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# Fluorination of graphene leads to susceptibility for nanopore formation by highly charged ion impact

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The formation of nanopores by highly charged ion impacts on freestanding fluorine-functionalized graphene is demonstrated. The process is driven by potential sputtering, which becomes active by changing the semi-metallic properties of graphene into a strongly insulating state by fluorination. The interaction of fluorographene with highly charged ions is also studied in terms of charge exchange and kinetic energy loss. A higher number of captured electrons and a larger kinetic energy loss than in pristine graphene are observed, which can be well explained by an increase in the ion's neutralization length and in the atomic areal density of the target, respectively. Using a computer code based on a time-dependent scattering potential model, a connection between the efficiency of charge exchange and the fluorine coverage is revealed. Our results suggest a competition of two distinct nanostructure formation processes leading either to pore formation or fluorine desorption.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Graphene is the most prominent representative of the class of two-dimensional materials [1]. Since its isolation in 2004 [2], it received lots of attention in research and applications due to its outstanding properties relevant in optics [3], electronics [4], and photonics [5]. Graphene is distinguished by its ultra-high electrical conductivity [6], high mechanical strength [7], and superior thermal conductivity [8]. These properties make graphene also a promising candidate for flexible electronics [9]. State-of-the-art chemical vapor deposition (CVD) [10] allows the growth of large-area and almost defect-free graphene. Its availability on a large scale paved the way for industrial applications, e.g. in electronics but also in membrane technologies [11]. Pristine graphene is impermeable to liquids, which makes it an ideal sealing material [12]. The controlled perforation of graphene even extends the application potential and covers fields from water desalination [13], atmospheric filtering [14], molecular separation [15], catalysis [16] to DNA sequencing [17]. Therefore, the production of nanopores with controlled sizes ranging from sub-nanometers up to a few nanometers is necessary [11]. For pore drilling, commonly techniques relying on ion and electron beams are used [18, 19]. Formation of pores with radii in the sub-10-nanometer range was demonstrated in graphene by the use of focussed electron [20] and helium ion beams [21]. However, these techniques are time-consuming, when large areas are perforated, since high fluences are necessary to produce one

single pore, i.e., helium fluences of  $\approx 10^5$  ions per  $\text{nm}^2$  [21, 22] are required for pore formation. Methods based on chemical etching [23] are faster, however, the size of the produced pores is poorly controllable [11].

Recently, highly charged ion (HCI) irradiation was proposed as an efficient technique for the perforation of two-dimensional  $\text{MoS}_2$  membranes [24]. By irradiating suspended monolayers of  $\text{MoS}_2$  with highly charged xenon ions with charge states between 20 and 40, the authors demonstrated the formation of pores with a mean radius ranging from 0.6 nm to 2.6 nm, adjustable by the ion's charge state. Pores of these sizes are well suitable for applications, like water desalination or DNA sequencing [11]. Here, the efficiency of pore production approaches unity.

Still, the utilization of perforated graphene for membrane technologies would be favorable, since large-scale growth is much easier. However, pore formation in graphene by highly charged ion impacts is not feasible so far, as shown recently [25, 26]. In the transmission electron microscope (TEM), no structural damage with respect to nanometer-sized holes was observed after highly charged ion irradiation. This was attributed to the ultra-high electrical conductivity of graphene, which allows rapid screening of the induced electronic excitations. Also self-healing properties of graphene may close small pores rapidly [27, 28]. Insulating carbon nanomembranes instead revealed nanopore formation by highly charged ion impacts [29, 30]. Therefore, it is obvious that the electronic properties of the target material plays an important role for the nanostructure formation process.

Chemical functionalization [31] of graphene is a promising way to tune its electrical and optical properties. Among different functional groups, fluorine has several advantages. The bandgap of fully fluorinated samples

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can be large (over 3 eV), hence graphene is turned into an insulator [32]. Moreover, fluorination of graphene is extensively studied and it can be controlled to a large extent [33–35]. Finally, fluorine can be exchanged with a plethora of functional groups, which enables to prepare graphene membranes with on-demand properties [36].

With respect to the interaction with highly charged ions, the influence of fluorination can be studied by a comparison with experiments for pristine graphene, which was investigated extensively in former works [25, 37–39].

For the present study, highly charged xenon ions were transmitted through suspended, fluorine-functionalized graphene (FIG. 1). Structural characterization after irradiations was carried out using scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM). Additionally, exit charge state spectra of transmitted ions were measured during irradiations. These provided the number of captured and stabilized electrons  $n_{\text{cap}}$  due to the ions' neutralization by passing the graphene sheet. Thus, insights into the neutralization dynamics associated with the deposition of the ion's potential energy are gained [40].

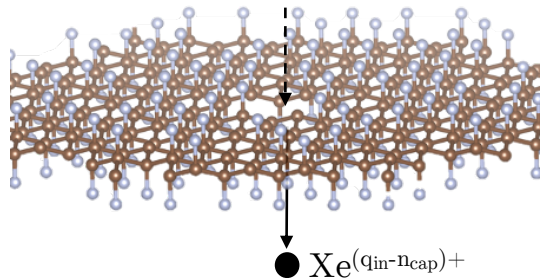


FIG. 1. (color online) A highly charged xenon ion with initial charge state  $q_{\text{in}}$  is transmitted through fluorographene. During neutralization, the ion captures and stabilizes a number of  $n_{\text{cap}}$  electrons, leading to a reduction of the ion's charge state accordingly. Corresponding potential energy deposition in the target and subsequent energy dissipation lead to nanopore formation. Fluorine atoms are shown in blue-gray, carbon atoms in brown.

## II. EXPERIMENT

### A. Sample fabrication

Graphene was synthesized by CVD [41, 42] on a copper foil (thickness: 25  $\mu\text{m}$ , purity: 99.9%). For growth, the copper foil was loaded into a quartz tubular furnace and annealed at 1000  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  in hydrogen flow of 50 sccm for 20 min followed by the injection of methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) for 30 min. Afterwards, overgrown graphene domains were etched in hydrogen flow for 5 min. Subsequently, the sample was cooled down to 90  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  and removed from the furnace. The copper foil was etched from the bottom side using a 30% aqueous solution of  $\text{FeCl}_3$  and diluted

hydrochloric acid.

The as-grown graphene was transferred onto a thermally oxidized Ni/NiO<sub>2</sub> TEM grid (Mesh 2000, 2spi) using a PMMA-supported wet-transfer procedure. After transfer, the polymer was removed by acetone vapor. The samples were cleaned by rinsing in isopropyl alcohol and methanol:deionized water, succeeding a blow-drying step with argon.

Suspended graphene was fluorinated by thermal degradation of xenon fluoride ( $\text{XeF}_2$ ) (Aldrich, 99.99%, CAS: 13709-36-9) under autogenous pressure. The samples were fixed on a Teflon jig and stored in a Teflon-lined autoclave, which was loaded by 500 mg of  $\text{XeF}_2$  under Ar atmosphere. Fluorination was initiated by adjusting the temperature slightly above the critical point of  $\text{XeF}_2$  at 120  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which caused its sublimation followed by the dissociation and subsequent chemisorption of the evolved fluorine radicals on graphene. The calculated vapor pressure of the  $\text{XeF}_2$  gas in the reactor amounts to 1.243 bar for a temperature of 120  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  [43].

In order to optimize the fluorination process, the samples were investigated as a function of fluorination time by means of Raman spectroscopy. Spectra were acquired immediately after fluorination with a LabRAM HR microscope equipped with a HeNe laser of 633 nm. The laser was focused to a spot size of 1  $\mu\text{m}^2$  on the sample surface using a 100x objective. A laser power of  $\sim 1$  mW at the sample surface is achieved in order to minimize the influence of heating. The spectrometer was calibrated before each series of measurements employing the  $\text{F}_{1g}$  mode of Si at 520.2  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . Raman spectra measured for as-grown graphene and after fluorination times of 12, 24, 36 and 48 hours are shown in FIG. 2. Characteristic D, G, and 2D bands are indicated. For the pristine material, the negligible intensity of the D band at  $\approx 1336$   $\text{cm}^{-1}$  and the FWHM of 27  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  of the 2D band indicate almost defect-free graphene [44]. After exposure to fluorine, the intensity of the D band is significantly enhanced implying its chemisorption to graphene [32, 45]. This manifests itself in an increase of the peak ratio  $I(\text{D})/I(\text{G})$  from 0.1 for pristine graphene to 2.3 after a fluorination time of 36 hours.

Furthermore, the position of the D band downshifts from  $\approx 1336$   $\text{cm}^{-1}$  for the pure material to 1324 - 1317  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  after fluorination due to the induced disorder [44]. For the G mode, however, an upshift from 1584  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  to 1607  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  due to fluorination is observed, in agreement with previous experiments on disordered graphene [44]. All Raman modes disappeared completely after 48 hours of fluorination, suggesting a full coverage of graphene with chemisorbed fluorine accompanied by the transformation of planar graphene to a cyclohexane chair structure. Consequently, a fluorination time of 48 hours was chosen for sample preparation.

After fabrication, samples were stored in UHV at a pressure of  $\sim 10^{-10}$  mbar. The stability of fluorinated graphene in UHV over a storage time of ten days was checked by means of X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy

(XPS) in Prague. The results are given in the supplemental material [46].

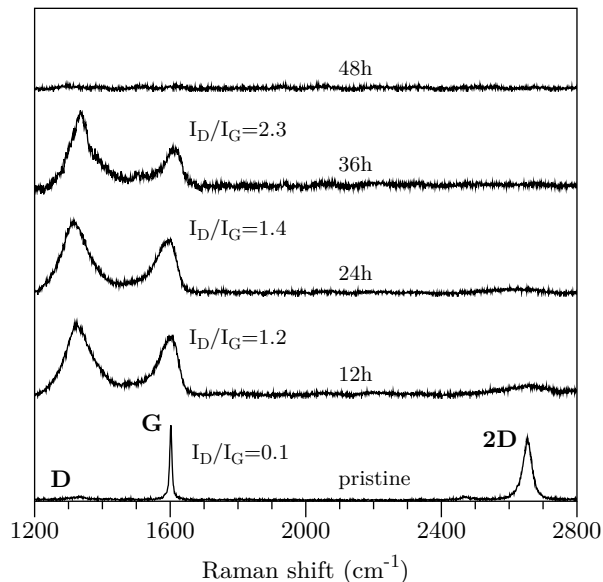


FIG. 2. Raman spectra as a function of fluorination time. Spectra are stacked for better visualization.

### B. Irradiation and simulation procedures

Highly charged xenon ions with charge states between 20 and 30 selected by a Wien filter were produced by an electron beam ion trap (EBIT) [47, 48] at kinetic energies of  $4.4 \text{ keV} \times q_{\text{in}}$ , where  $q_{\text{in}}$  denotes the incoming charge state. Ions were also slowed down to kinetic energies of  $0.9 \text{ keV} \times q_{\text{in}}$  by means of a deceleration unit. An assembly of electrostatic lenses permits steering of the ion beam into the experimental chamber with a spot size of 1 mm diameter on the target.

For the irradiations, samples were placed on a TEM grid holder with an opening for ion transmission experiments mounted on a four-axis goniometer.

Transmitted ions were analyzed with respect to their charge state and kinetic energy by means of an electrostatic analyzer (ESA) [49, 50] with a detection angle of  $0.5^\circ$ . The pressure in the experimental chamber was kept at  $1 \times 10^{-9}$  mbar during the experiments.

High-angle annular dark-field scanning transmission electron microscopy (HAADF-STEM) imaging before and after irradiations was performed at 200 kV with a Talos F200X microscope (FEI) at the Ion Beam Center at Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf.

Experimental results regarding the charge exchange are compared with computer simulations based on the TD-Pot (time-dependent scattering potential) model [39, 51]. Details on the theoretical background are given in ref. [51] and in the SI. The computer code explicitly takes

the lattice structure of the target material as well as the experimental conditions (detected scattering angles) into account. A corrugated graphene structure, double-sided functionalized by fluorine in chair configuration [52], was assumed. A random distribution of fluorine vacancies was also considered, which determines the fluorine atomic density or coverage, respectively.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Nanopore formation

FIG. 3 (a) and (b) show STEM images of fluorographene before and after highly charged ion irradiations, respectively. The irradiations were carried out using various charge states between 20 and 30 and kinetic energies between 20 keV and 130 keV. White spots are clusters of contaminations left from the fabrication process. Element mapping based on energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (performed in the TEM) indicated iron as a main component arising from the  $\text{FeCl}_3$  solution [53, 54] used as etchant for the copper foil, on which graphene was grown during the preparation process.

In the HAADF-STEM images, dark areas indicate holes in the fluorographene sheet. In order to determine their sizes, the area of each pore was measured using the program ImageJ [55] and converted into a radius assuming a circular shape. The distribution of pore density as a function of radius is shown in FIG. 4. The pristine sample shows a total pore density of  $1.5 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  characterized by a mean pore radius of  $(3.1 \pm 1.6)$  nm. After irradiation, a much higher total pore density of  $5.2 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  is determined. The higher density is ascribed to ion-induced nanopores. These show smaller radii characterized by a mean value of  $(1.5 \pm 0.6)$  nm corresponding to a mean sputter yield of  $500_{-200}^{+500}$  atoms. By taking into account the applied ion fluence of  $\sim 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ , an efficiency for pore formation (i.e. the number of pores per ion) of a few percent is estimated. While for pristine graphene no holes were found, applying a fluence of  $10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  with even higher charge states of 40 [25, 26], the insulating behavior of fluorinated graphene [56] enables the susceptibility to HCl perforation.

Nanopore formation by highly charged ion impact is initiated by the deposition of a fraction of the ion's potential energy associated with charge-exchange processes [30]. Resonant charge transfer from an ion interacting with a solid surface is commonly described by the classical over-the-barrier model [57, 58]. In short, an ion approaching a solid surface resonantly captures electrons from the target's surface into highly lying  $n$  shells ( $n$  indicates the principal quantum number), if a critical distance is reached. A hollow atom is formed characterized by filled outer shells and empty intermediate states [59, 60]. When the projectile comes closer to the surface, projectile states with lower quantum numbers  $n$  are occupied due to image charge shift and screening of already

captured electrons [60]. During the approach to the target surface, transitions of electrons from outer into inner shells already set in by means of auto-ionization processes [57], however, the projectile is still strongly excited upon impact [61, 62]. Stabilization of excited electrons proceeds to a minor part via the conversion of their excitation energy into X-rays [59].

Most of the ion's potential energy is deposited in the target material by means of close impact collisions, which facilitate two-center Auger processes between the projectile and the target atoms [37, 39, 63, 64]. Thereby, a high number of captured electrons on the order of the incident charge state is stabilized and decays into the ground state proceeding within a fs time scale [25]. For highly charged ion interaction between xenon and carbon, interatomic Coulombic decay [37, 65] (ICD, similar to direct Auger de-excitation) was proposed as the major relaxation channel of the hollow atom. A comparison between graphene with the 2D semiconductor MoS<sub>2</sub> showed no influence of the electronic properties on the mechanism of potential energy deposition [39].

This is in contrast to the dissipation process of the induced excitations in the material on a later time scale, which determines the efficiency for pore formation. Functionalization of graphene by fluorination leads to an insulating behavior by changing the hybridization from sp<sup>2</sup> into sp<sup>3</sup> [56]. Free electrons become localized due to the attached fluorine atoms and cannot serve as free charge carriers anymore. The induced excitations stay confined on a longer time scale compared to fs for pure graphene. Therefore, a significant fraction of the deposited potential energy will be available for damage formation processes, e.g. mediated by electron-phonon coupling [66, 67]. In the following, we consider the thermal spike model (TS) model for pore formation in fluorinated graphene. It was originally developed for swift-heavy-ion-induced tracks in insulators [66] and later also applied for the formation of nano-hillocks in CaF<sub>2</sub> by highly charged ion impact [67, 68]. In this model, nanostructure formation is associated with a local solid-liquid phase transition. It is assumed that the ion's potential energy is deposited in the electronic target sub-system by means of Auger electrons. Subsequently, heating of the crystal occurs by electron-phonon coupling. Damage formation sets in, when the melting temperature is exceeded. Since fluorination leads to a high electron-phonon coupling strength [69] and a reduction of the melting temperature [70], damage formation within the TS model should be efficient. However, other mechanisms, like Coulomb explosion (CE) [71, 72] or bond weakening [73–75], cannot be ruled out.

## B. Charge exchange and kinetic energy loss

The measurement of the ions' exit charge state after transmission through the graphene sheet enables the investigation of the time scale of neutralization, which is associated with the potential energy deposition [40]. FIG. 5

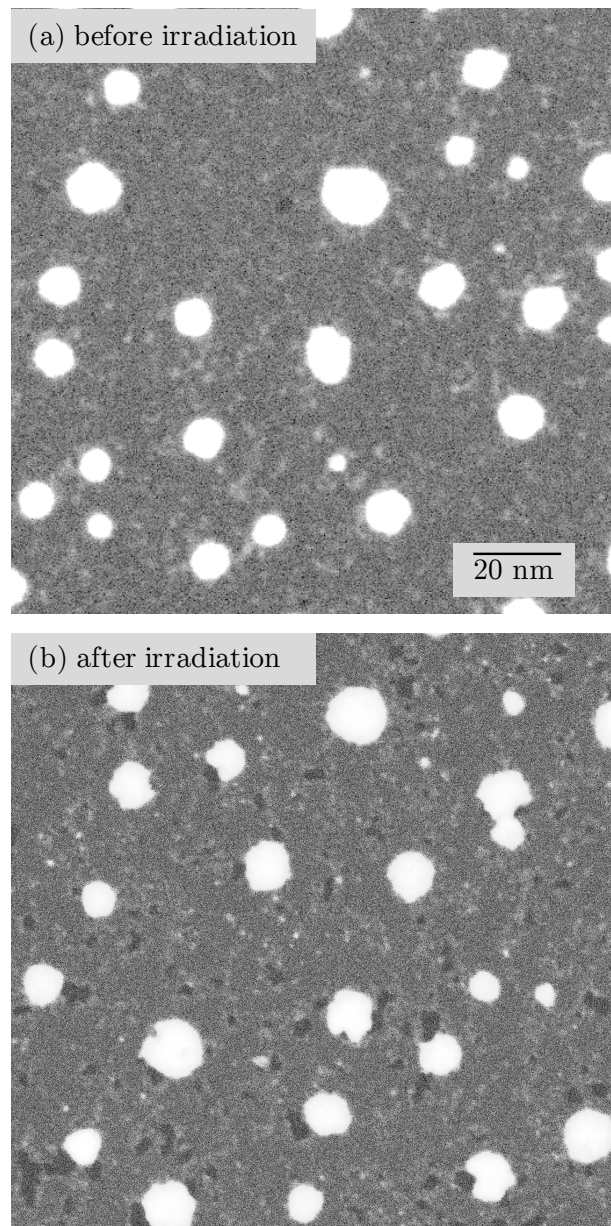


FIG. 3. Examples of STEM images of fluorographene before (a) and after irradiations (b) with highly charged xenon ions. White spots denote iron-containing clusters left from transfer. Darker areas indicate pores. Both images have the same scale bar.

(a) displays the exit charge state spectrum of Xe<sup>30+</sup> ions at a kinetic energy of 112 keV transmitted through fluorographene. A spectrum measured for graphene under the same conditions is also shown for comparison. Peaks at high charge states close to  $q = 30$ , which mark the primary ions, exhibit a shoulder toward lower charge states. This stems from the transmission of ions through cracks and defects in the target on the  $\mu\text{m}$  scale, leading to only small charge exchange at material edges [37, 39]. The distribution at low charge states ( $q < 20$ ) shows a distinct maximum with mean exit charge states of 11 and

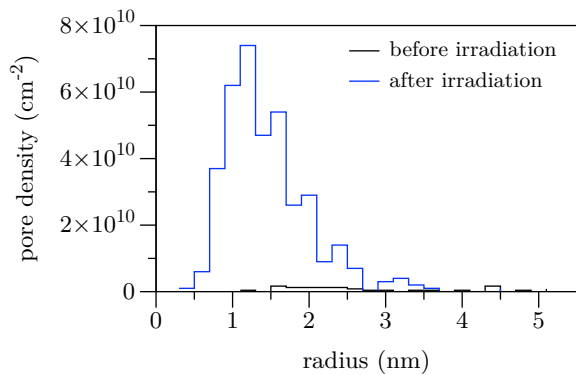


FIG. 4. (color online) Distributions of the pore radius before and after highly charged ion irradiations.

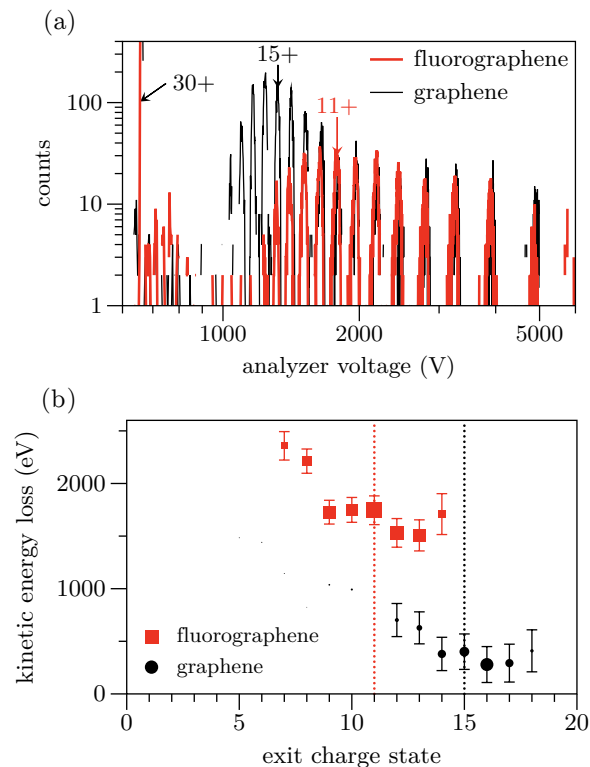


FIG. 5. (color online) (a): Exit charge state spectra of  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions with an initial kinetic energy of 112 keV transmitted through fluorographene and graphene. Mean exit charge states of 11 and 15, respectively, are indicated. (b): The kinetic energy loss determined from the spectra in (a) is shown for both target materials as a function of the exit charge state. Dashed lines mark the mean exit charge states. The diameter of the symbols indicates the ion abundance.

15 for fluorographene and graphene, respectively. The lower exit charge state for fluorographene is explained by a larger neutralization length, i.e. a longer ion trajectory in close proximity to the sample, increasing the efficiency for charge exchange (see FIG. 1) From the peak positions of the exit charge states in FIG. 5 (a), the kinetic energy

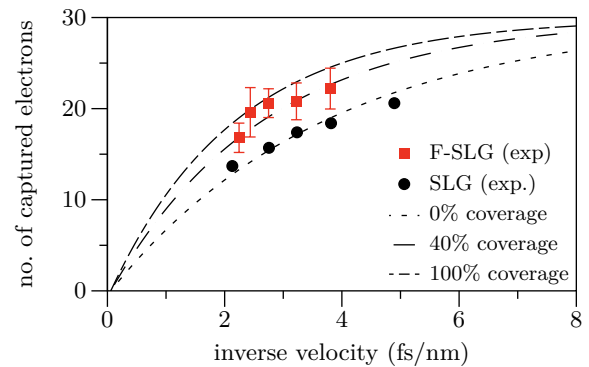


FIG. 6. (color online) Number of electrons captured by  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions over the ion's inverse velocity after transmission through fluorographene and graphene. Evaluated spectra were measured within the first 48 hours of consecutive irradiations. Lines are added and indicate fits (see text) to the values obtained from TDPot simulations assuming a fluorine coverage of 0 %, 40%, and 100%, respectively.

loss as a function of the exit charge state was determined and is presented in (b). The kinetic energy loss shows an increase toward lower exit charge states, which is well known from highly charged ion interaction with ultra-thin foils (e.g. [50, 76]). A kinetic energy loss accounting for more than 1000 eV for fluorographene is observed compared to a few hundreds of eV for pristine graphene. Since fluorine atoms attached to the graphene sheet lead to a larger areal atomic density, a higher number of target atoms will be excited upon ion impact. Therefore, larger kinetic energy losses are also expected, but the bandgap prohibits small excitations [77].

Ion transmission through iron-containing clusters with radii larger than a few nm leads to almost complete neutralization [78]. In this case, exit charge states between 2 and 0 are expected, which are close to the corresponding charge equilibrium values obtained for ion transmission through a thick layer. These are too low for the detection using the ESA. Therefore, ions transmitted through iron clusters do not contribute to the exit charge state spectra in our measurements.

We measured the charge exchange for  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions at different initial kinetic energies between 45 and 130 keV and determined the mean exit charge state  $\overline{q_{\text{out}}}$  as a function of the ions' kinetic energy. The mean number of captured electrons, defined as  $q_{\text{in}} - \overline{q_{\text{out}}}$ , is shown in FIG. 6 as a function of the ions' inverse velocity, which is proportional to the neutralization time. Values for graphene are shown as reference. Exit charge state distributions were also simulated by employing the computer code TDPot for different fluorine coverages of a double-sided functionalization. A fluorine coverage of 100 % assumes that each carbon atom is partnered with one fluorine atom. Electron capture and de-excitation rates were kept constant for different coverages, because no influence of the electronic target properties on the mechanism of potential

energy deposition was observed in previous experiments [39].

The lines in FIG. 6 indicate fits to the number of captured electrons for fluorine coverages of 0 % (corresponding to pristine graphene), 40 %, and 100 % from the simulations. An exponential time dependence for the decay of the ion's initial charge state according to  $n_{\text{cap}} = (q_{\text{in}} - q_{\text{eq}}) (1 - \exp(-\frac{v_N}{v}))$  [79, 80] is assumed, where  $v_N$  is a neutralization parameter, i.e. the (inverse) charge state decay constant, and  $q_{\text{eq}}$  denotes the equilibrium charge state given by  $q_{\text{eq}} = Z^{1/3}v/v_0$  [78], which describes the average charge state of an ion with nuclear charge  $Z$  passing through a solid with velocity  $v$ .

For a fluorine coverage of 0 %, a neutralization parameter of 0.27 nm/fs is obtained, fairly resembling the experimental values for pristine graphene. For fluorine coverages of 40 % and 100 %, the neutralization parameter is enhanced and amounts to 0.38 nm/fs and 0.47 nm/fs, respectively. In FIG. 6, these values correspond to the lower and upper bounds of the measured values  $q_{\text{in}} - \overline{q_{\text{out}}}$ . Therefore, a fluorine coverage of  $(70 \pm 30) \%$  is estimated.

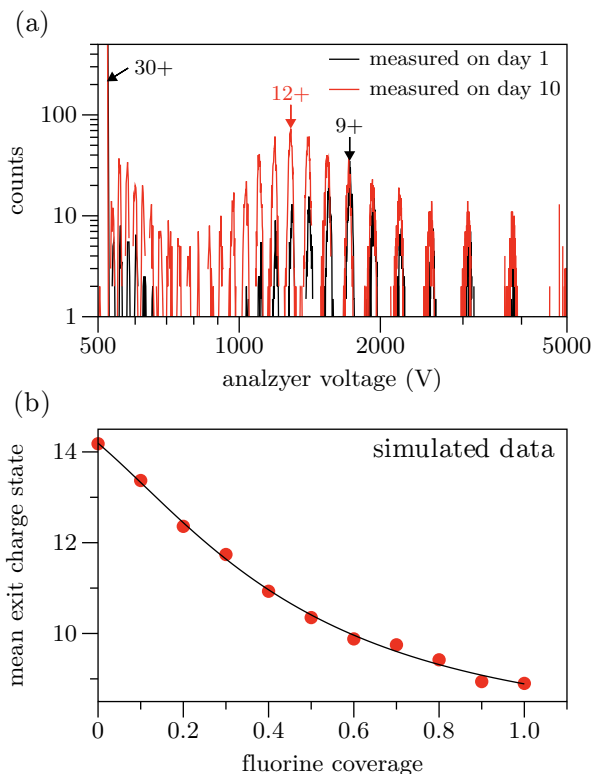


FIG. 7. (color online) (a) Experimentally obtained exit charge state spectra of  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions at  $E_{\text{kin}} = 88$  keV transmitted through fluorographene measured on day 1 and on day 10 of consecutive irradiations. The mean exit charge states of 9 and 12, respectively, are indicated. (b) Dependence of the mean exit charge on the fluorine coverage obtained from TDPot simulations for the same irradiation conditions as given in (a).

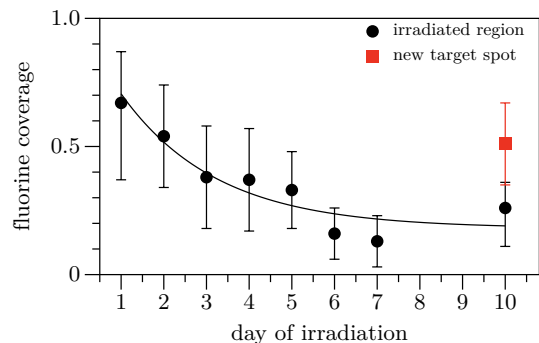


FIG. 8. (color online) Time dependence of the relative fluorine coverage estimated by charge exchange measurements, showing a continuous decrease over time. The solid line was obtained by an exponential fit for eye guiding (see text). On day 10 of the consecutive irradiations, the beam position on the sample was changed to a different target spot, for which a fluorine coverage of around 50 % was determined. Compared to the already irradiated region revealing a coverage of 25 %, the lower value indicates enhanced fluorine loss by ion irradiation.

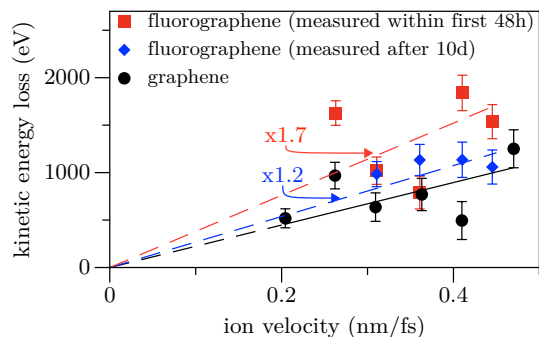


FIG. 9. (color online) Velocity dependence of the kinetic energy loss (averaged over the exit charge state) for  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions transmitted through fluorographene, which was measured within the first 48 hours and after 10 days of consecutive irradiations. Values for pristine graphene are shown as reference. The solid line is a fit to the data for graphene assuming a proportional dependence on the velocity. Dashed lines were obtained by multiplying the fit function with a factor of 1.2 and 1.7, respectively (see text).

### C. Fluorine desorption during consecutive irradiations

The spectra used for the evaluation in FIG. 6 were measured within the first 48 hours after the beginning of irradiations. Exit charge state spectra were also recorded during consecutive irradiations up to day 10. FIG. 7 (a) illustrates the spectra measured on day 1 and 10 for  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions at a kinetic energy of 88 keV. The latter shows a higher number of ions with high charge states  $q \geq 20$ , which stems from transmission through ion-induced nanopores (see section III A).

Moreover, the mean exit charge state for the lower distribution shifts from  $\bar{q}_{\text{exit}} = 9$  on day 1 to  $\bar{q}_{\text{exit}} = 12$  on day 10. The increase in the mean exit charge state is ascribed to the desorption of fluorine causing less-efficient charge exchange. In order to investigate the influence of desorption on charge exchange, TDPot simulations were performed, for which the fluorine coverage was gradually varied between 100% and 0%. FIG. 7 (b) shows the dependence of the mean exit charge state over the fluorine coverage as extracted from the simulations. A monotonic decrease of the fluorine concentration with an increase in the mean exit charge state is seen. A mean exit charge state of 9, measured on day 1, would then correspond to a fluorine coverage  $\approx 90\%$ , whereas the higher mean exit charge state of 12, measured on day 10, indicates a drop of the fluorine coverage to  $\approx 25\%$ . Note, that the sample is kept at room temperature and UHV conditions throughout the measurements.

We evaluated additional spectra measured on different days taken for different charge states and kinetic energies. Mean exit charge states obtained from the simulations for different fluorine coverages were compared to the experimental data. The coverages, which provided the best agreement in the mean exit charge state between experiment and simulation, are given in the SI. Consequently, from the exit charge state distributions on different days, the fluorine coverage over time can be extracted, which is shown in FIG. 8. A clear decrease over time is observed, starting from  $\approx 70\%$  to  $\approx 20\%$  after 10 days of irradiations. Note, that consecutive irradiations were performed on the same sample region. After 10 days, the ion beam was positioned on a new target spot, for which a higher fluorine coverage of  $\approx 50\%$  was determined. This clearly implies enhanced fluorine desorption on the irradiated region.

As an independent and model-free indicator, the kinetic energy loss as a function of exit charge state was determined from the exit charge state spectra recorded on different days. Mean values for the kinetic energy loss were obtained by taking the average over the exit charge state. For incident  $\text{Xe}^{30+}$  ions, the velocity dependence of the mean kinetic energy loss, measured for fluorographene within the first 48 hours and after 10 days of irradiations, is shown in FIG. 9. Values for graphene were added for comparison. Fits to the experimental data are obtained based on a proportional dependence of the kinetic energy loss on the velocity. Larger values for fluorographene are observed compared to the pristine material due to the higher atomic areal density of the target. Taking the fitting function for graphene as reference, we estimated values in case of fluorographene considering a 70% higher atomic areal density for the measurements within the first 48 hours (i.e., a factor of 1.7 times the energy loss in pristine graphene), and a 20% higher value after 10 days of consecutive irradiations. With respect to the influence of the bandgap, no threshold in the kinetic energy loss is ascertained, which would be expected for even lower kinetic energies [77].

For eye guiding, the time dependence of the fluorine coverage in FIG. 8 was described by an exponential function according to  $\phi(t) = A \times \exp(-\alpha_{\text{des}} \times t) + C$  [81]. From the fit, we determined a mean desorption rate  $\alpha_{\text{des}}$  of 0.45 per day and a non-desorbing fraction of 18%, which indicates non-volatile and stronger-bound (fluorine) atoms or contaminations remaining attached to the graphene sheet on day 10.

In contrast to the pore formation described in section III A, defluorination leaves the graphene sheet intact. It is also characterized by a higher cross section compared to perforation. This becomes evident by comparing the relative fractions of the perforated and the defluorinated area of  $\approx 4\%$  and  $\approx 50\%$ , respectively. The disparity is explained by different excitation densities, which are required for the different processes. Fluorine loss proceeds by the dissociation of single-covalent C-F bonds alone. This necessitates lower excitation energies than the ablation of CF clusters for pore formation.

As a possible underlying mechanism for fluorine loss, defect-mediated desorption is proposed, which explained the loss of halogen atoms due to the irradiation of alkali halides and  $\text{SiO}_2$  with photons, electrons, or ions [82–85]. As shown for LiF [84], defect-mediated desorption is already efficient at moderate excitation densities, i.e. when multiply charged ions are used (e.g.,  $\text{Ar}^{q+}$  ions,  $q \leq 9$ , for LiF). It was also applied to describe the creation of nanometer-sized pit-like structures on a KBr(001) and KCl(001) surfaces upon highly charged ion impact [86, 87]. This process is based on the formation of self-trapped excitons (STEs) upon ion impact [88]. The neutralization of a highly charged ion is accompanied by the formation of electron-hole pairs and hole states in the target surface. In materials with strong electron-photon coupling (like alkali halides or  $\text{SiO}_2$ ), these electronic excitations become localized in a self-produced lattice deformation, leading to the creation of STEs [89]. Relaxation of STEs causes the desorption of the neutralized anions (halide atoms or oxygen). For fluorinated graphene, a strong excitonic response is well known [56, 90, 91].

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

Nanopore formation in freestanding fluorographene by highly charged ion impacts is demonstrated and investigated using STEM. Fluorine functionalization alters the electronic properties of originally semi-metallic graphene to a highly insulating state. The induced electronic excitation due to the ion impacts remains confined on a time scale of up to ns, enhancing the efficiency of pore formation significantly. A mean nanopore radius of  $(1.5 \pm 0.6)$  nm in fluorographene for charge states between 20 and 30 of the incident xenon ions was determined.

Despite the disparity with respect to nanopore formation between fluorine-functionalized and pristine graphene, the process of potential energy deposition is expected to



behave similarly. However, the increased target thickness and the larger atomic areal density of fluorographene lead to a higher number of stabilized electrons during the ion's transmission and to a larger kinetic energy loss. A quantitative connection between the mean exit charge state after transmission and the fluorine coverage is shown based on computer simulations, explicitly taking the structural target properties into account. We exploit this dependence to estimate the fluorine coverage using the results of our charge exchange experiments. Measurements for consecutive irradiations imply fluorine loss, which is considered as a competing process to pore formation. We suggest defect-mediated desorption as the underlying mechanism for fluorine detachment, which is already operative at lower excitation densities. This leads to a higher cross section by one order of magnitude for defluorination compared to pore formation. Depending on the ion's charge state, this may allow the use of ion irradiation either for the modification of the electrical prop-

erties [92–94] due to defluorination or for pore formation in graphene [21] as desired for membrane technologies.

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