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Effect of Ion Pair on Contact Angle for Phosphonium Ionic Liquids

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Abstract

The wettability of ionic liquids (ILs) is relevant to their use in various applications. However, a mechanistic understanding of how the cation-anion pair affects wettability is still evolving. Here, focusing on phosphonium ILs, wettability was characterized in terms of contact angle using experiments and classical molecular dynamics simulations. Both experiments and simulations showed that contact angle was affected by the anion and increased as benzoate < salicylate < saccharinate. Further, the simulations showed contact angle decreased with increased alkyl chain length for these anions paired with five different tetra-alkyl-phosphonium cations. The trends were explained in terms of adhesive and cohesive energies in the simulations, and then correlated to the atomic scale differences between the anions and cations.

13 Introduction

14 Ionic liquids (ILs) are salts in the liquid state below 100°C, or even at room temperature
15 (25°C).¹ ILs have a unique combination of physico-chemical properties, including low vapor
16 pressure or non-volatility, long range of solubility, tunable acidity and basicity, high thermal
17 stability, high ion conductivity, and wide electrochemical window, etc.^{1,2} These properties
18 enable ILs to be used as organic solvents, mineral acids, bases, catalysts, and many more for
19 a diverse range of applications.¹⁻⁶

20 ILs comprise a positively charged cation and negatively charged anion. A wide variety of
21 anions, both organic and inorganic, are used in application-relevant ILs, but cations are usu-
22 ally organic species such as ammonium, phosphonium, imidazolium, or pyridinium.^{1,7} Among
23 these ILs, phosphonium ILs have been reported to have low wear and friction as lubricants,^{8,9}
24 high chemical and thermal stability,^{10,11} as well as superior resistance to corrosion.¹²⁻¹⁴ Im-
25 portantly, many halogen-free phosphonium ILs are considered environmentally friendly,¹⁵⁻¹⁷
26 since they are biodegradable and can be extracted from bio-based feedstock.^{5,18-20} Therefore,
27 phosphonium ILs are used as lubricants/lubricant additives,²¹⁻²⁶ battery electrolytes,²⁷⁻²⁹
28 heat transfer fluids,^{30,31} solvents for coating materials,^{32,33} and additives in polymeric mate-
29 rials.³⁴⁻³⁸

30 In many applications, phosphonium ILs are in contact with a solid surface and form a
31 solid-liquid interface. Therefore, the adsorption and spreading of phosphonium ILs on solid
32 surfaces, i.e., wettability, plays an important role in their performance.³⁹⁻⁴¹ Wettability is
33 controlled by the balance between the intermolecular adhesion (liquid-solid) and cohesion
34 (liquid-liquid) interactions.⁴² For phosphonium ILs used as lubricants, wettability is impor-
35 tant because it affects the fluid's ability to spread and protect solid surfaces.^{40,43} Wetting
36 is also important for phosphonium ILs used as electrolytes since the utilization rate of elec-
37 trode surface area and energy density of supercapacitors can be improved by increasing
38 wettability.⁴⁴

39 Usually, wettability is quantified as the contact angle between a liquid droplet and a

40 solid surface.⁴⁵ Strong adhesion to the substrate surface and weak cohesion within the liquid
41 lead to a high degree of wetting with low contact angles, while a combination of weak
42 adhesion and strong cohesion results in high contact angles and poor wetting. When a
43 droplet is placed on a surface, there is initially transient evolution of contact angle as the
44 liquid droplet is wetting the surface and then the contact angle reaches steady state. Both the
45 transient and steady-state contact angles are used to characterize wetting behavior. Usually,
46 a steady-state contact angle less than 90° indicates good wettability.⁴⁶ Wetting time, the time
47 required for the contact angle to reach steady state, can be used to determine the relative
48 strengths of adhesion and cohesion. Longer wetting times indicate adhesion domination,
49 whereas shorter wetting times indicate the dominance of cohesion.⁴⁷ These properties can
50 be measured experimentally using a goniometer as well as with molecular dynamics (MD)
51 simulations that give an atomistic view of contact angle mechanisms.

52 Experimental studies have reported the contact angle of neat phosphonium ILs measured
53 on a variety of surfaces and at a range of temperatures. All reported good wettability with
54 contact angles less than 90° .^{39,40,47-51} Some studies have compared contact angles on different
55 substrates and shown that wettability is better on materials with high surface free energy,
56 i.e, lower contact angle on steel than PTFE⁴⁹ and lower contact angle on TiN than steel,
57 CrN, and ZrN.⁴⁰ Temperature has also been shown to affect contact angle. However, while
58 the contact angle of some ILs decreases with increasing temperature,³⁹ other ILs exhibit
59 the opposite trend.⁴⁷ Lastly, the wettability of phosphonium ILs in solution has also been
60 measured experimentally and it has been reported that contact angles of IL solutions could
61 be smaller or larger than those of the neat ILs, depending on the solvent and substrate
62 material.^{22,52}

63 MD simulations have been used to complement experiments by exploring the atomistic
64 origins of IL wettability.⁵³⁻⁵⁸ However, currently there are few simulation studies focused
65 on the wettability of phosphonium ILs. Simulations showed that the steady state contact
66 angle of [P4,4,4,4][Cpy] on silanol and silane surfaces was less than 90° , indicating a strong

67 liquid-surface interaction, but the contact angle was slightly larger on the silane surface.⁵⁹
68 The steady-state contact angle of [P2,2,2,5][Tf₂N] nanodroplets on platinum surfaces at 298
69 K was calculated in simulations. The results showed that the contact angle on Pt(100) was
70 higher than on Pt(111), demonstrating that the crystallographic nature of the surface can
71 affect spreading. The simulations also compared two different ILs and found that the contact
72 angle of [P2,2,2,5][Tf₂N] nanodroplets was lower than that of its ammonium counterpart
73 [N2,2,2,5][Tf₂N] on both Pt surfaces.⁵⁸

74 IL properties, including wettability, are significantly affected by the chemistry and struc-
75 ture of the cation and anion combination.^{5,60} No previous studies of phosphonium ILs focused
76 on the effect of the cation. However, some studies that characterized the effect of cation for
77 other ILs reported that longer alkyl chains correspond to lower contact angle. For example,
78 the contact angle of [TF₂N] anion-based ILs with different cations was experimentally found
79 to be lower for longer alkyl chain with contact angle increasing as [C₁₀C₁im] < [C₄C₁im]
80 < [C₂C₁im].⁵⁴ This trend was consistent with simulation results that showed radial distri-
81 bution function (RDF) peaks were sharper and higher for longer chains, indicating better
82 ordering near the surface.⁵⁴ In another simulation study, the contact angle of [BF₄]-based
83 ILs on graphite surface was lower for [PrMIM] cation with a longer alkyl chain compared
84 to [DMIM] cation with a shorter alkyl chain. The interaction energy between graphite and
85 [PrMIM][BF₄] was found to be higher than that for [DMIM][BF₄] which implied that the
86 longer [PrMIM] cations had a stronger affinity towards the graphite surface, leading to a
87 lower contact angle.⁵⁵ Lastly, simulations showed that contact angles of ILs with [BMIM]
88 with long alkyl chains were lower than [EMIM] ILs with short chains for anions including
89 [Cl], [Br], [BF₄], [PF₆], and [TF₂N] on bismuth telluride surfaces.⁵⁷

90 For the effect of anion, it was reported that, for [P6,6,6,14] cations, contact angle increased
91 as [p-TsO] < [Tf₂N] < [Cl] < [DCA] < [BF₄] on PTFE surfaces. The lower contact angle
92 of [p-TsO] was attributed to the planarity and electron density of the aromatic ring.⁵⁰ An
93 experimental study reported that contact angle increased as [BEHP] < [(iC8)₂PO₂] < [Cl] <

94 [DCA] on AISI 52100 steel, CrN, and ZrN surface for the same [P6,6,6,14] cation. This trend
95 was attributed to the inverse relationship between anion size and surface tension.⁴⁰ The effect
96 of anion size was also observed in simulations of non-phosphonium ILs that showed larger
97 anions had better wetting on bismuth telluride surfaces and the contact angle decreased as
98 [Cl] > [Br] > [BF₄] > [PF₆] > [TF₂N] for imidazolium-based ([BMIM] and [EMIM]) ionic
99 liquids. This trend was attributed to higher cohesion energy for the larger anions.⁵⁷

100 Results reported so far have shown that cation and anion can affect wettability, but
101 there has been no systematic study of these effects for phosphonium ILs nor the underlying
102 mechanisms. Here we explored the relationship between phosphonium cation-anion pairs and
103 contact angle. In particular, the effect of different anions (especially with similar chemistries)
104 for the same cation and the effect of alkyl chain length in tetra-alkyl-phosphonium cations
105 for the same anion were studied. Although wetting behavior depends on the surface mate-
106 rial and morphology as well,⁵⁸ here we focus on the effects of the cation and anion. First,
107 the wettability of three ionic liquids with benzoate [Benz], salicylate [Sali], and saccharinate
108 [Sacc] anions paired with [P6,6,6,14] cation was experimentally measured on 52100 stainless
109 steel. The contact angle for these phosphonium ILs on a model iron surface was calculated
110 by MD simulations to confirm the trend observed in experiments. The simulations were ex-
111 tended to characterize the effect of the cation using ILs with [P4,4,4,4], [P4,4,4,8], [P4,4,4,14],
112 [P6,6,6,14], and [P8,8,8,14] cations. Finally, the origins of observed cation and anion trends
113 were explored in terms of the strength of the adhesion and cohesion interactions.

114 **Methods**

115 **Experiments**

116 Three ILs were synthesized through ion exchange reactions using [P6,6,6,14] chloride, and
117 either sodium saccharinate, sodium salicylate, or sodium benzoate, following the process
118 described previously by Reeves et al.⁶¹ and other researchers,^{62,63} to yield, [P6,6,6,14][Sacc],

119 [P6,6,6,14][Sali], and [P6,6,6,14][Benz]. Mirror finished AISI 52100 stainless steel surface
120 was prepared using silicon carbide polishing papers of 120, 240, 400, 600, 1000 grit size
121 followed by diamond suspension of 6 μm , 3 μm , and 1 μm . The average surface roughness
122 ($R_a=17.9\pm 4.9$ nm) was measured using an optical profilometer (Rtec, CA, USA), with 10x
123 magnification using white light interferometry.

124 The contact angle measurements of the three phosphonium ILs were carried out using
125 a goniometer (Rame-hart Model-260, NJ, USA). A 5 μL sessile droplet of each liquid was
126 deposited on the surface using a microsyringe assembly with a SS 304, straight, 22 gauge
127 needle with (part number 100-10-12-22), and the droplet was imaged using a camera with
128 750 FPS superspeed U2 series upgrade kit (part number 100-12-U2), all manufactured by
129 Rame-hart. Contact angle was calculated as the angle between the line along stainless steel
130 surface and the tangential line to the droplet surface. The contact angles on either side of
131 the sessile droplet were recorded every 1 second interval, using Dropimage software, and the
132 average of the contact angle on the two sides of the droplet (θ) was tracked over time. Each
133 test was repeated three times.

134 Molecular Dynamics Simulation

135 Since the alkyl chain length in cations affect contact angle, the simulations were extended
136 beyond the IL systems studied experimentally to include five different cations [P4,4,4,4],
137 [P4,4,4,8], [P4,4,4,14], [P6,6,6,14], and [P8,8,8,14] in combination with three anions [Benz],
138 [Sali], and [Sacc]. Snapshots of the individual ions are shown in Fig 1. Each simulation had
139 one IL droplet on a 250×250 \AA square surface comprising five layers of Fe atoms arranged
140 in a body-centered-cubic lattice with (111) orientation with the bottom layer fixed, as shown
141 in Fig. 2.

142 The interatomic interactions within and between the ILs were described by the OPLS-AA
143 Force field⁶⁴ based on LigParGen.⁶⁵ Interactions with the iron substrate were modeled using
144 the Lennard-Jones (LJ) potential with $\epsilon_{ss} = 0.2007$ eV and $\sigma_{ss} = 2.4193$ \AA .⁶⁶ Interactions

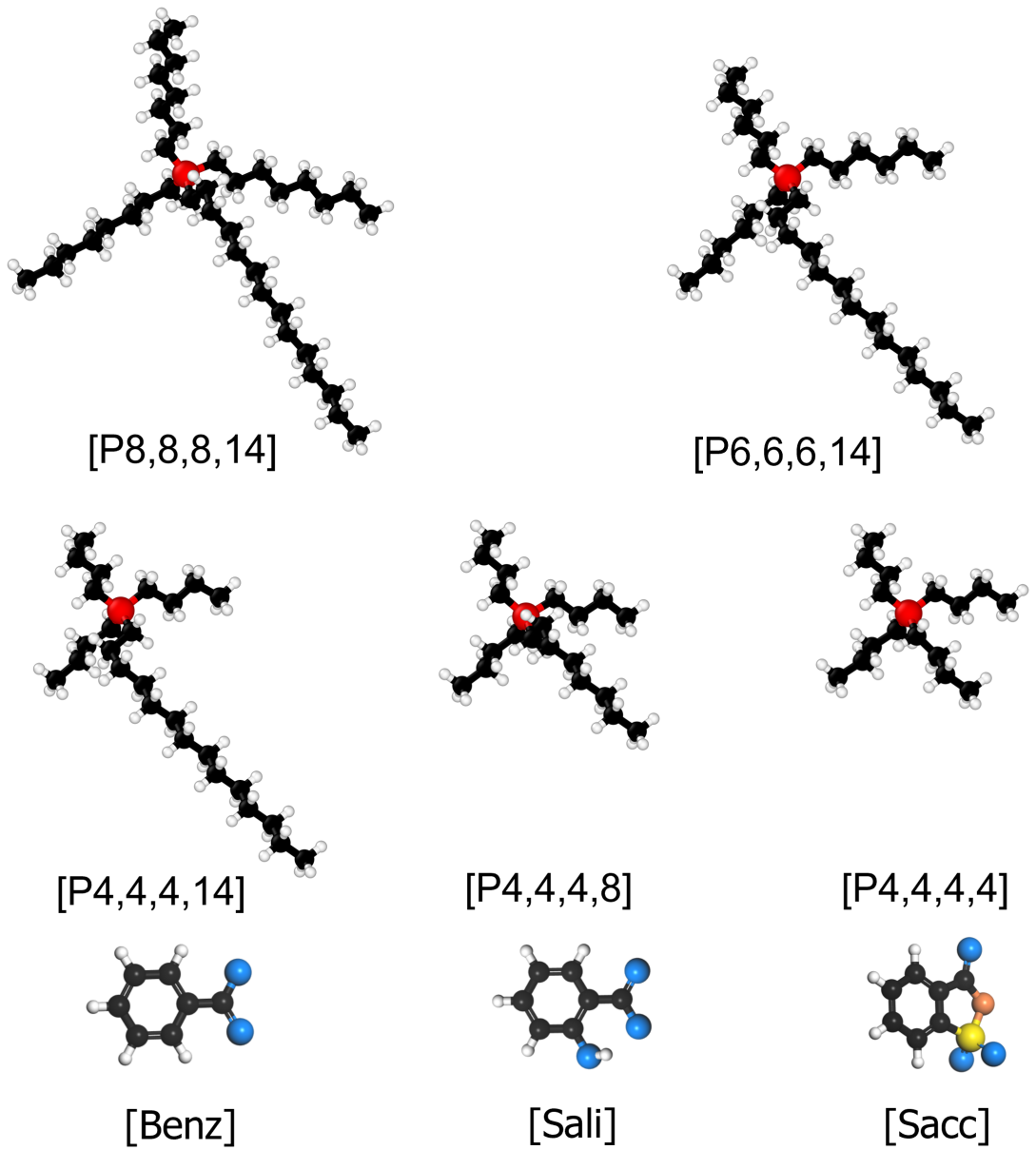


Figure 1: Snapshots of the molecular models of the five cations and three anions used in the simulations of phosphonium ILs. Sphere colors correspond to atoms type: white H, black C, red P, blue O, orange N, and yellow S.

145 between substrate and ILs were modeled using the LJ potential, combining the Fe parameters
146 with the LJ parameters of OPLS-AA using geometric mixing rules.⁶⁷

147 It has been found that contact angle generally increases linearly with droplet size until it
148 converges to a constant values after a critical number of ions or droplet radius is reached.^{68,69}
149 In previous simulations, the contact angle was found to converge for [BMIM][BF₄] on graphene
150 with at least 100 ion pairs⁶⁹ or an initial cubic box size of 50 Å⁵⁵ and for [EMIM][BF₄] on
151 silicon with a droplet radius of at least 20 Å.⁷⁰ Based on these, all model phosphonium IL
152 systems here were created using PACKMOL⁷¹ with at least 100 ion pairs, corresponding
153 to the liquid in a 50 Å cubic volume. The IL cube was initially placed 10 Å above iron
154 surface. All MD simulations were performed using the open-source Large Atomic/Molecular
155 Massively Parallel Simulation (LAMMPS) package⁷² with a timestep of 1 fs.

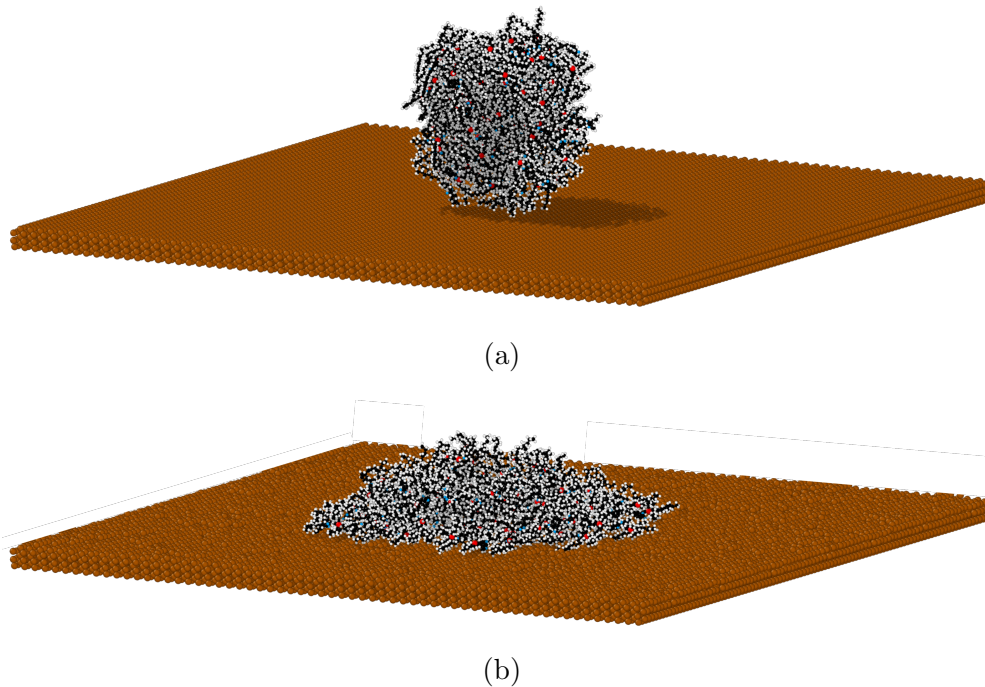


Figure 2: Perspective view snapshots of (a) the model IL droplet contacting the surface and (b) after 10 ns of relaxation for [P6,6,6,14][Benz].

156 First, energy minimization was performed using the conjugate gradient algorithm until
157 reaching a stopping tolerance of 1.0×10^{-6} for energy and 1.0×10^{-8} for force. After energy

158 minimization, the IL was partially relaxed as the temperature was increased from 1 K to
159 298 K over 1 ns in a canonical ensemble (NVT). The Nosé–Hoover thermostat⁷³ was used
160 to control the temperature of the system and the velocity-Verlet algorithm⁷⁴ was applied to
161 solve the equations of motion. This relaxation procedure ensured the cohesion in the ionic
162 liquid and droplet formation. During this relaxation stage, the cube IL droplet became a
163 more physically realistic spherical shape and came into contact with the substrate surface,
164 as shown in Fig. 2(a). Then, the production simulation was run at temperature of 298 K for
165 another 10 ns. The droplet spread on the surface starting from the initial point of contact
166 between the droplet and surface, finally reaching a steady state shape like that shown in
167 Fig. 2(b). Each simulation was run three times from the same atomic configuration with
168 different initial velocity distributions.

169 In previous simulation studies,^{57–59} the contact angle was determined using a simple
170 two-dimension method as the angle between the horizontal line at the liquid-solid interface
171 and the line tangent to the droplet surface at the liquid-solid-valor three phase contact
172 point. This calculation has also been performed using more complicated three-dimensional
173 algorithms.^{70,75,76} However, the tangent line is difficult to define for the relatively large and
174 branched ions here. Therefore, the contact angle was determined by the equation $\theta =$
175 $\tan^{-1}(h/r)$, where r is the radius of the liquid-solid contact circle and the h is the height of
176 the apex;^{53,77} details of the contact angle calculation are given in Fig. S1. After the potential
177 energy reached steady state, the contact angle was calculated by averaging 20 trajectories
178 (time steps) during the last 1 ns of the simulation.

179 Throughout the simulation, the adhesive and cohesive energies were calculated from the
180 sum of the energies between individual atom pairs. Adhesion energy was calculated as the
181 sum of the energy between atoms in the anion or cation and the Fe atoms in the substrate;
182 cohesion energy was calculated as the total interaction energy between atoms in the anion
183 and cation. These summed energies were averaged over the last 1 ns of the production
184 simulations, consistent with the contact angle calculation. A negative adhesive or cohesive

185 energy corresponds to net attraction.

186 Results and Discussion

187 Comparison of Experiments and Simulations

188 The ILs measured experimentally comprised [P6,6,6,14] with three different anions. As
189 shown in Fig. 3(a), the contact angle of all three ILs decreased rapidly to approach a steady-
190 state value. At steady state, the contact angles of [P6,6,6,14][Sacc], [P6,6,6,14][Sali], and
191 [P6,6,6,14][Benz] were 14.2° , 6.89° , and 4.10° , respectively. The small contact angles mea-
192 sured here are consistent with previous studies of [P6,6,6,14][Tf₂N] ILs on stainless steel
193 surface,^{47,51} which also reported contact angles less than 20° . Generally, the results indicate
194 that all three phosphonium ILs have a good wettability on stainless steel.

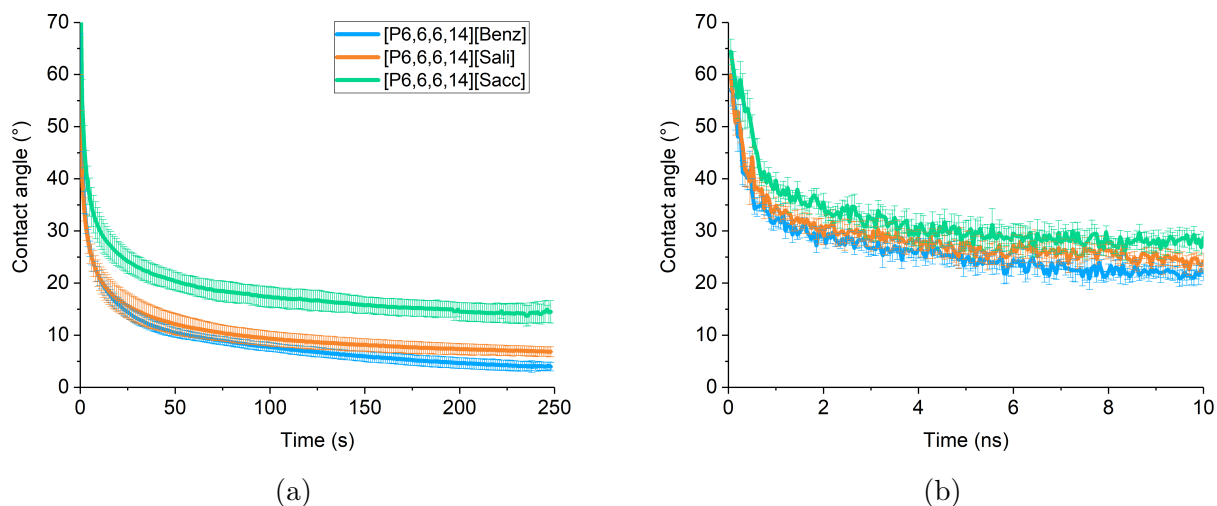


Figure 3: Contact angle as a function of time for [P6,6,6,14][Benz], [P6,6,6,14][Sacc], and [P6,6,6,14][Sali] from (a) experimental measurements on polished AISI 52100 steel surface with error bars reflecting the standard deviation across four independent measurements; and (b) simulation calculations on Fe (111) surface with error bars reflecting the standard deviation across three independent MD simulations.

195 Among the three ILs, [P6,6,6,14][Sacc] had the largest contact angle, more than twice that
196 of [P6,6,6,14][Sali] and [P6,6,6,14][Benz], over the entire spreading time. For [P6,6,6,14][Sali]

197 and [P6,6,6,14][Benz], the contact angles were not statistically different during the transient
198 phase but, at steady state, [P6,6,6,14][Sali] had a larger contact angle. These results indicate
199 that the anion can affect contact angle, as observed in previous studies.^{39,47–49,51,78}

200 MD simulations were carried out for the same three [P6,6,6,14]-based ILs characterized
201 experimentally. As shown in Fig. 3(b), the contact angle of all the three ILs gradually
202 decreased during the 10 ns simulation. The average contact angles over the last 1 ns of the
203 simulation for [P6,6,6,14][Sacc], [P6,6,6,14][Sali], and [P6,6,6,14][Benz] were 28.1°, 24.3°, and
204 21.8°, respectively. The magnitudes of the simulation contact angles were larger than those
205 in experiment due to the limited size and time scales of the simulations. Also, note that
206 the time scale of the experiments in Fig. 3(a) is seconds while that of the simulations in
207 Fig. 3(b) is nanoseconds, so the results cannot be directly compared. However, despite their
208 differences, in both simulations and experiments, [P6,6,6,14][Sacc] had the largest steady-
209 state contact angle and [P6,6,6,14][Benz] had the smallest.

210 As mentioned in the Introduction, both the cation and anion can affect wettability. The
211 simulations were used to explore this further by comparing the contact angle for ILs with
212 the three anions characterized above combined with five different cations. The effects of the
213 cations and anions were analyzed separately, with trends investigated in terms of adhesive
214 and cohesive energies.

215 **Effect of Cations**

216 The steady-state contact angle is plotted with respect to cation in Fig 4. It is observed that
217 steady-state contact angles decreased with increasing alkyl chain length for all three anions.
218 This trend was also reported in previous studies for imidazolium cations.^{54,55,57} Another
219 observation in Fig 4 is that contact angle decreased with increasing cation size, regardless of
220 whether the size increase was in one chain (compare [P4,4,4,4], [P4,4,4,8], and [P4,4,4,14])
221 or multiple chains ([P4,4,4,14], [P6,6,6,14], and [P8,8,8,14]). The overall trend may be due
222 to the longer chains increasing adhesion or decreasing cohesion, or both.

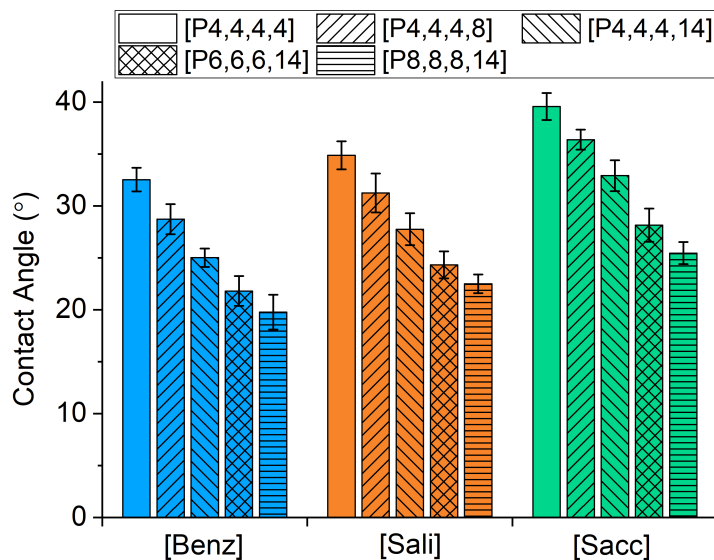


Figure 4: Comparison of the steady state contact angle for cations with different alkyl chain lengths paired with three different anions. Error bars reflect standard deviation among three independent MD simulations. Data is grouped by anion to highlight the effect of the cation.

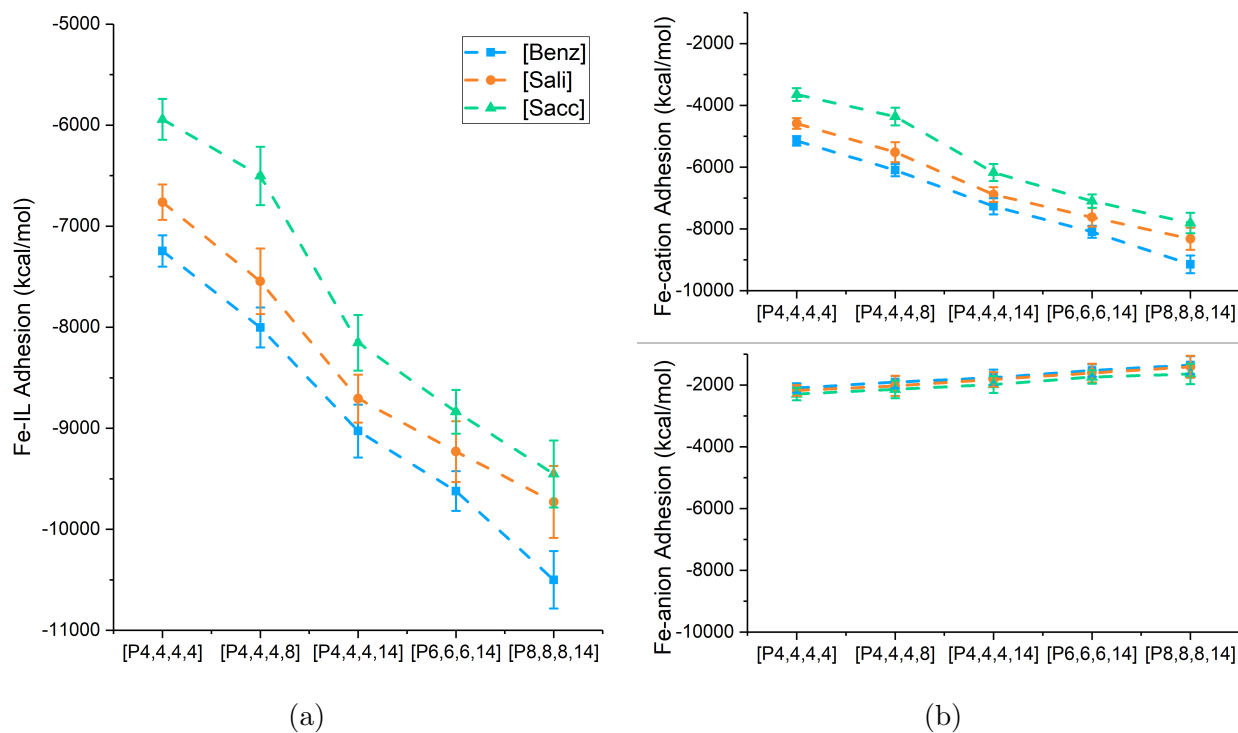


Figure 5: Adhesive interaction energy between the surface and the ILs, and (b) separated into the cation (top) and anion (bottom) contributions, plotted as functions of increasing alkyl chain length for the three anions.

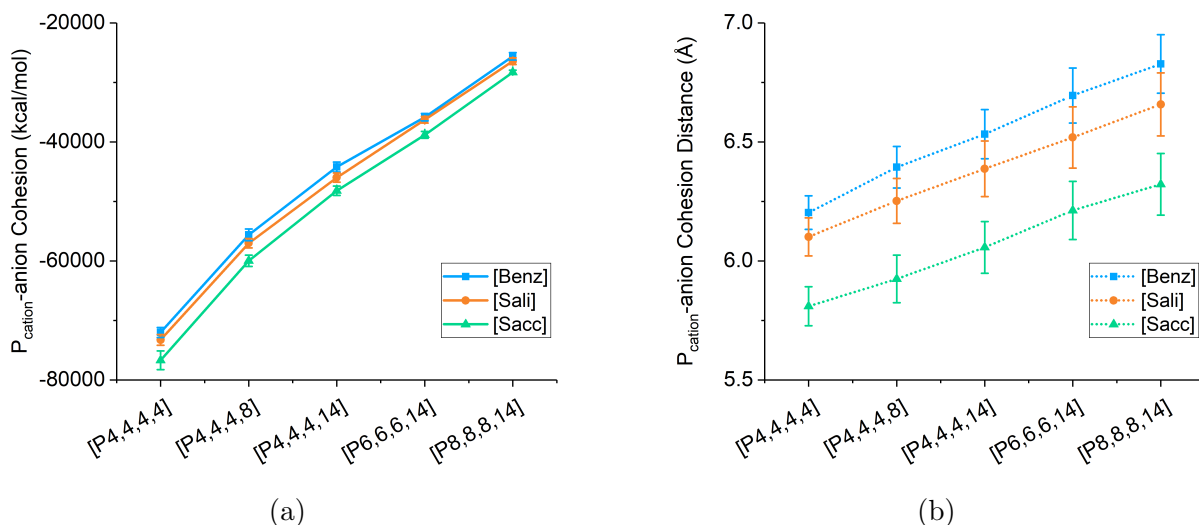


Figure 6: (a) Cohesive energy between P atoms in the cations and all atoms in the anions, and (b) average distance between cation P atoms and the COM of the anions, plotted as functions of increasing alkyl chain length for the three anions.

223 The total Fe-IL adhesion energy, reported in Fig. 5(a), increased (became more negative)
 224 with increasing cation chain length, consistent with the trend of decreasing contact angle.
 225 The adhesive energy was separated into contributions from the cation and anion, as shown
 226 in Fig. 5(b). The Fe-cation adhesive energy increased with chain length while the Fe-anion
 227 energy decreased with chain length. However, the magnitude of the cation adhesion was
 228 much larger than that for the anion, so the cation trend dominated the overall adhesion with
 229 the surface. The Fe-cation interaction energy was further broken down by atom type (Fig.
 230 S2) and it was found that the C atoms contribute most to the total adhesion. Therefore, the
 231 increasing adhesive energy trend can be attributed to the fact that there are more C atoms
 232 present in the longer chains.

233 The cohesion between ions was also analyzed. It was found that the only attractive inter-
 234 ionic interactions were between the P atoms in the cation and the atoms in the anions (Fig.
 235 S3). The cohesive energy between the cation P atoms and the anions, shown in Fig. 6(a),
 236 decreased (becomes less negative) with increasing chain length. The trend could be due to
 237 the interference of the longer chains that separated the anion and cation, thereby decreasing

238 cohesion. This hypothesis was confirmed by calculating the average distance between the
239 cation P atom and the center-of-mass (COM) of the nearest anion. As shown in Fig. 6(b),
240 the cation-anion distance increased with alkyl chain length, consistent with the decreasing
241 cohesive energy and the corresponding lower contact angle.

242 **Effect of Anions**

243 The steady-state contact angles are plotted with respect to anion in Fig. 7. For all five
244 cations, the contact angle increased as [Benz] < [Sali] < [Sacc]. It has been proposed that
245 larger anions will have lower contact angle.⁴⁰ Anions with aromatic rings like [p-TsO] have
246 also been reported to have lower contact angle than anions without aromatic rings like [BF₄],
247 [DCA], [Cl] and [Tf₂N] because of the planarity and delocalised electron density of the ring.⁵⁰
248 However, [Benz], [Sali], and [Sacc] are all aromatic ring-based anions with similar size, so
249 the difference in their contact angles should be attributed to other mechanisms. First, the
250 adhesion and cohesion were analyzed, following the approach used to explain the cation
251 trends.

252 The total Fe-IL adhesion energy, plotted vs. anion in Fig. 8(a), was largest for [Benz]
253 and smallest for [Sacc]. This trend is consistent with the observation that [Benz] has the
254 lowest contact angle while [Sacc] has the largest contact angle. To explain how the anions
255 affect total adhesion, the Fe-anion and Fe-cation adhesive energy were analyzed separately.

256 As shown in Fig. 8(b), Fe-anion adhesive energy increases as [Benz] < [Sali] < [Sacc].
257 This may be due to the fact that [Sacc] has the most atoms and, as shown in Fig. S4,
258 the biggest contribution to adhesion in [Sacc], the S atom, is not present in the other two
259 anions. Similarly, for [Sali], there is one more O atom in the hydroxyl group than [Benz]
260 which could contribute to the higher interaction energy observed for [Sali]. However, this
261 difference in Fe-anion energy is very small compared to the difference between the anions
262 in terms of Fe-cation adhesion. The Fe-cation adhesion is largest for [Benz] and smallest
263 for [Sacc], consistent with the contact angles. Therefore, the anion contact angle trend can

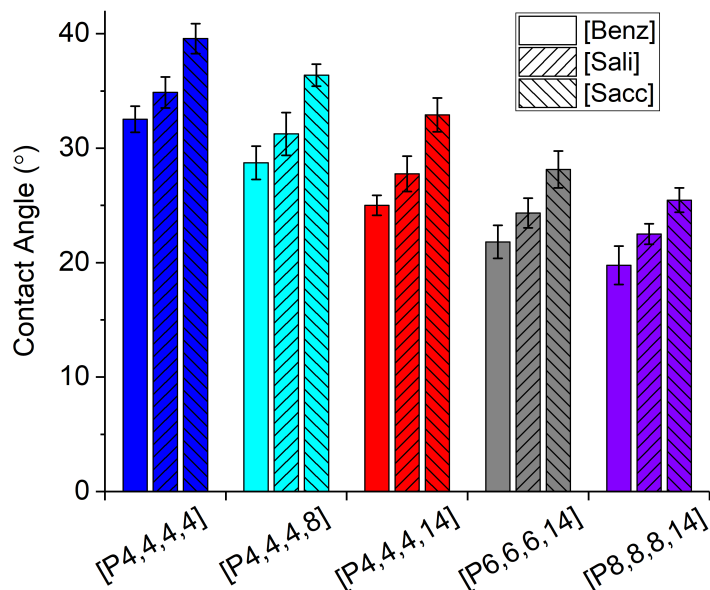


Figure 7: Comparison of the steady state contact angle for anions [Benz], [Sali], and [Sacc] paired with five different cations. Error bars reflect standard deviation among three independent MD simulations. Note that this is the same data as in Fig. 4 but shown here with the data grouped by cation to highlight the effect of anion.

264 be attributed to the indirect effect of the anion on interactions between the cations and
 265 substrate.

266 Since the Fe-anion energy is not very different for the three anions, their effect on cation
 267 adhesion may be due to the orientation of the anions with respect to the surface.^{79,80} An ori-
 268 entation order parameter^{53,55,56} was calculated from the relative directions of the Fe surface-
 269 normal and the direction normal to the plane of the anion atoms, as illustrated in Fig. S5.
 270 The value of orientation order parameter can vary from -0.5 when the anion ring is parallel
 271 to the surface to 1 when the anion ring is perpendicular to the surface. The distributions
 272 of the orientation order parameter for anions within 5 Å of the substrate (cutoff distance
 273 identified from the first peak of the anion position distribution functions, shown in Fig. S6,
 274 were calculated from the last 1 ns of all three independent simulations for each anion. The
 275 results for the [P6,6,6,14] cation are shown in Fig. 9, although similar distributions were
 276 found for other cations, as shown in Fig. S7 for [P4,4,4,4]. It can be seen that more of the
 277 [Benz] anions have an orientation order parameter near 1, meaning they are perpendicular to

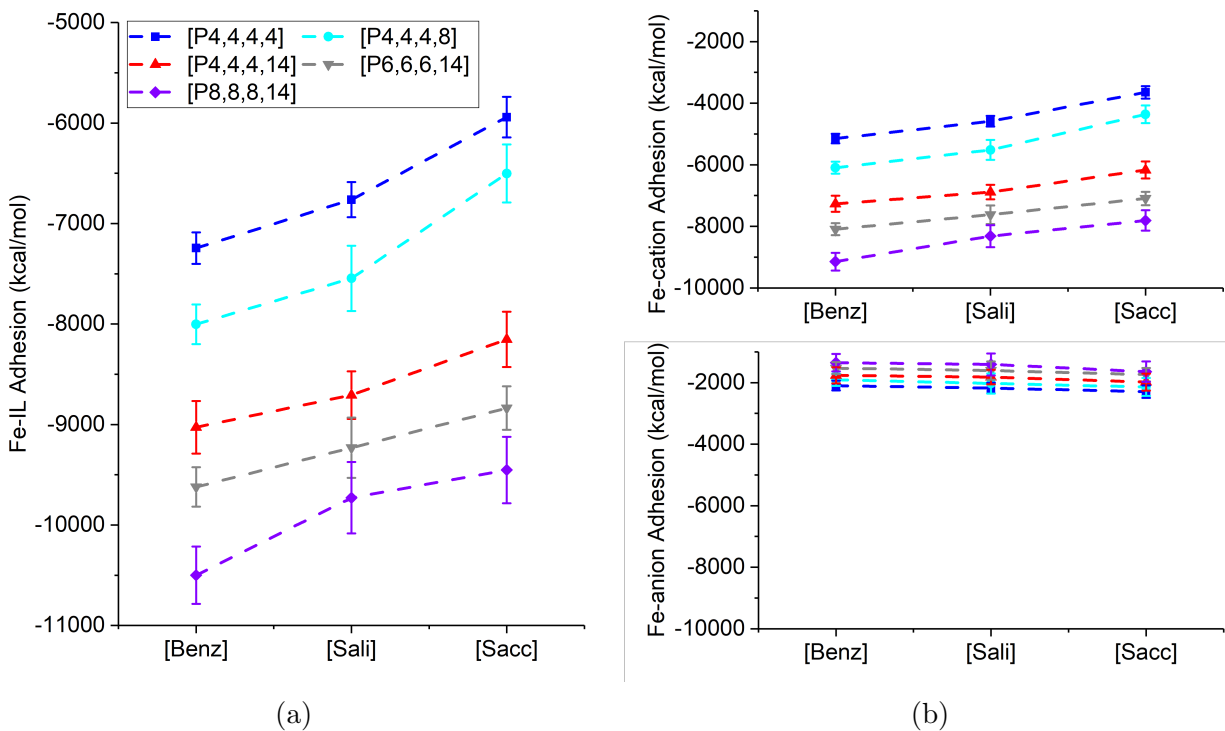


Figure 8: Adhesive interaction energy between the surface and the ILs, and (b) separated into the cation (top) and anion (bottom) contributions, plotted vs. anion for the five cations. Note that this is the same data as in Fig. 5 but plotted vs. anion to illustrate anion trends.

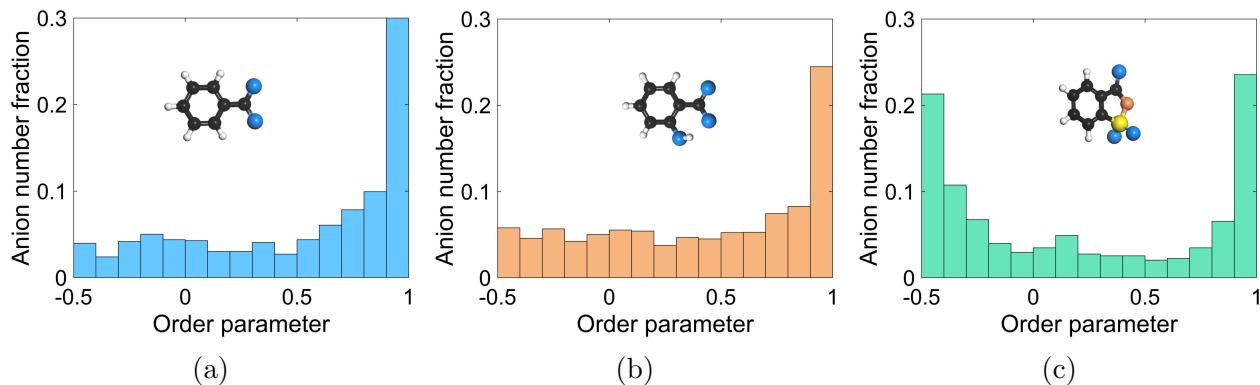


Figure 9: Orientation order parameter distribution for (a) [Benz], (b) [Sali], (c) [Sacc] paired with [P6,6,6,14] calculated from the last 1 ns of three independent simulations for each anion. The parameter ranges from -0.5 when the anion ring is parallel to the surface to 1 when the anion ring is perpendicular to the surface.

278 the surface, whereas the orientation order parameter for the [Sacc] anions is lower, indicating
 279 fewer are perpendicular. It has been reported that all three anions can orient perpendicu-
 280 lar to metal surfaces,^{81–85} but the asymmetry of the [Sacc] anion causes it to tilt towards

281 the surface.⁸⁵ The preferred perpendicular alignment of the [Benz] anions allows the cations
 282 more access to the surface, consistent with the stronger Fe-cation adhesion for the [Benz]
 283 ILs than the [Sacc] ILs in Fig. 8(b).

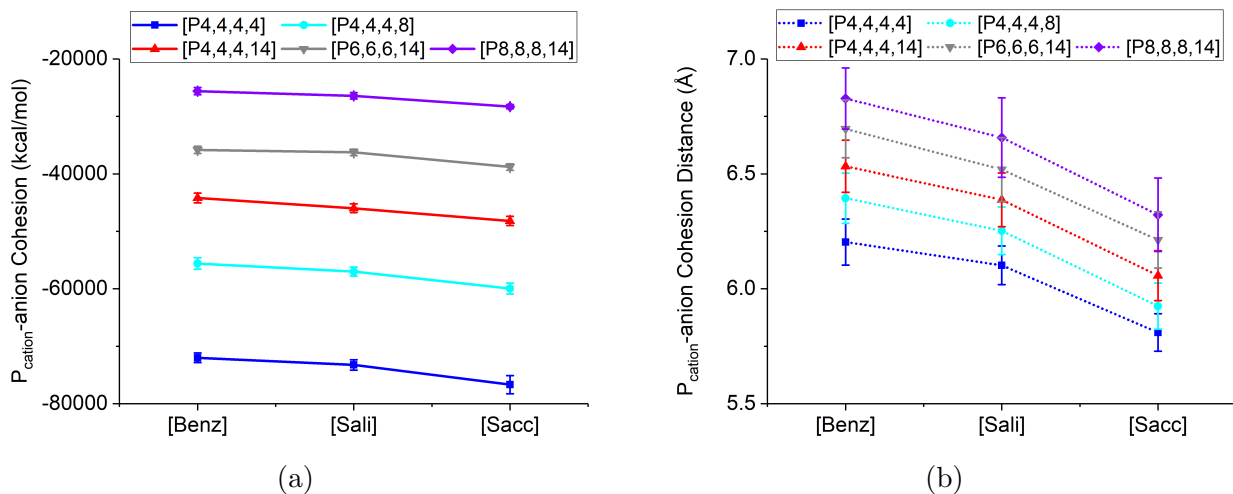


Figure 10: (a) Cohesive energy between P atoms in the cations and all atoms in the anions, and (b) average distance between cation P atoms and the COM of the anions, plotted vs. anions for the five cations. Note that this is the same data as in Fig. 6 but plotted vs. anion to illustrate anion trends.

284 The cohesive energy between the cation P atoms and anions is plotted vs. anion in
 285 Fig. 10a. The results show that the cohesion was strongest for [Sacc] and weakest for [Benz]
 286 with any cation. This trend was explained by the average distance between the cation P atom
 287 and the COM of the nearest anion, in Fig. 10b, that increased as [Sacc] < [Sali] < [Benz]. As
 288 presented in Fig. S8, there are more atoms in [Sacc] that have attractive interactions with
 289 the cation than the other two anions, and the extra O atom in [Sali] enables stronger cohesion
 290 than [Benz]. The cohesion energy and distance trends are consistent with the contact angle
 291 results.

292 Conclusions

293 The wetting of phosphonium ILs with systematically varied cation and anion combinations
 294 on ferrous surfaces was evaluated using experiments and MD simulations. Contact angles

295 of less than 20° in experiments indicated that the ILs have a good wettability on stainless
296 steel, but contact angles are different for [Benz], [Sali], and [Sacc]. The same trend was
297 reproduced in MD simulations. Next, the simulations were extended to include five different
298 cations [P4,4,4,4], [P4,4,4,8], [P4,4,4,14], [P6,6,6,14], and [P8,8,8,14] in combination with
299 three anions. It was found that longer alkyl chains in the cations led to lower contact
300 angle. This was explained by the effect of more C atoms that both increased adhesion with
301 the substrate and separated the P atom in the cation from the anion, thereby decreasing
302 cohesion. For anions, the contact angle increased as [Benz] < [Sali] < [Sacc] when paired
303 with the same cation. Like the cations, the anion contact angle trend was consistent with
304 cohesion energy, and explained by the number and type of atoms in the anions that had
305 attractive interactions with P atom in the cations. The adhesion energy was also consistent
306 with the anion contact angle trend, but this case was explained by the orientation of the
307 anions with respect to the surface. Specifically, perpendicular anion alignment allowed the
308 cations more access to the surface, thereby increasing adhesion. The alignment trends were
309 associated with asymmetry of the anion structures, where greater symmetry led to more
310 perpendicular alignment, higher cation-Fe adhesion, and lower contact angle.

311 Overall, the results reported here demonstrate that both the cation and anion affect
312 contact angle through their direct and indirect influence on adhesion and cohesion. Although
313 this study focused on the ions, the simulation-based methods developed may be extended
314 in future work to explore the effects of surface parameters and operating conditions. Also,
315 simulation results for more combinations of cations and anions might be used to develop
316 analytical relationships between IL properties and contact angle. Together with matched
317 experiments, such simulations can provide fundamental understanding of the mechanisms
318 underlying the wettability of ILs.

319 Ionic Liquid Abbreviations

320 The following are abbreviations used for cations and anions within the body of the document.

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| BMIM | 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium |
| DMIM | 1,3-dimethylimidazolium tetra-fluoroborate |
| EMIM | 1-ethyl-3-methylimidazolium |
| PrMIM | 1-propyl-3-methylimidazolium |
| P4,4,4,4 | tetrabutylphosphonium |
| P4,4,4,8 | tributyl-octylphosphonium |
| P4,4,4,14 | tributyl-tetradecylphosphonium |
| P6,6,6,14 | tri-hexyl-tetradecylphosphonium |
| P8,8,8,14 | tri-octyl-tetradecylphosphonium |
| (iC8) ₂ PO ₂ | bis(2,4,4-trimethylpentyl) phosphinate |
| BEHP | bis(2-ethylhexyl)phosphate |
| Benz | benzoate |
| BF ₄ | tetrafluoroborate |
| Br | bromide |
| Cl | chloride |
| Cpy | 2-cyanopyrrolide |
| DCA | dicyanamide |
| DEP | diethylphosphate |
| PF ₆ | hexafluorophosphate |
| PTFE | poly(tetrafluoroethylene) |
| p-TsO | p-toluene-sulfonate |
| Sacc | saccharinate |
| Sali | salicylate |
| Tf ₂ N | bis(trifluoromethylsulfonyl)amide |

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324 **Supporting Information Available**

325 The following file is available free of charge:

326 Supporting Information provides additional analysis from MD simulations. Contents
327 include a schematic and detailed explanation of the contact angle calculation, Fe-cation
328 adhesion interaction energy by atom type, C_{cation} -anion and P_{cation} -anion cohesion interaction
329 energy, Fe-anion adhesion interaction energy by atom type, illustration and description of
330 the orientation order parameter calculation, Fe-anion vertical distance distribution, anion
331 orientation order parameter distribution, and P_{cation} -anion cohesion interaction energy by
332 atom type.

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556 TOC Graphic

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