

# Bias-dependent displacement damage effects in a silicon avalanche photodiode

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## ABSTRACT

Radiation effects studies on a commercial beveled-edge avalanche photodiode (APD) showed that applying reverse bias to the device during irradiation enhanced the severity of apparent damage. Proton microbeam irradiations were made using a proton beam energy of 2 MeV and fluence ranging from  $2.0 \times 10^{10}$  to  $5.1 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . Charge collection measurements using the ion beam induced charge (IBIC) technique showed that relative losses increased by up to an order of magnitude when the reverse bias applied during irradiation increased from 50 to 1500 V. The presence of reverse bias also led to equivalent losses in charge collection that would only be seen in irradiations with an order of magnitude higher fluence in unbiased APDs. The results demonstrate that bias-enhanced irradiation damage is insufficiently understood and must be accounted for in characterizations of radiation effects.

## 1. Introduction

Radiation effects on electronics are important to understand when using various instrumentation and detection systems in nuclear safeguards, national security, and satellite applications. The accumulation of displacement damage within a semiconductor lattice leads to loss in performance and undesirable behavior of irradiated devices or their constituent components. Experimental studies typically focus on the particle types, energies, and fluence of incident radiation as well as the material type and doping profile of the target device. However, literature rarely discusses either the value or the effect of applied voltage during irradiation because this particular parameter tends to be inconsequential in the formation of displacement damage in silicon [1]. Past reports and new observations show that it merits further investigation.

Several irradiation studies using deep level transient spectroscopy (DLTS) reported that the relative concentrations of defects within irradiated devices were influenced by the bias applied during irradiation. Liu et al. showed that the populations of divacancy, vacancy-oxygen, and vacancy-phosphorus complexes were influenced by forward and reverse biases in a NPN transistor irradiated with Si ions [2]. Ravi et al. studied H and He implantation in PN diodes and found that while

divacancy production remained constant, other types of defects were suppressed by the application of bias [3]. These included defects due to hydrogen implantation as well as a type of defect which was only observed following helium implantation. These reports show that displacement damage formation is clearly susceptible to the bias applied during irradiation.

## 2. Methodology

An commercially-available APD from Luna Optoelectronics with model number 630–70–73–500 (formerly Advanced Photonix, Inc) was used for our study because it was previously found to perform well in radiation detection applications. The APD studied had a large active area of  $2 \text{ cm}^2$  and was designed to operate at reverse biases up to 2000 V. The design and operating characteristics of the APD are described elsewhere [4–6]. A set of spreading resistance measurements were conducted to determine the doping densities of the n and p-type regions. Uniform phosphorus doping at a density of  $7.44 \times 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-3}$  was present in the n-type float-zone region. Boron doping in the epitaxial p-type region was less uniform but was generally near  $1.05 \times 10^{15} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ . The junction depth was  $17.5 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$  below the surface.

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Proton irradiations were made using the microbeam end station at the Ruder Bošković Institute [7]. Two MeV energy protons were implanted in  $100 \times 100 \mu\text{m}^2$  squares on the APD using a raster scanning method. Transport of ions in matter (TRIM) simulations predicted an average final proton depth of  $48 \mu\text{m}$  and an average of 54 vacancies created per incident proton. Irradiation fluence ranged from  $2.0 \times 10^{10}$  to  $5.1 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ , average flux ranged from  $4.6 \times 10^7$  to  $1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ , and reverse biases applied during irradiation ranged from 0 to 1500 V. Typical uncertainties for the fluence and flux were below 3%. Ion beam induced charge (IBIC) measurements using 2 and 4 MeV protons assessed the change in signal response from irradiated regions, with a beam energy spread of about 1 keV. The IBIC measurements carried out at the Ruder Bošković Institute typically had a resolution of 20 to 40 keV for the Si detectors. Measurements biases included 40, 1200, 1600, and 1800 V, with only the latter two biases producing any band-to-band impact ionization. Ratios were then taken of the post-damage IBIC response to the pre-damage response to give the charge collection ratio (CCR). CCR was used to describe IBIC responses in this paper instead of charge collection efficiency (CCE) because the latter is traditionally used in the context of devices which do not have gain from impact ionization. CCR provides greater flexibility for analysis because the normalizing factor in the denominator can express the time-integrated current (aka induced charge) in the electrodes at biases where impact ionization occurs. Following IBIC measurements, data were extracted from the center of each irradiated region during post-processing to avoid edge effects. Uncertainties given for CCR values were calculated using list mode data within the central regions and expressed using one sigma standard deviations.

### 3. Results and discussion

The CCR values (in percent) of eight irradiations made over a range of reverse biases from 0 to 1500 V are depicted in Fig. 1a and 1b. Irradiation fluence and flux values were kept constant between regions, with values of  $6.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  and  $1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ , respectively. IBIC scans using 2 and 4 MeV protons with measurement biases of 1200, 1600, and 1800 V revealed the CCR of the irradiated regions.

The degradation in signal response from the APD was greatly amplified when large reverse biases were applied during irradiation. This was observed for all irradiation biases at or above 250 V. Only the 50 V irradiation had a higher CCR than the 0 V irradiation. In the 2 MeV scans, the drop in CCR for the 1500 V irradiation was 4 times greater than the drop in CCR for the 0 V irradiation when measured at 1800 V. When measured at 1600 V, the irradiation bias-induced drop was 5 times greater, and at 1200 V it was nearly 7 times greater.

The CCR values showed a remarkable sensitivity to the applied bias

during the measurement. This behavior indicated that radiation damage affected impact ionization rates. The introduction of defects caused trapping and increased scattering which reduced both the concentration and average velocity of conduction band electrons compared to pre-damage conditions. These effects worked together to reduce the CCR at higher biases by suppressing the effective electron ionization coefficient for impact ionization.

Similar trends were seen between the IBIC scans made with 4 MeV protons in Fig. 1b as those made with 2 MeV protons in Fig. 1a. For a given irradiation and measurement bias combination, the CCR values were up to 13% higher in Fig. 1b. than in Fig. 1a. The 2 MeV probing ions delivered the greatest IBIC sensitivity because its Bragg peak overlapped with the depth of maximum irradiation damage, and all electron-hole pairs were created within the damaged volume. In contrast, the 4 MeV probing ions generated a significant amount of charge beyond the damaged volume, as deep as  $148 \mu\text{m}$  below the surface. The resulting loss in sensitivity was strong enough in the 1200 V scan in Fig. 1b for the loss in CCR to appear almost negligible compared to the pre-damaged state. It is important to note that the edge of the depletion region, also known as the space charge region (SCR), was deeper than the end of range for a 4 MeV proton for measurement biases at 1200 V and above.

Eighteen additional irradiations were made to assess the combined effects of fluence and bias and are depicted in Fig. 2a, 2b, and 2c. Nine irradiations were made at zero bias and nine at 500 V reverse bias. Each set covered a range of fluence values from  $2 \times 10^{10}$  to  $5.1 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  with proton flux varying from  $4.6 \times 10^7$  to  $1.1 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ .

For each fluence value in Fig. 2, the irradiations made at 500 V had the lower CCR values compared to 0 V irradiations for all cases except the fluence of  $2 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . The CCR values in Fig. 2a for zero-bias irradiations exhibited a monotonous decrease as fluence increased. These trends contrasted with the CCR vs fluence behavior for 500 V irradiations in Fig. 2b, which showed unexpected increases in CCR at high fluences. As reference, Pastuovic et al. showed that irradiations made with zero bias on standard photodiodes would consistently give monotonous decreases in CCE for an increasing fluence for all measurements [8]. While standard photodiodes and APDs operate differently, the resemblance in behavior for zero-bias irradiations shows that the former can be a useful starting point in understanding the latter.

The differences between the CCR values seen in Fig. 2a and 2b were not as great as those seen within Fig. 1a and 1b, but they still showed substantial decreases. The region irradiated at 500 V with a fluence of  $1.3 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  showed a reduction in CCR that was more than three times greater than a region irradiated at zero bias with the same fluence. The measurements at 1800 V exhibited a CCR value of 87.1% in the 0 V irradiation which then fell to 55.3% in the 500 V irradiation. Fig. 2a and

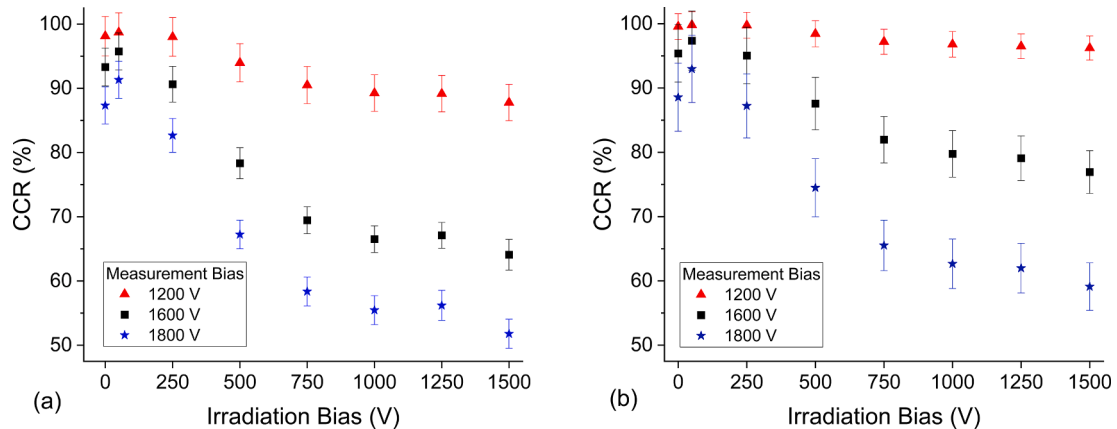
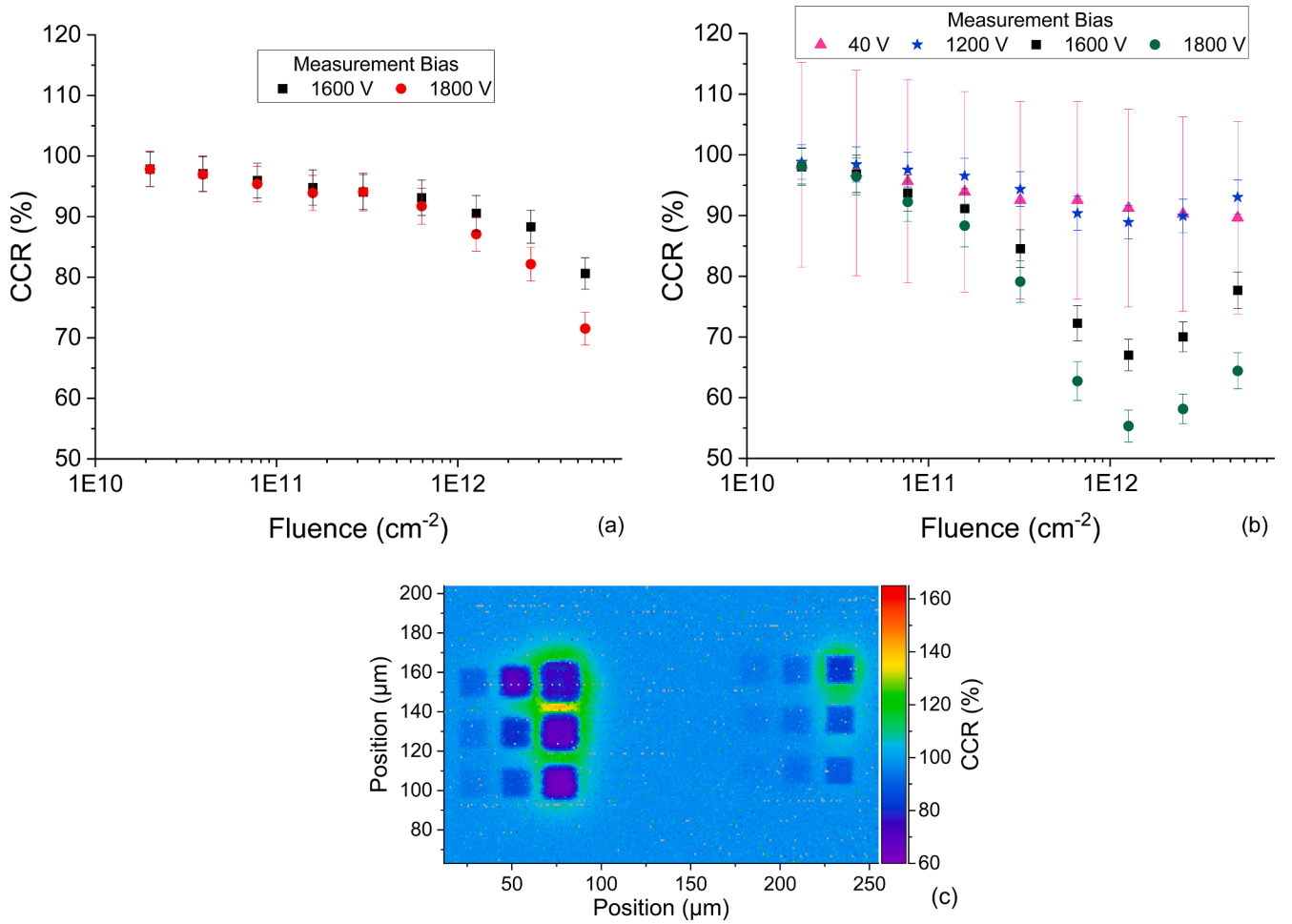


Fig. 1. CCR values from eight irradiations made with a fluence of  $6.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ , flux of  $1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ , and reverse biases from 0 to 1500 V. The IBIC probe used 2 MeV energy protons in (a) and 4 MeV protons in (b).



**Fig. 2.** IBIC response from 18 regions irradiated and measured with 2 MeV protons for a range of fluence values from  $2 \times 10^{10}$  to  $5.1 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . (a) shows IBIC measurements at 1600 and 1800 V for a set of irradiations made at zero bias. (b) shows similar data for irradiations at 500 V reverse bias while including IBIC scans at 40 and 1200 V. An IBIC scan at 1600 V of all 18 irradiated regions is seen in (c), with 0 V irradiations on the right and 500 V irradiations on the left.

2b also show that applying bias during irradiations reduced the amount of fluence required to reach a certain level of damage. Measurements at 1800 V showed that a 0 V irradiation with a fluence of  $5.1 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  reached a CCR of 71.5%. A greater level of damage was reached when a 500 V irradiation with a fluence of  $6.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  yielded a CCR of 62.7%. This produced stronger damage with an order of magnitude less fluence.

The IBIC scan in Fig. 2c shows a visual representation of the damaged regions and their relative loss in CCR. Halo-like regions were seen around regions with high fluence and their overlapping effects are thought to be responsible for the upward curve in CCR seen in higher fluence values in Fig. 2b. The mechanism behind the halos and their effect on CCR could not be explained at this time, although they are not the first halo-like effect seen in proton-irradiated diodes. Barbero et al. reported similar phenomena but with a reverse effect [9]. Instead of observing a stark increase in charge collection as seen in Fig. 2c, Barbero found that the CCE decreased over an area 12 times larger than the original irradiated zone. These effects were attributed to electric field bending from changes in the effective doping concentration.

The bias applied during irradiation may have affected defect formation both directly and indirectly. The direct mechanism may have involved the drift of charged interstitials (I) and vacancies (V) in the SCR. This likely promoted the motion of defects along the electric field and affected the spatial distribution of defect complexes, which could have formed. The indirect mechanism may have involved the alteration of defect charge states due to the greatly reduced concentrations of

charge carriers within the SCR. This likely altered the formation of defect complexes because charge states determine the mobility of V and I defects and interstitial hydrogen. Charge states also affect their probability of interaction with other defects. A compounding factor within this particular device may have been the relative lack of oxygen within the epitaxial and float-zone regions of the device. This is believed to have enhanced the mobility of vacancies compared to devices made of Czochralski silicon, enabling the effects of applied bias to be more pronounced. Based on the dependence of the CCR with irradiation bias as seen in Fig. 1, it seems probable that both the direct and indirect mechanisms were at play [10,11]. Another potential possible cause for the CCR degradation might be also the formation of an  $n^+$  layer induced by hydrogen implanted into the float zone (FZ) region of the diode. Deep level transient spectroscopy (DLTS) studies are necessary to determine the role which various defects play in these observations.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrated a case where applying bias to a device during exposure to radiation caused a drastic change in apparent damage. Losses in CCR when measured at 1200 V were seen to increase by an order of magnitude when the irradiation bias increased from 50 to 1500 V. An irradiation at 0 V had less damage than a similar irradiation at 500 V with an order of magnitude lower fluence. While it is not certain why the device under test exhibited such sensitivities to the applied bias during irradiation, this research shows that this parameter

must be considered more carefully in future studies involving displacement damage.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Robert M. Zedric:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing original draft. **Sunil S. Chirayath:** Project Administration, Formal analysis, supervision, review & editing. **Craig M. Marianno:** Project Administration, Formal analysis, supervision, review & editing. **Yacouba Diawara:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, review & editing. **Natko Skukan:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, review & editing.

### 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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