

Cosmological implications of DESI DR2 BAO measurements in light of the latest ACT DR6 CMB data

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We report cosmological results from the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI) measurements of baryon acoustic oscillations (BAO) when combined with recent data from the Atacama Cosmology Telescope (ACT). By jointly analyzing ACT and *Planck* data and applying conservative cuts to overlapping multipole ranges, we assess how different *Planck*+ACT dataset combinations affect consistency with DESI. While ACT alone exhibits a tension with DESI exceeding 3σ within the Λ CDM model, this discrepancy is reduced when ACT is analyzed in combination with *Planck*. For our baseline DESI DR2 BAO+*Planck* PR4+ACT likelihood combination, the preference for evolving dark energy over a cosmological constant is about 3σ , increasing to over 4σ with the inclusion of Type Ia supernova data. While the dark energy results remain quite consistent across various combinations of *Planck* and ACT likelihoods with those obtained by the DESI collaboration, the constraints on neutrino mass are more sensitive, ranging from $\sum m_\nu < 0.061$ eV in our baseline analysis, to $\sum m_\nu < 0.077$ eV (95% confidence level) in the CMB likelihood combination chosen by ACT when imposing the physical prior $\sum m_\nu > 0$ eV.

I. INTRODUCTION

The current understanding of the expansion of the Universe has been built upon rapidly evolving observations from a variety of cosmological probes. Each cosmological dataset provides information about the Universe at different epochs. The Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) data provide a description of the Universe at redshift $z \approx 1090$, a mere 400,000 years after the Big Bang. Baryon acoustic oscillations (BAO) from galaxy surveys constrain the expansion history of the Universe at $0.1 < z < 4.2$, exploring the matter dominated era and the recent era of cosmic acceleration. Type Ia Supernovae (SNe Ia) data were used to discover dark energy [1, 2] and constrain the expansion history at low redshifts.

The combination of these cosmological probes across the evolving Universe provides quantitative information on the temporal evolution of the dark energy density.

The most precise BAO measurements to date come from the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI). DESI is installed on the Mayall Telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory [3–6], and uses robotically controlled fiber-optic cables [7–11] to simultaneously capture light from up to 5,000 pre-selected galaxies and quasars across an eight-square-degree field of view. By analyzing the spectra of collected light, DESI has obtained redshift information on over 30 million extragalactic objects during the first three years of observations [12–14]. BAO measurements from more than 14 million galaxies and quasars [15, 16], as well as from 820,000 Lyman- α forest spectra [17–19] have significantly contributed to current knowledge of cosmological parameters.

Recently, the DESI collaboration presented a cosmo-

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logical analysis based on the latest BAO measurements from its Data Release 2 (DR2) [16]. This analysis points to discrepancies between datasets becoming more relevant within the Λ CDM model, highlighting evolving dark energy as a possible solution (or alternatively, unrecognized systematics in one or more datasets, or a rare statistical fluctuation), and also reporting updated constraints on the neutrino mass (with an extended analysis allowing an effective neutrino mass parameter that allows negative values [20]). In particular, while the DESI DR2 BAO results are broadly consistent with the picture of the Λ CDM cosmological model, they exhibit a 2.3σ tension [16] with *Planck* CMB data (including external CMB lensing data from [21]) [14, 22–26]. On the other hand, a time evolving dark energy component is favored by the joint analysis of these datasets, a scenario in which the datasets are consistent. This behavior can be deduced through either a simple CPL parameterization (w_0w_a CDM) [27, 28], or other dark energy reconstruction methods [29]. Using the w_0w_a CDM parameterization, DESI BAO DR2 combined with CMB temperature and polarization anisotropies, as well as CMB lensing, shows evolving dark energy is preferred at 3.1σ , increasing up to 4.2σ when including SNe data [16] (this preference is also supported by the Dark Energy Survey BAO and SN combined analysis [30]).

Around the same time as the DESI DR2 results were published, the Atacama Cosmology Telescope (ACT) collaboration also presented their final results on the CMB power spectrum measurements and cosmological implications [31–33], based on their Data Release 6 (DR6) with five years of observations. The ACT results provide measurements on the small-scale region of the CMB spectrum, adding extra information to the damping tail of the CMB not covered by the *Planck* space-based mission. Conversely, *Planck* is able to resolve anisotropies in the temperature and polarization of the CMB maps at large scales not accessible to ACT ($\ell < 600$), making the two CMB datasets complementary to each other.

Given the mild discrepancy between DESI BAO and *Planck* CMB (including ACT DR6 CMB lensing), it becomes important to evaluate the effect of the final ACT DR6 dataset in the context of DESI BAO, whether analyzed individually or combined with *Planck*. A conservative combination of ACT and *Planck* involves considering non-overlapping multipole ranges of each CMB spectrum. While in [31] the complete ACT dataset was complemented with CMB measurements from *Planck* up to $\ell = 1000$ to provide a complete CMB picture, other combinations with different multipole cuts are of interest, notably combinations between ACT and *Planck* based on the multipole ranges where each CMB experiment is more precise. Different combinations may impact parameters such as the physical cold-dark-matter density $\Omega_c h^2$, which can affect the discrepancy between DESI and CMB, and impact the evidence in favor of w_0w_a CDM. While ACT alone reports a higher $\Omega_c h^2$ value compared to *Planck* [31] (a $\sim 1.5\sigma$ shift), the P-ACT combination

used by the ACT collaboration measures a slightly lower $\Omega_c h^2$ (where h is the hubble constant normalized to 100 km s^{−1} Mpc^{−1}) with respect to *Planck*.

In addition, BAO helps break geometric degeneracies in CMB constraints on neutrino mass. DESI reported a 95% upper limit of $\sum m_\nu < 0.064$ eV for the sum of neutrino masses in the Λ CDM model when combined with *Planck* CMB data, that changes to $\sum m_\nu < 0.078$ eV with an alternative CMB likelihood [16]. The constraints on the neutrino mass is relaxed to $\sum m_\nu < 0.16$ eV in a w_0w_a CDM model. These differences in the neutrino mass constraints further justify a joint DESI+ACT analysis that covers the neutrino sector.

The purpose of this work is to explore the cosmological implications of including the latest ACT power spectrum data and likelihoods within the BAO+CMB+SNe combination already analyzed by the DESI Collaboration, and assess the robustness of the conclusions made by DESI in light of the latest ACT data. We extend the analysis to different combinations of the ACT and *Planck* datasets based on other multipole cuts that can be more precise at measuring $\Omega_c h^2$ and other parameters.

In Section II, we describe the datasets, likelihoods, and methodology. In Section III, we test the consistency of DESI and CMB data within the Λ CDM model. In Section IV, we present the results of dark energy for different datasets, including ACT DR6 power spectra. In Section V, we present constraints on the neutrino masses. Finally, we present our conclusions in Section VI.

II. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The purpose of this work is to explore the cosmological implications of incorporating the latest ACT power spectrum data [31] into a combined analysis with BAO, CMB, and SNe observations, as presented in [16]. We also consider the CMB data from *Planck* [44] and assess how the inclusion of ACT data affects the cosmological parameters. As reported in [31], ACT measures a higher $\Omega_c h^2$ value compared to *Planck* (a 1.5σ shift). Also, it was observed that the P-ACT combination defined in [31] favors a lower value of $\Omega_c h^2$ compared to both *Planck* (0.4σ lower) and ACT (1.9σ lower). Since the CMB measurement of $\Omega_c h^2$ is key for the DESI results as it can affect the discrepancy between DESI and CMB, the preference for w_0w_a CDM and the neutrino mass constraints, the exploration of these CMB datasets and how to combine *Planck* with ACT becomes relevant. Additionally, the results presented in [16] and [31] use a different version for the low- ℓ EE likelihood, which can have an impact on the neutrino mass constraints and deserves exploration.

The CMB high- ℓ power spectra from *Planck* and ACT are combined in a conservative way, without modeling a covariance between the surveys, but rather by applying simple data cuts. ACT resolves temperature anisotropies at smaller angular scales compared to *Planck*: its CMB spectra start at $\ell = 600$ and extend up to $\ell = 8500$. On

Datasets	Description
1. BAO data	
DESI DR2	BAO measurements from DESI DR2 in the range $0.1 < z < 4.2$ [16, 19].
2. SNe Ia data	
Pantheon+	A compilation of 1550 spectroscopically-confirmed SNe Ia in the range $0.001 < z < 2.26$ [34].
Union3	A compilation of 2087 SNe-Ia (among which 1363 SNe Ia are common to Pantheon+) that were analyzed through an updated Bayesian framework [35].
DES Y5	A compilation of 1635 SNe Ia in the redshift range $0.10 < z < 1.13$ complemented by an external sample consisting of 194 SNe Ia common to Pantheon+ in the range $0.025 < z < 0.10$ [36].
3. CMB standalone likelihoods (including CMB lensing)	
low- ℓ TT	<i>Planck</i> 2018 PR3 low- ℓ Commander likelihood for TT in the range $2 \leq \ell < 30$ [37, 38].
low- ℓ EE SimAll	<i>Planck</i> 2018 PR3 low- ℓ SimAll likelihood for EE in the range $2 \leq \ell < 30$ [37, 38].
low- ℓ EE SRoll12	Alternative low- ℓ likelihood for EE based on the SRoll12 code in the range $2 \leq \ell < 30$ [39].
high- ℓ PR3	<i>Planck</i> PR3 Plik_lite likelihood for the high- ℓ CMB TT, TE, EE spectra from $\ell = 30$ up to $\ell = 2500$ [37, 38].
high- ℓ PR4	<i>Planck</i> PR4 high- ℓ temperature and polarization likelihood using NPIPE maps. The high- ℓ TT, TE, EE spectra from <i>Planck</i> extends from $\ell = 30$ up to $\ell = 2500$ [40, 41].
ACT DR6	Power spectra from the anisotropies in the temperature and polarization CMB maps from the 6th data release of the Atacama Cosmology Telescope. The CMB power spectra extends from $\ell = 600$ up to $\ell = 8500$ [31].
CMB lensing	Combination of the CMB lensing measurements from the reconstruction of the CMB lensing potential using <i>Planck</i> PR4 NPIPE maps [42], and the CMB lensing measurements from the ACT Data Release 6 (DR6), which consists of five seasons of CMB temperature and polarization observations, with 67% of sky fraction overlap with <i>Planck</i> [21, 43].
4. Main CMB combinations	
ACT	low- ℓ EE SRoll12 + ACT DR6 + CMB lensing
P-ACT	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SRoll12 + high- ℓ PR3 ($\ell < 1000$ TT, $\ell < 600$ TE, EE) + ACT DR6 + CMB lensing
PR4+ACT	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SimAll + high- ℓ PR4 ($\ell < 2000$ TT, $\ell < 1000$ TE, EE) + ACT DR6 ($\ell \geq 2000$ TT, $\ell \geq 1000$ TE, EE) + CMB lensing
5. Additional CMB combinations studied	
ACT (no CMB lensing)	low- ℓ EE SRoll12 + ACT DR6 (same as ACT base in [31])
ACT (low- ℓ TT, EE)	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SimAll + ACT DR6 + CMB lensing
PR4	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SimAll + high- ℓ PR4 + CMB lensing (same as baseline CMB in [16])
PR4 _(1000,600) +ACT	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SimAll + high- ℓ PR4 ($\ell < 1000$ TT, $\ell < 600$ TE, EE) + ACT DR6 + CMB lensing
PR4 _(SRoll12) +ACT	low- ℓ TT + low- ℓ EE SRoll12 + high- ℓ PR4 ($\ell < 2000$ TT, $\ell < 1000$ TE, EE) + ACT DR6 ($\ell \geq 2000$ TT, $\ell \geq 1000$ TE, EE) + CMB lensing

TABLE I. Summary of the primary data sets (1-3) and CMB combinations (4-5) used in this work. For the CMB data, we also indicate the individual likelihood packages that were used in the fits.

the other hand, *Planck* can resolve the anisotropies well on large scales, even in the low- ℓ regime ($\ell < 30$) where the distribution of the CMB spectra is non-Gaussian, while its high- ℓ spectra are measured up to $\ell = 2500$. In our analysis, we consider the official *Planck* Release 3 (PR3) [37, 38, 45], as well as *Planck* Release 4 (PR4) [46], which is a reanalysis using the **NPIPE** processing pipeline and CMB lensing reconstruction of **NPIPE** maps [42]. Throughout this work, we focus on the PR4 **CamSpec** high- ℓ likelihood, which provides ~ 8 – 10% tighter constraints than PR3 **Plik** [41] on relevant parameters for this work such as $\Omega_c h^2$ and Ω_m , when analyzing CMB alone.

We summarize the datasets used in this work in Table I and define the variations under which we combine CMB datasets. Motivated by the ACT baseline data as defined in [31], we use the ACT DR6 high- ℓ spectra **MFLike** in combination with the low- ℓ EE *Planck* data analyzed through the **SRoll12** likelihood code [39]¹ (see also [47] for the **SRoll12 momento** extension, not tested here) but

with the inclusion of CMB lensing from the combination of *Planck* **NPIPE** and ACT DR6 as described in [43]. We label this combination simply as ACT². Since the ACT data cannot fully constrain the first two CMB acoustic peaks, it is useful to complement it with data from other CMB surveys. We define an analogous combination to P-ACT as used in [31], based on a combination of ACT DR6 and PR3 (**plik_lite**)³, but with the addition of CMB lensing. We consider fits to the PR4 data only, matching the baseline CMB combination presented in [16]. Since *Planck* and ACT probe a common part of the CMB spectra, we test different combinations between the two by means of ℓ cuts. We consider combinations between PR4 and ACT DR6 with a baseline low- ℓ TT **Commander** and low- ℓ EE **SimAll** data from *Planck*

between the optical depth parameter τ and the amplitude of primordial scalar fluctuations A_s .

² Note that this would be equivalent to ACT-L, in the nomenclature used in [31].

³ The absolute calibration parameter A_{Planck} is shared between the two CMB likelihoods.

¹ The inclusion of the low- ℓ EE data helps to break degeneracies

($\ell < 30$) [37], CMB lensing, and mixed high- ℓ information from PR4 and ACT DR6 split by a multipole cut ℓ_{TT} and a common cut $\ell_{\text{TE,EE}}$. This cut uses PR4 TT information for $\ell < \ell_{\text{TT}}$ and then ACT DR6 information for higher values of ℓ up to $\ell = 8500$. Similarly, the common TE and EE cut uses PR4 data for $\ell < \ell_{\text{TE,EE}}$ and ACT DR6 for the rest of the ℓ range up to $\ell = 8500$. We define the explicit cuts we use below.

We construct a CMB combination that can be regarded as maximal in the information included from ACT DR6, using its full CMB spectra. However, since the ACT DR6 data are highly impacted by atmospheric noise in the range $600 < \ell < 1000$ [32], we increase the Planck TT coverage and use $\ell_{\text{TT}} = 1000$ and $\ell_{\text{TE,EE}} = 600$, as done for P-ACT. This combination is analogous to P-ACT in this work but uses PR4 *CamSpec*. We label this combination as $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$. We also test a combination with $\ell_{\text{TT}} = 2000$ and $\ell_{\text{TE,EE}} = 1000$ motivated by Figure 12 in [31]. This combination corresponds approximately to the multipole range where the precision of ACT DR6 in measuring the TT spectrum across frequency channels begins to become comparable to, or slightly exceed, that of *Planck*, around $\ell \sim 2000$. Similarly, $\ell = 1000$ is a point where ACT DR6 is roughly more precise in measuring TE compared to *Planck*, while $\ell = 1000$ is also the scale at which approximately the white noise transition occurs for the ACT DR6 EE polarization data. We label this combination simply as $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$ and consider it as our baseline CMB combination. We note that this choice of ℓ cuts may not correspond to the configuration that minimizes cosmological parameter uncertainties, but rather should provide a fair approximation. For the latter set of cuts, we also test the effect of the *SRoll2* likelihood by defining an analogous variation where we replace the low- ℓ EE *SimAll* likelihood with the low- ℓ EE *SRoll2* likelihood and label this $\text{PR4}_{(\text{SRoll2})} + \text{ACT}$. Table I summarizes the CMB variations used in this paper. We discuss the effect on the parameter space for some of these combinations with respect to ACT DR6 and PR4 in Appendix A.

We use DESI DR2 BAO data (see [16] for definitions of co-moving distances D_{M} , D_{H} , and D_{V}) containing measurements of $D_{\text{V}}/r_{\text{d}}$ at redshifts $0.1 < z < 0.4$ for the BGS tracer, and measurements of $D_{\text{H}}/r_{\text{d}}$ and $D_{\text{M}}/r_{\text{d}}$ for the rest of the tracers, LRGs at $0.4 < z < 0.6$ and $0.6 < z < 0.8$, a combined tracer LRG+ELG at $0.8 < z < 1.1$, the ELG tracer at $1.1 < z < 1.6$, QSO at $0.8 < z < 2.1$ plus the Ly α forest and the correlation with QSO positions, at $1.8 < z < 4.2$. Here, r_{d} represents the sound horizon at the drag epoch, when acoustic waves stall in the primordial plasma as baryons cease to feel the ‘drag’ from the photons.

We also used SNe Ia data from Pantheon+ that consists of 1550 spectroscopically classified type Ia SNe [48]. Similarly, we use the Union3 sample that consists of 2087 SNe Ia and uses an alternative analysis framework based on Bayesian hierarchical modeling using Unity 1.5 [35]. We also include SNe Ia data from the DESY5 sample

with 1635 photometrically classified SNe [36].

We test deviations from ΛCDM , corresponding to dynamical dark energy, by means of the $w_0 w_a \text{CDM}$ parameterization based on an equation of state of dark energy given by $w(a) = w_0 + w_a(1 - a)$, with w_0 and w_a as free parameters. Finally, when performing constraints on the sum of neutrino masses, we adopt a physical prior $\sum m_\nu > 0$ and assume 3 degenerate states. Throughout this work, we adopt the priors and tension metrics as described in [16].

III. CONSISTENCY OF DESI DR2 BAO AND CMB WITHIN ΛCDM

In this section, we explore the consistency between DESI BAO data and CMB across the CMB combinations described in Section II, assuming the ΛCDM model. In [16] it was pointed out that DESI DR2 BAO data show a discrepancy of 2.3σ with PR4. It is interesting to assess how this discrepancy stands with the latest CMB spectra from ACT, which provide precision measurements of the small-scale CMB anisotropies in temperature and polarization, as well as tight constraints on the CMB damping tail. At the cosmological parameter level, the quantitative comparison between BAO and CMB data is performed by analyzing the 2D posteriors on the combination $H_0 r_{\text{d}} - \Omega_{\text{m}}$, which are the two cosmological parameters constrained by BAO data. The left panel of Figure 1 shows the comparison of two CMB combinations (ACT in green, and $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$ in purple) with DESI BAO and DESY5 SNe data. We observe that the discrepancy between DESI and CMB occurs along the degeneracy direction of constant $\Omega_{\text{m}} h^3 = \text{const.}$ [49], roughly preserving the location of the first acoustic peak. This ensures that DESI is consistent with the acoustic angular scale θ_* predicted from CMB. In the following, we describe how the consistency between CMB and DESI changes across the various CMB combinations.

The base ACT combination (without CMB lensing) shown in [31] reports high values of $\Omega_{\text{c}} h^2$ and $\Omega_{\text{b}} h^2$ and a lower H_0 with respect to *Planck*. This further pushes the ACT (no CMB lensing) data away from DESI, leading to a moderate 3.2σ tension. The inclusion of CMB lensing reduces this tension to 2.7σ . Interestingly, this is the opposite effect observed in [16], where excluding CMB lensing elongates the CMB contours reducing the discrepancy between DESI and PR4 data. The discrepancy persists even when the low- ℓ *SRoll2* likelihood is replaced with low- ℓ *SimAll* and low- ℓ TT information is included. However, the combination of P-ACT with the CMB lensing included alleviates the discrepancy leading to a 1.6σ difference with DESI. This pull of the CMB contours towards the DESI best-fit value is related to the higher values of $\Omega_{\text{b}} h^2$ and the spectral index n_{s} measured by ACT with respect to *Planck*, as well as to parameter correlations, as explained in Appendix A.

We further explore how DESI compares with a com-

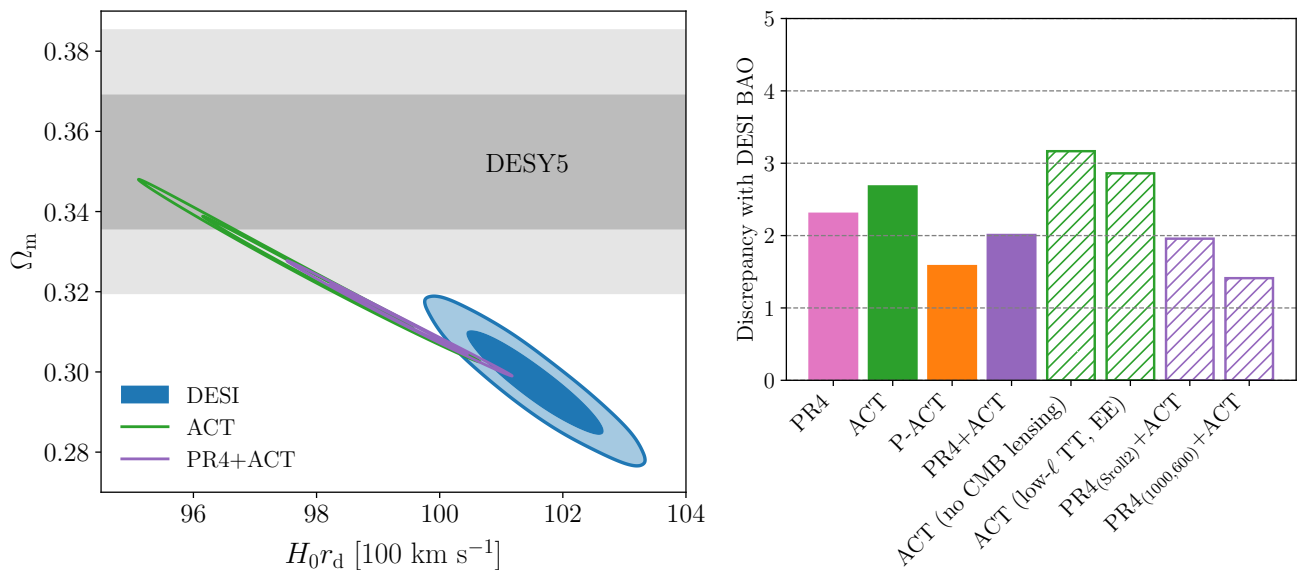


FIG. 1. *Left:* The 68% and 95% constraints on the $H_0 r_d$ - Ω_m 2D parameter space for DESI DR2 BAO, ACT, PR4+ACT, and DESY5 SNe Ia, under the Λ CDM model. The combination based on ACT alone with SR0112 is shown in green, while our baseline combination PR4+ACT is shown in purple. The ACT dataset shows a 2.7σ tension with DESI (3.2σ if CMB lensing is excluded), while the combination of PR4+ACT shows a 2.0σ tension with DESI, once CMB lensing and low- ℓ TT data have been also included. *Right:* Tension between DESI DR2 BAO and different CMB variations (expressed in $n\sigma$ units), in the Λ CDM model. The tension is calculated given the 2D posterior distributions of Ω_m and $H_0 r_d$. The first bars shown are PR4 (pink), ACT (green), P-ACT (orange) and PR4+ACT (purple). The hatched bars of the corresponding color represent variations of the CMB dataset.

combination of PR4 and ACT. While ACT is more consistent with PR3 as compared to PR4 as pointed out in [31], here we assess the consistency between ACT and PR4 under the assumed ℓ cuts before combining them and verify that the overall discrepancy is 2.0σ or less in a six-parameter space under Λ CDM, and that individual parameters show discrepancies below this threshold. Our baseline CMB dataset labeled as PR4+ACT shows a 14% and 23% precision improvement in n_s and $\Omega_b h^2$ parameters, respectively, with respect to PR4. Also, it shows only a mild discrepancy of 2.0σ with DESI (or 1.9σ for PR4(SR0112)+ACT). Applying a cut analogous to the one assumed in the P-ACT combination but using PR4, leads to a 1.4σ discrepancy with DESI, for our PR4(1000,600)+ACT combination. We also tested that removing the $600 < \ell < 1000$ TT data from *Planck* to avoid any overlaps in ℓ while still using a dataset that is “maximal” in ACT increases the discrepancy with DESI to 2.0σ .

We summarize the results in the right-hand-side panel of Figure 1 highlighting the three base CMB combinations for the rest of this work: ACT (the new CMB dataset), P-ACT (the official combination using PR3) and PR4+ACT (our baseline combination using PR4).

Finally, the left panel of Figure 1 also shows the SNe Ia data from DESY5 (for a more comprehensive comparison of all cosmological probes), which favors a high value of Ω_m with respect to DESI and CMB. Other SNe Ia datasets (not shown in Figure 1), Pantheon+ and

Union3, show a slightly better consistency with DESI. If we combine DESI with P-ACT, the Ω_m tension between DESI+CMB and SNe Ia ranges from 1.6σ for Pantheon+, to 2.0σ for Union3, and to 3.0σ for DESY5. We do not observe a significant change in these numbers using different CMB datasets. Overall, the combination between DESI and any CMB combination of *Planck* and ACT shows a mild to moderate discrepancy with the Ω_m measurement from SNe Ia, under Λ CDM.

IV. DARK ENERGY CONSTRAINTS

We proceed to explore how the constraints on dark energy as presented in [16] depend on the ACT results. We parameterize deviations from the cosmological constant using the $w_0 w_a$ CDM [27, 28] dark energy equation of state given by $w(a) = w_0 + (1 - a)w_a$. As demonstrated in [16], $w_0 w_a$ CDM provides enough flexibility to jointly fit current BAO, CMB, and SNe Ia data while preserving consistency between the datasets; thus, we combine all three datasets into our analysis for $w_0 w_a$ CDM constraints.

The combination of DESI DR2 BAO with ACT, P-ACT and PR4+ACT are shown in the w_0, w_a plane in the left-hand-side panel of Figure 2. We observe that DESI+ACT pulls the constraints away from the $(w_0, w_a) = (-1, 0)$ limit, leading to a 2.9σ preference in favor of $w_0 w_a$ CDM. Interestingly, ACT provides a CMB

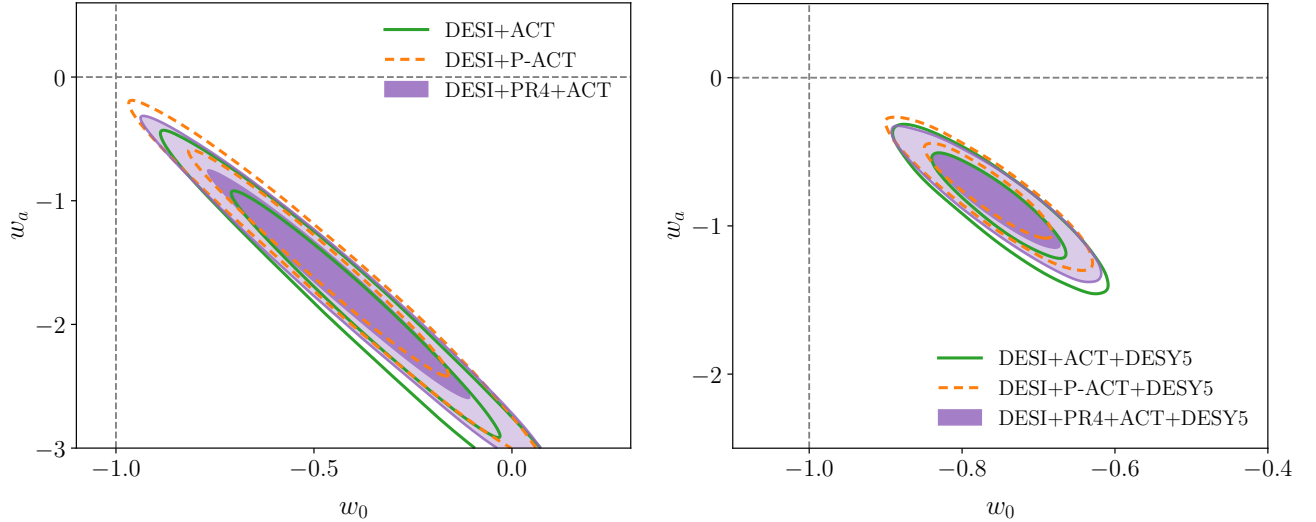


FIG. 2. *Left*: The 68% and 95% confidence contours in the w_0 - w_a plane using DESI DR2 BAO data in combination with CMB data. The blue contour describes the results from the combination DESI+ACT, while the unfilled orange contour shows DESI in combination with the P-ACT dataset described in [31]. The combination between DESI and our baseline CMB dataset with mixed multipole cuts in both *Planck* PR4 and ACT is shown in the unfilled green contour. The intersection of the two straight dashed gray lines represents the Λ CDM model. *Right*: Similar to the left panel but now including DESY5 data but using a different ranges for w_0 and w_a .

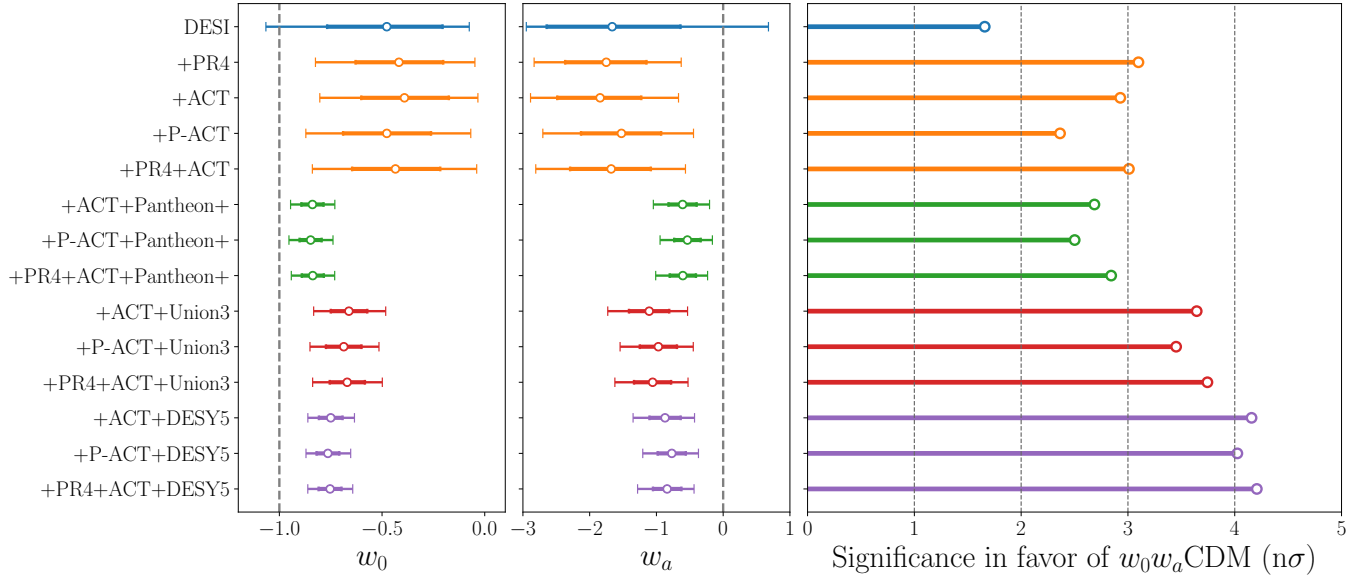


FIG. 3. 1D constraints on w_0 (left panel) and w_a (middle panel), highlighting the robustness of the results against variations in the CMB dataset chosen for the analysis. In the left and central panels, the thick bars represent the 68% errors while the thin bars correspond to the 95% errors. The vertical black dashed lines represent the Λ CDM value for w_0 and w_a . The right panel shows the corresponding significance in favor of the $w_0 w_a$ CDM model.

dataset that is well fit by $A_{\text{Lens}} \approx 1$, where the parameter A_{Lens} can lead to an artificial smoothing of the CMB peaks [50]. Thus, it does not suffer from the so-called lensing anomaly. For DESI+P-ACT, the preference for a departure from Λ CDM diminishes to 2.4σ . On the other hand, the combination DESI+PR4+ACT shows a 3.0σ preference in favor of $w_0 w_a$ CDM. For this combination,

the errors on w_0 and w_a remain unchanged compared to P-ACT. Since the PR4+ACT combination roughly chooses a sweet spot between *Planck* and ACT that provides more precise error bars on CMB parameters, we include more data from *Planck* compared to the P-ACT combination.

The difference between the evidence in favor of

Datasets	$\Delta\chi^2_{\text{MAP}}$	Significance	$\Delta(\text{DIC})$
DESI+ACT	-11.4	2.9σ	-7.8
DESI+ACT+Pantheon+	-9.9	2.7σ	-6.3
DESI+ACT+Union3	-16.4	3.6σ	-13.0
DESI+ACT+DESY5	-20.7	4.2σ	-16.8
DESI+P-ACT	-8.0	2.4σ	-5.4
DESI+P-ACT+Pantheon+	-8.8	2.5σ	-4.5
DESI+P-ACT+Union3	-15.0	3.5σ	-10.9
DESI+P-ACT+DESY5	-19.5	4.0σ	-15.2
DESI+PR4+ACT	-11.9	3.0σ	-7.8
DESI+PR4+ACT+Pantheon+	-10.8	2.8σ	-6.5
DESI+PR4+ACT+Union3	-17.2	3.7σ	-13.8
DESI+PR4+ACT+DESY5	-21.1	4.2σ	-17.2

TABLE II. Table summarizing the results on the difference in the effective χ^2_{MAP} value for the best-fit w_0w_a CDM model relative to the best Λ CDM model with $w_0 = -1$, $w_a = 0$, and its corresponding significance level in a frequentist representation. The last column shows the results for the deviance information criteria, $\Delta(\text{DIC}) = \text{DIC}_{w_0w_a\text{CDM}} - \text{DIC}_{\Lambda\text{CDM}}$.

w_0w_a CDM when DESI is combined with ACT versus that when DESI is combined with P-ACT or PR4+ACT can be linked to the difference in the measured $\Omega_c h^2$ in the Λ CDM model by these respective CMB datasets. For example, a high CMB measurement of $\Omega_c h^2$ in Λ CDM would lead to a high Ω_m and a low $H_0 r_d$ with respect to DESI, pulling the contours away from $w_0 = -1$ and $w_a = 0$ in a w_0w_a CDM model. In contrast, a lower measurement of $\Omega_c h^2$ with respect to, e.g. PR4, would lead to more consistent results with DESI. This is also related to the importance of jointly matching physical density parameters like $\Omega_c h^2$ from the CMB with BAO, given the consistency of BAO with the CMB-predicted acoustic scale θ_* and that most of the significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM comes from CMB priors on $(\theta_*, \Omega_b h^2, \Omega_{bc} h^2)$, as discussed in [16]. As shown in Appendix A, ACT alone shows a high value of $\Omega_c h^2$ with respect to PR4, although with larger error bars. On the other hand, P-ACT shows the opposite behavior measuring a lower $\Omega_c h^2$ compared to PR4, while in PR4+ACT the $\Omega_c h^2$ measurement is still lower than the PR4 prediction but the constraint is 19% tighter than P-ACT. In terms of the ACT data, it was reported that there is a strong dependency on the inferred values of $\Omega_c h^2$ and H_0 given the polarization efficiency calibration choices [31], which may impact the determination of these parameters.

The right-hand-side panel of Figure 2 shows the constraints for DESI+DESY5 in combination with the three CMB baseline datasets. We can see that once the background cosmology is set by BAO and SNe Ia data, the effect of assuming a different CMB variation leads to only minor changes. As summarized in Figure 3, we find that the significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM ranges from 2.5σ

to 4.2σ , depending on the SNe Ia dataset used, while the assumed CMB variation has little impact on it. Table II summarizes the results on the effective difference on the χ^2_{MAP} , the corresponding significance in the frequentist representation, and the results for the deviance information criterion analysis, as presented in [29]. Once SNe Ia is included, the combination providing the mildest tension with Λ CDM is DESI+P-ACT+Pantheon+, with a 2.5σ significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM. However, replacing Pantheon+ with Union3 and DESY5 increases the significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM to 3.5σ and 4.0σ , respectively. The results from our baseline CMB variations provide compatible results, with tensions ranging between 2.8σ (using Pantheon+) up to 4.2σ (using DESY5). We also test the effect of using an alternative low- ℓ EE likelihood, replacing SRoll2 with SimAll in the ACT combination, and find that changing the low- ℓ polarization likelihood has little impact in the significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM. This highlights the robustness of the results presented in [16], after including newer CMB datasets based on ACT or combinations of it with *Planck*.

Finally, we summarize the results from the parameter constraints in Table III for Λ CDM and w_0w_a CDM⁴, as well as models with varying neutrino mass as discussed in the following section.

V. NEUTRINO MASS CONSTRAINTS

Despite the fact that BAO data alone cannot constrain the total neutrino mass, $\sum m_\nu$, determining Ω_m and $H_0 r_d$ from low redshifts significantly enhances the CMB sensitivity to $\sum m_\nu$ via the neutrino-induced shift in the angular diameter distance to last scattering. CMB photons are sensitive to the neutrino mass through lensing, since neutrinos suppress the growth of structures below their free-streaming scale. Low- ℓ E-mode polarization of the CMB also plays an important indirect role in constraining neutrino masses by breaking the degeneracy between the optical depth to reionization and the amplitude of primordial scalar fluctuations measured from high- ℓ multipoles. This in turn gives a more accurate estimation of the lensing potential, which is suppressed on small scales by massive neutrinos. Therefore, the upper limits on $\sum m_\nu$ obtained from the combination of DESI and CMB depend on both the BAO constraining power and the choice of the CMB likelihood, as different likelihoods slightly vary in the amount of lensing power they infer from the lensed TT, TE, and EE spectra at both low- and high- ℓ .

The inferred constraints on $\sum m_\nu$ from BAO+CMB depend on the underlying cosmological model. In the following, we focus on the Λ CDM and w_0w_a CDM models

⁴ While this paper was under final review, [51] presented constraints on w_0w_a CDM from DESI+P-ACT and DESI+P-ACT+Pantheon+. We find consistent results with theirs.

Model/Dataset	Ω_m	H_0 [km s ⁻¹ Mpc ⁻¹]	$\sum m_\nu$ [eV]	w_0	w_a
ΛCDM					
DESI+ACT	0.3003 ± 0.0039	68.48 ± 0.29	—	—	—
DESI+P-ACT	0.3003 ± 0.0035	68.43 ± 0.27	—	—	—
DESI+PR4+ACT	0.3019 ± 0.0035	68.28 ± 0.26	—	—	—
$w_0 w_a$ CDM					
DESI+ACT	$0.355^{+0.022}_{-0.020}$	$63.6^{+1.6}_{-2.0}$	—	$-0.39^{+0.23}_{-0.19}$	-1.84 ± 0.59
DESI+ACT+Pantheon+	0.3108 ± 0.0057	67.72 ± 0.60	—	-0.839 ± 0.055	$-0.61^{+0.22}_{-0.20}$
DESI+ACT+Union3	0.3274 ± 0.0088	66.09 ± 0.85	—	-0.661 ± 0.089	$-1.11^{+0.32}_{-0.28}$
DESI+ACT+DESY5	0.3188 ± 0.0058	66.94 ± 0.57	—	-0.750 ± 0.058	$-0.87^{+0.25}_{-0.22}$
DESI+P-ACT	$0.347^{+0.020}_{-0.023}$	64.1 ± 1.9	—	-0.48 ± 0.21	$-1.52^{+0.64}_{-0.56}$
DESI+P-ACT+Pantheon+	0.3098 ± 0.0056	67.62 ± 0.60	—	-0.848 ± 0.054	$-0.54^{+0.21}_{-0.18}$
DESI+P-ACT+Union3	0.3251 ± 0.0085	66.08 ± 0.84	—	-0.686 ± 0.086	$-0.97^{+0.30}_{-0.26}$
DESI+P-ACT+DESY5	0.3175 ± 0.0055	66.85 ± 0.56	—	-0.764 ± 0.056	$-0.77^{+0.22}_{-0.20}$
DESI+PR4+ACT	0.350 ± 0.021	$63.8^{+1.8}_{-2.0}$	—	-0.43 ± 0.21	-1.68 ± 0.58
DESI+PR4+ACT+Pantheon+	0.3107 ± 0.0056	67.59 ± 0.59	—	-0.837 ± 0.054	$-0.60^{+0.21}_{-0.19}$
DESI+PR4+ACT+Union3	0.3265 ± 0.0085	66.00 ± 0.84	—	-0.670 ± 0.086	$-1.06^{+0.29}_{-0.26}$
DESI+PR4+ACT+DESY5	0.3182 ± 0.0055	66.83 ± 0.56	—	-0.753 ± 0.056	$-0.84^{+0.23}_{-0.20}$
ΛCDM+$\sum m_\nu$					
DESI+ACT	0.2992 ± 0.0039	68.63 ± 0.31	< 0.0733	—	—
DESI+P-ACT	0.2987 ± 0.0037	68.61 ± 0.29	< 0.0768	—	—
DESI+PR4+ACT	0.2999 ± 0.0036	68.50 ± 0.28	< 0.0606	—	—
$w_0 w_a$ CDM+$\sum m_\nu$					
DESI+ACT	$0.355^{+0.024}_{-0.020}$	$63.7^{+1.6}_{-2.2}$	< 0.170	$-0.39^{+0.25}_{-0.19}$	$-1.85^{+0.61}_{-0.75}$
DESI+ACT+Pantheon+	0.3105 ± 0.0058	67.72 ± 0.60	< 0.124	-0.843 ± 0.056	$-0.57^{+0.24}_{-0.21}$
DESI+ACT+Union3	0.3273 ± 0.0090	66.10 ± 0.85	< 0.147	-0.665 ± 0.092	$-1.09^{+0.36}_{-0.30}$
DESI+ACT+DESY5	0.3186 ± 0.0058	66.95 ± 0.57	< 0.136	-0.753 ± 0.059	$-0.85^{+0.26}_{-0.23}$
DESI+P-ACT	0.349 ± 0.022	$63.9^{+1.8}_{-2.1}$	< 0.186	-0.45 ± 0.22	$-1.62^{+0.73}_{-0.65}$
DESI+P-ACT+Pantheon+	0.3095 ± 0.0057	67.64 ± 0.60	< 0.131	-0.852 ± 0.055	$-0.51^{+0.23}_{-0.19}$
DESI+P-ACT+Union3	0.3253 ± 0.0089	66.08 ± 0.85	< 0.155	-0.687 ± 0.090	$-0.97^{+0.34}_{-0.28}$
DESI+P-ACT+DESY5	0.3173 ± 0.0058	66.87 ± 0.56	< 0.149	-0.766 ± 0.058	$-0.76^{+0.26}_{-0.21}$
DESI+PR4+ACT	0.350 ± 0.022	$63.9^{+1.8}_{-2.1}$	< 0.152	-0.44 ± 0.21	-1.66 ± 0.62
DESI+PR4+ACT+Pantheon+	0.3099 ± 0.0057	67.64 ± 0.60	< 0.108	-0.846 ± 0.054	$-0.55^{+0.22}_{-0.19}$
DESI+PR4+ACT+Union3	0.3259 ± 0.0087	66.05 ± 0.84	< 0.128	-0.678 ± 0.088	$-1.01^{+0.32}_{-0.27}$
DESI+PR4+ACT+DESY5	0.3177 ± 0.0057	66.86 ± 0.57	< 0.122	-0.761 ± 0.057	$-0.79^{+0.25}_{-0.21}$

TABLE III. Summary table of key cosmological parameter constraints from DESI DR2 BAO (labeled simply as DESI) in combination with external datasets for the Λ CDM and extended models. We report the mean value and the 68% confidence for all parameters, except for the total neutrino mass, for which the 95% upper limit is quoted.

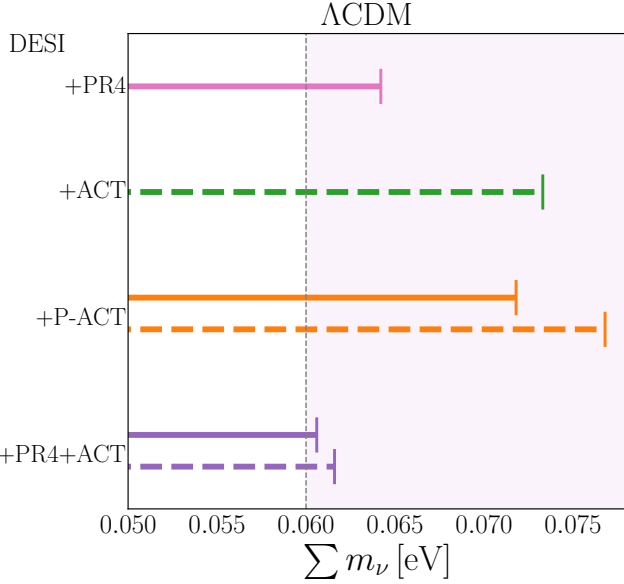


FIG. 4. Whisker plots showing the 95% confidence constraints on $\sum m_\nu$ from the combination of DESI DR2 BAO with various CMB likelihoods under the Λ CDM model. Dashed lines correspond to constraints obtained using the low- ℓ EE **SRo112** likelihood, while solid lines use low- ℓ EE **SimAll** likelihood in each corresponding combination. The vertical dashed line and shaded region indicate the minimal sum of neutrino masses for the normal ($\sum m_\nu > 0.06$ eV) mass ordering.

with free total neutrino mass, assuming three degenerate mass eigenstates. We also adopt a minimal physical prior, $\sum m_\nu > 0$ eV, noting that scenarios allowing for a negative effective neutrino mass have recently gained interest [20, 52–54].

Recently, the ACT collaboration set an upper bound on the total neutrino mass of $\sum m_\nu < 0.082$ eV at 95% confidence level (c.l.) under Λ CDM [33], based on the combination of DESI DR1 BAO measurements and what we refer to as P-ACT. Using the updated DESI DR2 BAO data, this limit tightens to $\sum m_\nu < 0.077$ eV at 95% c.l., representing about a 6% reduction in the upper bound due to the improved BAO measurements in DESI DR2 with respect to DR1. This constraint is, however, about 20% weaker than the baseline bound recently reported by the DESI collaboration, $\sum m_\nu < 0.064$ eV at 95% c.l. [16], which combines DESI DR2 BAO with *Planck* PR4. The difference between the P-ACT and PR4 combinations primarily arises from the treatment of low- ℓ EE and high- ℓ TT likelihoods, including specific choices of cuts.

However, we stress that these results, along with those presented below, are influenced by the prior $\sum m_\nu > 0$ eV. This dependence has been discussed in [16], and more thoroughly in [20], that employed a profile likelihood analysis to quantify the impact of the prior and further investigated the implications of effective neutrino negative masses [54]. A similar profile likelihood analysis

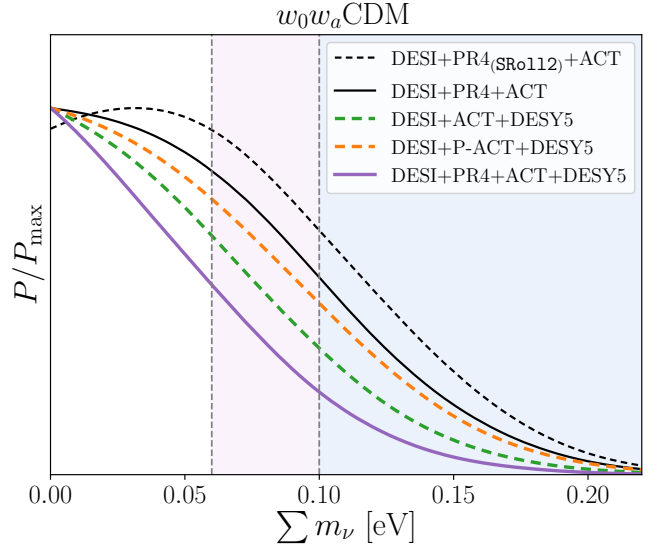


FIG. 5. 1D marginalized posterior constraints on $\sum m_\nu$ from various dataset combinations within the w_0w_a CDM model. The black curves show results from combining DESI DR2 BAO with PR4+ACT. We also present posteriors obtained using DESI DR2 BAO with the main CMB combinations, all combined with DESY5. Dashed curves correspond to datasets that include the low- ℓ EE **SRo112** likelihood, while solid curves instead use the low- ℓ EE **SimAll** likelihood. The vertical dashed lines and shaded regions indicate the minimum sum of neutrino masses allowed for the normal ($\sum m_\nu > 0.06$ eV) and inverted ($\sum m_\nu > 0.10$ eV) mass orderings.

is presented in Appendix B.

Figure 4 illustrates how the constraints on the neutrino mass are influenced by the main CMB combinations — ACT, P-ACT, and PR4+ACT — when combined with DESI DR2 BAO. For comparison, we include the baseline results from [16] in magenta. For the PR4+ACT combination, we observe that by cutting the PR4 likelihood at the multipoles $\ell = 2000$ in TT and $\ell = 1000$ in TEEE, and merging with ACT data starting from these multipole cuts, tightens the upper bound to $\sum m_\nu < 0.061$ eV at 95% c.l. (solid purple line) for Λ CDM. This results in a reduction of approximately 5% compared to the baseline results from [16], providing the tightest constraints on the total neutrino mass to date, derived exclusively from BAO and CMB datasets.

The difference in constraining power between PR4+ACT and the baseline results from [16] stems not only from the inclusion of ACT data, but also from the specific choice of the ℓ -range where *Planck* is cut and ACT is added. In the PR4+ACT combination, we select the region of the spectrum where the ACT signal roughly exhibits lower uncertainty compared to *Planck* across most frequency spectra (see Figure 12 of [31]), leading to tighter neutrino mass constraints.

Additionally, Figure 4 includes the constraints from the joint DESI+ACT analysis, which, despite covering a smaller portion of the CMB power spectrum, yields an

upper bound of $\sum m_\nu < 0.073$ eV (95% c.l.), similar to those obtained with other CMB likelihood combinations.

In the w_0w_a CDM scenario, the combination of DESI DR2 BAO and the main CMB datasets (without SNe) yields marginalized 1D posterior distributions that peak at positive values of $\sum m_\nu$, consistent with the findings of [16]. This behavior is found across all main CMB dataset combinations. To avoid overcrowding, Figure 5 shows only the posteriors for PR4_(SRo112)+ACT (dashed black) and PR4+ACT (solid black), the latter being the only DESI+CMB combination whose posterior peaks at zero. This case also provides the most stringent constraint on the neutrino mass within w_0w_a CDM, with $\sum m_\nu < 0.15$ eV (95% c.l.).

Although the DESI+CMB results are largely consistent with positive neutrino masses, they also exhibit a preference for higher values of Ω_m (see Table III), which are “stabilized” when including information from SNe Ia datasets. In that case, all posteriors peak at $\sum m_\nu = 0$, and they would reach a maximum at negative $\sum m_\nu$ values if extrapolated.⁵ This behavior is illustrated in Figure 5 for DESY5 and also holds when considering either Pantheon+ or Union3. These findings are consistent with those reported in [16, 26], and we explore them in more detail using the profile likelihood analysis in Appendix B.

Finally, we highlight the impact of the $\ell < 30$ multipoles polarization data. In particular, we find that across all analyses, replacing the baseline low- ℓ EE likelihood with SRo112 shifts the posterior peak toward higher values, as illustrated in Figure 5. This shift apparently loosens the neutrino mass constraints by up to 7%, in both the Λ CDM and w_0w_a CDM models.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we reanalyze the cosmological results on the evidence for evolving dark energy and neutrino mass constraints of the official DESI DR2 BAO analysis presented in [16] by incorporating the latest ACT DR6 CMB data. The ACT DR6 data predict higher values for the physical densities of both baryons $\Omega_b h^2$ and cold dark matter $\Omega_c h^2$, compared to *Planck*. Within the Λ CDM model, this results in a discrepancy with DESI at a level exceeding 3σ , which is larger than the 2.0σ discrepancy observed with *Planck* PR4 (without CMB lensing). Since the ACT DR6 data cover a wide range of multipoles, partially sharing angular scales with *Planck* (in the range $600 \leq \ell \leq 2500$), we combine these two CMB datasets using multipole cuts to avoid overlap. Along with ACT, we focus on two other CMB data combinations, namely, P-ACT (based on PR3, matching the combination presented in [31]), and PR4+ACT (our baseline

CMB dataset). The PR4+ACT combination, based on PR4, uses cuts in the common multipole range between PR4 and ACT that lead to tighter constraints, showing a precision improvement of 14% in n_s and 23% in $\Omega_b h^2$ with respect to PR4, and a 5% precision improvement over other combinations with a different ℓ -cut scheme such as PR4_(1000,600)+ACT.

We explore the evidence for evolving dark energy under these three CMB datasets using ACT DR6 and find that DESI+ACT shows a 2.9σ evidence in favor of the w_0w_a CDM model. This evidence is reduced to 2.4σ when using DESI+P-ACT. This is due to the pull from P-ACT towards lower values of $\Omega_c h^2$, compared to those from ACT and *Planck* individually, in the Λ CDM model. The combination DESI+PR4+ACT, which provides tighter constraints on cosmological parameters, leads to a 3.0σ significance in favor of w_0w_a CDM. We also test the inclusion of the three SNe Ia datasets, namely Pantheon+, Union3 and DESY5, and find that variations in the CMB dataset leads to at most 0.3σ differences and that the evidence for evolving dark energy can go up to 4.0σ . Therefore, we conclude that the results presented in [16] are robust in light of the new ACT CMB data.

We also present updated constraints in the neutrino mass bounds from cosmology and find that, in Λ CDM and assuming a physical prior $\sum m_\nu > 0$ eV, DESI+ACT yields a neutrino mass constraint of $\sum m_\nu < 0.073$ eV (95% c.l.). Our baseline CMB dataset, PR4+ACT, imposes an upper bound of $\sum m_\nu < 0.061$ eV (95% c.l.) when combined with DESI. This represents a 5% reduction in the error compared to the neutrino mass constraints in [16], for the DESI+CMB baseline combination. Extending the background to an evolving dark energy component parameterized by w_0 and w_a gives an upper mass limit of $\sum m_\nu < 0.17$ eV and $\sum m_\nu < 0.15$ eV at 95% c.l., for DESI+ACT and DESI+PR4+ACT, respectively. Consistent with [16], we find that combining DESI BAO with CMB data yields a preference for positive neutrino masses. However, this preference vanishes when SNe data are included in the analysis. Finally, we find that the use of the low- ℓ EE SRo112 likelihood can relax the constraints on neutrino mass compared to the low- ℓ EE SimA11 likelihood by up to 7%, mostly due to a shift of the best-fit $\sum m_\nu$ towards larger values.

Overall, we find the results presented in [16] to be robust under the inclusion of the ACT data for the CMB combinations tested in this work. A joint treatment of *Planck* and ACT DR6 covariance could eventually coalesce to a consolidated CMB dataset.

VII. DATA AVAILABILITY

The data used in this analysis will be made public with Data Release 2 (details in <https://data.desi.lbl.gov/doc/releases/>). The data corresponding to the figures in this paper will be available in a Zenodo repository.

⁵ This feature has motivated interest in exploring the implications of negative effective neutrino masses [20, 52–54].

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Appendix A: Combining *Planck* and ACT

We describe how the CMB variations used in this work affect the cosmological parameters within Λ CDM, under the different multipole cuts used to combine *Planck* and ACT DR6. [Figure 6](#) shows the four parameters $\Omega_{bc}h^2$, $\Omega_b h^2$, Ω_m , and n_s , under ACT, PR4 and several CMB combinations. Here, the parameter $\Omega_{bc}h^2$ controls several elements in early physics such as the epoch of matter-radiation equality and the acoustic scale of the CMB peaks, while Ω_b affects the photon-to-baryon density ratio. Also, the low-redshift data from background probes is affected by Ω_m , and n_s characterizes the scale dependence of the primordial power spectrum of scalar perturbations. Additionally, [Figure 6](#) also shows the 1D posterior for $\Omega_c h^2$ which is a key parameter for the deviations from $(w_0, w_a) = (1, 0)$ in $w_0 w_a$ CDM when combining DESI with CMB.

The ACT data favor higher $\Omega_{bc}h^2$ and $\Omega_b h^2$ values compared to PR4, leading to a small r_d . The higher value of $\Omega_c h^2$ measured from ACT with respect to PR4 also leads to ACT alone being less consistent with DESI. An interesting feature is the correlation observed between $\Omega_b h^2$ and n_s when measured with ACT and PR4 [\[55\]](#). *Planck*, constraining large scales, measures a positive correlation, while ACT, on small scales, measures a negative correlation, making the two surveys highly complementary. This difference in the correlation of $\Omega_b h^2$ and n_s between the two CMB experiments, along with the fact that the measured values of n_s and particularly $\Omega_b h^2$ from ACT are higher than the *Planck* prediction, control the behavior of the joint constraints in the higher parameter space.

As defined in [Section II](#), the PR4+ACT combination combines PR4 and ACT such that we do not have any overlapping multipole regions and that we can get more constraining power by using each survey in the regime where its uncertainties are lower. [Figure 6](#) shows how PR4+ACT provides a tight constraint that falls between ACT and PR4 following the degeneracy direction of PR4. This constraint means higher $\Omega_b h^2$ and n_s values compared to PR4, with the central values of these parameters landing between the PR4 and ACT constraints. The effect on the rest of the parameters can be understood from the correlations with these parameters. For example, we observe that for PR4 high values of $\Omega_b h^2$ and n_s correspond to low values of $\Omega_{bc}h^2$, as observed in [Figure 6](#). A similar effect occurs for Ω_m and $\Omega_c h^2$, leading to joint constraints in PR4+ACT to measure lower val-

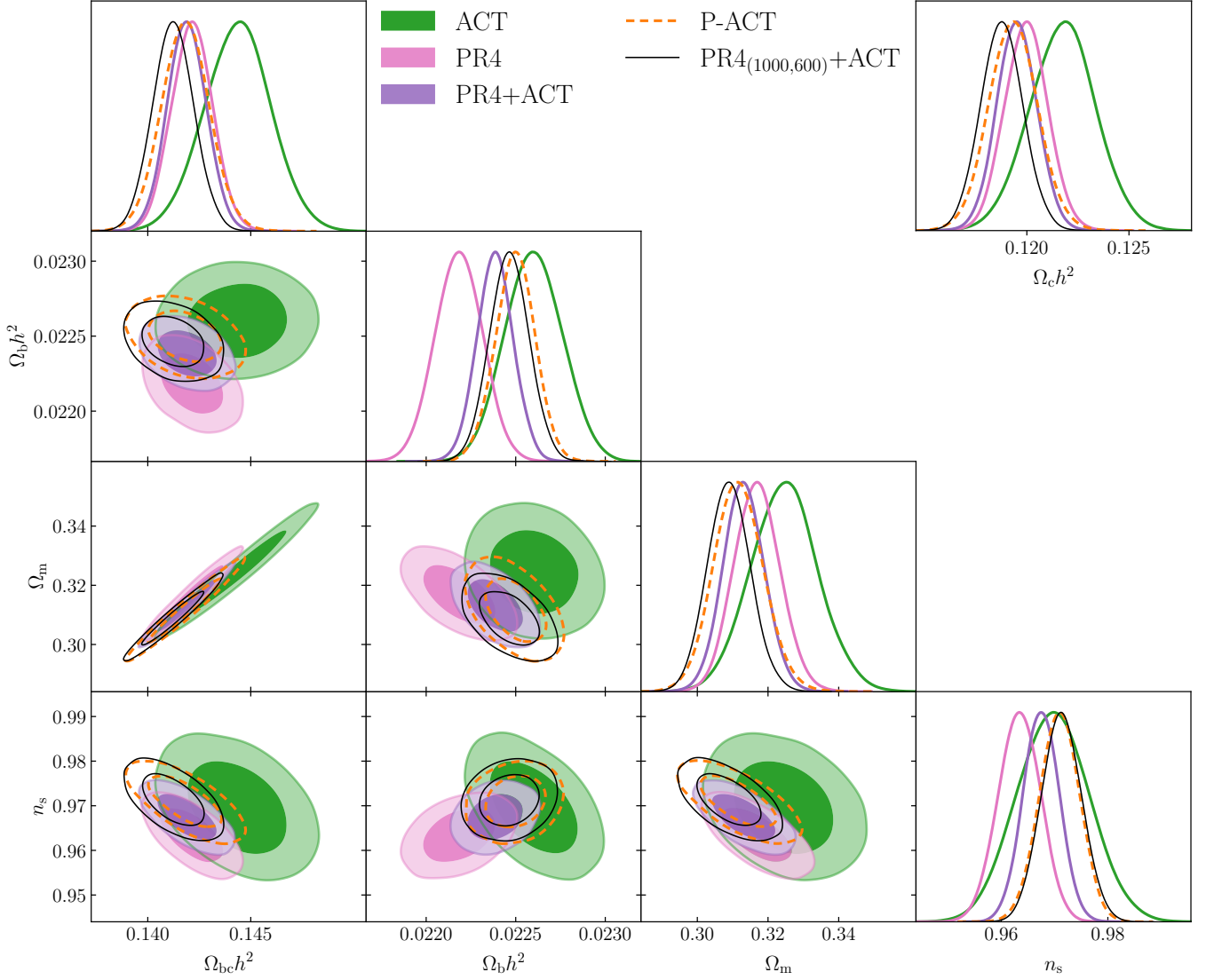


FIG. 6. The 68% and 95% confidence contours for the parameters $\Omega_{bc}h^2$, $\Omega_b h^2$, Ω_m , and n_s using various CMB datasets. The green contours show the ACT data described in [31] with CMB lensing, while the pink contours correspond to the baseline CMB dataset used in [16]. The baseline CMB dataset of this work is shown in purple, and the P-ACT and $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$ results are shown in orange and black unfilled contours, respectively. The $\Omega_b h^2$ - n_s panel shows the positive correlation between these parameters as measured by PR4, opposite to the negative correlation measured by ACT (see [55]). The corresponding 1D posterior distributions on $\Omega_c h^2$ are shown in the upper right corner.

ues of Ω_m and $\Omega_c h^2$ compared to PR4. Furthermore, the fact that *Planck* and ACT individually prefer a higher value of Ω_m compared to any of their joint combinations (either P-ACT or $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$) becomes relevant for the tensions shown in Figure 1, leading to better consistency with DESI when combining *Planck* and ACT. Thus, the inferred values on these parameters play a key role in the consistency with the DESI data and therefore can affect the evidence for evolving dark energy.

Figure 6 also shows the comparison between $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$ and the results from P-ACT and $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$. We observe that the datasets are consistent with each other, with the combinations

using PR4 showing slightly tighter constraints. The precision improvement on the $\Omega_c h^2$ measurement of $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$ is 19% with respect to P-ACT, coming primarily from adopting PR4 instead of PR3 and secondarily due to our multipole cuts. In fact, the $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$ is 5% more precise in $\Omega_c h^2$ than $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$, coming exclusively from our choice of the ℓ cuts. Finally, the combinations P-ACT and $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$ contain more information from ACT than in the case of $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$. This implies that both P-ACT and $\text{PR4}_{(1000,600)} + \text{ACT}$ measure higher values of $\Omega_b h^2$ with respect to $\text{PR4} + \text{ACT}$, therefore leading to lower values of $\Omega_{bc} h^2$, Ω_m and $\Omega_c h^2$.

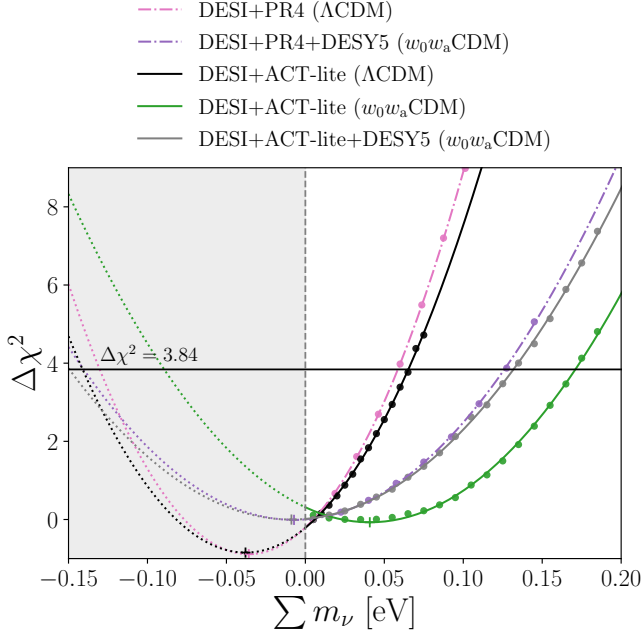


FIG. 7. Profile likelihoods for $\sum m_\nu$ from different combinations of datasets and cosmological models. The green curve corresponds to the combination of DESI DR2 BAO and ACT-lite in the $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$ model, while the gray curve additionally includes SNe data from DESY5. For completeness, the combination DESI DR2 BAO+PR4+DESY5 is shown in purple. The inclusion of SNe information shifts the profile back into the negative $\sum m_\nu$ region, in agreement with the Bayesian results presented in Section V. For comparison, we also show ΛCDM profiles using ACT-lite (black) and PR4 (pink), both with minima lying in the unphysical (negative) region.

Appendix B: Frequentist analysis for neutrino mass constraints

When constraining the neutrino mass in Section V, we have seen that the posteriors tend to peak at $\sum m_\nu = 0$, which is an indication that the physical prior $\sum m_\nu > 0$ impacts our constraints. To further investigate this behavior, we perform a profile likelihood analysis for the combination of DESI DR2 BAO and ACT data⁶ in the ΛCDM and $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$ models, and explore how these constraints are affected by the inclusion of SNe data.

We follow the same methodology as in [20], where the profile likelihood is evaluated for several fixed values of $\sum m_\nu$, while maximizing the likelihood \mathcal{L} (or equivalently minimizing $\chi^2 = -2 \log \mathcal{L}$) with respect to all other cosmological and nuisance parameters. As in that work, we perform a numerical minimization of the log-likelihood

Model/Dataset	μ_0 [eV]	σ [eV]	95% c.l [eV]
DESI+PR4 (ΛCDM)	-0.036	0.043	< 0.053
DESI+ACT-lite (ΛCDM)	-0.038	0.048	< 0.060
DESI+ACT-lite ($w_0w_a\text{CDM}$)	0.041	0.066	< 0.170
DESI+PR4+DESY5 ($w_0w_a\text{CDM}$)	-0.007	0.068	< 0.126
DESI+ACT-lite+DESY5 ($w_0w_a\text{CDM}$)	-0.009	0.072	< 0.132

TABLE IV. Profile likelihood parameters for various dataset combinations and cosmological models. We report the minimum μ_0 , the scale σ , and the 95% c.l. computed using the Feldman-Cousins prescription [56].

using the `Minuit` algorithm [57], via its Python interface, `iminuit` [58]. The resulting profiles, shown in Figure 7, closely follow a parabolic fit parameterized by the minimum μ_0 and its scale σ . The latter can be interpreted as the constraining power of the corresponding data combination. The minima μ_0 , the scale σ , and the 95% c.l. are summarized in Table IV.

The profile likelihood results are in good agreement with the Bayesian findings. In both approaches, the combination of DESI DR2 BAO and CMB data in the $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$ model yields a peak in the positive neutrino mass region—either in the profile likelihood or in the posterior. The inclusion of SNe data primarily shifts the profile toward lower values, reaching the boundary of the physical region, while the scale σ is only moderately affected. Consequently, the tightening of the estimated upper limit is mainly driven by this shift rather than by a substantial change in the uncertainty scale.

Figure 7 shows that for the ΛCDM model, combining DESI DR2 BAO with either ACT-lite or PR4 leads to a profile likelihood minimum that lies outside the physical region, consistent with the Bayesian results presented in Section V. The minima from both CMB combinations remain almost unaffected, with the only difference being that ACT-lite exhibits weaker constraining power, as also observed in the Bayesian analysis. This latter behavior is also seen in the $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$ model.

Finally, one can compare the upper bounds on $\sum m_\nu$ derived from both Bayesian and frequentist analyses. In ΛCDM , the profile likelihood leads to a smaller bound than the Bayesian method by up to 0.013 eV, while in $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$, they become very consistent, differing by up to 0.001 eV at most. This difference can be attributed to the position of the profiles and posteriors with regard to the $\sum m_\nu > 0$ eV bound. In the $w_0w_a\text{CDM}$ model, the profiles have minima close to or greater than zero, which brings the situation closer to a regular, uninterrupted Gaussian distribution where Bayesian and frequentist frameworks are expected to coincide.

⁶ For computational efficiency, we use the ACT-lite likelihood, a compressed version of the multi-frequency likelihood (`MFLike`) provided by the ACT team [31]. Differences with `MFLike` are

expected to be negligible, given that the inferred cosmological parameters agree to within 0.1σ , as shown in Appendix F of [31].