weinert^{9,10}, Alan J. Weinstein¹, Rainer Weiss⁵³, Felix Wellmann^{9,10}, Linqing Wen⁷², Peter Weßels^{9,10}, Jonathan W. Westhouse³⁶, Karl Wette⁸, John T. Whelan⁶⁷, Bernard F. Whiting³¹, Chris Whittle⁵³, Dennis M. Wilken^{9,10}, Daniel Williams⁵², Roy D. Williams²⁰³, Andrew R. Williamson¹²⁹, Joshua L. Willis¹, Benno Willke^{10,9}, Walter Winkler^{9,10}, Christopher C. Wipf¹, Holger Wittel^{9,10}, Graham Woan⁵², Janis Woehler^{9,10}, Jared K. Wofford⁶⁷, Chun-fung Wong¹⁰¹, Jennifer L. Wright⁵², David S. Wu^{9,10},

Daniel M. Wysocki⁶⁷, Liting Xiao¹, Hiro Yamamoto¹, Le Yang¹³², Yang Yang³¹,
 Ziyan Yang⁴⁵, Min-jet J. Yap⁸, Maher Yazback³¹, David W. Yeeles¹¹², Hang Yu⁵³,
 Haocun Yu⁵³, Shingheirobin Yuen¹⁰¹, Adam K. Zadrożny¹⁶, Adam Zadrożny¹⁶¹,
 Michele Zanolin³⁶, Tatiana Zelenova³⁰, Jean-pierre Zendri⁵⁹, Michael Zevin¹⁴,
 Jue Zhang⁷², Liyuan Zhang¹, Teng Zhang⁵², Chunnong Zhao⁷², Guoying Zhao¹⁰⁹,
 Minchuan Zhou¹⁴, Zifan Zhou¹⁴, Xingjiang J. Zhu⁶, Aaron B. Zimmerman¹⁷⁶,
 Michael E. Zucker^{53,1}, John Zweizig¹, The LIGO Scientific Collaboration, The
 Virgo Collaboration

¹ LIGO, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125, USA

² Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA

³ Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune 411007, India

⁴ Dipartimento di Farmacia, Università di Salerno, I-84084 Fisciano, Salerno, Italy

⁵ INFN, Sezione di Napoli, Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo, I-80126 Napoli, Italy

⁶ OzGrav, School of Physics & Astronomy, Monash University, Clayton 3800, Victoria, Australia

⁷ LIGO Livingston Observatory, Livingston, LA 70754, USA

⁸ OzGrav, Australian National University, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 0200, Australia

⁹ Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics (Albert Einstein Institute), D-30167 Hannover, Germany

¹⁰ Leibniz Universität Hannover, D-30167 Hannover, Germany

¹¹ Theoretisch-Physikalisches Institut, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, D-07743 Jena, Germany

¹² University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TN, UK

¹³ University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK

¹⁴ Center for Interdisciplinary Exploration & Research in Astrophysics (CIERA), Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208, USA

¹⁵ Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais, 12227-010 São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

¹⁶ The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, TX 78520, USA

¹⁷ Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), I-67100 L'Aquila, Italy

¹⁸ INFN, Laboratori Nazionali del Gran Sasso, I-67100 Assergi, Italy

¹⁹ International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bengaluru 560089, India

²⁰ NCSA, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801, USA

²¹ INFN, Sezione di Pisa, I-56127 Pisa, Italy

²² Laboratoire des Matériaux Avancés (LMA), IP2I - UMR 5822, CNRS, Université de Lyon, F-69622 Villeurbanne, France

²³ University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201, USA

²⁴ SUPA, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1XQ, UK

²⁵ Dipartimento di Matematica e Informatica, Università di Udine, I-33100 Udine, Italy

²⁶ INFN, Sezione di Trieste, I-34127 Trieste, Italy

²⁷ APC, AstroParticule et Cosmologie, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/Irfu, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, F-75205 Paris Cedex 13, France

²⁸ California State University Fullerton, Fullerton, CA 92831, USA

²⁹ LAL, Univ. Paris-Sud, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, F-91898 Orsay, France

³⁰ European Gravitational Observatory (EGO), I-56021 Cascina, Pisa, Italy

³¹ University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA

³² Chennai Mathematical Institute, Chennai 603103, India

³³ INFN, Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, I-00133 Roma, Italy

³⁴ INFN, Sezione di Roma, I-00185 Roma, Italy

³⁵ Laboratoire d'Annecy de Physique des Particules (LAPP), Univ. Grenoble Alpes, Université Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS/IN2P3, F-74941 Annecy, France

³⁶ Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Prescott, AZ 86301, USA

³⁷ Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043, USA

³⁸ Nikhef, Science Park 105, 1098 XG Amsterdam, The Netherlands

³⁹ Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information, Daejeon 34141, South Korea

⁴⁰ Christopher Newport University, Newport News, VA 23606, USA

⁴¹ Università di Perugia, I-06123 Perugia, Italy

⁴² INFN, Sezione di Perugia, I-06123 Perugia, Italy

⁴³ Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244, USA

⁴⁴ Université de Liège, B-4000 Liège, Belgium

⁴⁵ University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA

⁴⁶ Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, I-20126 Milano, Italy

⁴⁷ INFN, Sezione di Milano-Bicocca, I-20126 Milano, Italy

⁴⁸ LIGO Hanford Observatory, Richland, WA 99352, USA

⁴⁹ Caltech CarT, Pasadena, CA 91125, USA

⁵⁰ Departament de Física Quàntica i Astrofísica, Institut de Ciències del Cosmos (ICCUB), Universitat de Barcelona (IEEC-UB), E-08028 Barcelona, Spain

⁵¹ Dipartimento di Medicina, Chirurgia e Odontoiatria "Scuola Medica Salernitana", Università di Salerno, I-84081 Baronissi, Salerno, Italy

⁵² SUPA, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK

⁵³ LIGO, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA

⁵⁴ Wigner RCP, RMKI, H-1121 Budapest, Konkoly Thege Miklós út 29-33, Hungary

⁵⁵ Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, USA

⁵⁶ Università di Pisa, I-56127 Pisa, Italy

⁵⁷ Università di Camerino, Dipartimento di Fisica, I-62032 Camerino, Italy

⁵⁸ Università di Padova, Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia, I-35131 Padova, Italy

⁵⁹ INFN, Sezione di Padova, I-35131 Padova, Italy

⁶⁰ Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717, USA

⁶¹ Nicolaus Copernicus Astronomical Center, Polish Academy of Sciences, 00-716, Warsaw, Poland

⁶² OzGrav, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia 5005, Australia

⁶³ INFN, Sezione di Genova, I-16146 Genova, Italy

⁶⁴ RRCAT, Indore, Madhya Pradesh 452013, India

⁶⁵ Faculty of Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow 119991, Russia

- ⁶⁶ SUPA, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley PA1 2BE, UK
- ⁶⁷ Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY 14623, USA
- ⁶⁸ Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 5290002, Israel
- ⁶⁹ Università degli Studi di Urbino “Carlo Bo”, I-61029 Urbino, Italy
- ⁷⁰ INFN, Sezione di Firenze, I-50019 Sesto Fiorentino, Firenze, Italy
- ⁷¹ Artemis, Université Côte d’Azur, Observatoire Côte d’Azur, CNRS, CS 34229, F-06304 Nice Cedex 4, France
- ⁷² OzGrav, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia 6009, Australia
- ⁷³ Dipartimento di Fisica “E.R. Caianiello”, Università di Salerno, I-84084 Fisciano, Salerno, Italy
- ⁷⁴ INFN, Sezione di Napoli, Gruppo Collegato di Salerno, Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo, I-80126 Napoli, Italy
- ⁷⁵ Physik-Institut, University of Zurich, Winterthurerstrasse 190, 8057 Zurich, Switzerland
- ⁷⁶ Univ Rennes, CNRS, Institut FOTON - UMR6082, F-3500 Rennes, France
- ⁷⁷ University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, USA
- ⁷⁸ Laboratoire Kastler Brossel, Sorbonne Université, CNRS, ENS-Université PSL, Collège de France, F-75005 Paris, France
- ⁷⁹ Université catholique de Louvain, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
- ⁸⁰ Astronomical Observatory Warsaw University, 00-478 Warsaw, Poland
- ⁸¹ VU University Amsterdam, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- ⁸² Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics (Albert Einstein Institute), D-14476 Potsdam-Golm, Germany
- ⁸³ University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, USA
- ⁸⁴ School of Physics, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332, USA
- ⁸⁵ Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, CNRS, Institut Lumière Matière, F-69622 Villeurbanne, France
- ⁸⁶ Università di Napoli “Federico II”, Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo, I-80126 Napoli, Italy
- ⁸⁷ NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, MD 20771, USA
- ⁸⁸ Dipartimento di Fisica, Università degli Studi di Genova, I-16146 Genova, Italy
- ⁸⁹ RESCEU, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, 113-0033, Japan
- ⁹⁰ Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China
- ⁹¹ Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409, USA
- ⁹² Università di Roma Tor Vergata, I-00133 Roma, Italy
- ⁹³ Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla, MO 65409, USA
- ⁹⁴ Departamento de Astronomía y Astrofísica, Universitat de València, E-46100 Burjassot, València, Spain
- ⁹⁵ Museo Storico della Fisica e Centro Studi e Ricerche “Enrico Fermi”, I-00184 Roma, Italy
- ⁹⁶ National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu City, 30013 Taiwan, People’s Republic of China
- ⁹⁷ Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales 2678, Australia
- ⁹⁸ Physics and Astronomy Department, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY 11794, USA
- ⁹⁹ Center for Computational Astrophysics, Flatiron Institute, 162 5th Ave, New York, NY 10010, USA
- ¹⁰⁰ University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637, USA
- ¹⁰¹ The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong
- ¹⁰² Dipartimento di Ingegneria Industriale (DIIN), Università di Salerno, I-84084 Fisciano, Salerno, Italy
- ¹⁰³ Institut de Physique des 2 Infinis de Lyon (IP2I) - UMR 5822, Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard, CNRS, F-69622 Villeurbanne, France
- ¹⁰⁴ Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, South Korea
- ¹⁰⁵ Pusan National University, Busan 46241, South Korea
- ¹⁰⁶ INAF, Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova, I-35122 Padova, Italy
- ¹⁰⁷ OzGrav, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia
- ¹⁰⁸ Universitat de les Illes Balears, IAC3–IEEC, E-07122 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
- ¹⁰⁹ Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels 1050, Belgium
- ¹¹⁰ Departamento de Matemáticas, Universitat de València, E-46100 Burjassot, València, Spain
- ¹¹¹ Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA
- ¹¹² Cardiff University, Cardiff CF24 3AA, UK
- ¹¹³ University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881, USA
- ¹¹⁴ Bellevue College, Bellevue, WA 98007, USA
- ¹¹⁵ MTA-ELTE Astrophysics Research Group, Institute of Physics, Eötvös University, Budapest 1117, Hungary
- ¹¹⁶ California State University, Los Angeles, 5151 State University Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90032, USA
- ¹¹⁷ Universität Hamburg, D-22761 Hamburg, Germany
- ¹¹⁸ Institute for Plasma Research, Bhat, Gandhinagar 382428, India
- ¹¹⁹ IGFAE, Campus Sur, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 15782, Spain
- ¹²⁰ The University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK
- ¹²¹ Dipartimento di Scienze Matematiche, Fisiche e Informatiche, Università di Parma, I-43124 Parma, Italy
- ¹²² INFN, Sezione di Milano Bicocca, Gruppo Collegato di Parma, I-43124 Parma, Italy
- ¹²³ Dipartimento di Ingegneria, Università del Sannio, I-82100 Benevento, Italy
- ¹²⁴ Università di Trento, Dipartimento di Fisica, I-38123 Povo, Trento, Italy
- ¹²⁵ INFN, Trento Institute for Fundamental Physics and Applications, I-38123 Povo, Trento, Italy
- ¹²⁶ Università di Roma “La Sapienza”, I-00185 Roma, Italy
- ¹²⁷ Università degli Studi di Sassari, I-07100 Sassari, Italy
- ¹²⁸ INFN, Laboratori Nazionali del Sud, I-95125 Catania, Italy
- ¹²⁹ University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, PO1 3FX, UK
- ¹³⁰ West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, USA
- ¹³¹ The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, USA
- ¹³² Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA
- ¹³³ Institute for Nuclear Research (Atomki), Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Bem tér 18/c, H-4026 Debrecen, Hungary
- ¹³⁴ CNR-SPIN, c/o Università di Salerno, I-84084 Fisciano, Salerno, Italy
- ¹³⁵ Scuola di Ingegneria, Università della Basilicata, I-85100 Potenza, Italy
- ¹³⁶ National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, 2-21-1 Osawa, Mitaka, Tokyo 181-8588, Japan
- ¹³⁷ Observatori Astronòmic, Universitat de València, E-46980 Paterna, València, Spain
- ¹³⁸ INFN Sezione di Torino, I-10125 Torino, Italy
- ¹³⁹ Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Powai, Mumbai 400 076, India
- ¹⁴⁰ University of Szeged, Dóm tér 9, Szeged 6720, Hungary
- ¹⁴¹ Delta Institute for Theoretical Physics, Science Park 904, 1090 GL Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- ¹⁴² Lorentz Institute, Leiden University, PO Box 9506, Leiden 2300 RA, The Netherlands
- ¹⁴³ GRAPPA, Anton Pannekoek Institute for Astronomy and Institute for High-Energy Physics, University of Amsterdam, Science Park 904, 1098 XH Amsterdam, The Netherlands

- ¹⁴⁴ Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai 400005, India
¹⁴⁵ INAF, Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte, I-80131 Napoli, Italy
¹⁴⁶ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
¹⁴⁷ American University, Washington, D.C. 20016, USA
¹⁴⁸ University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA
¹⁴⁹ Maastricht University, P.O. Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, The Netherlands
¹⁵⁰ Directorate of Construction, Services & Estate Management, Mumbai 400094, India
¹⁵¹ University of Białystok, 15-424 Białystok, Poland
¹⁵² King's College London, University of London, London WC2R 2LS, UK
¹⁵³ University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK
¹⁵⁴ University of Washington Bothell, Bothell, WA 98011, USA
¹⁵⁵ Institute of Applied Physics, Nizhny Novgorod, 603950, Russia
¹⁵⁶ Ewha Womans University, Seoul 03760, South Korea
¹⁵⁷ Inje University Gimhae, South Gyeongsang, 50834, South Korea
¹⁵⁸ National Institute for Mathematical Sciences, Daejeon 34047, South Korea
¹⁵⁹ Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology, Ulsan 44919, South Korea
¹⁶⁰ Bard College, 30 Campus Rd, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY 12504, USA
¹⁶¹ NCBJ, 05-400 Świerk-Otwock, Poland
¹⁶² Institute of Mathematics, Polish Academy of Sciences, 00656 Warsaw, Poland
¹⁶³ Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14850, USA
¹⁶⁴ Université de Montréal/Polytechnique, Montreal, Quebec H3T 1J4, Canada
¹⁶⁵ Lagrange, Université Côte d'Azur, Observatoire Côte d'Azur, CNRS, CS 34229, F-06304 Nice Cedex 4, France
¹⁶⁶ Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI 49242, USA
¹⁶⁷ Korea Astronomy and Space Science Institute, Daejeon 34055, South Korea
¹⁶⁸ Institute for High-Energy Physics, University of Amsterdam, Science Park 904, 1098 XH Amsterdam, The Netherlands
¹⁶⁹ NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, Huntsville, AL 35811, USA
¹⁷⁰ University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, USA
¹⁷¹ Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, I-00146 Roma, Italy
¹⁷² INFN, Sezione di Roma Tre, I-00146 Roma, Italy
¹⁷³ ESPCI, CNRS, F-75005 Paris, France
¹⁷⁴ Center for Phononics and Thermal Energy Science, School of Physics Science and Engineering, Tongji University, 200092 Shanghai, People's Republic of China
¹⁷⁵ Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA 70813, USA
¹⁷⁶ Department of Physics, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712, USA
¹⁷⁷ Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Trieste, I-34127 Trieste, Italy
¹⁷⁸ Centre Scientifique de Monaco, 8 quai Antoine 1er, MC 98000, Monaco
¹⁷⁹ Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai 600036, India
¹⁸⁰ Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, F-67000 Strasbourg, France
¹⁸¹ Institut des Hautes Etudes Scientifiques, F-91440 Bures-sur-Yvette, France
¹⁸² IISER-Kolkata, Mohanpur, West Bengal 741252, India
¹⁸³ Department of Astrophysics/IMAPP, Radboud University Nijmegen, P.O. Box 9010, 6500 GL Nijmegen, The Netherlands
¹⁸⁴ Kenyon College, Gambier, OH 43022, USA
¹⁸⁵ Whitman College, 345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla, WA 99362, USA
¹⁸⁶ Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY 14456, USA
¹⁸⁷ Department of Physics, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YB, UK
¹⁸⁸ OzGrav, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn VIC 3122, Australia
¹⁸⁹ Trinity University, San Antonio, TX 78212, USA
¹⁹⁰ Dipartimento di Fisica, Università degli Studi di Torino, I-10125 Torino, Italy
¹⁹¹ Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar Ahmedabad Gujarat 382424, India
¹⁹² INAF, Osservatorio Astronomico di Brera sede di Merate, I-23807 Merate, Lecco, Italy
¹⁹³ Centro de Astrofísica e Gravitação (CENTRA), Departamento de Física, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, 1049-001 Lisboa, Portugal
¹⁹⁴ Marquette University, 11420 W. Clybourn St., Milwaukee, WI 53233, USA
¹⁹⁵ Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad, Sangareddy, Khandi, Telangana 502285, India
¹⁹⁶ INAF, Osservatorio di Astrofisica e Scienza dello Spazio, I-40129 Bologna, Italy
¹⁹⁷ International Institute of Physics, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal RN 59078-970, Brazil
¹⁹⁸ Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Ave, Villanova, PA 19085, USA
¹⁹⁹ Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, USA
²⁰⁰ Carleton College, Northfield, MN 55057, USA
²⁰¹ Department of Physics, Utrecht University, 3584CC Utrecht, The Netherlands
²⁰² Concordia University Wisconsin, 2800 N Lake Shore Dr, Mequon, WI 53097, USA
²⁰³ Institute for Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Royal Observatory, Blackford Hill, EH9 3HJ, UK
²⁰⁴ Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, 4800 Oak Grove Drive, Pasadena, CA 91109, USA
²⁰⁵ Theoretical Astrophysics Including Relativity (TAPIR), MC 350-17, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125, USA

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ABSTRACT

Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo are monitoring the sky and collecting gravitational-wave strain data with sufficient sensitivity to detect signals routinely. In this paper we describe the data recorded by these instruments during their first and second observing runs. The main data products are gravitational-wave strain time series sampled at 16384 Hz. The datasets that include this strain measurement can be freely accessed through the Gravitational Wave Open Science Center at <http://gw-openscience.org>, together with data-quality information essential for the analysis of LIGO and Virgo data, documentation, tutorials, and supporting software.

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Code metadata

Current data version	O1 V1 and O2 R1
Permanent link to code/repository used for this data version	https://doi.org/10.7935/K57P8W9D and https://doi.org/10.7935/CA75-FM95
Legal Code License	Creative Commons Attribution International Public License 4.0
Code versioning system used	NA
Software code languages, tools, and services used	Python, Django
Compilation requirements, operating environments & dependencies	Unix, Linux, Mac, Windows
Link to documentation/manual	https://www.gw-openscience.org/O1 and https://www.gw-openscience.org/O2
Support email for questions	gwosc@igwn.org

1. Motivation and significance

Gravitational waves (GWs) are transverse waves in the space-time metric that travel at the speed of light. They are generated by accelerated masses and more precisely, to lowest order, by time changes of the mass quadrupole [1], such as in the orbital motion of a binary system of compact stars. GWs were predicted in 1916 by Albert Einstein after the final formulation of the field equations of general relativity [2,3]. They were first observed directly in 2015 [4] by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) [5] during its first observing run (O1), which took place from September 12, 2015 to January 19, 2016.

After an upgrade of the detectors, the second observing run (O2) took place from November 30, 2016 to August 25, 2017. Advanced Virgo [6] joined this observing run on August 1, 2017. On April 1, 2019, Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo initiated their third observing run (O3), lasting almost one year [7]. The analysis of O1 and O2 data produced 11 confident detections (10 binary black hole mergers [4,8–12] and 1 binary neutron star merger [13]) and 14 marginal triggers, collected and described in the Gravitational Wave Transient Catalog (GWTC-1) [14].

Notable events in this catalog are the first observed event GW150914 [4], the first three-detector event GW170814 [12] and the binary neutron star (BNS) coalescence GW170817 [13]. This latter event is the first case where gravitational and electromagnetic waves have been observed from a single source [15] offering a unique description of the physical processes at play during and after the merger of two neutron stars.

The main data product of the LIGO and Virgo detectors is a time series containing the measure of the strain, which will be described more in detail in the section 2. The LIGO Scientific Collaboration and the Virgo Collaboration (LVC) release their calibrated strain data to researchers outside the LVC and to a broader public that includes amateur scientists, students, etc. The roadmap for these data releases is described in the LIGO Data Management Plan [16] and in the Memorandum of Understanding between Virgo and LIGO [17] (Attachment A, Sec. 2.9). Two types of data release are foreseen. When GW events are discovered and published individually or in a catalog, the LVC releases short segments of GW strain data around the time of the GW events, as in the case of GWTC-1 [18]. In addition, a release of the strain recorded during the entire observation run occurs after a proprietary period of internal use, necessary also to validate and calibrate the data.

The cleaned, calibrated GW strain data related to both the O1 and O2 runs were released in January 2018 [19] and in February 2019 [20], respectively. The release of the strain data for the first block of six months of O3 is currently scheduled for April 2021, and November 2021 for the second 6-month block.

This article focuses on the already-released data from the O1 and O2 runs. Public access to these data along with extensive

documentation and usage instructions are provided through the Gravitational Wave Open Science Center (GWOSC) [21] at <http://gw-openscience.org>. GWOSC also provides online tools for finding and viewing data, usage guidelines and tutorials. We summarize this information, and include a comprehensive bibliography describing the detectors, the data collection and calibration, the noise characterization and software packages for data analysis.

To date more than 200 scientific articles have been written using the data from the GWOSC website. These analyses confirm, complement and extend the results published by the LVC, demonstrating the impact on the scientific community of the GW data releases. The covered topics span from alternative methods to search for gravitational wave events, some leading to new detections, e.g. [22–34], to reassessed estimations of the event parameters, e.g. [35–42], studies on matter effects for the binary neutron star, e.g. [43–46], GW polarization, e.g. [47,48], black-hole ringdown, e.g. [49,50], application of machine learning techniques to GW data analysis, e.g. [51,52], search for GW lensing effects, e.g. [53,54] and many other applications to astrophysics and cosmology, e.g. [55–59]. The list of projects goes beyond published scientific research and also includes student projects, academic courses, and art installations.¹

This paper is organized as follows. The section 2 provides insights about how the data are collected and calibrated, about data quality and simulated signal injections. The GWOSC file format and content are described in the section 3, while the section 5 gives suggestions on the tools that can be used to guide the analysis of the GW data.

2. Methods

The Advanced LIGO [5] and Advanced Virgo [6] detectors are enhanced Michelson interferometers (see a simplified description of the experimental layout in Fig. 3 of [4] and Fig. 3 of [6]). Each detector has two orthogonal arms of equal length $L_x = L_y = L$, each with two mirrors acting as test masses and forming a Fabry–Perot optical cavity. The arm length is $L = 4$ km for LIGO, and $L = 3$ km for Virgo. Advanced LIGO consists of two essentially identical detectors at Hanford, Washington and Livingston, Louisiana, while the Advanced Virgo detector is located in Cascina near Pisa, Italy.

When GWs reach Earth, they alter the detector arm lengths, stretching or contracting each one according to the wave's direction, polarization and phase. This induces a time-dependent differential arm length change $\Delta L = \delta L_x - \delta L_y = hL$, proportional to the GW strain amplitude h projected onto the detector (see e.g., [1] chap. 9, p. 470). Photodiodes continuously sense the differential length variations by measuring the interference between

¹ See <http://gw-openscience.org/projects/> for the list of scientific papers and projects.

the two laser beams that return to the beam splitter from the detector arms.

While Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo follow a similar general scheme, each facility has a specific, though closely related, design. We refer the reader to the following references for details about the technical developments on the instrumentation and instrument controls that play a major part in reaching the sensitivities obtained during the O1 and O2 observing runs. For Advanced LIGO those include the light source (a pre-stabilized laser) [60,61], the main optics [62–69], the signal recycling mirror (used to optimize the GW signal extraction) [5,70,71], the optics suspension and seismic isolation systems [72–85], the sensing and control strategies [86–88], the automation system [89], and various techniques for the mitigation of optical contamination, stray light and thermal effects [90–93].

For Advanced Virgo [6,94] a similar list includes the high reflective coatings of the core optics [95,96], the locking, control and thermal compensation systems [97–99], and the mitigation of magnetic and seismic noises [100–103].

When the detectors are taking data in their nominal configuration, they are said to be in *observing mode* or *science mode*. This condition does not occur all the time for various technical reasons. For example, the Fabry–Perot cavities included in the detector arms have to be kept at resonance together with the power and signal recycling cavities [104]. There are periods when the control loops fail to maintain the instrument on this working point causing a non-observing period. Other possible reasons for non-observing include maintenance periods and environmental effects like earthquakes, wind and the microseismic ground motion arising from ocean storms [105,106].

The time percentage during which the detectors are in science mode is called *duty cycle* or *duty factor*. During O1 the LIGO detectors had individual duty factors of 64.6% for Hanford and 57.4% for Livingston, while in O2 it was 65.3% and 61.8%, respectively. Virgo operated with a duty factor of 85.1% during O2 (see table 1 of [7]).

If we define the *network duty factor* by the time percentage during which all the detectors in the network are in science mode simultaneously, we find 42.8% for the LIGO network during O1 and 46.1% during O2 [14]. For the LIGO–Virgo network it was 35%.

It is customary to quantify the detector sensitivity by the *range* [107,108], i.e., the distance to which sources can be observed. In Figs. 1 and 2, the *BNS range* is calculated assuming that the observed source is a coalescence of compact objects of masses of $1.4 M_{\odot}$ each, the observation has a minimum threshold in signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) of 8, and the range is averaged over all possible sky locations and orientations of the source, following [107]. The figures contain also the equivalent cumulative time–volume [108] obtained by multiplying the amount of time spent observing by the observed astrophysical volume as defined by the range. The sharp drops in the *BNS range* are typically due to transient noise in the interferometer limiting its sensitivity, while the gaps are due to non-observing periods. In particular, during O2, there were two long breaks, one for end-of-year holidays and another to make improvements to the detectors. At the end of both runs there was a sensitivity drop in one of the LIGO detectors. For O1, a drop in sensitivity at LIGO Livingston was caused by electronics noise at one of the end stations while, for O2, a drop in sensitivity at LIGO Hanford was due to electrostatic charging of the test mass optics caused by an earthquake in Montana.

The plots in Figs. 1 and 2 are indicative of the performance of the individual detectors.² However, observations are performed

jointly by Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo as a network. Roughly speaking, the sensitivity of the global network is determined by that of the second most sensitive detector operating at any time. Despite the lower BNS range and cumulative time–volume for Virgo, its contribution has been important for astrophysical parameter estimation, especially in determining source localization and orientation [109]. For instance, GW170814 and GW170817 were localized by the three-detector network within a few tens of square degrees while the other events were localized by the two-detector network in sky areas ranging from a few hundreds to several thousands of square degrees.

Note that the sensitive distance depends strongly on the source mass, and can be much higher (up to gigaparsecs) for higher-mass BBH systems (see e.g. Fig. 1 of Ref. [110]).

The next sections provide details on the calibration, the detector noise characterization, the data quality and signal injections.

2.1. Calibration

The differential arm length read-out of the interferometer is recorded digitally through a data acquisition system [5,6,111]. The LIGO and Virgo data acquisition systems acquire data at sampling rates $f_s = 16\,384$ Hz and 20 000 Hz, respectively. The Virgo data is digitally converted to the same sampling rate as LIGO prior to any analysis.

A calibration procedure [112–117] is applied to produce the dimensionless strain from the differential arm length read-out. For both the Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo detectors, the calibration procedure creates a digital time series, $h(t)$, from the detector control system channels. Details of the production and characterization of $h(t)$ can be found in [118,119]. The calibration uncertainty estimation and residual systematic errors are discussed in [119–121]. The strain time series include both detector noise and any astrophysical signal that might be present.

Multiple versions of the calibrated data are produced as more precise measurements or instrument models become available. A first strain $h(t)$ is initially produced online using calibration parameters measured just before the observing period starts. This data stream is analyzed within a few seconds to generate alerts when an event is detected thus allowing follow-up observations by other facilities [122]. Other offline versions of the calibration is produced later, offline, to include improvements to the calibration models or filters, to resolve dropouts in the initial online version or after applying noise cleaning procedures. This data stream is used in the production of the final search results, e.g., the final event catalog.

For the O1 and O2 science runs, we released the final offline version, that has the most precise uncertainties and after applying available noise cleaning procedures. The calibration versions differ for the single event data releases depending on whether they pertain to the initial publication of the event (early version) [123–129] or to the catalog GWTC-1 publication (final version) [18].

The detector strain $h(t)$ is only calibrated between 10 Hz and 5000 Hz for Advanced LIGO [118,120] and 10 Hz and 8000 Hz for Advanced Virgo [119]. Any apparent signal outside this range cannot be trusted because it is not a faithful representation of the GW strain at those frequencies. This part of the spectrum where the data are not calibrated corresponds to the regions where the measurement noise increases rapidly, thus drastically reducing the chance for observing GWs.

2.2. Detector noise characterization and data quality

The strain measurement is impacted by multiple noise sources, such as quantum sensing noise, seismic noise, suspension thermal noise, mirror coating thermal noise, and local gravity gradient

² These figures are produced with data calibrated using the procedure described in the next section.

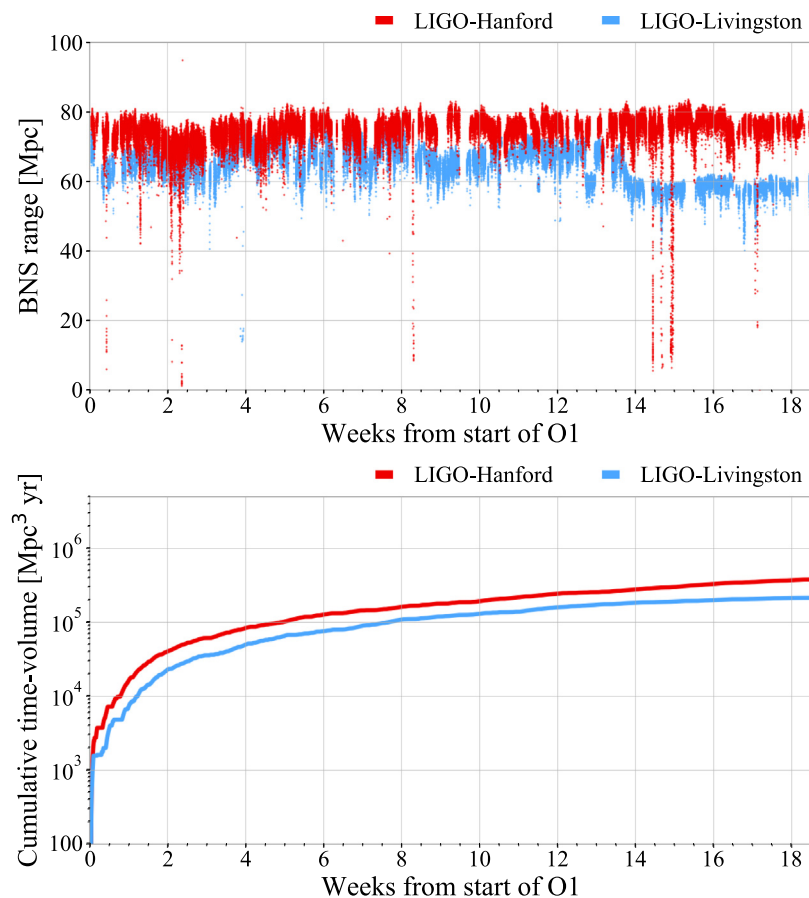


Fig. 1. Upper plot: O1 sensitivity of the Livingston and Hanford detectors to GWs as measured by the BNS range (in megaparsecs) to binary neutron-star mergers averaged over all sky positions and source orientations [107]. Lower plot: cumulative time–volume (assuming an Euclidean geometry appropriate for small redshifts) of the Livingston and Hanford detectors during O1, obtained by multiplying the observed astrophysical volume by the amount of time spent observing.

noise produced by seismic waves (called Newtonian noise) [5]. The noise budget plot for Advanced LIGO during O1 can be found in [70]. In Figs. 3 and 4 the noise budget for O2 is shown for Advanced LIGO and Advanced Virgo, respectively.

The plots show the measured noise spectrum and the contribution from various known noise sources.³ The noise spectra indicate that the dominant noises rise steeply at high and low frequencies. This opens an observational window between tens of Hz and a few kHz. Data analysis pipelines that are used to search for gravitational-wave signals usually concentrate on frequency intervals smaller than the full calibrated bandwidth to avoid the high noise level at the extremes of this band.

The strain data are high-pass filtered at 8 Hz to avoid a number of digital signal processing problems related to spectral dynamic range and floating point precision limitation that may occur downstream when searching in the data.⁴

As shown in Figs. 3 and 4, the data contain spectral lines that can complicate searches for signals in those frequency bands [132]. These lines include calibration lines, power line harmonics, “violin” modes (resonant frequencies of mirror suspension fibers), other known instrumental lines, unknown lines and also evenly spaced combs of narrow lines, typically in exact multiples of some fundamental frequency. Further details on spectral lines during

³ Other useful references for the detector sensitivity are [130] for O1 and [14] for O2.

⁴ See https://www.gw-openscience.org/yellow_box/ and in particular the example showing the 8 Hz roll-off at https://www.gw-openscience.org/static/images/ASDs_GW150914_1-Hz.png.

O1 and O2 can be found in [133,134] as well as on the GWOSC web pages.⁵

The detector sites are equipped with a large number of sensors that monitor both the instrumental and environmental state (see [105,106,135] for details). The measurements performed by these sensors are recorded in *auxiliary channels* that are crucial for diagnosing instrument faults or for identifying environmental perturbations. Non-Gaussian transient noise artifacts, called *glitches*, can mask or mimic true astrophysical signals [105]. Auxiliary channels provide a useful source of information for the characterization of glitches, and their mitigation. Glitches are caused by anomalous behavior in instrumental or environmental channels that couple into the GW channel. The observation of coincident glitches between the GW and auxiliary channels provides a mechanism for rejecting a detected (potential) event in the former as not astrophysical in origin. The large volume of auxiliary data (hundreds of thousands of auxiliary channels) are inspected (see [105,106,135] for details) and distilled into *data quality vetoes* that allow identification of times that are unsuitable for analysis or are likely to produce false alarms. Veto conditions are determined using systematic studies to remove glitches with high efficiency and limited loss of observation time [105]. As an example, vetoes discard glitches from electronics faults, photodiode saturations, analog-to-digital converter (ADC) and digital-to-analog converter (DAC) overflows, elevated seismic noise and computer failures. The data quality vetoes are

⁵ <http://gw-openscience.org/o1speclines> and <http://gw-openscience.org/o2speclines>.

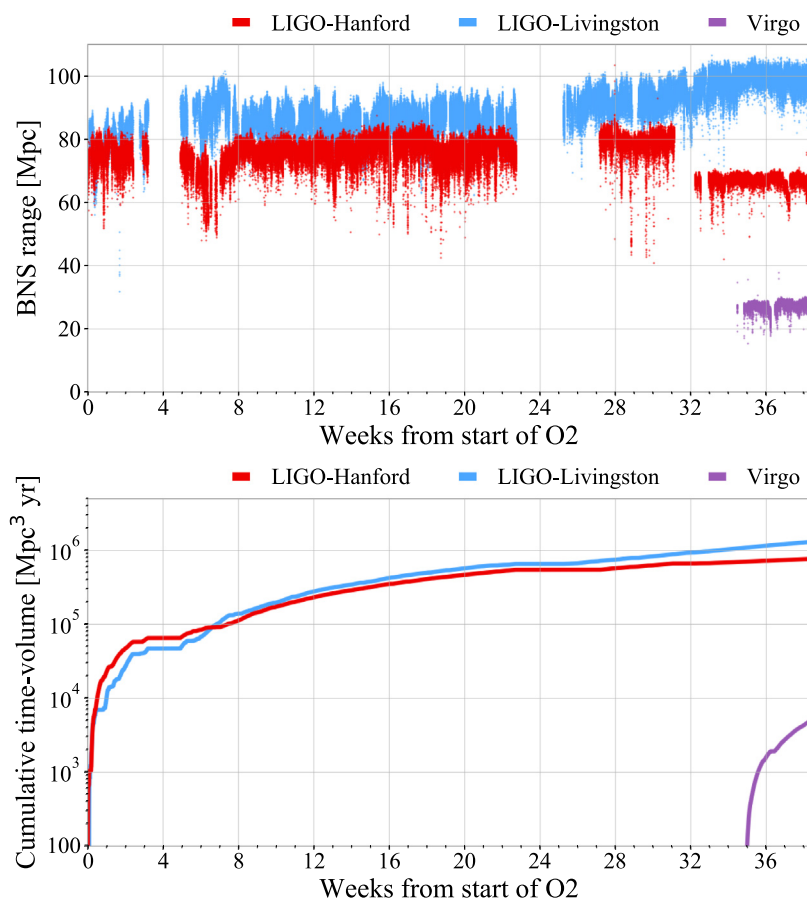


Fig. 2. Upper plot: O2 sensitivity of the Livingston, Hanford and Virgo detectors to GWs as measured by the BNS range (in megaparsecs) to binary neutron-star mergers averaged over all sky positions and source orientations [107]. Lower plot: cumulative time-volume (assuming Euclidean geometry appropriate for small redshifts) of the Livingston, Hanford and Virgo detectors during O2, obtained by multiplying the observed astrophysical volume by the amount of time spent observing. Although Virgo has a lower BNS range and cumulative time-volume, its contribution is crucial for source localization and astrophysical parameter estimation.

used by the GW searches to reduce the noise background [105] (see Sec. 3.2 for search-related usage information).

Different categories of data quality are defined according to the severity level and degree of understanding of the noise artifact. Data flagged as invalid due to severe detector malfunctioning, calibration error, or data acquisition problems, as described in [136] are typically not used for data analysis and are replaced by NaNs in the GWOSC data releases. We elaborate further on the various data quality categories and their usage in the section 3.6

Auxiliary channels are also used to subtract post-facto some well identified instrumental noise from the GW strain data. A procedure based on a linear coupling model [137] computes the transfer function that couples the witness channels to $h(t)$ and subtracts the contributing noise from the strain amplitude. This procedure was used during the second observing run in Advanced LIGO data. It achieved an increase of up to 30% of the detector sensitive volume to GWs for a broad range of compact binary systems and was most significant for the LIGO-Hanford detector [138]. In some cases data are available both before and after noise subtraction is applied (for example in the case of GW170817 [129]).

2.3. Signal injections

In addition to data quality, some metadata provide information about *hardware injections* [139] inserted into the detector

⁶ See also http://gw-openscience.org/o1_details and http://gw-openscience.org/o2_details.

data for testing and calibration. The detectors' test masses (interferometer mirrors) are physically displaced by an actuator in order to simulate the effects of a GW.⁷ A simulated GW signal is introduced into the detector control system yielding a response which mimics that of a true GW. The analysis of a data segment that includes an injection allows an end-to-end test of the ability for the analysis procedure to detect and characterize the GW strain signal.

Hardware injections are also used for detector characterization to check that the auxiliary channels used for vetoes do not respond to gravitational-wave-like signals. This is a *safety* check since a channel that has no sensitivity to GWs is considered safe for use when constructing a veto. It is clearly important to keep a record of injections to avoid any confusion with real events. In the section 3 we describe how this bookkeeping is done.⁸

3. Data records

GW open data are distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution International Public License 4.0⁹ through the GWOSC web pages.¹⁰ The files can be directly downloaded one by one from this web page. However, to download large amounts of

⁷ Calibration lines mentioned earlier are generated using the same process.

⁸ See the GWOSC web page http://gw-openscience.org/o1_inj and http://gw-openscience.org/o2_inj.

⁹ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

¹⁰ <http://gw-openscience.org/data/>

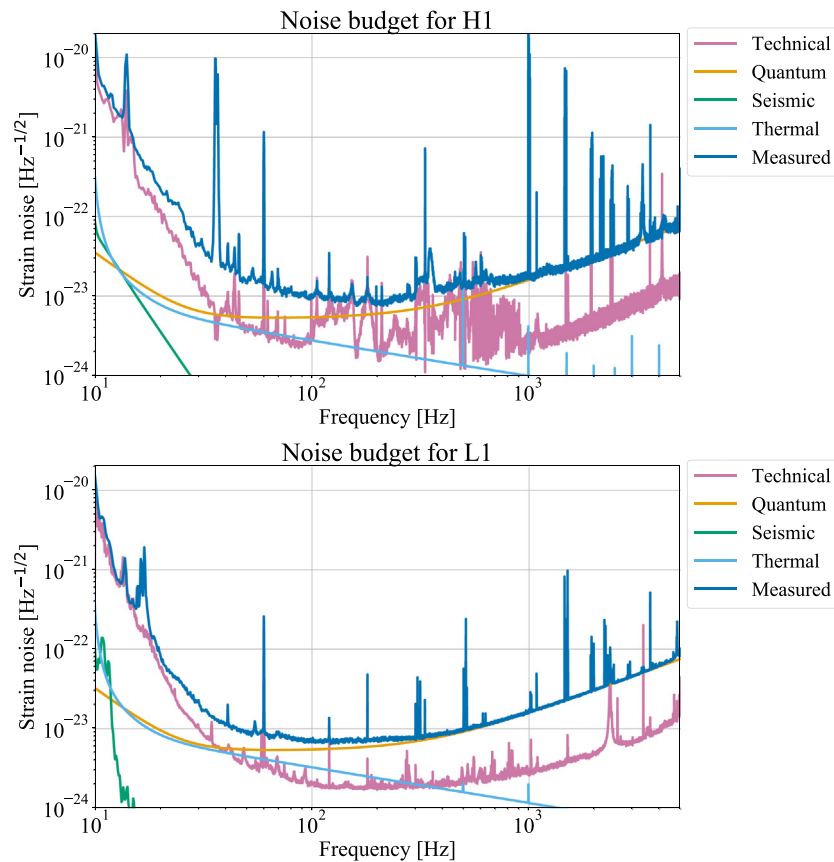


Fig. 3. Sensitivities of the Advanced LIGO detectors during the second observation run (O2), expressed as the equivalent strain noise spectrum of each detector (the blue “Measured” curves). Also shown are the known contributors to the detector noise, which sum to the measured spectrum across much, but not all of the frequency band (i.e. the measured noise spectrum is not fully explained by all known sources of noise). The quantum noise includes both shot noise (dominant at higher frequencies) and radiation pressure noise (dominant at lower frequencies). Thermal noise includes contributions from the suspensions, the substrate and coatings of the test masses. Seismic noise is computed as the ground displacement attenuated through the seismic isolation system and the suspensions chain. The seismic curves differ for H1 and L1 as actual seismic data were used for L1 while the H1 curve is a model that also includes Newtonian noise. Technical noise includes angular and length sensing/control noise for degrees of freedom that are not related to the differential arm length measurement, and other sub-dominant noises such as laser frequency, intensity and beam jitter noise, sensor and actuation noise, and Rayleigh scattering by the residual gas. The strong line features are due to the violin modes of the suspension wires, other resonance modes of the suspensions, the AC power line and its harmonics, and the calibration lines. Examples of similar plots for other data taking runs can be found in [70,131]. These noise spectra do not include any of the post-data collection noise subtraction mentioned in the text. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

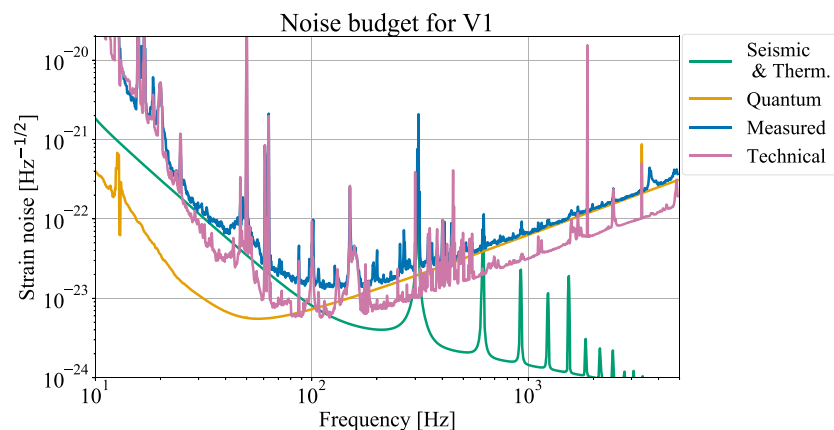


Fig. 4. Sensitivity of the Advanced Virgo detector during the O2 observation run. The meaning of the noise source contributions is the same as in Fig. 3, except for the seismic and thermal noises that are combined in this case and for the Newtonian noise which is not included. These noise spectra do not include any of the post-data collection noise subtraction mentioned in the text.

data (such as an entire observing run) the use of the distributed filesystem CernVM-FS [140,141] is preferred.¹¹ Once installed,

¹¹ For installation instructions, see <http://gw-openscience.org/cvmfs/>

Table 1

The channel names and frame types listed in this table are unique identifiers in the LIGO and Virgo data archives that allow tracing the provenance of the strain data released on GWOSC. The attribute CLEAN in H1 and L1 for O2 indicates that the noise subtraction procedure mentioned previously and described in [137] was used. The attributes CO2, DCS, DCH and Repro2A refer to the calibration version.

Run Det.	Channel name	Frame type
O1 H1	H1:DCS-CALIB_STRAIN_CO2	H1_HOFT_CO2
O1 L1	L1:DCS-CALIB_STRAIN_CO2	L1_HOFT_CO2
O2 H1	H1:DCH-CLEAN_STRAIN_CO2	H1_CLEANED_HOFT_CO2
O2 L1	L1:DCH-CLEAN_STRAIN_CO2	L1_CLEANED_HOFT_CO2
O2 V1	V1:Hrec_hoft_V102Repro2A_16384 Hz	V102Repro2A

this filesystem allows access to GWOSC data as files in a directory tree mounted locally on the user's computer.

The calibrated strain data of O1 [19] and O2 [20] described in this paper are conveniently divided into files of 4096 s. Short segments of 32 s and 4096 s duration for each GW event are also released.¹² The description of the data records that follows is valid both for single event release and for bulk data release.

The strain data are repackaged and resampled by GWOSC to make it more accessible to users both within the LVC and outside. Along with the native 16384 Hz sampling rate, the data on GWOSC are also made available at 4096 Hz.¹³ The down-sampling is performed using the standard decimation technique implemented in `scipy.signal.decimate`¹⁴ from the Python package `scipy` [143]. From the Nyquist-Shannon sampling theorem [144–146], the largest accessible frequency is the Nyquist frequency equal to half of the sampling rate f_s . This should be kept in mind when choosing the sampling rate to download from GWOSC, and in general when analyzing these files; in particular, because of the anti-aliasing filter's roll-off, the data sampled at 4 kHz are valid only up to frequencies of about 1700 Hz.

The publicly released data are generated from data streams in the LIGO and Virgo data archives uniquely identified by a channel name and a frame type (an internal label that specifies the content of the files). For completeness, we give the provenance of the GWOSC data in Table 1 and list the channel names and frame types used to generate the O1 and O2 dataset discussed in this article. In this table and in the following, H1 and L1 indicate the two LIGO detectors (Hanford and Livingston respectively) while V1 refers to Virgo. Downsampling (for the 4 kHz dataset) and replacement with NaNs of bad quality or absent data are the only modifications of the original data.

3.1. Gwosc file formats

The GW open data are delivered in two different file formats: `hdf` and `gwf`. The Hierarchical Data Format `hdf` [147] is a portable data format readable by many programming languages. The Frame format `gwf` [148] is used internally by the GW community. In addition, the data associated with GW events are also released as plain text files containing two columns with the GPS time and the corresponding strain values.

There are some differences in the structure of the file names between O1 and O2 due to the evolution of GWOSC itself. For O1 the name of the files has the structure: `obs-ifo_LOSC_s_Vn-GPSstart-duration.extension`, where `obs` is the observatory, i.e. the

¹² <http://gw-openscience.org/eventapi/>

¹³ In the rest of the paper the sampling rates will be indicated in kHz and rounded to the closest integer, i.e. 4 and 16 kHz means 4096 and 16384 Hz, respectively

¹⁴ This method applies an anti-aliasing filter based on an order-8 Chebyshev type I infinite impulse response (IIR) filter [142] before decimation.

Table 2

Channel names of the GWOSC frame (`gwf`) files. In the name, `ifo` is a place holder for the interferometer name, i.e. H1, L1 or V1, and `s` the sampling rate in kHz. The R1 substring represents the revision number of the channel name so it will become R2 in case there is a second (revised) release, and so on.

	O1 (4 kHz sampling)	O1 (16 kHz sampling) and O2
Strain	<code>ifo:LOSC-STRAIN</code>	<code>ifo:GWOSC-sKHZ_R1_STRAIN</code>
Data quality mask	<code>ifo:LOSC-DQMASK</code>	<code>ifo:GWOSC-sKHZ_R1_DQMASK</code>
Injections mask	<code>ifo:LOSC-INJMASK</code>	<code>ifo:GWOSC-sKHZ_R1-INJMASK</code>

site, so can have values L or H; `ifo` is the interferometer and can have values H1 or L1; `LOSC` is the previous name of GWOSC, (the L in `LOSC` stands for LIGO); `s` is the sampling rate in kHz with possible values 4 or 16; `n` is the version number of the file (until now we have only one version, so only V1); `GPSstart` is the starting time in GPS of the data contained in the file; `duration` is the duration in seconds of this segment of data, which value is always 4096 in this case; the `extension` can be `gwf` or `hdf`. The file names in O2 are instead of the type `obs-ifo_GWOSC_ObservationRun_sKHZ_Rn-GPSstart-duration.extension`, with the same meaning of the italic letters, but in this case `obs` and `ifo` can have also the values V and V1, respectively, for Virgo data and we added the run name in the file names, so in this case `ObservationRun` is O2.

The folders (or groups) included in the `hdf` files are:

- `meta`: metadata of the file containing the following fields:
 - `Description`, e.g. “Strain data time series from LIGO”,
 - `DescriptionURL`: URL of the GWOSC website,
 - `Detector`, e.g. L1, and `Observatory`, e.g. L,¹⁵
 - `Duration`, `GPSstart`, `UTCstart`: duration and starting time (in GPS and UTC, respectively) of the segment of data contained in the file.

In the O2 files it was decided to add also the `StrainChannel` and `FrameType` of the original files internally used by the LVC (i.e. the content of Table 1).

- `strain`: array of $h(t)$, sampled at 4 or 16 kHz depending on the file. For the times when the detector is not in science mode or the data does not meet the minimum required data quality conditions (see next section), the strain values are set to NaNs. The strain $h(t)$ is a function of time, so it is accompanied by the attributes `Xstart` and `Xspacing` defining the starting GPS time of the data contained in the array and the corresponding distance in time between the points of the array.
- `quality`: this folder contains two sub-folders, one for data quality and the other for injections, each including a bitmask to indicate at each second the status of the data quality or the injections and the description of each bit of the mask, i.e. the content of Tables 3 and 4 (see section 3.2 for details).

The `gwf` files have a similar content but with a different structure. They contain 3 channels, one for the strain data, one for the data quality and one for the injections. The channel names differ slightly in O1 and O2 as described in Table 2. Note that the original files produced internally, whose channel names are listed in Table 1, contain only the strain channel, while the GWOSC files include also the data quality and injection information in the same file.

¹⁵ The observatory refer to the site and it is indicated by one letter, like L for Livingston. The addition of a number after the letter to indicate the detector, e.g. L1, could be useful if multiple detectors are installed in the same site, as it was at the beginning of LIGO.

3.2. Data quality and injections in gwosc files

Several types of searches are performed on the LIGO and Virgo data. Those searches are divided into four families named after the type of signals they target: Compact binary coalescences (CBC), GW bursts (BURST), continuous waves (CW) and stochastic backgrounds (STOCH).

CBC analyses (see e.g., [8,14,110,149–153]) seek signals from merging neutron stars and black holes by filtering the data with waveform templates. BURST analyses (see e.g., [154–158]) search for generic GW transients with minimal assumption on the source or signal morphology by identifying excess power in the time–frequency representation of the GW strain data. CW searches (see e.g., [159–162]) look for long-duration, continuous, periodic GW signals from asymmetries of rapidly spinning neutron stars. STOCH searches (see e.g., [163,164]) target the stochastic GW background signal which is formed by the superposition of a wide variety of independent and unresolved sources from different stages of the evolution of the Universe.

Due to the fundamental differences among these searches, some types of noise are problematic only for one or two types of search. For this reason, the data quality related to transient noises depends on the search type. It is provided inside the GWOSC files for the two GW transient searches CBC and BURST, that are most sensitive to this type of noise. The data quality information most relevant for CW and STOCH searches is in the frequency domain and it is provided as lists of instrumental lines in separate files [165–169].

Data quality and signal injection information for a given GPS second is indicated by bitmasks with a 1-Hz sampling rate. The bit meanings are given in Tables 3 and 4 for the data quality and injections, respectively. To describe data quality, different *categories* are defined. For each category, the corresponding bit in the bitmask shown in Table 3 has value 1 (good data) if in that second of time the requirements of the category are fulfilled, otherwise 0 (bad data).

The meaning of each category is the following:

DATA Failing this level indicates that LIGO and Virgo data are not available in GWOSC data because the instruments were not operating in nominal conditions. For O1 and O2, this is equivalent to failing Category 1 criteria, defined below. For these seconds of bad or absent data, NaNs have been inserted.

CAT1 (Category 1) Failing a data quality check at this category indicates a critical issue with a key detector component not operating in its nominal configuration. Since these times indicate a major known problem they are identical for each data analysis group. However, while CBC_CAT1 and BURST_CAT1 flag the same data, they exist separately in the dataset. GWOSC data during times that fail CAT1 criteria are replaced by NaN values in the strain time series. The time lost due to these critical quality issues (*dead time*) is: 1.683% (H1) and 1.039% (L1) of the run during O1; and 0.001% (H1), 0.003% (L1) and 0.053% (V1) of the run during O2 (all the percentages have been calculated with respect to the periods of science mode).

CAT2 (Category 2) Failing a data quality check at this category indicates times when there is a known, understood physical coupling between a sensor/auxiliary channel that monitors excess noise, and the strain channel [170]. The dead times corresponding to this veto for the CBC analysis are: 0.890% (H1) and 0.007% (L1) of the run during O1; 0.157% (H1) and 0.090% (L1) of the run during O2. The dead times corresponding to this veto for the BURST analysis are:

Table 3

Data quality bitmasks description. Data that are *not* present are replaced by NaN values in the strain time series. CBC_CAT1 and BURST_CAT1 are equivalent (see the definition of CAT1 in the text).

Bit	Short name	Description
0	DATA	Data present
1	CBC_CAT1	Pass CAT1 test
2	CBC_CAT2	Pass CAT1 and CAT2 test for CBC searches
3	CBC_CAT3	Pass CAT1 and CAT2 and CAT3 test for CBC searches
4	BURST_CAT1	Pass CAT1 test
5	BURST_CAT2	Pass CAT1 and CAT2 test for BURST searches
6	BURST_CAT3	Pass CAT1 and CAT2 and CAT3 test for BURST searches

Table 4

Meaning of the injection bits.

Bit	Short name	Description
0	NO_CBC_HW_INJ	No CBC injections
1	NO_BURST_HW_INJ	No burst injections
2	NO_DETCHAR_HW_INJ	No detector characterization injections
3	NO_CW_HW_INJ	No continuous wave injections
4	NO_STOCH_HW_INJ	No stochastic injections

0.624% (H1) and 0.021% (L1) of the run during O1; 0.212% (H1) and 0.151% (L1) of the run during O2. CAT2 was not used for Virgo in O2.

CAT3 (Category 3) Failing a data quality check at this category indicates times when there is statistical coupling between a sensor/auxiliary channel and the strain channel which is not fully understood. This category was not used in O1 and O2 LVC searches, but it is still in the file format for historical reasons.

As an example, [170] gives the list of all sensors/auxiliary channels used to define the CAT1 and CAT2 flags for BURST and CBC around the event GW150914.

Data quality categories are cascading: a time which fails a given category automatically fails all higher categories. Since CAT3 is not used in this specific case and only data passing CAT1 are provided, there is only the possibility that the data pass or not CAT2. However, the different analysis groups qualify the data independently: failing BURST_CAT2 does not necessarily imply failing CBC_CAT2.

The injection bitmask marks the injection-free times. Five different types of injections are usually performed: injections simulating signals searched for by CBC, BURST, CW and STOCH LVC pipelines, and injections used for detector characterization, labeled DETCHAR. For each injection type, the bit of the bitmask, whose meaning is described in Table 4, has value 1 if the injection is not present, otherwise 0.

Virgo did not perform hardware injections during O2, therefore all the bits of the injection bitmask have value 1.

4. Technical validation

The data repackaged for public use are validated by another independent internal team. In particular, this review team checks that:

- the strain vectors in the GWOSC hdf and gwf files are identical to machine precision to the corresponding strain vectors of the LVC main archives;
- the data quality and injection information given to the user correspond to what is included in the original LVC data quality database. The user can get this information in two ways: the bitmask included in the GWOSC files and the *Timeline* tool described in detail in the section 5. The output of both methods is checked against the database;

- the documentation web pages and the content of the present article contain correct and comprehensive information.

The data files, the *Timeline* and the web pages are released to the public once all those checks have been passed.

5. Usage notes

GW detectors are complex instruments, and their data reflect this complexity. For this reason, caution should be taken when searching for GW signals in the detector strain data, taking into account all the details about the usable frequency range, noise artifacts, data quality and injections discussed in this paper and in the references. In particular, the application of all data quality flags described in the previous section does *not* imply that the remaining data are free of transient noise artifacts. The user can find guidance to analyze the GW data in the tutorials and tools collected in the GWOSC website and discussed in the next subsections. The data analysis techniques used to detect GW signals and infer the source properties are described in [132] where good practices and advices to avoid common errors are also provided. The GWOSC website also contains basic information about the geographical position¹⁶ and the current status¹⁷ of the detectors.

5.1. Timeline

The LIGO and Virgo detectors are not always in observing mode and, even when they are, it is possible that data quality does not meet the requirements of a given analysis. For these reasons it is necessary to restrict analysis to valid *segments* of data characterized by data quality information that indicates the data is acceptable for the desired analysis. *Timeline*¹⁸ is a tool to provide a visual representation of available valid data segments over a time interval, together with the related information about data quality and presence of injected signals (see Fig. 5 for an example with the O2 dataset). If the requested interval is short enough, this is shown at the time scale of seconds. For longer intervals, *Timeline* shows the average value of the selected data-quality bit over nonoverlapping 2^n -second subintervals.

Besides the visual representation, this tool allows the user to download the list of start and stop of the segments for a specific data quality category or injection type, and also the corresponding data.

5.2. Courses, software packages and tutorials for gw data analysis

On-line courses that provide an introduction to GW data analysis ranging from the basics to more advanced topics with hands-on exercises are available from the GWOSC website.¹⁹ Those courses have been recorded during the GW Open Data Workshops. They include lectures on various aspects of GW science and are supported by many tutorials that can be used to understand how to read and analyze the data. The tutorials on the GWOSC website²⁰ are in the form of Jupyter notebooks [171]. They explain how to access the data, produce time–frequency spectrograms, carry out matched-filtering searches, infer astrophysical parameters, and manipulate GW localization information. A few tutorials start from first principles and use generic and broadly used analysis software such as *scipy* [143], but most are based on the specialized software packages and libraries that the LVC

developed to produce observational results and other scientific products.

A list of those packages is available on the GWOSC website²¹ and includes:

- the light-weight application *readligo* to access data;
- general purpose application software, such as the LSC Algorithm Library Suite (LALSuite) [172] and the Python package *gwp* [173];
- search-oriented software such as *pycbc* [149,150], *Gst-LAL* [174] and Coherent Waveburst (*cWB*) [154];
- post-processing software for e.g., parameter estimation such as *bilby* [175], *LALInference* [176] and *Bayeswave* [177, 178].

All these packages are open source and freely distributed.

5.3. Summary and additional information

The LVC is committed to providing strain data from the LIGO and Virgo detectors to the public, according to the schedule outlined in the LIGO Data Management Plan [16], via the Gravitational Wave Open Science Center (GWOSC) [179]. They are also committed to providing a broad range of data analysis products to facilitate reproducing the results presented in their observational papers. Many of these data products are available through the LIGO Document Control Center (DCC); for example, data products associated with the GWTC-1 event catalog [14] can be found in [18] and [180]. Many more data offerings are planned for the future. This includes the catalog of observed events and the bulk strain data from the LIGO/Virgo O3 run. More GWOSC Open Data Workshops are also planned.

All users of these data are welcome to sign up with the GWOSC User's Group at <https://www.gw-openscience.org/join/>. Anyone who uses these data in publications and other public data products are requested to acknowledge GWOSC by following the guidance in [181]. Publications that acknowledge GWOSC will be listed in <https://www.gw-openscience.org/projects/>; email gwosc@igwn.org to make sure your publication(s) are included.

The Collaborations, and the GWOSC team, welcome comments and suggestions for improving these data releases and products, and their presentation on the GWOSC website [179], via email to gwosc@igwn.org. Questions about the use of these data products may also be sent to that email, and will be entered into our help ticket system. More general questions about LIGO, Virgo, and GW science should go to questions@ligo.org.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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¹⁶ <http://gw-openscience.org/static/param/position.txt>

¹⁷ http://gw-openscience.org/detector_status/

¹⁸ <http://gw-openscience.org/timeline/>

¹⁹ <http://gw-openscience.org/workshops/>

²⁰ <http://gw-openscience.org/tutorials/>

²¹ <http://gw-openscience.org/software/>



Fig. 5. The GWOSC offers immediate access to duty cycle information for data quality and injection bits through the *Timeline* (<http://gw-openscience.org/timeline/>). By default, the time resolution is chosen to display the entire dataset. From there, one can zoom in to smaller timescales by clicking on the display.

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