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DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

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Abderrahim Hadj Larbi^{*1}, Moufdi Hadjab², Abderrazak Hamam¹, Ala Boulegane¹, Fayçal Bouzid¹, Radhia Yekhle¹

¹Research Center in Industrial Technologies CRTI, P.O. Box 64, Cheraga 16014, Algiers, Algeria

²Department of Electronics, Faculty of Technology, University of M'sila, Algeria

*Corresponding author: hadjlarbi@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study predicts the electronic, mechanical and anisotropic properties of AZnF₃ perovskite compounds, where A represents Li, K, and Rb. Ground state functions are computed using the full potential linearized augmented plane wave (FP-LAPW) method. A close agreement is observed when comparing the calculated ground state structural parameters with available results. The elastic constants induced by pressure reveal the mechanical stability of the studied materials, satisfying the Born stability criteria. Regarding Young's modulus, shear modulus, and Poisson's ratio, RbZnF₃ stands out as the compound exhibiting ductile behavior. LiZnF₃ displays the highest shear stiffness and possesses the greatest resistance to deformation when compared to the other fluoroperovskites investigated in this study. With increasing pressure, these fluoroperovskites become more and more ductile at higher pressure. The discussion delves into the elastic moduli's dependence on pressure, emphasizing the overall anisotropic nature of the studied compounds.

Keywords: Halide perovskites, first-principles study, DFT, elastic property, anisotropy

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, halide perovskites (ABX₃) have emerged as compelling materials for next-generation high-performance solar cells, photodetectors, and lasers, among other applications[1–9]. Halide perovskites have gained considerable attention, thanks to their different physical properties[10,11]. Some of these properties arise from the perovskite structure and the variety of elements they may include, featuring a monovalent organic or inorganic A¹⁺ cation, a divalent metal B²⁺ cation, and a halide X¹⁻ anion, such as F¹⁻, Cl¹⁻, Br¹⁻, or I¹⁻. The wide applications, and the limited available information on the properties of halide perovskites, specifically Zn-based fluoroperovskite motivate us to investigate these compounds here.

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

Idrissi et al investigated different optical properties of AgZnF₃, LiZnF₃ and NaZnF₃ [12]. Kumari et al studied physical features of RbXF₃ [13]. Theoretical work has been done by Erum et al on series of cubic perovskites RbMF₃ [14]. Shakeel et al investigated anisotropic and physical properties of XYF₃ [15]. Eventually, Mouna et al worked on the influence of pressure on physical properties of KBeF₃, RbBeF₃ compounds [16].

For AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, Rb) structures, several studies have focused on the electronic and optical properties. Nevertheless, there is insufficient literature on the impact of pressure on the mechanical properties and anisotropy insights of these compounds. Furthermore, the mechanical properties and pressure-induced behaviors are still unexplored. It is worth noting that in the case of LiZnF₃, both Li and Zn ions are of comparable size, yet the fluoroperovskite structure is possible and has been reported in the Inorganic Crystal Structure Database (ICDD) [17]. To address this knowledge gap, the objective of this research is to enhance our understanding of the electronic, mechanical, and anisotropic properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) under pressure. This study is based on theoretical analysis by employing the density functional theory (DFT) with generalized gradient approximation (GGA) embodied in Wien2k code [18]. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The proposed computational technique is described in Section 2, and findings regarding the structural, electronic, and mechanical properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) compounds are analyzed in Section 3. Section 4 reviews the major conclusions of this research.

2. Computational details

In this investigation, we conducted comprehensive calculations using the FP-LAPW method, a density functional theory (DFT) approach implemented in the Wien2k package [18–20]. Initially, we applied the generalized gradient approximation (GGA) to optimize crystal structures and determine electronic bands [21]. The separation of valence and core states employed a plane wave cut-off energy of -6 Ryd, with a matrix size defined as $R_{mt} \times K_{max} = 9$, where K_{max} signifies the plane wave cut-off and R_{mt} is the minimum atomic sphere radius. Distinct atomic sphere radii were assigned for Li, K, Rb, Zn, and F, namely 2.5, 2.5, 2.5, 1.8, and 1.7 atomic units, respectively. The maximum number of partial waves within the muffin-tin spheres was expanded up to $l_{max} = 10$. The Monkhorst-Pack method facilitated k-integration over the Brillouin zone using a $10 \times 10 \times 10$ k mesh in the irreducible wedge [22]. Convergence in the self-consistent calculation was determined when the total energy difference fell below 0.0001 Ryd. Electronic configurations for chemical atoms were specified as follows: Li ($1s^2 2s^1$), K ($3s^2 3p^6 4s^1$), Rb ($4s^2 4p^6 5s^1$), Zn ($1s^2 2s^2 2p^6 3s^2 3p^6 3d^{10} 4s^2$), and F ($1s^2 2s^2 2p^5$).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Structural stability and energy gap

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

The Fluoroperovskites have a cubic structure with the highest symmetry space group of Pm-3m at room temperature[23]. In the case of AZnF₃ (where A = Li, K, or Rb) as shown in Fig.1, the cations (Li, K, or Rb) occupy the (0, 0, 0) position in a cuboctahedral site. Zinc is located at the center of the cube at (0.5, 0.5, 0.5) in an octahedral site, while the fluoride anions are positioned at the centers of the cube's faces with coordinates (0.0, 0.5, 0.5), (0.5, 0.0, 0.5), and (0.5, 0.5, 0.0).

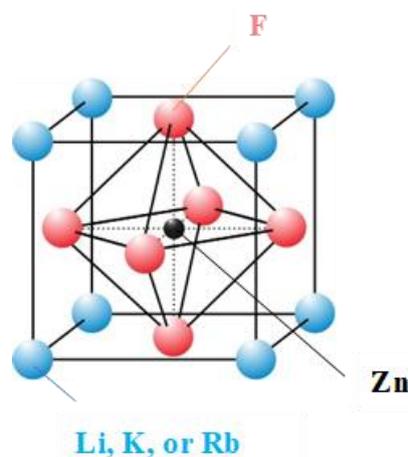


Fig. 1. Crystal structure of the cubic perovskite AZnF₃ (A=Li, K, or Rb)

Table 1. Calculated lattice parameter a (Å), and Bulk modulus B (GPa) of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K and Rb), using GGA–PBESol, compared to some experimental and other theoretical works.

	a_0	K	Ref.
LiZnF ₃	3.97	82.94	This work
	-	-	Experimental
	3.96 [12]	-	Other work
KZnF ₃	4.06	79.19	This work
	4.05 [24]	77.6 [25]	Experimental
	4.06 [26]	77.21 [26]	Other work
RbZnF ₃	4.11	79.33	This work

4.12 [27]	-	Experimental
4.11 [15]	79.34 [15]	Other work

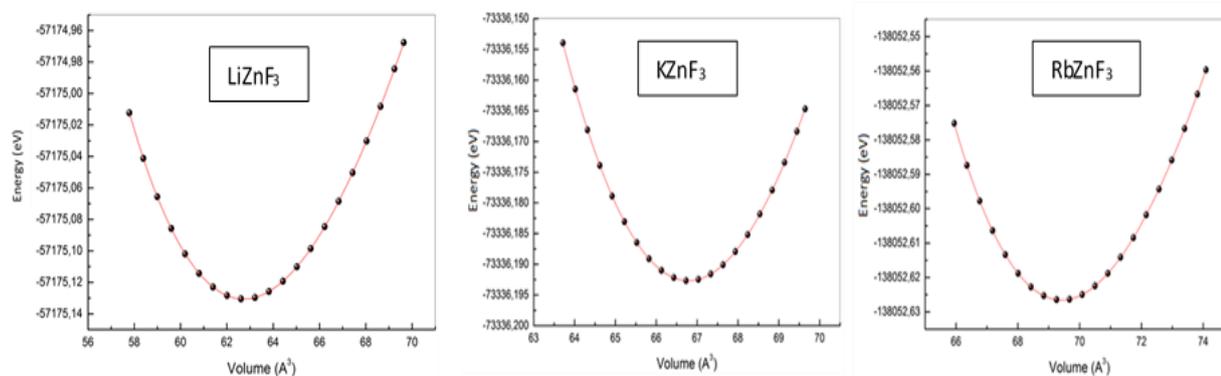


Fig. 2. Total energy of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K and Rb) as a function of volume (Å³), using GGA–PBESol

Analyzing the structural properties is crucial for predicting various physical properties through ab initio methods. Many previous studies have extensively tested and established the well-known efficacy of the PBESol functional in predicting the structural properties of solid materials [28,29]. This is accomplished by systematically varying the unit cell volume in the studied compounds and aligning it with the well-established Murnaghan equation[30]. The goal is to determine the optimal values of the lattice parameter 'a' (in Å). Therefore, this approach enables us to determine various structural parameters, such as the lattice parameter, bulk modulus, which are presented in table 1 and compared to both experimental and other theoretical findings. Our results align well with both existing theoretical and experimental values. Fig. 2 illustrates the variation of the unit cell volume as a function of energy for the examined compounds (LiZnF₃, KZnF₃, and RbZnF₃). The continuous line represents the Murnaghan fit applied to our calculated data points.

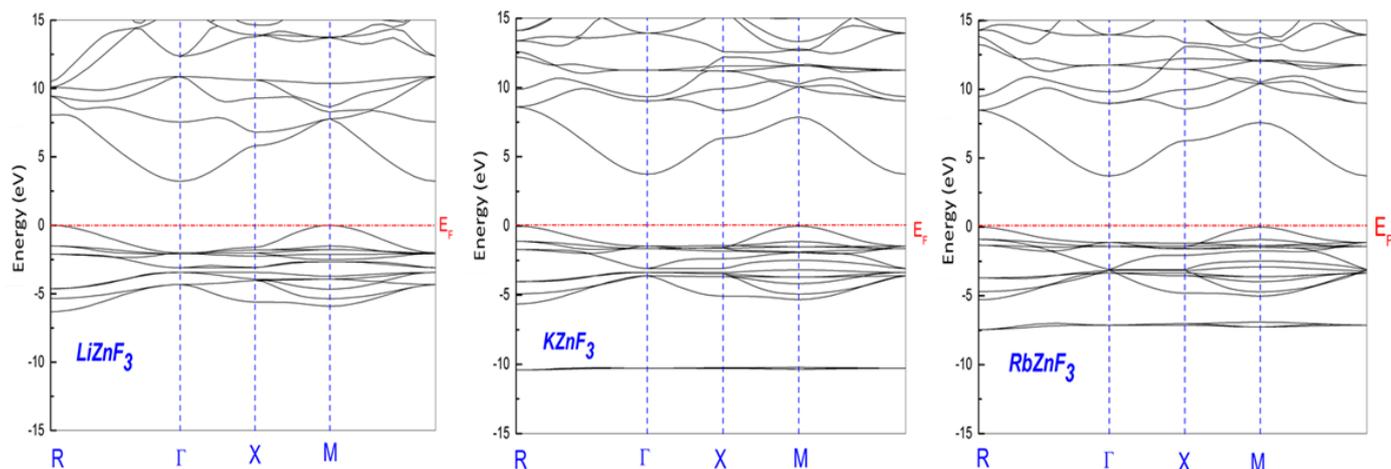
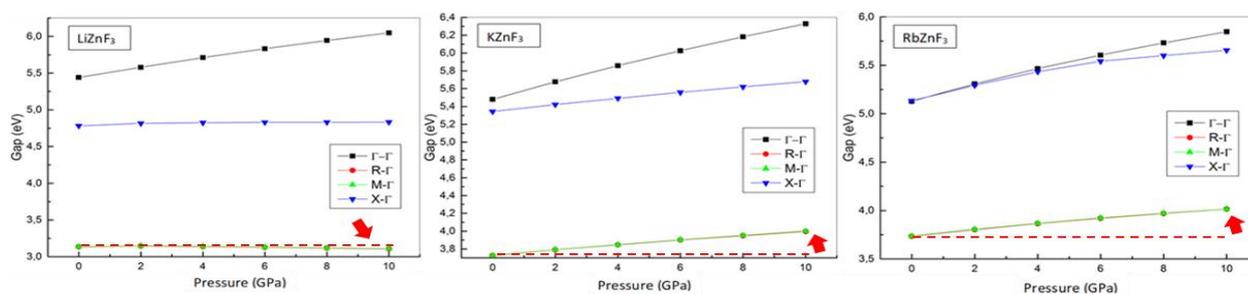


Fig. 3. Band structures of AZnF₃ (A= Li, K, and Rb) at 0 GPa, using the GGA-PBE approximation

To describe the trend of the energy gap as a function of hydrostatic pressure, we calculated the gap energy of AZnF₃ (A= Li, K, and Rb) at different pressures ranging from 0 to 10 gigapascals (GPa). At 0 GPa, we plotted the band structure of the three compounds in Fig. 3. The figure illustrates that all these unpressed compounds exhibit an indirect band gap between the valence band maximum at the R symmetry point and the conduction band minimum at the Γ symmetry. The calculated band gaps at zero pressure, using the GGA approximation, are 3.23 eV for LiZnF₃, 3.73 eV for KZnF₃, and 3.70 eV for RbZnF₃. The changes in the band gap values of these compounds are calculated under hydrostatic pressure and plotted in Fig. 4. For LiZnF₃ the band gap slightly decreases through the pressure variation, but for KZnF₃ and RbZnF₃, the band



gap increases as the pressure increases in the range 0–10 GPa.

Fig. 4. Variation of band gap (R- Γ) and energy difference of high symmetry points (Γ - Γ , X- Γ , M- Γ) in the function of the pressure up to 10 GPa for AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) compounds.

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

We can explain the decrease of gap energy of LiZnF₃, by the impact of pressure on the volume. This impact is inevitably a direct result of volume contraction which rise the overlap between the neighboring orbitals which is responsible for the increase in the electronic band dispersion. These bands comprise of antibonding, bonding and nonbonding orbitals. By applying pressure, the overlap between these orbitals increases, the antibonding nature of the bands pushing it up while the bonding nature dropping it down and thus the bands dispersed. In this way, it is very clear that when the conduction and valence bands spread the band gap energy decreases.

The increase in the band gap for KZnF₃ and RbZnF₃ can be interpreted on the basis of the nature of bonding (covalent and ionic) in these compounds. The main contribution in the band gap opening to the pressure dependence arises from the covalent energy [31]. With pressure, the covalent nature increase in these compounds which cause greater covalent energy and result in the band gap opening [15]. This effect is predominantly due to nonbonding and antibonding nature of bands closer to the Fermi level, which are specifically responsive to pressure.

3.2. Elastic constants and mechanical properties

The usual starting point of elastic theory is the Hooke's law, which states that stress is proportional to strain for small deformations. An elastic crystal spontaneously returns to its original shape when external stresses are removed. Therefore, the deformation always remains in the vicinity of a natural state of the system, which is an equilibrium state where all stresses cancel out.

The following relation defines Hooke's law.

$$\sigma_{ij} = \sum_{kl} C_{ijkl} \varepsilon_{kl}. \quad (1)$$

Where σ_{ij} is the stress tensor, ε_{kl} is the strain tensor, and C_{ijkl} are the elastic constants.

The basic understanding of how stress-free crystalline structures remain mechanically stable has been established since the research conducted by Born [32]. Subsequent studies have outlined the general requirements for elastic stability in crystal lattices and have provided simplified conditions for specific types of highly symmetrical crystals. Specifically, for cubic crystals, the stability conditions can be expressed in a straightforward manner [33]:

$$C_{11} - C_{12} > 0, \quad C_{11} + 2C_{12} > 0, \quad C_{44} > 0. \quad (2)$$

These conditions are necessary and sufficient to determine the mechanical stability of these stress-free materials. However, when subjected to isotropic compression, cubic crystals exhibit three other distinct stability conditions [34–36]:

$$M_1 = (C_{11} + 2C_{12} + P)/3 > 0,$$

$$M_2 = C_{44} - P > 0, \quad (3)$$

$$M_2 = (C_{11} + C_{12})/2 - P > 0.$$

From the elastic constant data, the bulk modulus K and shear modulus G can generally be calculated using the Voigt approximation[37]and the Reuss approximation methods [38].

For a cubic crystal, the Voigt bulk modulus (K_V), and Reuss bulk modulus (K_R) are given by following relationships[39,40]:

$$K_V = K_R = \frac{1}{3}(C_{11} + 2C_{12}). \quad (4)$$

And Voigt shear modulus (G_V) and Reuss shear modulus (G_R) are defined as[39]:

$$G_V = \frac{1}{5}(C_{11} - C_{12} + 3C_{44}), \quad (5)$$

$$G_R = \frac{5 C_{44}(C_{11} - C_{12})}{4C_{44} + 3(C_{11} - C_{12})}. \quad (6)$$

Hill proposed that the bulk modulus (K) and shear modulus (G) be the arithmetic averages of the Voigt and Reuss bulk and shear moduli[39]:

$$K = \frac{1}{2}(K_V + K_R), \quad G = \frac{1}{2}(G_V + G_R). \quad (7)$$

Furthermore, the Young's modulus E and Poisson's ratio ν can be given by[39]:

$$E = \frac{9KG}{3K + G}, \quad (8)$$

$$\nu = \frac{3K - 2G}{6K + 2G}. \quad (9)$$

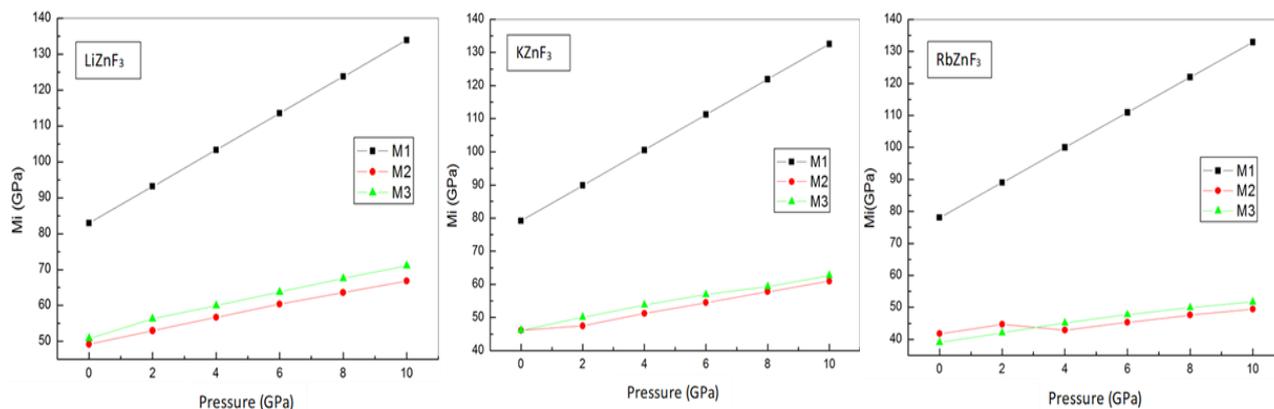


Fig. 5. Variation of generalized stability criteria M_i in function of pressure for $AZnF_3$ ($A=Li, K, \text{ and } Rb$) materials

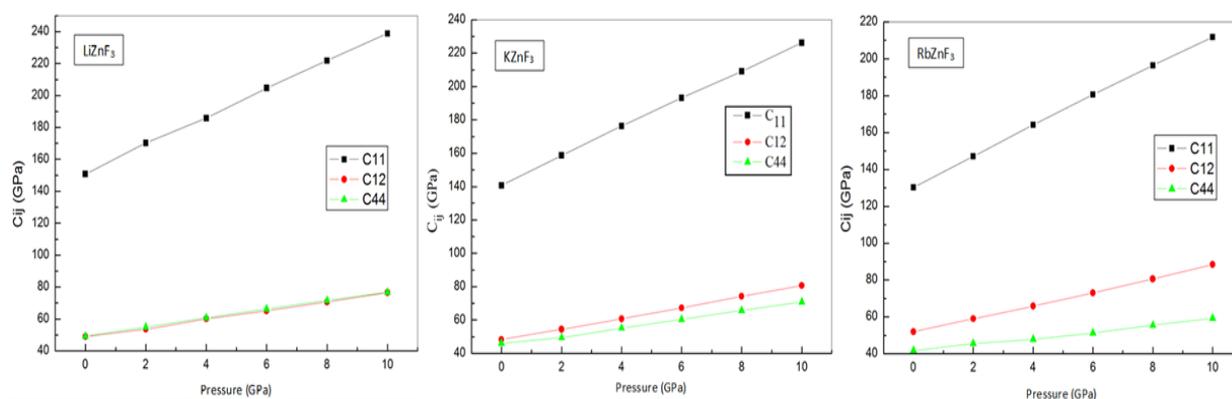


Fig. 6. Variation of elastic constants C_{ij} in function of pressure for $AZnF_3$ ($A=Li, K, \text{ and } Rb$) materials

By applying hydrostatic pressure (P) in the range of 0 GPa to 10 GPa, we obtained the M_i and C_{ij} values as illustrated in Fig. 5 and Fig.6. The stability criteria as demonstrated in Fig.5, reveal that all values of M_i are positive for the three materials. Fig.6 depicts the pressure-dependent behavior of elastic constants, showcasing a significant increase in C_{ij} with rising pressure. Notably, the elastic constants C_{ij} exhibit a linear increase with the rise in pressure, thereby supporting the generalized stability criteria of the $AZnF_3$ ($A = Li, K, \text{ and } Rb$) materials. Furthermore, Aguado et al experimentally confirmed the stability of $KZnF_3$ perovskite structure in the explored range [41]. Consequently, this information provides valuable insights into the anticipated physical properties of these compounds within the specified pressure range.

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

Notably, the generalized gradient approximation (GGA) consistently overestimates C_{11} , C_{12} , and C_{44} [42]. The elastic constants depend sensitively on the volume, and therefore, an error depending on the error in volume is introduced in the calculated elastic constants compared to experimental volume. It is imperative to exercise caution, recognizing that the calculated values are specific to 0 K, whereas experimental investigations are conducted at room temperature. Generally, an elevation in temperature tends to diminish elastic constants due to thermal expansion [23].

Table 2. Calculated single-crystal elastic constants (C_{ij} in GPa) and polycrystalline elastic moduli (K, G, E in GPa) along with Pugh's ratio (K/G), Poisson's ratio (ν), Anisotropy (A) for AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, Rb) materials at 0 GPa and 10 GPa.

		C_{11}	C_{12}	C_{44}	K	G	E	K/G	ν	A	Ref.
LiZnF ₃	0 GPa	150.67	49.07	49.17	82.94	49.82	124.53	1.66	0.249	0.97	This work
	10 GPa	239.21	77.15	77.12	131.17	78.65	196.65	1.67	0.250	0.95	This work
	0 GPa	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Experimental
KZnF ₃	0 GPa	140.44	48.54	45.88	79.17	45.91	115.42	1.72	0.257	0.998	This work
	10 GPa	226.12	80.85	69.97	129.27	71.02	180.09	1.82	0.267	0.963	This work
	0 GPa	134.4	53.2	38.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	[23] ^{Experiment}
	0 GPa	137.93	46.86	42.77	-	43.88	110.66	1.76	0.261	0.939	[26] ^{GGA}
RbZnF ₃	0 GPa	130.24	51.96	41.81	78.05	40.72	104.06	1.92	0.277	1.068	This work
	10 GPa	211.53	89.49	50.98	130.17	54.78	144.13	2.37	0.315	0.835	This work

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of AZnF₃ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Experimental
GPa											
0	113.81	47.16	35.76	69.37	34.79	89.36	1.99	0.285	1.07	[43] ^{GGA}	
GPa											

The elastic constants C_{11} , C_{12} , and C_{44} play distinct roles in characterizing material properties, where C_{11} signifies the elasticity in length, while C_{12} and C_{44} quantify elasticity in shape while maintaining a constant volume. In Fig. 6, it is evident that both C_{12} and C_{44} exhibit lower sensitivity to pressure compared to C_{11} . It is noteworthy that C_{11} consistently surpasses C_{44} for all compounds, suggesting that these materials generally offer less resistance to shear stress compared to their resistance against unidirectional compression. In addition, LiZnF₃ stands out with the highest value of C_{11} among all systems, indicating its exceptional incompressibility under uniaxial stress along the a-axis. For more details, Table 2 presents an overview of the specific elastic constants and elastic moduli of polycrystalline materials, along with their corresponding mechanical parameters, for AZnF₃ (A= Li, K, and Rb) under a pressure of 0 GPa and 10 GPa.

Examination of these data reveals that LiZnF₃ exhibits the highest bulk modulus (K), followed by KZnF₃, and RbZnF₃. In general, the capacity of a substance to withstand volumetric deformation when subjected to hydrostatic compression can be effectively assessed using the bulk modulus (K). These findings suggest that LiZnF₃ possesses the least compressibility among the examined compounds. Similarly, the observed trends in the shear modulus (G) and Young's modulus (E) show that LiZnF₃ demonstrating the highest values, followed by KZnF₃ and RbZnF₃. Shear modulus (G) serves as a measure of its resistance to deformation under shear stress, and Young's modulus (E) denotes the degree of rigidity (resistance to axial loading). This indicates that LiZnF₃ displays the highest shear stiffness and possesses the greatest resistance to deformation when compared to the other fluoroperovskites investigated in this study.

In light of these findings, and at 0 GPa, we found that the K/G ratio for RbZnF₃ exceeds Pugh's critical threshold of 1.75, which is a widely utilized empirical relationship for predicting the brittle/ductile behavior of solids [44]. When the K/G ratio surpasses 1.75, a material exhibits ductile behavior, while values below this threshold indicate brittle behavior. Consequently, based on our calculation, we can categorize RbZnF₃ as a ductile material. Conversely, the K/G ratio for LiZnF₃ falls below 1.75, while the KZnF₃ ratio slightly dips below 1.75, indicating that this compound can be characterized as a brittle material. Brittle materials lack the ability to withstand significant thermal shocks due to their limited capacity to dissipate thermal stress through plastic deformation, resulting in a rapid decline in their mechanical properties at elevated temperatures.

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of $AZnF_3$ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

With increasing pressure, this ratio increases, as seen in table 2, which exhibits that these fluoroperovskites become more and more ductile at higher pressure.

Poisson's ratio (ν) is another quantity, that defines the ratio between transverse strain and longitudinal strain in the elastic loading direction therefore provides insight into the way the structural elements are packed, the nature of bonding in solids, and the directions of bonding forces [45,46]. Frantsevich et al. proposed that materials exhibit ductile behavior when the Poisson's ratio exceeds 0.26, otherwise, they are deemed brittle [47]. The computed Poisson's ratio values for $RbZnF_3$, as presented in Table 2, surpass 0.26, unequivocally indicating the ductile nature of the studied materials. The table further demonstrates an increase in Poisson's ratio with pressure, consequently, pressure increasing ductility for $AZnF_3$ (A=Li, K, and Rb) perovskites at high pressure. Additionally, Covalent crystals typically have a Poisson's ratio of ~ 0.10 , while that for ionic crystals is approximately ~ 0.25 [48]. Therefore, based on the ν values (cf. Table 2), the current fluoroperovskites are anticipated to fall into the category of ionic materials. Furthermore, bonding forces between atoms are considered central when ν falls within the range of 0.25–0.50 [49]. The results of this study indicate that, for $AZnF_3$ (A = Li, K, Rb) materials, inter-atomic forces are predominantly central.

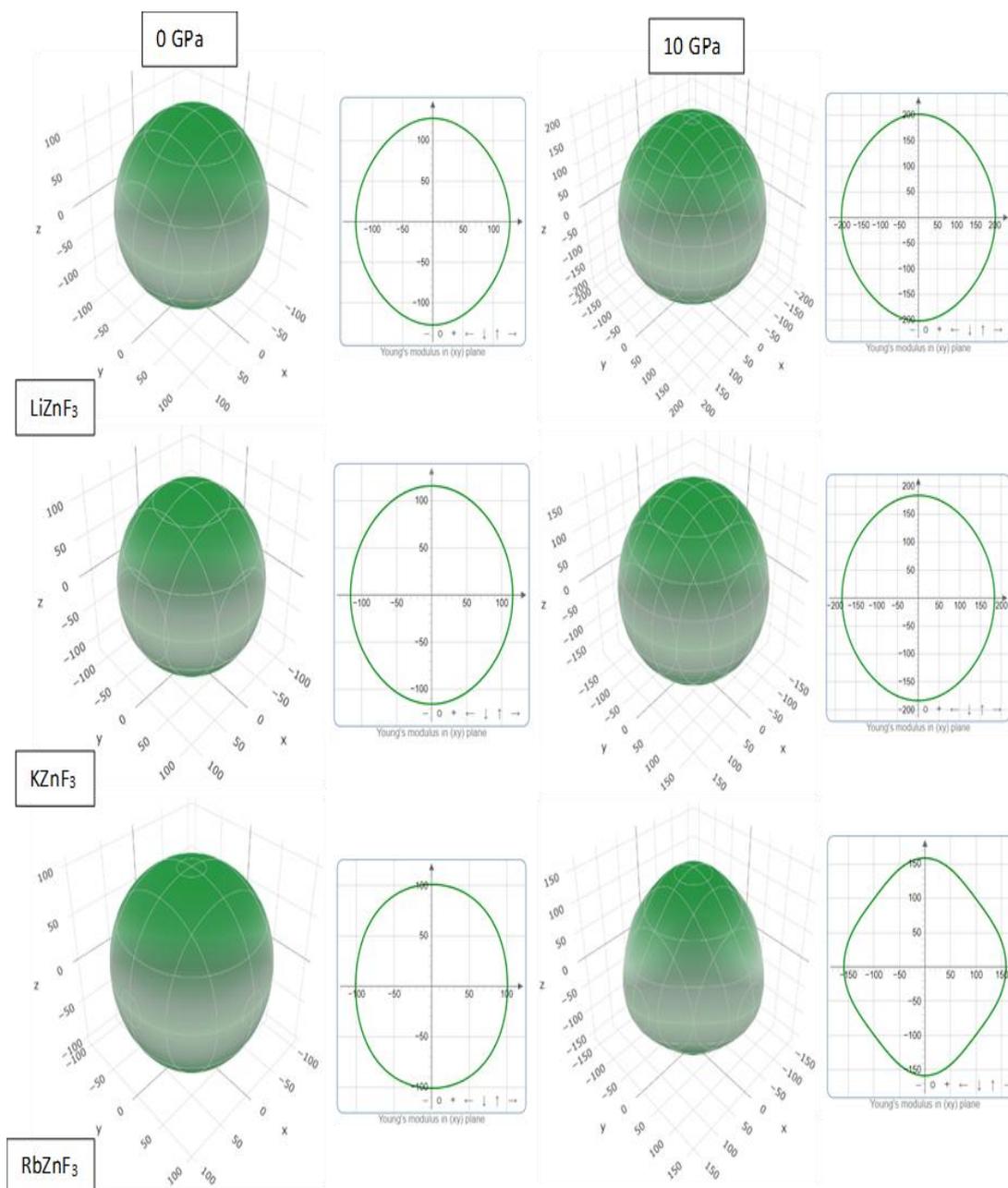


Fig. 7. 2D and 3D Visualization of spatial dependence of Young's modulus (E) of AZnF₃ (A=Li, K, and Rb) materials

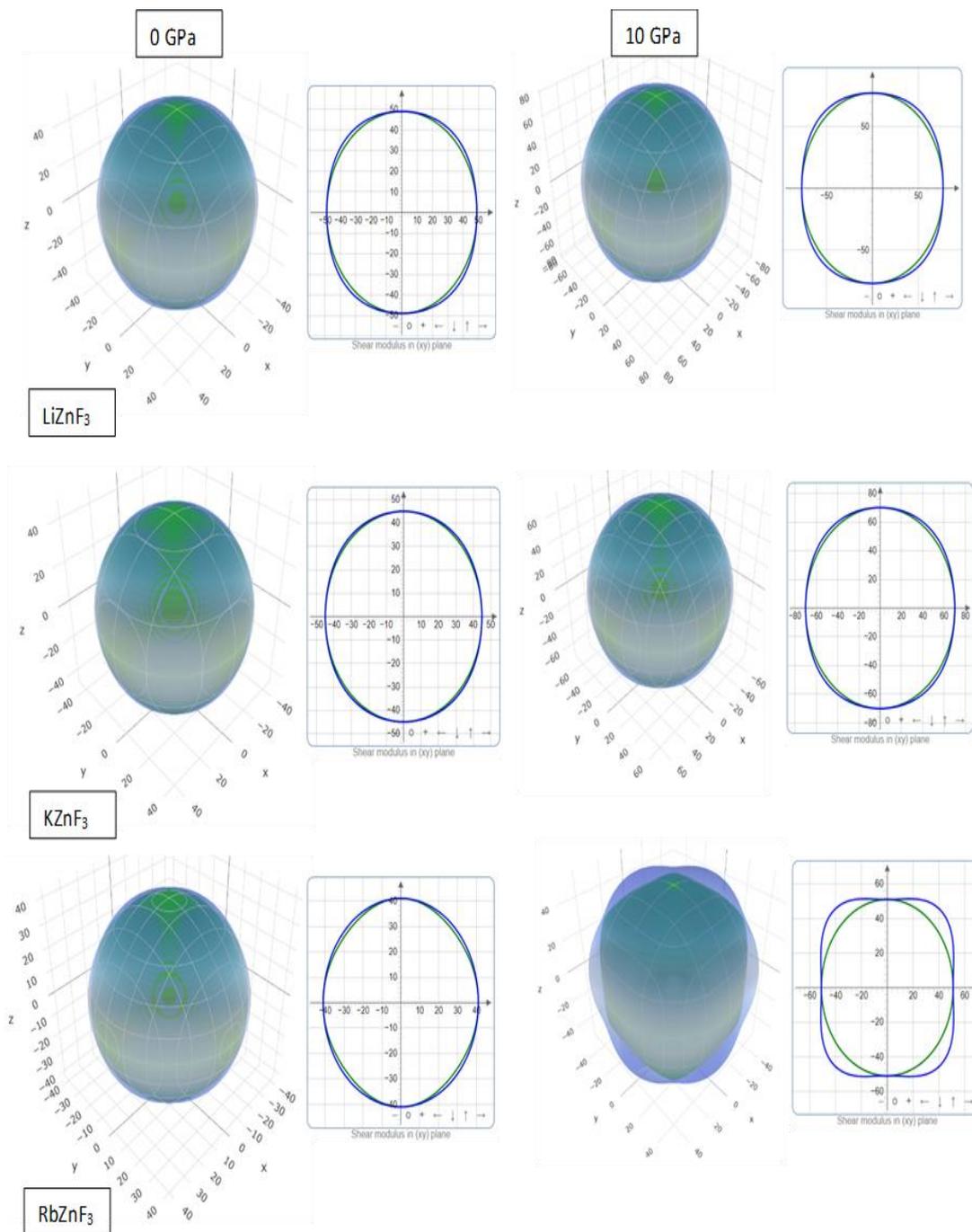


Fig. 8. 2D and 3D Visualization of spatial dependence of Shear modulus (G) of AZnF₃ (A=Li, K, and Rb) materials

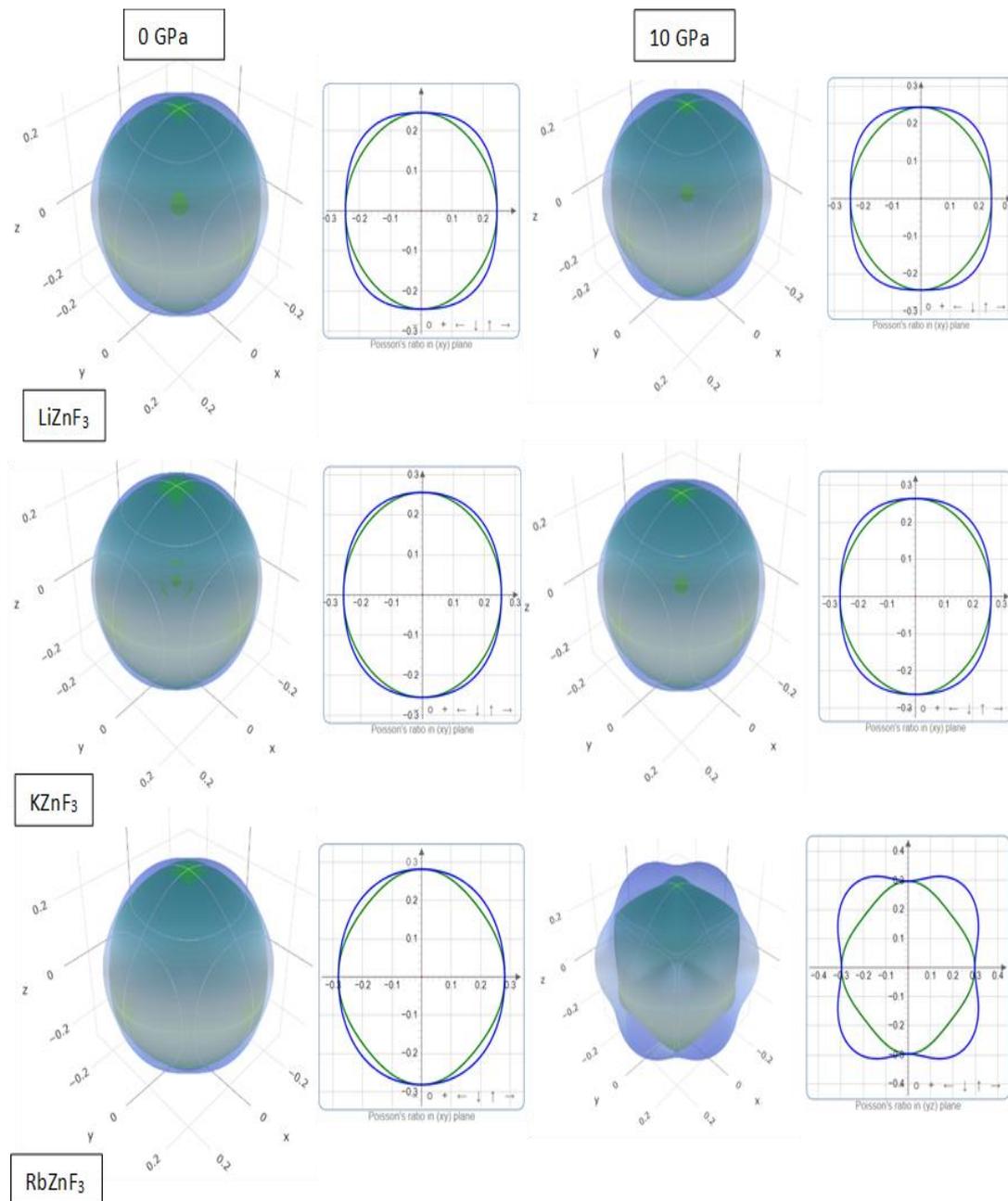


Fig. 9. 2D and 3D Visualization of spatial dependence of Poisson's ratio (ν) of AZnF₃ (A=Li, K, and Rb) materials

In the end, solids possess various practical applications due to their knowledge of anisotropic behavior. Anisotropic behavior is applied to evaluate a lot of physical processes, including plastic behavior, phase transition, and the formation of micro-fractures within the materials. Mechanical anisotropy can be assessed using anisotropy indices and 3D graphical representations of elastic moduli. To investigate the elastic anisotropy of crystals based on their moduli, we utilized the ELATE program to generate three-dimensional (3D) contour graphs, and their projections along (xy) planes[50]. Fig. 7-9 depict elastic moduli such as Young's modulus (E), shear modulus (G),

DFT insights into Mechanical and Anisotropic Properties of $AZnF_3$ (A = Li, K, and Rb) Systems under Pressure

and Poisson's ratio (ν) for fluoroperovskites $AZnF_3$ (A = Li, Zn, and Rb) at pressures of 0 GPa, and 10 GPa. The data for these plots were obtained from calculated C_{ij} . The degree of anisotropy in solids can be discerned through these (3D) plots, where perfect isotropy is represented by a spherical shape, and any deviation from this sphere indicates the extent of anisotropy; where the maximum and minimum values are indicated through blue and green color.

The anisotropy in Young's modulus, shown in Fig.7, does not exhibit clearly in $LiZnF_3$, $KZnF_3$, and $RbZnF_3$. However, the pressure increases the level of anisotropy for $RbZnF_3$, unlike the other materials of $LiZnF_3$ and $KZnF_3$. At 10 GPa and for $RbZnF_3$, the maximum value of Young's modulus appears along the $\langle 100 \rangle$ direction and the minimum value occurs along the $\langle 110 \rangle$ direction. The shear modulus exhibits a maximum value along the $\langle 110 \rangle$ direction and a minimum value along the $\langle 100 \rangle$ directions for the three compounds, but appear more clearly for $RbZnF_3$. The maximum value of Poisson's ratio appears along the $\langle 110 \rangle$ and the minimum value appears along the $\langle 100 \rangle$ direction. Through the whole elastic anisotropy feature analysis of $AZnF_3$ (where A = Li, K, and Rb) we have obtained that Poisson's ratio exhibits highest anisotropic manner compared to other elastic parameters. Comparative the 3D plots and the anisotropy values in Table 2 reveals that the sequence of anisotropy is $RbZnF_3 > LiZnF_3 > KZnF_3$.

4. Conclusion

In this work, we have studied the pressure effects on band gaps, and mechanical properties of $AZnF_3$ (A = Li, K, and Rb), applying the FP-LAPW method in the framework of DFT. Our results agree well with the experimental data, and other theoretical calculations. The structural stability, mechanical, and anisotropic properties of $AZnF_3$ (Ae = Ca, Sr, Ba) halide perovskite have been carried out successfully employing the first-principles method based on the DFT within GGA. A fair agreement has been found while comparing the calculated ground state parameters with available results, validated the herein method used. The pressure induced elastic stability was further assessed by Born stability criteria and found all materials as elastically stable under considered pressure up to 10GPa. Based on the calculated elastic moduli, various mechanical properties under pressure are evaluated; among them, Young's modulus, shear modulus, and Poisson's ratio predicted that $RbZnF_3$ compound behave as ductile, while $LiZnF_3$ exhibits the highest shear stiffness and possesses the greatest resistance to deformation when compared to the other compounds investigated in this study. All anisotropy factors regarding elastic moduli indicate that the studied fluoroperovskites are elastically anisotropic.

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