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Review on band structure and spin polarization of altermagnetic materials

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Abstract

Recent theoretical and experimental efforts have revealed the existence of a new class of magnetic materials, altermagnets, characterized by distinct symmetries in spin and real space. Combining the properties of ferromagnets, such as band spin polarization and time-reversal symmetry breaking responses, and antiferromagnets, like vanishing stray field and terahertz magnon dynamics, altermagnets are attracting enormous attention in both magnetism and spintronics community. While numerous altermagnetic candidates and emerging physical properties have been studied in theory extensively and enthusiastically, the experimental investigation of altermagnetism is struggling against the lack of proper altermagnetic materials and the controversial results reported for specific candidates. In this review, we first give a general description on the concept and key properties of altermagnetism, outline its distinction from other compensated magnetic order from the aspects of time-reversal symmetry in the spin momentum locking texture and time-reversal symmetry breaking responses. The main body of this review concentrates on the progress in altermagnetic material study with special focus on their band structure and spin polarization features, as well as the controversies over several candidate materials. Going forward, we point out several directions which altermagnetic material investigation might follow and guidelines which could help to avoid the pitfalls in the experimental pursuit of ideal altermagnets.

1. Introduction

In the past four years, we have witnessed the explosive increase of altermagnet related fundamental researches ranging from theoretical calculation [1–154], material synthesis [155–169], structure and magnetic structure [170–182], to band structure and spin polarization study [183–202]. The unique combination of ferromagnetic and antiferromagnetic properties in altermagnets places this novel state of matter at the frontier of magnetism and spintronics study. The distinct symmetries in spin and lattice space of altermagnets [16, 17] lead to band spin polarization [1, 2, 4–6, 8, 10, 17], unconventional spin splitting effects and spin currents [3, 7, 203–211], unconventional piezomagnetism [8, 34, 57, 77, 212] as well as the possibility of various time-reversal symmetry (T -symmetry) breaking responses including x-ray magnetic linear/circular dichroism (XMCD) [103, 213–223], anomalous Hall effect (AHE) [1, 65, 124, 224–235], magneto-optical Kerr effect (MOKE) [82, 106, 236, 237], orientation-dependent giant/-tunneling magnetoresistance (GMR/TMR) [14, 23, 43, 238–240] and their thermal [241–245] and magnonic [29, 94, 143, 246–250] counterparts. Furthermore, the compatibility of altermagnets with other spontaneous quantum orders in the same material enables the interplay of altermagnetism with exotic phenomena such as superconducting states [24, 26, 27, 30, 32, 36, 39, 41, 44, 47, 48, 61, 76, 78,

87, 95, 108, 114], topological states [24, 45, 47, 90, 110, 251] and magneto-electric states [84, 95, 252, 253]. These properties promote altermagnets as intriguing materials for information technology.

Like many other quantum states of matter, the novel physics and potential applications of altermagnetism rely on the distinct electronic structure embedded in the hosting materials. Consequently, it is a major task of altermagnetism study to investigate the spin splitting and polarization of the band structure in candidate materials following the theoretical prediction. Although theoretical studies have advanced rapidly in predicting altermagnetic materials and their intriguing properties, experimental verification and material realization remain in their early stages. In particular, this field is challenged by the limited number of desired materials, and the conflicting results that need to be reconciled for several workhorse candidates under ongoing investigation. Currently there are several comprehensive reviews and concise perspectives on altermagnets research [12, 16, 35, 63, 99, 113, 125, 127, 254, 255], most of which aim at a general and didactic description on the exciting aspects of altermagnetism, yet without addressing the reality that experimentally demonstrated altermagnets are scarce and the workhorse candidates are under strong debate. This might deliver over-optimistic illusions to those from related fields. It is thus one of our responsibilities in this review to explicitly present the status of experimental efforts, besides an understandable description on the concept and progress of altermagnetism. We also give an introductory insight, from a point of view of condensed matter experimentalist, on the key features that can define an altermagnet, by discriminating between T -symmetry breaking spin symmetry and T -symmetry breaking responses. We point out several guidelines for experimental investigation of altermagnetism and desirable characteristics which we prefer in an ideal altermagnet, to possibly guide the material exploration and fulfill the tempting potential of altermagnetism.

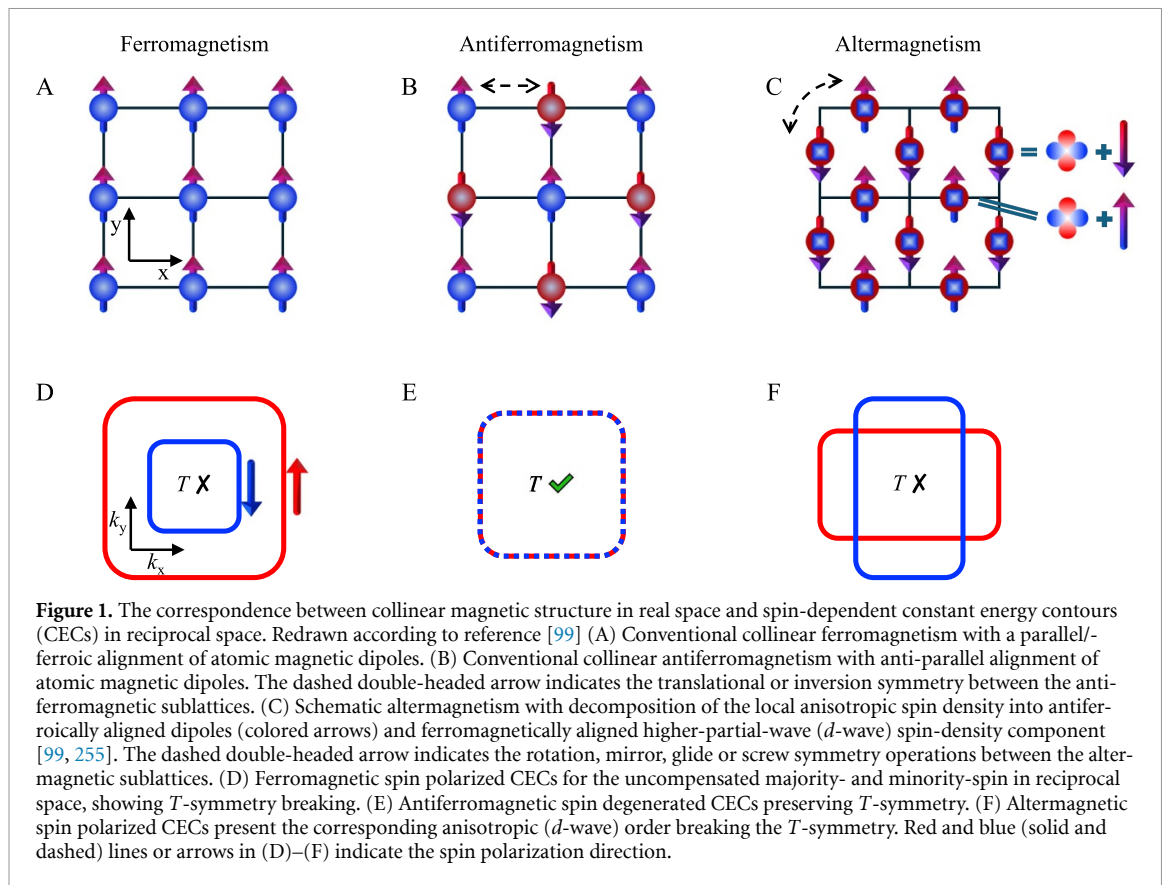
2. Defining characteristics of altermagnetism

2.1. What is altermagnetism?

In conventional collinear ferromagnets, only one type of magnetic lattices exists and the ferroic alignment of magnetic moments leads to macroscopic magnetization (figure 1(A)), generating T -symmetry breaking spin polarization in the band structure and constant energy contours (CECs) in reciprocal space (figure 1(D)). In conventional collinear antiferromagnets, opposite magnetic sublattices are linked by combinations of T -symmetry and spatial operations including inversion (P) or translation (τ) symmetries (figure 1(B)), resulting in spin degenerated (T -symmetric) CECs in reciprocal space (figure 1(E)). The term ‘altermagnetism’ is introduced to describe the alternating spin polarizations presented in both real (figure 1(C)) and reciprocal (figure 1(F)) space, which is characteristic of this new magnetic state of matter [12, 16, 17]. Altermagnets are unconventional compensated magnetism of which the magnetic sublattices are connected by crystal symmetry operations (C) including rotation, mirror, glide and screw, rather than P or τ , giving rise to C -paired spin momentum locking (SML) of the band structure in reciprocal space (figure 1(F)), which is T -symmetry breaking.

On the one hand, the alternating alignment of magnetic moments in real space leads to compensated magnetization globally, *i.e.*, zero net magnetization as antiferromagnets have. Such compensating alignment leads to robustness against external magnetic field perturbation, the absence of parasitic stray fields and ultrafast dynamics. Meanwhile, the breaking of such symmetry, say, by strain or field, together with the T -symmetry breaking SML in altermagnetism, is capable of generating large magnetotransport effects [256], and unconventional piezomagnetism [8, 34, 57, 77, 212], holding great potential in spintronics applications such as terahertz nano-oscillators [257]. On the other hand, the C -paired SML solely arising from the non-relativistic, anisotropic exchange interactions rather than relativistic spin-orbit coupling (SOC) or subtle correlated instabilities in metallic Fermi fluids [99, 258, 259], promises charge-spin conversion effect [3, 7, 97, 128, 203–211] at ambient conditions in a variety of metallic and insulating materials. This mimics ferromagnets which facilitate the readout and writing functionalities in magnetic random-access memories (MRAMs) through TMR, spin-transfer torque or spin-orbit torque effects. Furthermore, altermagnets are allowed to have T -symmetry breaking responses such as the AHE [1, 65, 124, 177, 224–235, 260], the anomalous Nernst effect (ANE) [242–245], MOKE [82, 106, 236, 237] and circular dichroism (CD) [103, 189, 213–223].

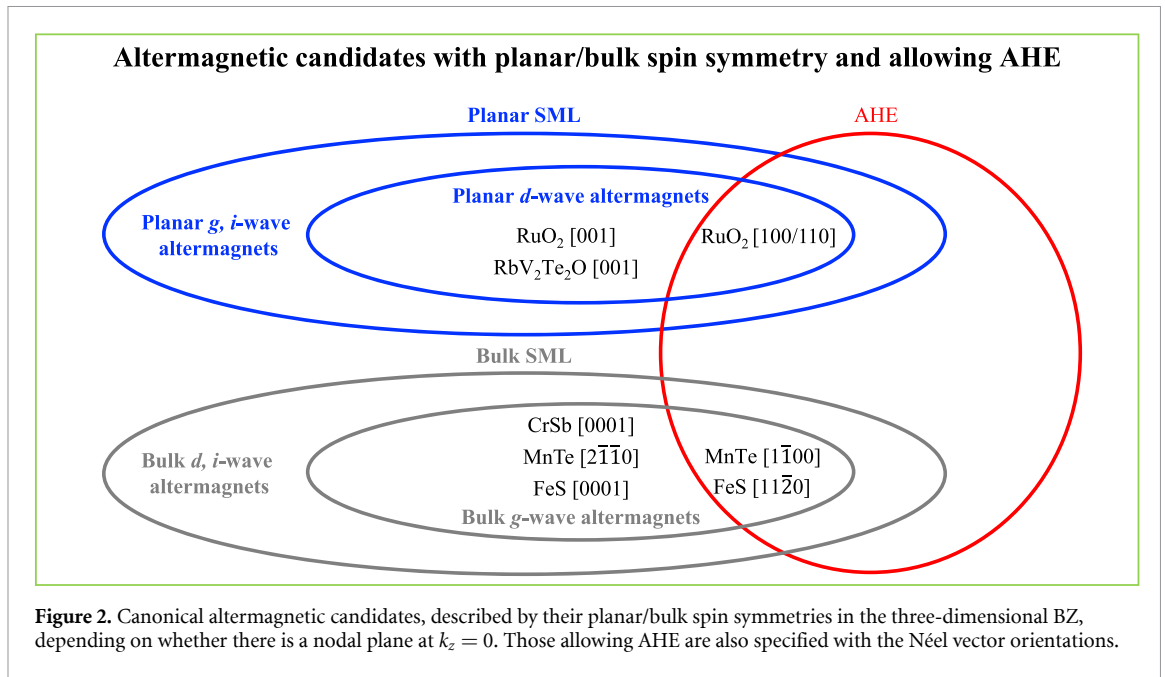
Besides these T -symmetry breaking properties, the compatibility of altermagnetism with other novel states of matter including superconductivity, band topology and (anti)ferroelectricity in one material offers valuable chances to explore exotic quantum states of matter and macroscopic quantum phenomena. The connection between altermagnetism and superconductivity is naturally realized by the



proposal of possible altermagnetism in La_2CuO_4 as a typical parent compound of cuprate high- T_c superconductors [17]. Other cuprates [108] and ruthenates [78] are also altermagnetic candidates [114]. Based on superconductor/altermagnet junctions, novel superconducting phenomena have been discussed, such as orientation dependent Josephson effect, Andreev reflection and superconducting diode effect [26, 27, 30, 36, 41, 44, 61, 87]. The *d*-wave altermagnetism also enables Majorana modes [24, 47], finite-momentum Cooper pairing and mixed *s*-wave and *p*-wave pairings [32, 39, 76]. These potentially offer a new platform for superconducting spintronics [48, 95, 261]. The distinct spin symmetry in real space and reciprocal space, and the inherent spin polarization in the electronic structure of altermagnetism not only give rise to topological Weyl quasiparticles and Fermi arcs [164, 201], but also bulk magnetic topological states and the potential realization of orientation-dependent quantum AHE [45, 58, 90, 110, 251]. Multiferroic materials that combine ferroelectricity and altermagnetism provide the chance to integrate altermagnetic spin polarization and electrical polarization [84, 145, 146], not only enriching the spectrum of magnetoelectric coupling but also paving the way for electrically controlled spintronic and multiferroic devices.

2.2. Characteristic of altermagnetism

With the advance of antiferromagnetic spintronics [256], antiferromagnetic materials possessing diverse magnetic structure symmetry, band spin polarization symmetry, and particularly optical, electrical, thermal responses have gained widespread attention. This leads to the introduction of terminologies such as ‘spin-split antiferromagnets [72]’, ‘non-collinear antiferromagnets [262, 263]’, ‘Anomalous Hall antiferromagnets [15]’, ‘odd/even-parity magnets [264, 265]’, ‘*T*-symmetry breaking/conserving SML’ and ‘*T*-symmetry breaking responses’. Since each of these terms focuses on different facet of the studied magnetism, with the latter three rigorously defined by symmetry while the others not, conceptual overlaps are unavoidable, leading to potential misunderstanding. From the standpoint of a condensed matter experimentalist, it is necessary to properly differentiate between the *T*-symmetry of SML in reciprocal space and *T*-symmetry breaking responses for different types of altermagnets, yet the recent literatures often fail to do so. For example, it is a common misunderstanding to assume that one type of *T*-symmetry breaking, such as *T*-symmetry breaking SML, inherently corresponds to *T*-symmetry breaking responses, such as AHE/ANE, or vice versa. Another example is to simply use the term



‘ T -symmetry breaking’ to describe the angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy (ARPES)-measured spin

polarization symmetry in two-dimensional momentum space. As both SOC type SML and bulk altermagnetic SML exhibit antisymmetric spin polarization when reversing only two components of momentum (i.e., $E(k_x, k_y, \uparrow) = E(-k_x, -k_y, \downarrow)$), just observing such asymmetry in one specific two-dimensional momentum plane determined by the photon energy is not enough to establish the T -symmetry breaking SML in altermagnet.

According to the characteristic spin-group integer, defined as the number of nodal surfaces crossing the Γ -point in the whole Brillouin zone (BZ), the spin polarization symmetry in altermagnets can be classified as d -wave (2), g -wave (4), and i -wave (6). Furthermore, depending on the presence or absence of nodal surface at $k_z = 0$, such symmetry can be planar or bulk. The combination of these two classification generates totally 6 types of anisotropic symmetries, which is explicitly shown in the supplementary figure 2 of [17]. Since ARPES measurement using one single photon energy is only able to measure the band structure in a quasi-planar momentum space, the expected spin symmetry in such space varies for bulk and planar type altermagnets. According to the planar/bulk- $d/g/i$ -classification, planar type anisotropy has symmetric SML in k_x-k_y plane ($E(k_x, k_y, \uparrow) = E(-k_x, -k_y, \uparrow)$) or along k_z ($E(k_z, \uparrow) = E(-k_z, \uparrow)$). In contrast, bulk type presents antisymmetric SML both in k_x-k_y plane and along k_z . Consequently, observing an antisymmetric SML using ARPES (for most of the cases, in k_x-k_y plane) at one photon energy is not enough to demonstrate the existence of altermagnetism, since traditional SOC induced Rashba type SML also manifests such antisymmetry. Regarding specific materials, as listed in figure 2, RuO₂ and RbV₂Te₂O belong to planar d -wave altermagnets with symmetric SML in two-dimensional momentum planes. Hexagonal α -MnTe, CrSb and FeS, instead, belong to bulk g -wave type with antisymmetric SML in momentum planes. Note that all types of collinear altermagnets have even-parity symmetry. Hexagonal Mn₃Sn has been proved to exhibit T -symmetry breaking responses such as AHE [266, 267], yet its T -symmetry breaking SML remains to be demonstrated in experiment. Odd-parity magnets exhibit T -symmetric, nonrelativistic spin splitting [268–270], for which the characteristic SML awaits direct experimental confirmation.

SOC in an altermagnet (where T -symmetry is broken) can create weak ferromagnetism or weak ferrimagnetism and allows for an AHE that depends on the direction of the Néel ordering vector [79, 123]. In a spin-split, compensated magnet like altermagnet, the absence of SOC means that the symmetry operations of spin and lattice are separated, which can be described by spin groups. AHE, except topological Hall effect, on the other hand, is a relativistic effect, for which the magnetic materials should be described by magnetic groups in which SOC locks the lattice and spin rotations. The distinct symmetry groups describing magnets which allow for AHE and altermagnets which show T -symmetry breaking SML leads to separate pools of materials. For example, d -wave altermagnet RbV₂Te₂O presents planar

type spin polarization in momentum space, but no AHE given its Néel vector along [001]. G -wave altermagnet α -MnTe exhibits bulk type SML in $k_z \neq 0$ momentum planes (without SOC) for Néel vectors aligned with $[1\bar{1}00]$, $[0001]$ and $[2\bar{1}\bar{1}0]$ directions, but only the first one allows AHE [228].

3. Band structure and spin polarization study of candidate altermagnets

Having defined the key characteristics of altermagnetism, the core mission remains to realize such state of matter in real materials. One natural question arises: what kind of approaches could provide sufficient and necessary evidence to demonstrate the existence of altermagnetism in a material? According to the previous section, the distinction of altermagnetism from conventional antiferromagnetism lies in the C -paired sublattice symmetry. Thus, diffraction methods such as powder or single-crystal neutron diffraction can in principle directly detect the altermagnetic order [170, 176]. However, the value of altermagnetism is more about its novel phenomena and responses rather than structure. The characteristic T -symmetry breaking SML composes the vital evidence one should provide to demonstrate the altermagnetism.

3.1. Status of altermagnetic material exploration

In recent years, guided by spin group symmetry analysis and supported by density functional theory (DFT) calculations, a growing number of candidate altermagnetic materials have been identified [10, 17, 21, 31, 40, 53, 67, 71, 80, 130]. These include RuO₂ [1, 7, 17, 203–205], RbV₂Te₂O [192], KV₂Se₂O [196, 271], MnTe [183, 184, 186, 188], CrSb [185, 187, 191, 202], FeS [229], FeSb₂⁹ [272, 273], Mn₅Si₃ [231–233], CoNb₄Se₈ [274–277], MnF₂ [37, 58, 278], FeF₂ [279], CaMnO₃ [278, 280], MnO₂ [281], ReO₂ [38], LiFe₂F₆ [282], RuF₄ [283], κ -Cl [3, 284], and others. Their non-relativistic spin-splitting properties have been investigated using a variety of experimental techniques, ranging from diffraction, microscopy, spectroscopy to transport measurements. ARPES provides direct evidence for the alternating lifting of spin degeneracy in momentum space— T -symmetry breaking SML. The most direct experimental confirmation of altermagnetism is achieved by probing its spin-dependent electronic bands via spin-resolved ARPES (SpinARPES). This section first presents, in table 1, a summary of key parameters for experimentally identified candidate altermagnetic materials, covering space group, conductivity, magnetic ordering temperature, band splitting, spin polarization, and other relevant properties. Following this, we focus on a detailed review of experimental results concerning the band structure and spin polarization of several mainstream altermagnetic candidates: RbV₂Te₂O/KV₂Se₂O, RuO₂, α -MnTe, CrSb, and CoNb₄Se₈.

3.2. D-wave altermagnet RbV₂Te₂O

The experimental study on d -wave altermagnets, RbV₂Te₂O family is inspired by the initial theoretical predictions by Ma *et al* [8] who first identified that a novel type of SVL, termed C -paired SVL, in antiferromagnetic systems, can be realized in monolayer V₂Se₂O and V₂Te₂O. As shown in figure 3, in C -paired SVL, spin-polarized valleys are connected by crystal symmetry C (e.g. rotation or mirror) such that $E_{\uparrow}(K) = E_{\downarrow}(CK)$. Distinct from conventional T -paired SVL, where spin-split valleys are related by time-reversal symmetry T ($E_{\uparrow}(K) = E_{\downarrow}(-K)$) and rely on strong SOC and broken inversion, C -paired SVL originates from strong exchange coupling between itinerant electrons and the underlying antiferromagnetic order. This mechanism can generate spin splitting up to several eVs in the absence of SOC. Enforced by the crystal's rotational symmetry, this polarization manifests as C -paired SVL, where the opposite spin is locked to opposite valleys (K and K'). Consequently, the observation of C -paired SVL serves as a definitive electronic signature of the altermagnetic state, while the altermagnetism provides the strong intrinsic spin splitting necessary for robust valleytronic functionality.

Following this prediction, the authors' group [192] studied an analogous layered material RbV₂Te₂O (figure 4(A)) using SpinARPES, scanning tunneling microscopy/spectroscopy (STS) and first-principles calculations, demonstrating its uniqueness as a room-temperature ordered ($T_N > 307$ K), metallic, layered, d -wave altermagnet. Figure 4(C) presents the ARPES band spectra measured along high-symmetry paths at 12 K, overlaid with the corresponding calculated dispersion. Structural and magnetic symmetries govern the electronic properties of RbV₂Te₂O, leading to a Fermi surface exhibiting four-fold rotational symmetry and diagonal mirror operations connecting reciprocal-space valleys. Low-energy band structure is dominated by three sharp bands (α, β, γ), with first-principles calculations revealing alternating spin polarization along X – M vs Y – M and consistent spin ordering among α, β, γ . The excellent agreement between theory and ARPES measurements conclusively establishes C -paired SVL in this layered room-temperature antiferromagnet. Furthermore, the alternating spin polarization has been directly

Table 1. The key properties of the candidate altermagnets experimentally investigated. M: metal; S: semiconductor; SML: spin–momentum locking; AM: altermagnet; NM: nonmagnetism. E_F : Fermi level; AHE: anomalous Hall effect; ANE: anomalous Nernst effect; SSMR: spin-splitting magnetoresistance; μ SR: muon spin rotation; GMR/TMR: giant/tunneling magnetoresistance; XMCD: x-ray magnetic circular dichroism; ARPES: angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy; DFT: density functional theory.

Candidate	Space group	Conduction	Parity	T_N (K)	Band splitting	Spin polarization	Other properties
RbV ₂ Te ₂ O KV ₂ Se ₂ O	P4/mmm	M	<i>d</i> -wave AM	>307 [192] 400 [182]	~1.6 eV. All bands split at E_F .	<i>T</i> -breaking SML at E_F [192,196].	Possible hidden AM [182].
RuO ₂	P4 ₂ /mnm	M	<i>d</i> -wave AM	>300 [171,172]	~1.4 eV (DFT) along Γ –M and A–Z [1,190]	<i>T</i> -breaking SML at E_F ¹⁸⁹ .	AHE [225], SSMR [285], MCD-ARPES [189], spin splitting effects [7, 203–209], GMR/TMR [14,23,43,239,240].
			NM	/	Rashba-like splitting [190]	<i>T</i> -symmetric SML [190]	Ordinary Hall effect [286] $m_{Ru} \sim 10^{-4} \mu B$ [178, 179] Fermi liquid [136]
Strained Mn ₅ Si ₃	P6 ₃ /mcm	M	<i>d</i> -wave AM	~260 [242]	~0.2 eV (DFT) [232]	<i>T</i> -breaking SML (DFT) [234]	AHE [231–234], ANE [242–244].
α -MnTe	P6 ₃ /mmc	S	<i>g</i> -wave AM	267~310	>0.3 eV [183,186,188], temperature-dependent band splitting [184,186,188]	<i>T</i> -breaking SML [183]	Chiral split magnon [246], AHE [228, 230], XMCD [213], piezomagnetic properties [212]
						<i>T</i> -symmetric SML [195]	
CrSb	P6 ₃ /mmc	M	<i>g</i> -wave AM	700~705	≥0.8 eV [166,185,187,191,201,202]	<i>T</i> -breaking SML [202]	Chiral spin-split magnons [143,223], Néel vector-dependent anomalous transport [224,235,287], XMCD [220], ANE [245].
CoNb ₄ Se ₈	P6 ₃ /mmc	M	<i>g</i> -wave AM	168 [274]	Temperature-dependent band splitting [276]	<i>T</i> -breaking SML [276]	/

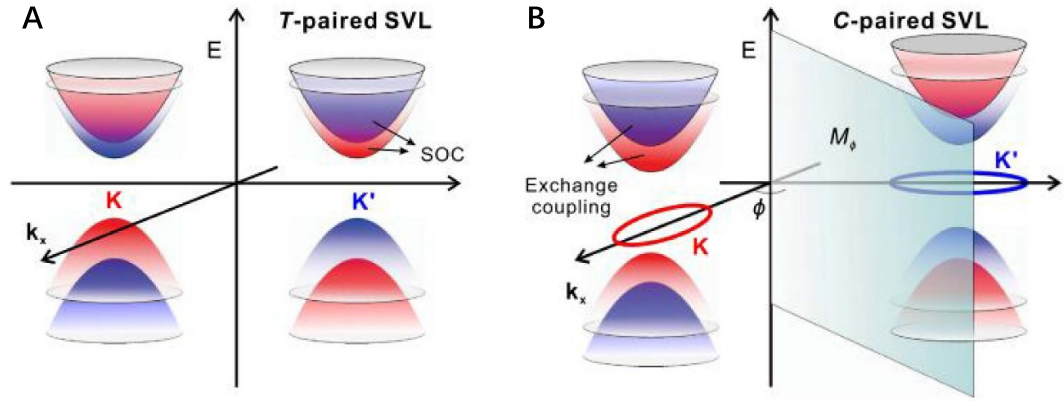


Figure 3. Schematics of *T*-paired SVL and *C*-paired SVL. (A) In *T*-paired SVL, the spin-split bands (spin-up in red, spin-down in blue) arise from strong SOC under broken inversion symmetry, and the two valleys are connected by time-reversal symmetry. (B) In *C*-paired SVL, the spin splitting originates from exchange coupling between itinerant electrons and local magnetic moments, while different valleys are connected by a crystal symmetry *C*, such as a mirror symmetry M_ϕ . Reproduced from [8]. CC BY 4.0.

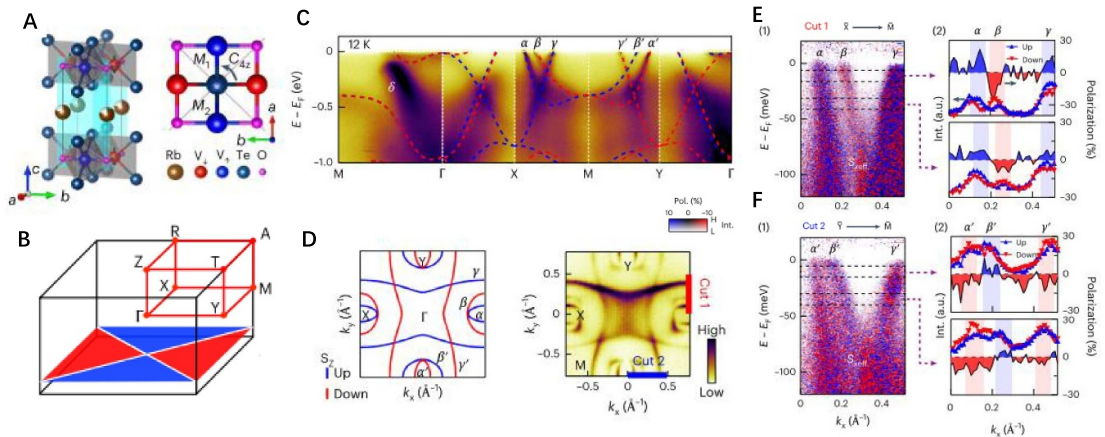
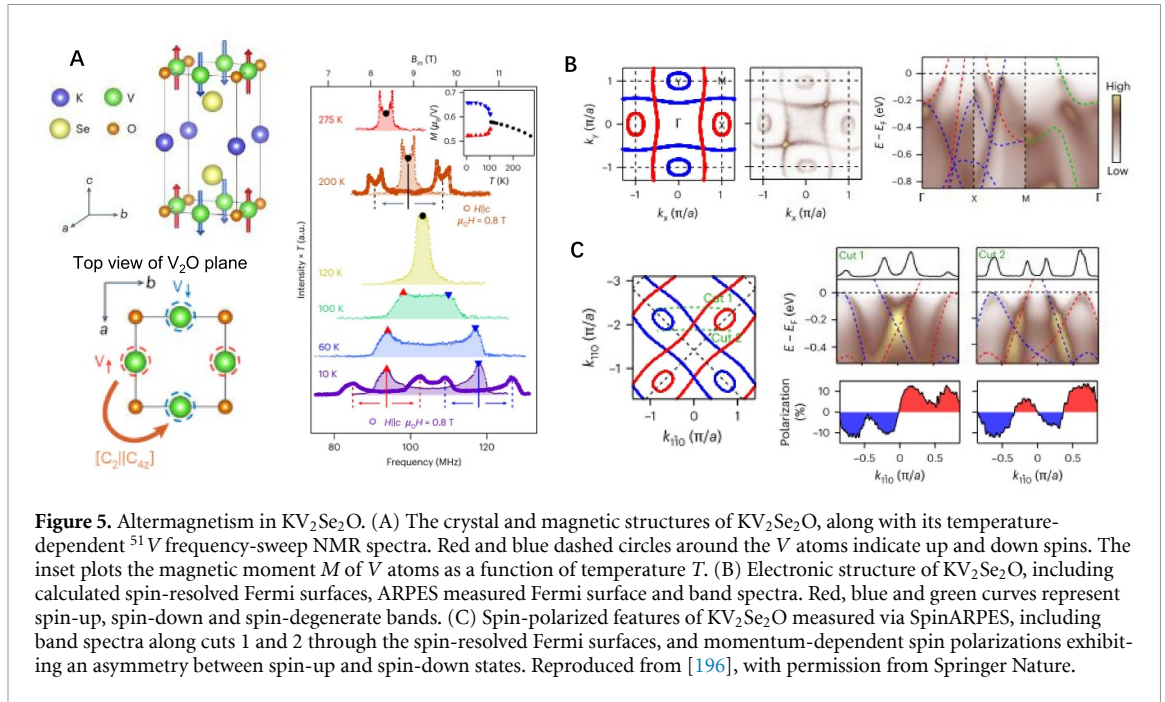


Figure 4. *C*-paired SVL in *d*-wave altermagnet $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$. (A) Crystal structure of $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$, where the arrows indicate the magnetic moments of V that are parallel/antiparallel to the *c*-axis. Opposite-spin sublattices are connected by diagonal mirror symmetry M_1 and M_2 (transparent blue planes) and four-fold rotation symmetry (C_{4z}). (B) The bulk Brillouin zone shows a pattern of alternating spin polarization across adjacent valleys, represented by blue and red regions. (C) Band structure of $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$ along high-symmetry paths. The dashed red and blue lines denote first principles calculated bands with opposite spin polarizations. Bands labeled α , β , γ and α' , β' , γ' are connected by diagonal mirror symmetry and exhibit spin splitting induced by the *C*-paired AFM order. Band δ arises from surface reconstruction associated with Rb atoms. Here, the ARPES data were collected at $T = 12$ K. (D) The calculated spin-resolved Fermi surface for the altermagnetic phase and ARPES mapping at $h\nu = 69$ eV. (E, F) Band spin polarization. Spin-resolved band spectra and their corresponding momentum distribution curves along the high-symmetry cuts $\bar{X}-\bar{M}$ (cut1) and $\bar{Y}-\bar{M}$ (cut2). All SpinARPES spectra are taken with photon energy $h\nu = 21.2$ eV. Int., intensity; Pol., polarization; H, high intensity; L, low intensity. Reproduced from [192], with permission from Springer Nature.

proved via SpinARPES. As shown in figures 4(E) and (F), SpinARPES measurements along mirror-symmetric momentum cuts (cut 1: $\bar{X}-\bar{M}$ and cut 2: $\bar{Y}-\bar{M}$) reveal opposite spin-polarization symmetries along the two directions, directly confirming *C*-paired SVL in $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$. Through analysis of the quasi-particle interference pattern in STS mapping (shown in the figure 4 in [192]), it is further revealed a strong suppression of intervalley scattering—a phenomenon originating from the spin selection rules imposed by spin–momentum locking, which directly manifests the SVL mechanism under weak SOC. All these results establish $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$ as a layered room-temperature antiferromagnetic metal featuring alternating magnetic sublattices and a novel type of symmetry-driven spin splitting. It provides an ideal material platform for both fundamental studies and potential device applications in spintronics and valleytronics.



Almost simultaneously, Jiang *et al* [196] reported room-temperature altermagnetism with d -wave spin-momentum locking in the quasi-two-dimensional metallic oxide $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$. Through magnetic susceptibility, nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), and neutron diffraction measurements, they have unambiguously confirmed the presence of a magnetic ordered state in $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$, with the magnetic moments aligned along the crystallographic c -axis, shown in figure 5(A). Furthermore, they also investigated its band structure using photon-energy-dependent ARPES, revealing a simple quasi-two-dimensional electronic structure that aligns well with first-principles calculations, shown in figure 5(B). Compared with band calculation, they found that the bands along the high-symmetry direction $\Gamma - X - M$ are spin split, whereas the bands along $\Gamma - M$ remain spin degenerate, in consistent with the d -wave symmetry. The momentum-dependent spin-splitting, which originates from anisotropic crystal fields, reaches 1.6 eV at E_F , one of the largest values reported among altermagnets. Figure 5(C) shows the spin polarization of the band spectra measured via SpinARPES. Two momentum cuts crossing the Fermi surface reveal a characteristic spin-polarization sequence. Along cut 1, the spin polarization of the corresponding bands exhibit a down-down-up-up ordering, while for cut 2, it is a down-up-down-up spin sequence. These spin textures confirm the unconventional d -wave altermagnetism in $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$.

Notably, while SpinARPES measurements have unambiguously demonstrated that $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$ and $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ exhibit room-temperature d -wave altermagnetism, characterized by a T -symmetry breaking SML, recent neutron diffraction experiments yielded the opposite conclusion. Through neutron diffraction studies of polycrystalline and single-crystal samples, Sun *et al* [182] revealed a G-type antiferromagnetic order in bulk $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ at room temperature. This finding contradicts the C-type magnetic structure previously considered essential for d -wave altermagnetism, indicating that bulk $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ is not an intrinsic altermagnet. The apparent discrepancy likely arises from the surface-sensitive nature of photoemission measurement, which probes primarily the topmost $\text{V}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ layer of the cleaved crystal $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$, whereas neutron diffraction averages over the bulk $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ magnetic order. This aligns with theoretical predictions that altermagnetic properties originate from the monolayer $\text{V}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ limit and suggests the existence of hidden altermagnetism in $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$. Consequently, the application of bulk $\text{KV}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ in altermagnetic spintronics may face limitations, underscoring the need for further exploration of genuinely two-dimensional altermagnetic materials.

3.3. RuO_2

RuO_2 adopts the rutile structure with space group $\text{P}4_2/\text{mmn}$, as shown in figure 6(A). In this structure, each Ru atom is coordinated by six O atoms, forming a slightly distorted octahedron [288]. Notably, neighboring oxygen octahedra are connected through rotation rather than translation. The specific connectivity, combined with antiferromagnetic alignment of spins at the Ru sites, is predicted to give rise to a characteristic d -wave altermagnetic ground state with zero net magnetization that simultaneously exhibits ferromagnetism-like lifted Kramers spin degeneracy (LKSD) in reciprocal space (figure 6(A)).

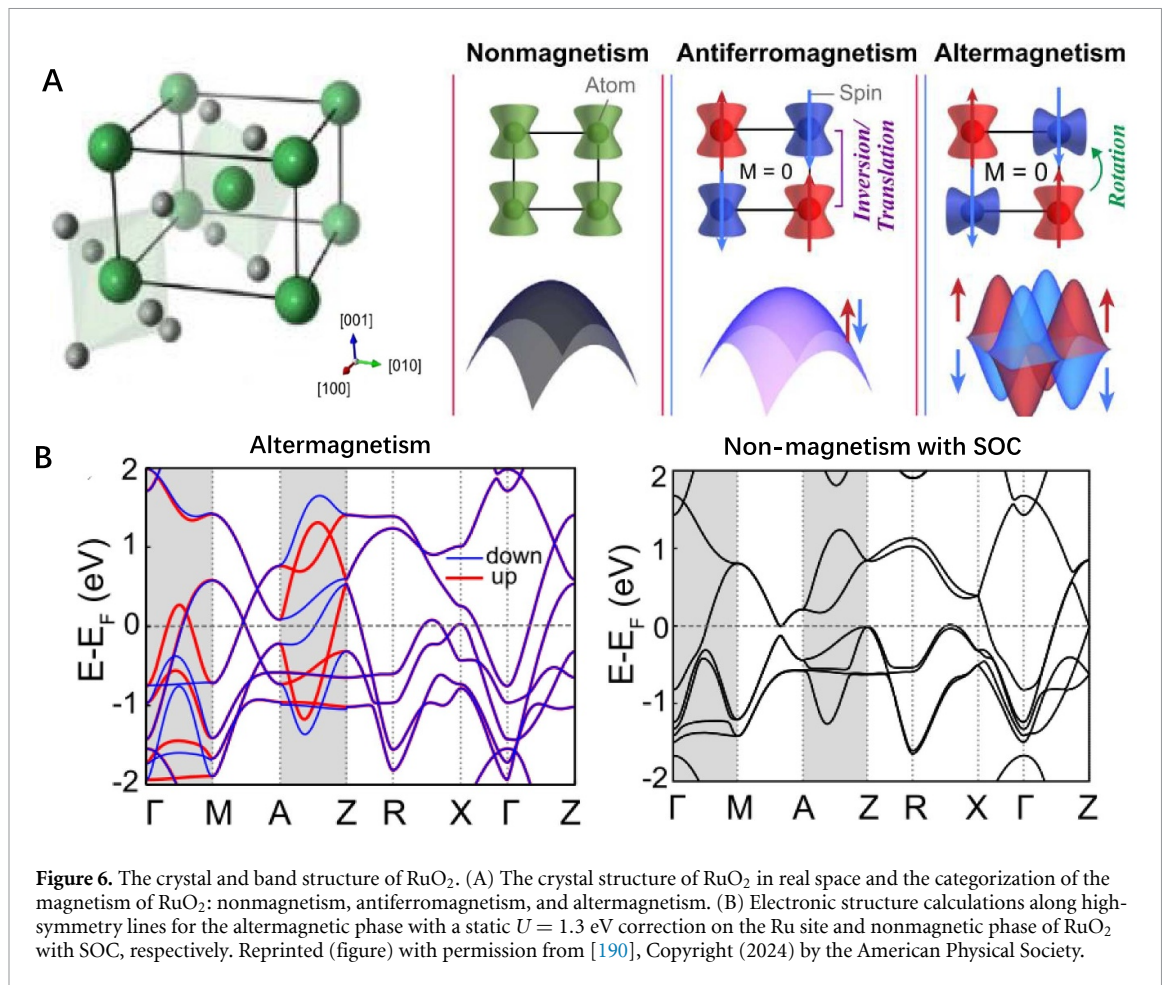


Figure 6. The crystal and band structure of RuO₂. (A) The crystal structure of RuO₂ in real space and the categorization of the magnetism of RuO₂: nonmagnetism, antiferromagnetism, and altermagnetism. (B) Electronic structure calculations along high-symmetry lines for the altermagnetic phase with a static $U = 1.3$ eV correction on the Ru site and nonmagnetic phase of RuO₂ with SOC, respectively. Reprinted (figure) with permission from [190], Copyright (2024) by the American Physical Society.

Furthermore, first-principles calculations confirm that an altermagnetic state in RuO₂ induces spin-splitting along the $\Gamma - M$ and $A - Z$ directions, whereas a nonmagnetic configuration retains full band degeneracy, as shown in figure 6(B). RuO₂ is predicted to possess a significant spin splitting of up to 1.4 eV, along with the presumed magnetic ordering well above room temperature [1]. Due to its substantial spin splitting and a high critical temperature, RuO₂ is considered a highly promising material for modern spintronics. These attributes could enable faster and more energy-efficient spin-based information processing in devices, heralding significant potential for future applications.

The prediction of altermagnetism in RuO₂ is corroborated by numerous spin transport results. Feng *et al* [225] reported an AHE in RuO₂ films with a conductivity exceeding $1000 \Omega^{-1}\text{cm}^{-1}$, which is over both the ordinary Hall contribution and that arising from a weak field-induced magnetization, attributed to the compensated collinear magnetic order. Tschirner *et al* [227] revealed a saturation of the AHE under high applied magnetic fields, which is consistent with the expected Néel-vector reorientation field. Bose *et al* [204] revealed that RuO₂ produces a spin current with a tilted spin polarization aligned approximately with its Néel vector by angular-resolved measurements of the full torque vector. These results have been interpreted as hallmarks of the altermagnetic order. More recent studies have further solidified this perspective by extensively probing the altermagnetic spin splitting effect with a variety of methods, such as spin Seebeck effect, electrical transport, spin splitting torque, and terahertz (THz) emission measurements [14, 203, 205–211, 240]. It was experimentally observed that RuO₂ exhibits crystallographic-axis dependent spin-to-charge conversion efficiency, reversible and inverse spin-splitting effect, spin-splitting magnetoresistance, electrical manipulation of spin splitting torque, and anisotropic THz emission.

However, the magnetic nature of RuO₂ remains a subject of intense debate. Early investigations, employing techniques such as polarized neutron diffraction [171] and resonant x-ray scattering [172], reported evidence consistent with antiferromagnetic ordering in both bulk and thin film samples, forming an initial consensus. Yet more recent and highly sensitive local-probe studies have fundamentally challenged this view. Muon spin rotation/relaxation (μSR) experiments, which are exceptionally sensitive to weak internal magnetic fields, detected either an extremely small ordered moment (on the order of $[10\text{--}4] \mu_B/\text{Ru}$) or a complete absence of long-range magnetic order in high-quality RuO₂ crystals and

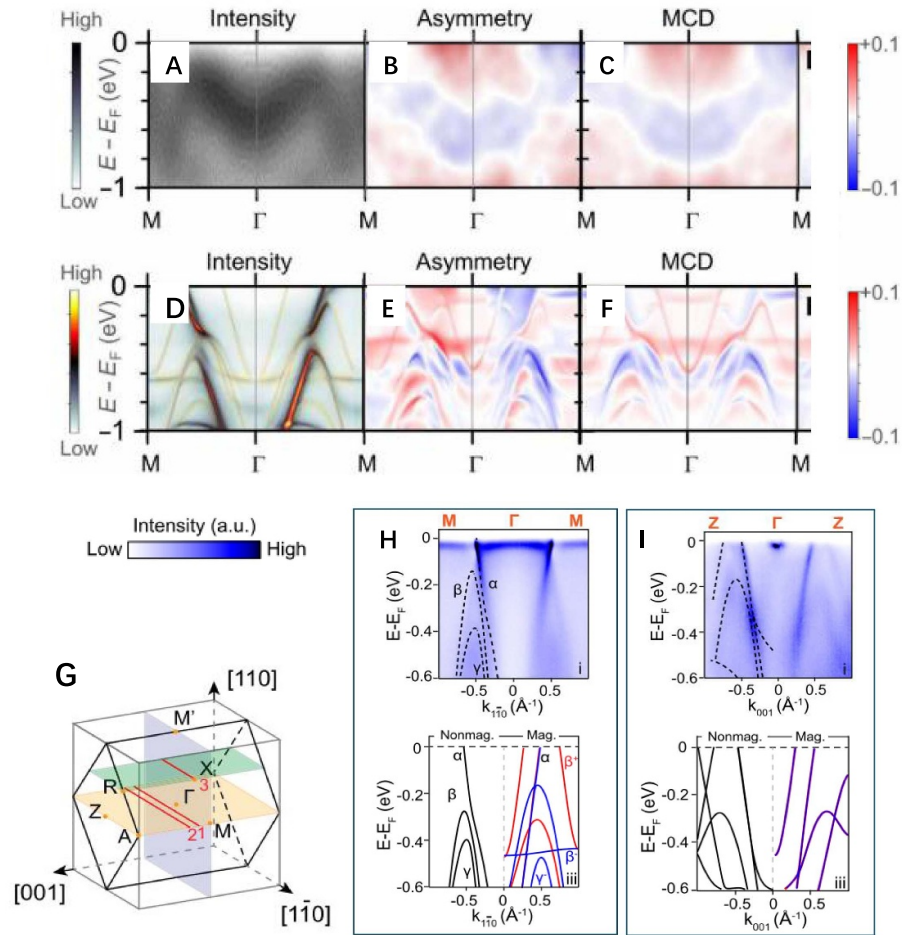


Figure 7. Comparison of experimental MCD and band dispersion of RuO₂ with theoretical calculations. (A) Bands along the $M - \Gamma - M$ measured at 70 K. (B) Measured intensity asymmetry, $A(E_B, 0, k_y)$. (C) MCD $A_{MCD}(E_B, 0, k_y)$ extracted from the asymmetry. (D) Calculated spectral density average and (E) its asymmetry for circular right and left polarization of the incident light within the experimental geometry. (F) The theoretical MCD extracted. (G) 3D BZ of RuO₂, with yellow and green planes showing high symmetry planes $\Gamma - M - A - Z$ and $R - X$. (H) and (I) The band dispersion of RuO₂ along $\Gamma - M$ and $\Gamma - Z$, compared with nonmagnetic/altmagnetic calculations, respectively. Red and blue lines represent band spin polarization. (A)–(F) Reproduced from [189]. CC BY 4.0. (G)–(I) Reprinted (figure) with permission from [190], Copyright (2024) by the American Physical Society.

films [178, 179]. These results are corroborated by bulk-sensitive spectroscopic techniques like broad-band infrared spectroscopy [136]. The stark discrepancy has led to a re-examination of the earlier data, with suggestions that the observed signals in some neutron diffraction studies may be attributed to artifacts rather than true magnetic order. Consequently, the previously assumed altermagnetic ground state in RuO₂, predicated on robust AFM order, is now under significant debate, highlighting the critical importance of sample quality and the choice of bulk-sensitive local probes in determining its true magnetic state.

The unique spin groups delineating altermagnetic order in both position and momentum spaces result into non-relativistic spin splitting of the bands. ARPES serves as a key experimental tool for probing such spin splitting, enabling direct characterization of the momentum-resolved spin polarization. Recently, various ARPES-based techniques have been used to study the electronic structure of RuO₂. By finding magnetic circular dichroism (MCD) in the angular distribution for both soft x-ray and ultra-violet photon excitation, Fedchenko *et al* directly confirmed a pronounced time-reversal symmetry-breaking signatures in the electronic band structure of RuO₂ films [189], shown in figures 7(A)–(F). Since dichroism in ARPES is per se a matrix element effect, which depends on the initial and final states as well as on the perturbation by the light field, the lack of systematic orientation dependent and photon energy dependent CD measurements calls for reexamination of the reported magnetic behavior. Subsequently, Liu *et al* [190] conducted comprehensive ARPES and SpinARPES investigations on both thin-film and single-crystal rutile RuO₂. Their study systematically examined the Fermi surface topology and band dispersions along high-symmetry directions, in combination with DFT calculations. Their results reveal that the expected band splitting characteristic of an altermagnetic state is not observed. As

shown in figures 7(H) and (I), their experimental measurements along the $\Gamma - M$ direction reveal only three bulk bands near E_F : an electron-like α band crossing E_F , and two hole-like bands (β and γ) with their band tops located approximately 0.2 eV and 0.4 eV below E_F , respectively. Only one band crossing E_F was observed within the momentum range of 0–0.5 $\text{\AA}^{-1}$ along $\Gamma - Z$ direction. This conflicts with the altermagnetic prediction. According to the proposed altermagnetic state in RuO_2 , all low-lying bulk bands are expected to exhibit lifted spin degeneracy except those along the $\Gamma - Z$ direction, which are connected by the screw rotation operation $S_{4z} = \{C_{4z} \mid (1/2, 1/2, 1/2)\}$. Along the $\Gamma - Z$ direction, the screw rotation symmetry protects spin degeneracy even in the altermagnetic scenario. Contrary to the predicted two bands crossing E_F , the experimental data reveal only one. The experimental findings support the nonmagnetic scenario in RuO_2 , as opposed to the proposed altermagnetic state. Recently, Lin *et al* [198] reported weak sign of splitting between bands β and γ in parallel to $\Gamma - M$ direction using high-resolution soft x-ray spectra measurements. Further theoretical calculations reveal that both the magnetic-order-included and nonmagnetic band structures show approximate agreement with experimental data, indicating that the electronic structure of RuO_2 is considerably complex and difficult to conclusively determine by any single characterization method.

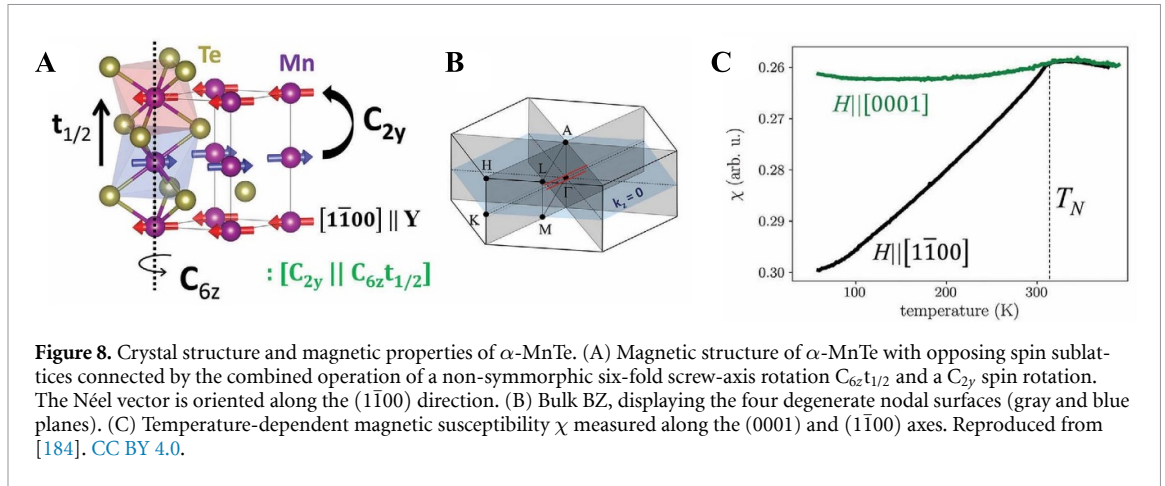
SpinARPES serves as a direct and crucial technique for probing the momentum-dependent band splitting and spin polarization induced by altermagnetism. Liu *et al* [190] also examined the spin polarization of RuO_2 by SpinARPES experiments using a helium lamp with photon energy of 21.2 eV, shown in figures 7(H) and (I). These experimental results demonstrate that the bulk band exhibits significant in-plane spin polarization, with the polarization vector S_{001} displaying an antisymmetric profile relative to the $\Gamma - Z - M'$ high-symmetry plane. This observation stands in sharp contradiction to the prevailing theoretical prediction for an altermagnetic state, wherein the α band is expected to be fully spin-polarized yet symmetric across the same high-symmetry plane. Based on combined theoretical analysis, the authors attribute the observed spin-polarization structure in RuO_2 to a Rashba-like spin splitting induced by broken space-inversion symmetry, rather than to an exchange magnetic mechanism arising from broken time-reversal symmetry.

The above conflicting results, with only canonical works selected, on RuO_2 concerning its very magnetic ground state pose a major challenge in the field as this material facilitates the introduction of altermagnetism concept. With accumulating reports appearing, it is realized that the magnetic ground state of RuO_2 should be very sensitive to the sample quality, epitaxial strain, stoichiometry deviations, extrinsic disorder, interfacial effects and so on, due to its proximity to a quantum phase transition [66, 119]. Those promising transport properties and especially the spin torque reported could be ascribed to the anisotropic spin Hall effect. We shall not go into details concerning these results as the present review focuses on the band structure and spin polarization aspects. We encourage the readers to refer to specialized reviews for more information [109, 289, 290].

3.4. G-wave altermagnet α -MnTe

Before 2022, α -MnTe had long been considered as a conventional collinear antiferromagnet [170, 291–293]. This perception stemmed from focusing solely on the lattice of magnetic Mn atoms while overlooking the crucial role of non-magnetic Te atoms in the magnetism of α -MnTe crystals. α -MnTe has a hexagonal NiAs-type structure with the space group $P6_3/\text{mmc}$, where two Mn magnetic sublattices are connected by a six-fold screw axis along the c -axis. Below the Néel temperature ($T_N = 307\text{ K}$ for bulk), obtained from temperature-dependent susceptibility measurements under various magnetic field directions [184] in figure 8(C), it exhibits an A-type AFM ground state where Mn atoms are ferromagnetically ordered along the in-plane $[1\bar{1}00]$ axis while stacked antiferromagnetically along the out-of-plane c direction. The Mn spin sublattices are connected by a non-symmorphic six-fold screw-axis rotation $C_{6z}t_{1/2}$ combined with C_{2y} spin rotation (figure 8(A)). The resulting non-relativistic spin-group symmetry reveals a strong time-reversal symmetry breaking and alternating spin splitting in the band structure outside the nodal planes. Consequently, α -MnTe falls into the g -wave altermagnetism category. There are four specific planes where spin degeneracy is preserved: one at the $k_z = 0$ plane and three along the $\Gamma - K$ directions without SOC, as shown by the gray and blue planes in figure 8(B)¹⁷. By inclusion of SOC, the spin degeneracy within these nodal planes is lifted, known as weak LKSD [183]. On non-high-symmetry planes, the Kramers spin degeneracy is lifted regardless of the presence or absence of SOC, resulting in alternating spin-splitting signals in the energy band structures, known as strong LKSD [183].

The altermagnetic nature of α -MnTe is supported by both theoretical predictions and experimental observations. In 2022, Šmejkal *et al* [16, 17] theoretically predicted that α -MnTe is a high-parity g -wave room-temperature altermagnet with exceptionally large spin-splitting energy bands (1.1 eV).



Subsequently, Osumi *et al* [188], Lee *et al* [186], Krempaský *et al* [183], and Hajlaoui *et al* [184] experimentally measured the electronic band splitting of α -MnTe using ARPES, providing spectroscopic evidence for the existence of altermagnetism in α -MnTe.

Specifically, Krempaský *et al* [183] demonstrated that strong LKSD originating from crystalline symmetry exhibits alternating spin splitting, whereas weak LKSD arising from SOC gives rise to non-alternating spin splitting. Meanwhile, the strong altermagnetic LKSD can be identified in the electronic structure only outside the four nodal planes, and the weak altermagnetic LKSD exists within the band structure of the four nodal planes. They compare the measured and simulated ARPES data inside and outside the nodal planes in figures 9(A) and (B). At $k_z = 0.35\text{\AA}^{-1}$ ($h\nu = 368\text{ eV}$), the path $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{K}$ is within one of the nodal planes (figure 9(A)), while $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{M}$ path is outside the nodal planes (figure 9(B)). Both experimental and theoretical results reveal a significantly larger band splitting in figure 9(B) (strong altermagnetic), reaching $\sim 0.5\text{ eV}$, in the B_1/B_2 spectral region, compared to the weak altermagnetic case (figure 9(A)). Further, through SpinARPES measurements, they observed the alternating sign of the spin-polarization component along the $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{M}$ with the presence of the strong altermagnetic LKSD at a photon energy of 24 eV ($k_z = 0.12\text{\AA}^{-1}$) in figure 9(C). However, we noted in another article [184] that a photon energy of 24 eV corresponds to $k_z = 0$, as shown in figure 9(D), implying that the bands are located within the nodal planes. Unexpectedly, different groups have determined the inner potentials of α -MnTe to be 10 eV [194], 11 eV [184] and 16.5 eV [186], respectively, through fitting its photon energy dependent photoemission spectral intensity. In principle, the inner potential fitted for a given material is expected to be consistent across different measurements.

Recently, Zeng *et al* [195] observed k -independent Rashba-like spin texture in α -MnTe, which is different from the alternating spin-polarization signals characteristic of altermagnets. Subsequent experiments revealed that this k_z -independent spin polarization stems from emergent surface bands dominated by a Rashba-type spin texture induced by SOC. As shown in figure 9(F), four sharp, hole-like bands emerge at binding energies of $0\text{--}0.5\text{ eV}$. Spin-momentum distribution curve (MDC) measurements along the $O_1\text{--}B_1$ direction (denoted as Cut 1 at $h\nu = 108\text{ eV}$, $k_z = 11.5\pi/c$) reveal a clear spin polarization signal in these bands, exhibiting a distinct ‘ $+-+$ ’ alternating pattern. Shifting the measurement direction from $O_1\text{--}B_1$ (Cut 1) to $O_1\text{--}B_2$ (Cut 2), the spin patterns remain identical. In sharp contrast to the in-plane spin texture predicted for an altermagnet, this behavior aligns perfectly with the Rashba-like pattern expected from an SOC-driven model. Next, they change the incident photon energy to examine whether the spin pattern is k_z -dependent, as predicted in the altermagnet model of α -MnTe. Measurements were performed along Cut 3 ($\Gamma - M$, $h = 120\text{ eV}$, $k_z = 12\pi/c$) and Cut 4 ($O_2\text{--}B_3$, $h = 129\text{ eV}$, $k_z = 12.5\pi/c$). As shown in figure 9(F), the spin pattern of the near- E_F bands remains essentially unchanged across the two sides of k_z ’s within the bulk BZ, persistently showing the ‘ $+-+$ ’ configuration. The $k_{||}$ - and k_z -independent Rashba-like spin texture suggest its origin from SOC, rather than altermagnetism. Therefore, the lack of comprehensive three-dimensional spin polarization data precludes direct evidence for the proposed altermagnetic order, namely its g -wave spin texture. This limitation stems from an insufficient density of momentum points sampled in spin-resolved measurements throughout the bulk BZ. Meanwhile, Zhou *et al* [294] also observed surface states crossing the Fermi level in 50-unit-cell (UC) thick α -MnTe films. The experimentally observed surface states are in agreement with first-principles calculations for α -MnTe with a top Te termination. Furthermore, they

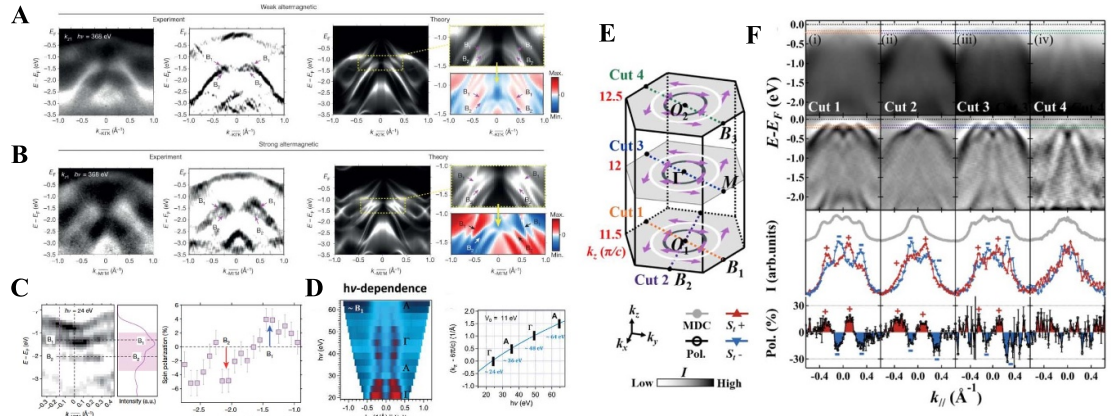


Figure 9. Band structure study of α -MnTe. (A, B) Band spectra showing (A) weak and (B) strong LKSD at $k_z \neq 0$. Measurements were performed using a photon energy of 368 eV and $k_z = 0.35 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$ along the (A) $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{K}$ and (B) $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{M}$ high-symmetry directions. Corresponding one-step ARPES simulations are shown alongside. Red and blue colors indicate opposite spin polarizations. (C) SpinARPES measurements along the $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{M}$ direction. Reproduced from [183]. CC BY 4.0. (D) Photon-energy dependent ARPES spectra, assuming a parabolic final-state band and an inner potential of $V_0 = 11 \text{ eV}$ Reproduced from [184]. CC BY 4.0. (E) Bulk BZ of α -MnTe, with two-dimensional cross-sections highlighting the $\bar{\Gamma} - \bar{M} - \bar{K}$ planes at three different k_z values. (F) ARPES and SpinARPES data acquired along Cuts 1–4. Cuts 1, 2, 3, and 4 were measured at $k_z = 11.5, 11.5, 12, 12.5 \pi/c$ along the $O_1 - B_1, O_1 - B_2, \Gamma - M,$ and $O_2 - B_3$ paths, respectively. Reproduced from [195]. CC BY 4.0.

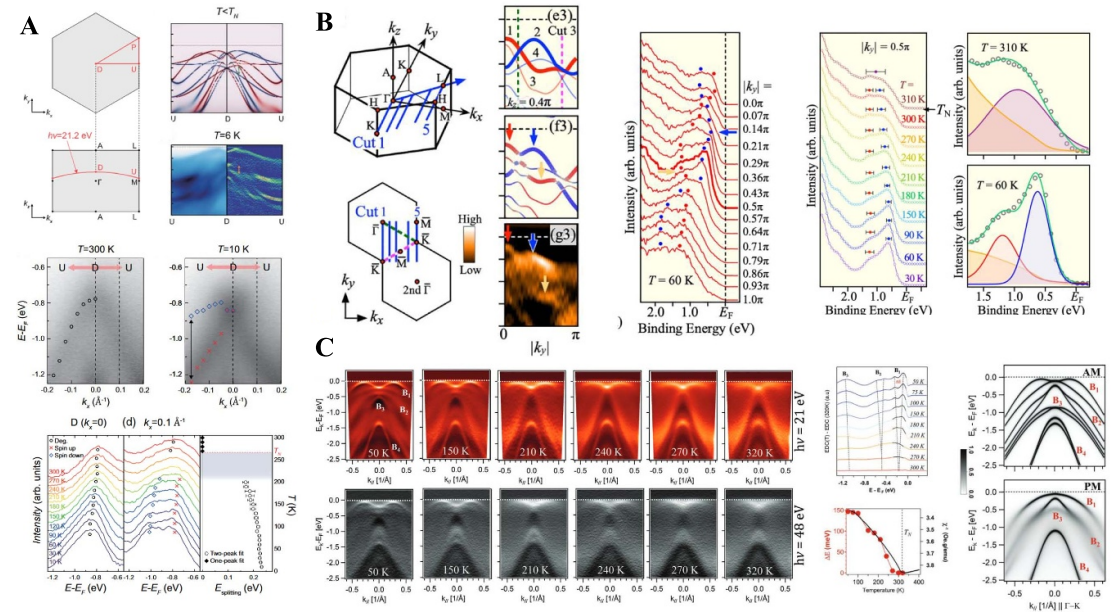


Figure 10. Temperature-dependent band structure of α -MnTe. (A) Calculated bands and ARPES spectra for the paramagnetic and altermagnetic states. Reprinted (figure) with permission from [186], Copyright (2024) by the American Physical Society. (B) Calculated band structures, ARPES spectra and temperature dependence of energy distribution curves (EDCs). Reprinted (figure) with permission from [188], Copyright (2024) by the American Physical Society. (C) Temperature-dependent spin splitting. Reproduced from [184]. CC BY 4.0.

detected a robust AHE and demonstrated that the Hall response arises from the Berry curvature of surface states rather than from bulk bands.

We also note that the large band splitting ($\Delta E > 0.3 \text{ eV}$) outside the nodal planes measured via ARPES by Lee *et al* [186] and Osumi *et al* [188] correlates with the altermagnetic transition temperature (figures 10(A) and (B)). However, Hajlaoui *et al* [184] found that the SOC-induced band splitting within the nodal planes is also correlated with the magnetic transition temperature in figure 10(C). Therefore, relying solely on the observation of band splitting correlated with the magnetic transition temperature is not entirely sufficient to conclusively verify the altermagnetism.

Given the in-plane magnetic easy axes in α -MnTe, the magnetic structures will form domains with Néel vectors oriented along one of the six equivalent in-plane easy axes. Although the size of these magnetic domains varies with temperature and growth conditions, it is generally much smaller than the

typical ARPES beam spot size. Consequently, the band structure is averaged over multiple domains. In ideal models, spin splitting directly translates into complete spin polarization. In contrast, a much lower spin polarization is commonly observed in experiments on real α -MnTe samples. For example, the presence of magnetic domains, often connected by symmetry, tends to average the spin signals of independent domains. This averaging significantly reduces the level of spin polarization in the spin split bands. Therefore, it is often challenging to measure spin polarization of T -symmetry breaking states if multiple domains contribute to opposite signs of spin polarization, by SpinARPES.

In addition, Autieri and Fakhredine [148] extended the study of SML in the altermagnet α -MnTe from the nonrelativistic limit to the relativistic limit. They found that SOC induces antisymmetric exchange interactions and spin canting, leading to the formation of relativistic SML for all three spin components (S_x , S_y , and S_z). In α -MnTe, the dominant S_y component is reduced from g -wave to d_{yz} -wave symmetry due to the breaking of C_{6z} symmetry by the Néel vector along the y axis. The overall relativistic SML comprises S_x (d_{xz} -wave), S_y (d_{yz} -wave), and S_z (s -wave) components. Although the amplitude of the canted spin components in real space is three orders of magnitude smaller than that of the dominant component, their spectral weight in k -space is comparable, significantly influencing k -space-related physical properties such as spin Hall conductivity and spin photocurrents. Moreover, Ye *et al* [295] explored the intrinsic spin and orbital magnetization of the magnetic ground state in the prototypical α -MnTe. They also find that SOC induces weak ferromagnetism through spin canting, along with a slight in-plane rotation of the Néel vector. Remarkably, they identify a net orbital magnetization of $0.176 \mu_B$ per UC oriented along the z -axis, which is two orders of magnitude larger than the spin magnetization ($0.002 \mu_B$) in the same direction. These findings highlight the dominant role of orbital magnetization and its significance for orbital-mediated effects in altermagnets.

3.5. G-wave altermagnet CrSb

As another prototypical g -wave altermagnet, CrSb exhibits a large band splitting ($\Delta E \geq 0.8$ eV) along non-high-symmetry directions. This key feature has been directly observed by multiple groups, including those of Yang *et al* [202], Ding *et al* [191], Zeng *et al* [187], Reimers *et al* [185], and Liao *et al* [200], and is consistent with DFT calculations. For example, Zeng *et al* [187] measured the bands along a low-symmetry direction (E - D , Cut 1) and a high-symmetry path (Γ - A , Cut 2). A splitting of ~ 0.8 eV was observed along E - D (green dashed line in figure 11(A)), while no splitting was resolved along Γ - A , in agreement with theoretical predictions. Ding *et al* [191] observed spin-split bands on the (10 $\bar{1}0$) cleaved surface. Their photoemission data along D - P - D , alongside calculated spin-split bulk bands, are presented in figure 11(B). By analyzing second-derivative spectra and energy distribution curves (EDCs), they determined a maximum splitting $\Delta \approx 0.93$ eV at $k_z = 0.25 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$. Meanwhile, the k_z dependence of this bulk altermagnetic splitting was investigated by Yang *et al* [202]. ARPES spectra along $\bar{\Gamma}$ - $\bar{M}$ taken at three photon energies (80, 68, and 90 eV) are shown in figure 11(C) (with second derivatives in figure 11(D)). For 80 eV photons ($k_z = 0.28 c^*$), corresponding to a point outside the nodal planes, two hole-type bands near E_F are observed with a splitting up to 1.0 eV. In contrast, within the nodal planes (68 and 90 eV, $k_z = 0$ and $0.5 c^*$, respectively), only a single hole band is detected near E_F . This experimentally observed k_z -dependent splitting aligns well with *ab initio* results (green arrows in figure 11(E)). The calculations further show that the split bands at $k_z = 0.28 c^*$ exhibit strong spin polarization (red/blue curves), whereas the out-of-plane spin polarization $\langle S_z \rangle$ vanishes at $k_z = 0$ and $0.5 c^*$ (black curves), protected by the $(C_2^S || M_z)$ symmetry. This confirms that the splitting is primarily driven by altermagnetic order, with SOC playing a minor role. Finally, the measured and DFT-calculated k_x - k_z maps (and their second derivatives) in figure 11(F) show remarkable agreement: the altermagnetic splitting is negligible at $k_z = 0$, increases to a maximum near $k_z = 0.25 c^*$, and decreases back to zero at $k_z = 0.5 c^*$, conclusively demonstrating the bulk-type altermagnetic character of the splitting in CrSb.

Furthermore, to directly probe the spin polarization of the altermagnetically split bands, SpinARPES measurements were conducted along the $\bar{\Gamma}$ - $\bar{M}$ direction at a photon energy of 80 eV ($k_z = 0.28 c^*$), where the splitting is near its maximum. Figure 11(G) shows the spin-resolved MDCs extracted along the cut marked by the white dashed line. Both the spin-up and spin-down MDCs display a broadened double-peak structure, corresponding to the spin-split bands. The clear shift in peak positions between the spin-up and spin-down bands directly manifests the momentum-dependent spin splitting characteristic of altermagnetism in CrSb. The spin polarization is extracted and shown. The direct observation of significant spin polarization in the split bands, combined with its excellent agreement with DFT calculations, provides compelling evidence for the altermagnetic nature of the spin splittings in CrSb.

However, from the analysis of the altermagnetic bands in α -MnTe as validated in the previous section, it is known that merely observing a large band splitting and spin polarization at a given k_z

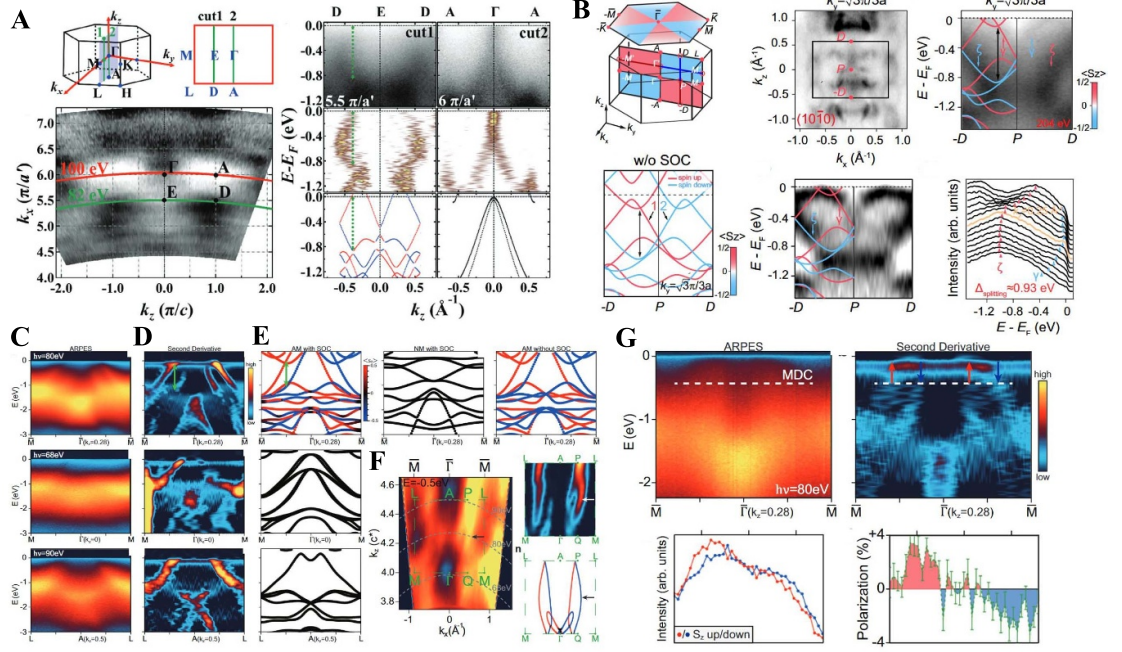


Figure 11. Altermagnetic band splitting and spin polarization in CrSb. (A) Left, photon energy dependent ARPES mapping within the Γ MLA plane. Right, from top to bottom: ARPES spectra, its second-derivative analysis, and DFT-calculated bulk bands along cuts 1 and 2 (measured at photon energies of 82 eV and 100 eV, respectively). Green dashed lines indicate the maximum observed energy separation (~ 0.8 eV) of the split bands. Reproduced from [187]. CC BY 4.0. (B) Comparison between the calculated spin-splitting distribution across the Γ MAL plane (and along D - P - D) and the experimentally measured band splitting along D - P - D . The yellow curve is the EDCs at $k_z = 0.25^{-1}$, showing the $\Delta_{\text{splitting}} = 0.93$ eV Reprinted (figure) with permission from [191], Copyright (2024) by the American Physical Society. (C) The k_z dependence of altermagnetic splitting along the in-plane $\bar{\Gamma}-\bar{M}$ direction. ARPES spectra taken with 80 eV, 68 eV, 90 eV photons, respectively. (D) The second derivatives of the ARPES spectra corresponding to (C). (E) Spin resolved band structure from DFT calculations. (F) The measured and calculated $k_x - k_z$ map, indicating the spin polarization. (G) Evidence of spin polarization from SpinARPES measurements. Reproduced from [202]. CC BY 4.0.

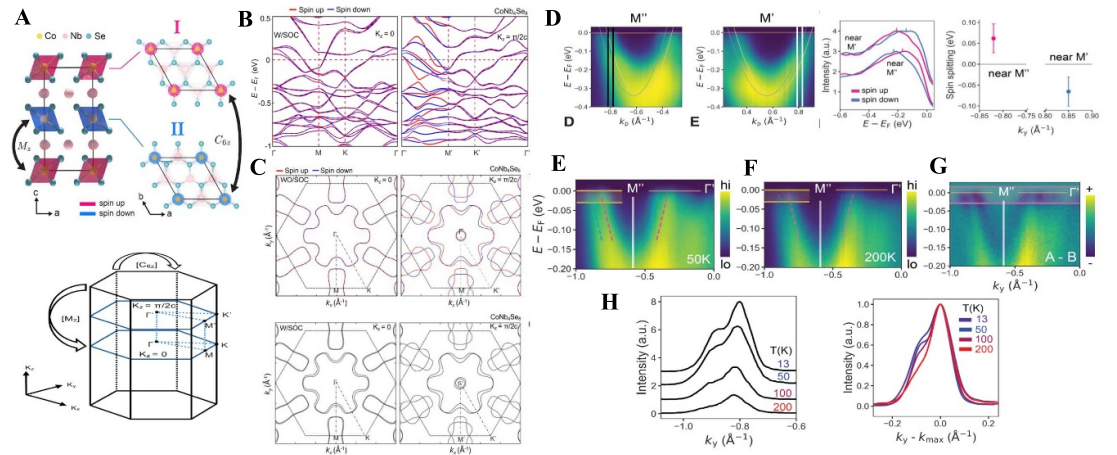


Figure 12. Electronic structure of the altermagnetic candidate CoNb_4Se_8 . (A) Magnetic structure and the bulk BZ [276, 277]. Reproduced from [276]. CC BY 4.0. (B) DFT-calculated spin-resolved band structures for the nodal plane ($k_z = 0$, along Γ - M - K - Γ) and an off-nodal plane ($k_z = 1/2c$, along Γ' - M' - K' - Γ'). Red and blue lines denote spin-up and spin-down channels, respectively. (C) Calculated Fermi surfaces at the nodal plane ($k_z = 0$) and an off-nodal plane ($k_z = 1/2c$), with and without SOC [277], respectively. Reproduced with permission from [277]. (D) Comparison between ARPES measurements and the calculated band structure along $M''-\Gamma'-M'$. Spin-resolved EDCs at selected momenta (black/white vertical lines) are shown alongside the momentum-dependent spin splitting extracted from the spin-up and spin-down band positions. (E)-(G) Low-energy ARPES spectra along $M''-\Gamma'-M'$ at $T = 50$ K and 200 K, and their difference. (H) Temperature dependence of the total spectral intensity and the maximum peak height in the MDCs. Reproduced from [276]. CC BY 4.0.

plane is far from sufficient to confirm its altermagnetism. A comprehensive understanding of its three-dimensional spin polarization configuration is required.

3.6. CoNb₄Se₈

CoNb₄Se₈ crystallizes in the hexagonal space group P6₃/mmc (No. 194) (figure 12(A)) and hosts a robust collinear antiferromagnetic order [274]. With the z -axis parallel to the crystal's c -axis, the two magnetic sublattices are thus related by a six-fold rotation C_{6z} combined with a $1/2$ c translation, or alternatively, by the mirror M_z across the $c = 1/4$ plane, exhibiting altermagnetism. Through symmetry analysis and first-principles calculations, Regmi *et al* [274] and Sah *et al* [277] showed that M_z and C_{6z} symmetry inherent to the P6₃/mmc space group protect spin degeneracy in the $k_z = 0$ plane for A-type AFM stacking configuration. These symmetries enforce spin-degenerate nodal lines along high-symmetry paths such as $\Gamma - M - K - \Gamma$, while this symmetry breaking lifts the spin degeneracy, where profound spin splitting can be seen along the low-symmetry $\Gamma' - M'$ path in the $k_z = \pi/2c$ plane, as shown in figure 12(B). Although SOC induces additional band splitting along the high-symmetry nodal planes, the underlying symmetry forbids any net spin polarization there. These results confirm that, despite including SOC in the calculations, the centrosymmetric lattice preserves Kramers degeneracy at $k_z = 0$. To further illustrate this, Sakhya *et al* [275] and Sah *et al* [277] computed the Fermi surfaces with and without SOC (figure 12(C)). The left panel ($k_z = 0$) shows complete spin degeneracy, consistent with the symmetry-protected nodal lines. In contrast, the right panel ($k_z = \pi/2c$) exhibits clear spin splitting and strong spin polarization along $\Gamma' - M'$, matching the band dispersions in figure 12(B). This comparison highlights that in such A-type antiferromagnets, spin splitting originates from symmetry breaking even without SOC—a hallmark of altermagnets.

Dale *et al* [276] measured ARPES spectra of CoNb₄Se₈ along the $M'' - \Gamma' - M'$ momentum cut (figure 12(D)), in agreement with many of the salient features of the tight-binding model. They selected a specific off-nodal plane to highlight the spin splitting of two electron pockets at the BZ edge, consistent with DFT results that show opposite spin splittings at M and M' . Figure 12(D) provides a spin-resolved view to examine this alternating splitting around the M' and M'' points. EDCs at momentum k_1 exhibit significant spin polarization. In contrast, at momentum $k_2 = C_2(k_1) = C_{36}(k_1)$, the spin splitting is reversed. The summary in figure 12(D) directly illustrates this alternating spin-splitting pattern, providing key evidence of T -symmetric SML.

However, the presence of alternating C_{6z} spin splitting alone does not fully confirm altermagnetic order, as similar effects might result from conventional SOC mechanisms. Thus, temperature-dependent evidence in figures 12(E)–(H) further confirms an altermagnetic phase transition in CoNb₄Se₈, indicated by temperature-dependent changes in spin splitting within the electronic structure. In the low-energy ARPES spectra, two distinct spin-split electron pockets emerge below the Néel temperature (figure 12(E)). Above this temperature (figure 12(F)), the spectral weight near the Fermi level decreases uniformly across the BZ. The change in spectral density (figure 12(G)) suggests a phase transition, typically accompanied by symmetry breaking. At 13 K, the MDCs at the Fermi level, shown in figure 12(H), exhibit two peaks with nearly equal intensity. Above the Néel transition, both peaks decrease sharply in intensity.

Similar to materials like α -MnTe and CrSb, merely detecting band splitting associated with the magnetic transition temperature and verifying spin polarization on a fixed plane are insufficient to conclusively demonstrate their altermagnetic nature. Verifying T -symmetry breaking SML in bulk BZ by SpinARPES is necessary.

Notably, the surface [28, 150, 195, 294] and strain [38, 101, 105] can induce phase transition from antiferromagnet to altermagnet, or among altermagnetic types. On the one hand, several recent studies [28, 150, 195, 294] have focused on two-dimensional altermagnetic systems, centering on surfaces/interfaces and thin films. They break through the limitations of traditional bulk altermagnetism research, taking the surface functionalization of antiferromagnets and thin film systems as the main research platforms. The results show that ‘symmetry breaking’ is the core mechanism for the emergence and regulation of altermagnetism: by terminating antiferromagnets in specific directions, the bulk PT (parity-time) symmetry is broken while the magnetic compensation symmetry is preserved, leading to the emergence of altermagnetism on the surface. For most materials, only one surface orientation can retain altermagnetism (e.g. the (110) surface of α -MnTe and the (100) surface of LaMnO₃), while the others are ‘blind surfaces’. Moreover, the spin splitting magnitude of surface states is basically consistent with that of the bulk. In addition, an external electric field can activate altermagnetism on blind surfaces. Although SOC only slightly modifies the spin splitting amplitude, it can induce new spin textures without destroying the core characteristics of altermagnetism.

On the other hand, some researches, based on symmetry analysis and first-principles calculations, have adopted strain as the core regulatory tool to achieve multi-dimensional optimization of altermagnetism. Chakraborty *et al* [38] used compressive strain to drive the transition from the monoclinic phase (antiferromagnetism) to the tetragonal phase (*d*-wave altermagnetism), accompanied by a metal-insulator transition in ReO_2 . Belashchenko *et al* [296] induced a *g*-wave to *d*-wave transition via 1% in-plane shear strain, with the spin splitting gauge factor exceeding 30 in α -MnTe. León *et al* [105] tuned magnetic stability using biaxial strain—2% tensile strain enhanced altermagnetic splitting by 9%, while compressive strain beyond 2% drives the phase transition from antiferromagnetism to altermagnetism in $\text{Ca}_3\text{Ru}_2\text{O}_7$. Karetta *et al* [101] realized a *g*-wave to *d*-wave transition through four types of shear strain, with the spin splitter effect reaching 5% under 1% strain in CrSb. These studies demonstrate the potential of strain engineering in controllable preparation of altermagnets, which is compatible with thin-film epitaxial growth technology.

4. Guidelines to identify an ideal altermagnet

Traversing through all the altermagnetic candidates that have been experimentally investigated and confronting the controversies directly, we have learned that ARPES and particularly SpinARPES could provide critical evidence for the existence of altermagnetism. Yet, cautiousness, much more than currently manifested, is needed in practice to obtain reliable information. Below are several guidelines which we hope can be informative in experimental investigation of band structure and spin polarization of altermagnetism.

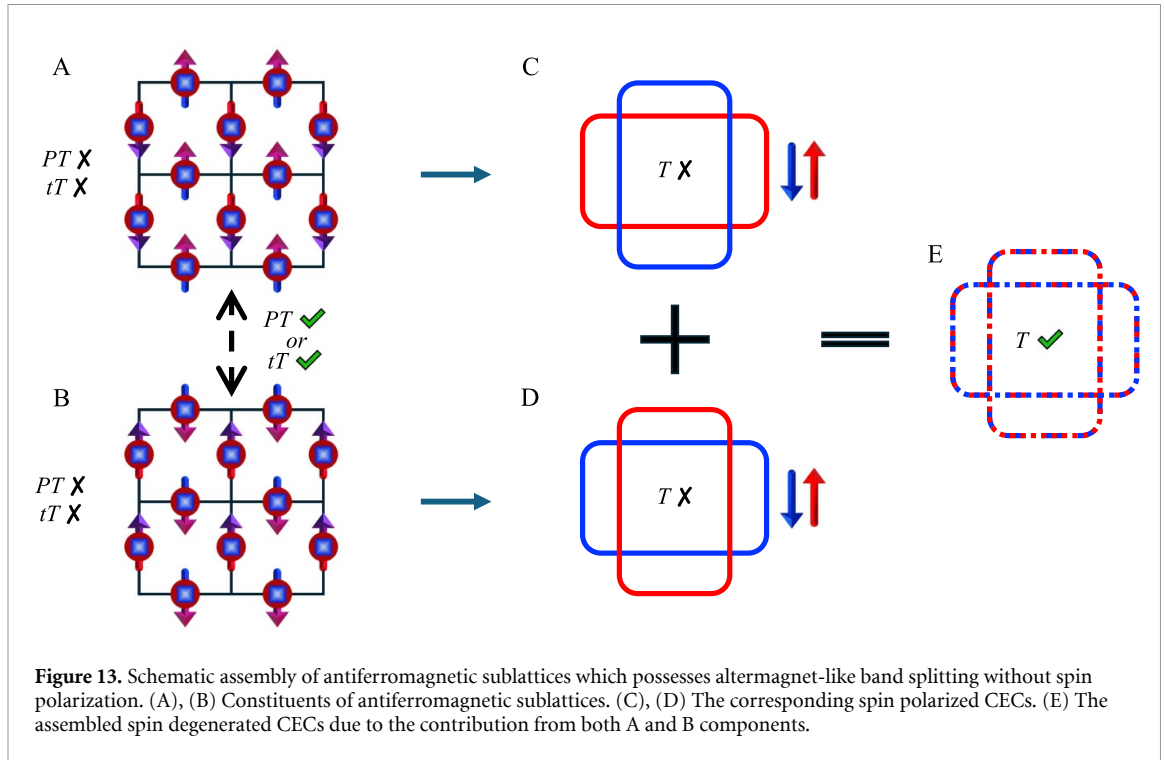
4.1. The incompetence of band splitting

Among the ARPES studies on altermagnetic candidates with unresolved controversies, we notice several works claiming observation of altermagnet-type band splitting, without demonstrating the spin polarization. While band splitting could be the consequences of exchange coupling, it is not necessarily associated with altermagnetism. In fact, besides the *C*-paired antiferromagnetic sublattice symmetry, there are plenty of symmetry operations connecting the sublattice which can give rise to band splitting with similar shape of altermagnetic type yet without spin polarization. While it is beyond the scope of this review to present the group theory analysis and specify the potential spin groups, we could still conduct a deductive reasoning. As shown in figure 13, altermagnetic lattices (figures 13(A) and (B)) have no *PT* or *tT* symmetry but the *CT* symmetry leads to *T*-symmetry breaking SML (figures 13(C) and (D)). Note these two lattices have opposite dipole orientations. This leads to spin polarized CECs with opposite spin polarization. Assuming these two lattices are assembled in such a way that globally the *PT* or *tT* symmetry is retained, then the corresponding CECs preserving the *T*-symmetry. In fact, the shape of the total CECs follows that of the component sublattices and can be viewed as the superposition of both CECs. This is to say, the total band structure shares the same band splitting with the component sublattices, but without spin polarization. One outstanding example of the above hypothesis is the so called ‘hidden altermagnetism’, which has recently been discussed in $\text{V}_2\text{Se}_2\text{O}$ family of materials. Globally this material may have a *G*-type [182] antiferromagnetic structure and the bands are spin degenerated, with band splitting follows the shape of altermagnetism hosted by each component layer. We thus reach the conclusion that just band splitting is far from enough to demonstrate the altermagnetic order.

4.2. Reliable spin polarization

Among the SpinARPES works on altermagnetic band structure, it is known to all that the observed spin polarization is of low magnitude, which is in stark contrast to the SOC type spin polarization such as that of the topological surface states [297] or hidden spin polarization [254, 298, 299]. This is mainly the results of compensation from opposite spin polarization signal corresponding to antiferromagnetic domains with opposite Néel vector. The size of these antiferromagnetic domains may vary from 100 nanometers to 10 micrometers according to the x-ray photoemission electron microscopy study on α -MnTe [214], which is much smaller than most of the SpinARPES instrumental spatial resolution decided by the beam spot size. It is tempting to align the antiferromagnetic domains using a high magnetic field, yet such device is usually unavailable in photoemission instruments due to the concern of magnetization. Recently, it is proved that field cooling can prepare a single-domain state of α -MnTe [193].

The low magnitude of altermagnetic spin polarization poses a great challenge for SpinARPES to achieve reliable polarization information. On the one hand, SpinARPES technique is notorious for its

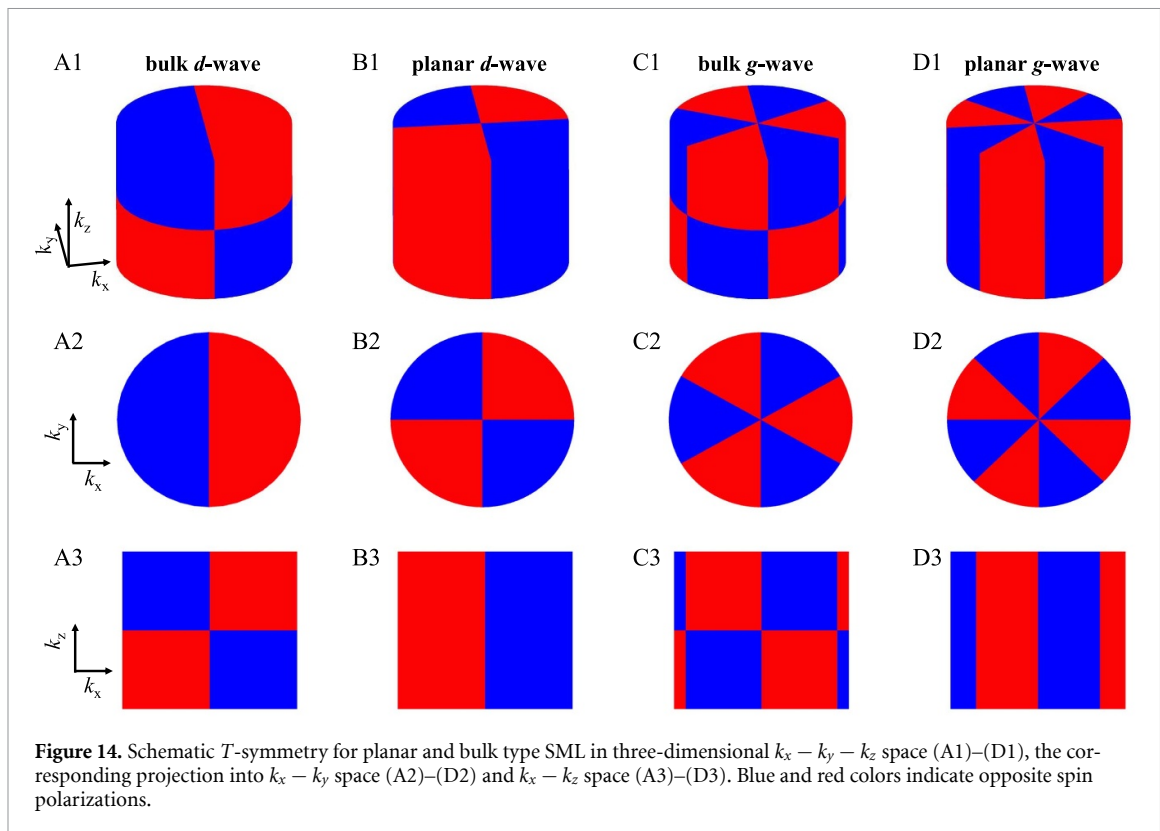


low efficiency. Unless a significant amount of time is spent for high level of signal statistic, spin polarization spectra are always suffering from noise since the polarization is defined as the difference between the counts from a pair of channeltrons divided by the sum of them. On the other hand, such noise is frequently found to be with the same level of magnitude as the band spin polarization of altermagnets. Consequently, it is vital to distinguish true band polarization signal from the noisy fluctuation. One must ensure the correspondence between the observed polarization feature and the spectral peak position/width in the measured energy/momentum distribution curves. Last but not the least, the measured spin polarization spectra should be repeatable, not only during the same measurement, but also for different pieces or positions of samples.

4.3. Spin–momentum locking

Besides reliable spin polarization features, one also need to make sure that the observed spin polarizations obey the altermagnetic symmetry in momentum space. As already been discussed in section 2, the SML in altermagnets can be either symmetric or antisymmetric in k_x – k_y momentum space depending on whether the spin degenerate nodal planes have z dependence. The bulk type SML, such as those show in figure 14(A) for bulk d -wave and in figure 14(C) for bulk g -wave, although has T -symmetry breaking SML in three-dimensional k_x – k_y – k_z space (figures 14(A1) and (C1)), would nevertheless manifest anti-symmetric spin polarization in two-dimensional k_x – k_y space ($E(k_x, k_y, \uparrow) = E(-k_x, -k_y, \downarrow)$, figures 14(A2) and (C2)). This is also true for the planar type SML (figures 14(B) and (D)) if it is projected onto k_x – k_z space (figures 14(B3) and (D3)). In fact, such situation holds when the projected planes contain one less nodal planes than the bulk has. Consequently, it is vital to prove the symmetry of SML in both k_x – k_y and k_x – k_z space to verify the existence of bulk type altermagnetism.

Now let us consider the reality, from the aspects of ARPES measurement and candidate materials. In ARPES measurement, with a fixed photon energy one can detect the energy-momentum relation (dispersion) in a quasi-two-dimensional plane with determined k_z value. For altermagnets with planar type SML, such as $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$ family [192, 196], the T -symmetry breaking SML can be measured using one single photon energy ($E(k_x, k_y, \uparrow) = E(-k_x, -k_y, \uparrow)$ for any k_z). However, for altermagnets with bulk type SML, such as α - MnTe and CrSb , using one single photon energy one can only probe the antisymmetric spin polarization for a single k_z plane ($E(k_x, k_y, \uparrow) = E(-k_x, -k_y, \downarrow)$ at $k_z \neq 0$), which is not sufficient to prove the T -symmetry breaking SML expected for altermagnetism. Even worse, the SOC effect, which is quite strong in materials containing heavy elements such as in α - MnTe and CrSb , leads to k_z independent spin polarization in the presence of inversion symmetry breaking [195]. This SOC effect is ubiquitous at the surface of many altermagnetic candidates, making the observed antisymmetric SML not only insufficient to justify the altermagnetism, but also incapable of distinguishing bulk from surface effects.



It is thus essential to perform photon energy dependent SpinARPES measurements to establish the bulk type SML in altermagnets.

5. What characteristics should an ideal altermagnet have?

Having gone through all the workhorse altermagnetic candidates and particularly the controversies over many of them, one immediately realizes that many efforts are needed to explore reliable materials and their potential functionalities. Obviously, it is premature to draw any conclusion at the current stage. Instead, to possibly guide the material exploration and fulfill the tempting potential of altermagnetism, here we list several desirable characteristics which we prefer in an ideal altermagnet.

Layered structure enables exploration of various effects in two-dimensional materials that have been discovered in recent years, for example, the realization of topological superconductors via superconducting proximity effect [300], tunable electronic properties through gating [301, 302], modification of band structures through strain [303] and potential to form twisted systems like moiré superlattices [304]. Therefore, exploring layered materials in altermagnets is highly anticipated to realize more exotic states of matter and more promising potentials for developing high-density, high-speed and low-energy-consumption spintronic devices.

The functionality of altermagnets in spintronics typically relies on the pure spin currents or spin polarized currents. For example, in MRAMs, the strong spin polarization of the electrical current, provided by the ferromagnetic order, is used for both reading and writing. This asks for conductivity in the altermagnet-based MRAM development. Thus, metals or semiconductors are more favorable for altermagnetic candidates. Furthermore, while in principle altermagnets with all kind of spin symmetries can have TMR used in MRAM, the bulk conductivity of an altermagnet itself is spin dependent only in d -wave. Thus, a metallic, d -wave altermagnet is highly desired. Such expectation is recently realized in $\text{RbV}_2\text{Te}_2\text{O}$ family [192, 196], yet it is chemically unstable in atmosphere due to the existence of alkali atoms. Further efforts are needed to achieve chemical stability in this material family, for an ultimate goal of realizing ideal altermagnet.

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Data availability statement

All data that support the findings of this study are included within the article (and any supplementary files).

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