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ARTICLE

## Engineering the electronic and magnetic properties of $d^0$ 2D dichalcogenide materials through vacancy doping and lattice strains

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**Abstract:** We have systematically investigated the effects of different vacancy defects in 2D  $d^0$  materials SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> using first principles calculations. The theoretical results show that single cation vacancy and vacancy complex like V-SnS6 can induce large magnetic moments ( $3\mu_B - 4\mu_B$ ) in these single layer materials. Other defects, such as V-SnS3, V-S, V-ZrS3 and V-ZrS6, can result in n-type conductivity. In addition, the *ab initio* studies also reveal that the magnetic and conductive properties from the cation vacancy and defect complex V-SnS6 can be modified using the compressive/tensile strain of the in-plane lattices. Specifically, the V-Zr doped ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayer, can be tuned from a ferromagnetic semiconductor to a metallic/half-metallic material with decreasing/increasing magnetic moments depending on the external compressive/tensile strains. On the other hand, the semiconducting and magnetic properties of V-Sn doped SnS<sub>2</sub> is preserved under different lattice compression and tension. For the defect complex like V-SnS6, only the lattice compression can tune the magnetic moments in SnS<sub>2</sub>. As a result, by manipulating the fabrication parameters, the magnetic and conductive properties of SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> can be tuned without the need of chemical doping.

### 1. Introduction

Single-layer dichalcogenide materials have attracted widespread attention due to their unique electronic, magnetic and optical properties.<sup>1-8</sup> Recently, two new members of 2D dichalcogenide materials, SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub>, have been synthesized experimentally.<sup>9, 10</sup> These materials have demonstrated remarkable properties for the applications of field effect transistors, lithium ion batteries, and photodetector devices.<sup>11-13</sup>

Vacancy defect can have significant effect on the magnetic properties of two-dimensional (2D) materials.<sup>14-17</sup> For instance, transition-metal dichalcogenide material like MoS<sub>2</sub> grown using chemical vapor deposition (CVD) method<sup>18</sup> can exhibit a large magnetic moment of  $6\mu_B$ , which is attributed to the MoS6 vacancy complex<sup>19</sup>. Thus, investigating the effect of vacancy on the electronic and magnetic properties of the newly discovered SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayers is of great interest for future spintronic devices. Strain is another important technique that has been widely used to engineer the electronic and magnetic properties of 2D materials.<sup>20-23</sup> Even though the effect of lattice strain has been investigated

theoretically in the pristine SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub>,<sup>24, 25</sup> understanding the influence of strain on these 2D materials doped with vacancy is very limited.

In this paper, we systematically investigated the electronic and magnetic properties of vacancy-doped SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayers with the external lattice strain. Since both SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> have the  $d^0$  electronic configuration in the cation site, we aim to: (1) investigate if the vacancy doping can induce magnetic moments and alter the electronic properties, and (2) explore how these properties can be engineered through the strain. These results will provide an important guidance for further experimental studies of SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub>-based magnetic devices.

### 2. Computational details

The spin-polarized DFT calculations were performed using the VASP code<sup>26</sup>, with the projector augmented wave (PAW) potentials<sup>27</sup> and the Perdew-Burk-Ernzerhof (PBE) functional.<sup>28</sup> A vacuum region of 15 Å was used to avoid the interaction between the neighbouring slabs. The plane-wave basis set was expanded with a cutoff energy of 400 eV. To study the effect of vacancy doping, different types of defects were considered, such as anion S mono-vacancy (V-S), cation M (M=Sn/Zr) mono-vacancy (V-M), vacancy complex consisting of one M and its nearby three S atoms (V-MS3), and vacancy complex consisting of one M and its nearby six S atoms (V-MS6).

Different supercell sizes were employed to investigate the different vacancies' behaviours. A 4×4 supercell with a 6×6×1

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Monkhorst-Pack<sup>29</sup> k-point mesh was used to model single cation (V-M) and anion (V-S) vacancy. For the defect complexes like V-MS3 and V-MS6, 6×6 supercells with a 4×4×1 Monkhorst-Pack k-point mesh was used for the theoretical calculations. All the atom positions were relaxed until the Hellmann-Feynman forces were less than 0.01 eV/Å. The biaxial strain is defined as  $\epsilon\%=(c-c_0)/c_0$ , where  $c_0$  and  $c$  are the unstrained and strained lattice constants. The lattice parameters and bandgaps were calculated to be 3.69 Å and 3.63 Å, and 1.58 eV and 0.94 eV for pristine SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> respectively. These values are consistent with previous theoretical and experimental results.<sup>24,30</sup>

The formation energy of the vacancy doped system is given by

$$E_f = E_{V-i@MS_2} - E_{MS_2} + n \times \mu_M + m \times \mu_S \quad (1),$$

where  $E_{V-i@MS_2}$  is the total energy of the supercell containing vacancy defect,  $E_{MS_2}$  is the total energy of the pristine MS<sub>2</sub> (M=Sn/Zr) supercell,  $\mu_M$  and  $\mu_S$  are the total energy of the isolated M and S atoms, respectively, and  $n$  and  $m$  are the number of M and S atoms removed from the supercell, respectively.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Stability and structural properties of vacancy defects

To understand the stability of the vacancy doped SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayers, we have calculated their formation energies based on equation (1). According to Table 1, the high formation energies indicate that vacancy defects are not easy to form in both of the SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayers under equilibrium conditions. However, such defects can be induced in non-equilibrium processes such as e-beam lithography<sup>31</sup>,

Table 1 Formation energies and magnetic properties for vacancy doped SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayers.  $M_{Total}$ ,  $M_S$ , and  $M_{Sn(Zr)}$  refer to the total magnetic moment of the supercell, the magnetic moment from each first-neighboring S atom and that from each first-neighboring Sn or Zr atoms, respectively.

	$E_f$ /eV	$M_{Total}$ /μ <sub>B</sub>	$M_S$ /μ <sub>B</sub>	$M_{Sn(Zr)}$ /μ <sub>B</sub>
<b>SnS<sub>2</sub></b>				
V-S	5.05	0	0	0
V-Sn	9.12	4.00	0.60	0
V-SnS3	16.71	0	0	0
V-SnS6	28.34	4.00	0.40	0.20
<b>ZrS<sub>2</sub></b>				
V-S	5.76	0	0	0
V-Zr	15.53	3.05	0.45	0
V-ZrS3	24.65	0	0	0
V-ZrS6	41.14	0	0	0

which has been successfully applied to decorate vacancy defects in MoS<sub>2</sub> monolayer.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the relative low formation energies of V-S imply that single anion vacancies [Fig. 1(a)] are thermodynamically more stable in both monolayers compared to other vacancy defects [Fig. 1(b), (c), and (d)]. In addition, the formation of these defects can affect the structural geometry of the monolayers. As demonstrated in Fig. 1(d), the formation of the V-ZrS6 defect in the ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayer attracts the surrounding atoms towards the vacancy site, thus enhancing the binding between the Zr and S atoms adjacent to the defects. The reconstructed structure around the vacancy now contains shorter Zr-S bonds (2.47 Å) as compared to the pristine structure (2.57 Å). However, similar vacancy complex has minimal effect on the geometry of the SnS<sub>2</sub> host material. Meanwhile, except for V-M, the defects, such as V-S and V-MS3 [Figs. 1(a) and (c)], introduce varying degree of distortion around the vacancy site in both materials. Specifically, the creation of anion vacancy defect repels the surrounding Zr atoms dramatically, resulting in an elongated Zr-Zr distance of 4.11 Å compared to the pristine of 3.63 Å in ZrS<sub>2</sub> monolayer.

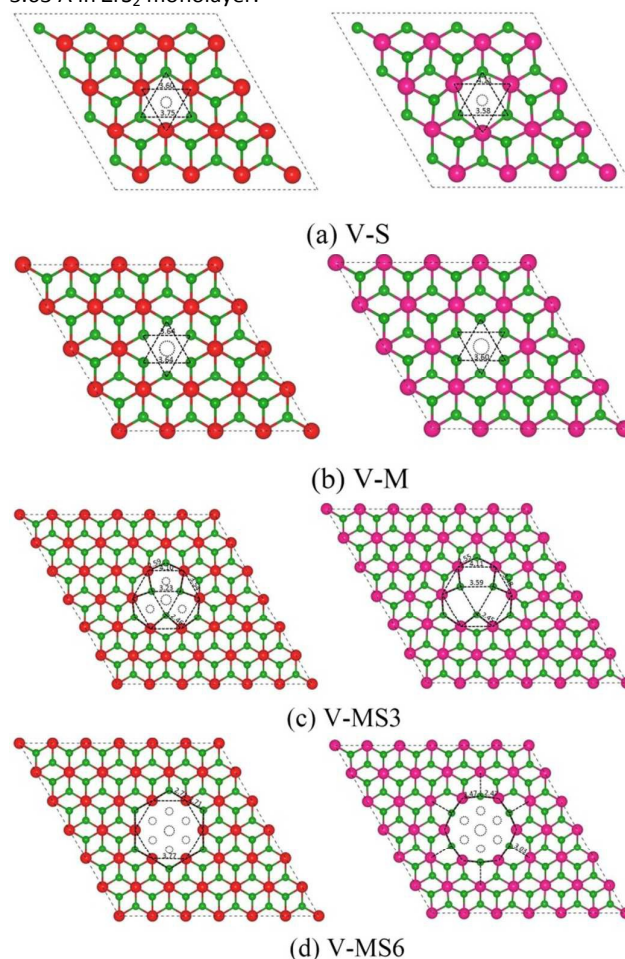


Fig. 1 Schematic view of the relaxed geometrical structure for the MS<sub>2</sub> (M=Sn/Zr) monolayers with (a) V-S, (b) V-M, (c) V-MS3, (d) V-MS6. Distances of the atoms near the vacancy sites are measured, which are all in angstroms. Sn, Zr, and S atoms are represented by red, pink and green balls, respectively. Dashed atoms are vacant sites.

For V-S doped  $\text{SnS}_2$ , the Sn atoms are slightly attracted towards the vacancy site, resulting in a shorter Sn-Sn distance of 3.60 Å compared to the 3.68 Å in the pristine structure. Such structural variations are attributed to the different responds of the Sn/Zr atoms to the electron redistribution. After one binding S atom is removed, the first neighbouring Zr atoms tend to find stronger bonding with the inner S atoms, leading to the decreased Zr-S bond length and the elongated Zr-Zr distance. Whereas for the Sn atoms in  $\text{SnS}_2$ , they tend to bind with each other by sharing the non-bonding electrons left in the vacancy site, resulting in the slightly decreased Sn-Sn distance.

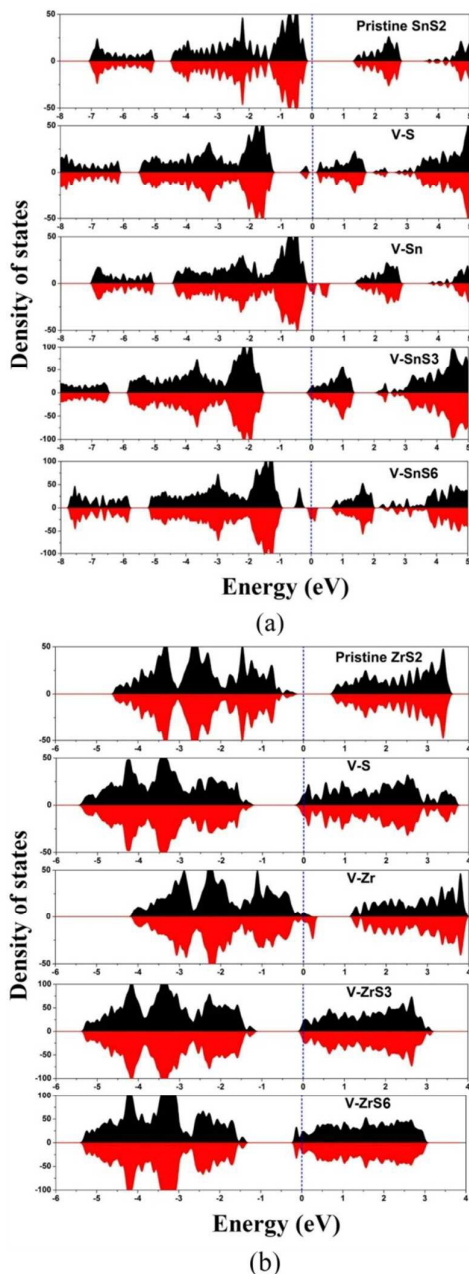


Fig. 2 The spin-resolved total density of states (DOS) for the defective (a)  $\text{SnS}_2$  and (b)  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayer. The spin up and down parts are shaded by

black and red colours, respectively. The Fermi levels are set to zero, which are indicated by blue dashed lines.

### 3.2 Electronic and magnetic properties of vacancy defects

As demonstrated in Fig. 2, the formation of non-magnetic defects like V-S in  $\text{ZrS}_2$  and V-MS3 in both materials shift the Fermi levels in the conduction band, indicating the effective n-type doping. In the case of V-S doped  $\text{SnS}_2$ , a defective state appears close to the bottom of the conduction band, resulting in a smaller band gap of about 0.35 eV. On the other hand, the cation vacancies induce large total magnetic moments of  $4\mu_B$  and  $3.05\mu_B$  in the  $\text{SnS}_2$  and  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayers, respectively. The semiconducting nature of the pristine structures is now transformed to magnetic half-metallicity and metallicity due to the delocalized S-atoms  $p$  states [Fig. 3(a) and (b)]. As shown in Figs. 3 and 4, such interesting electronic properties of the V-M doped  $\text{MS}_2$  can be attributed to the holes from the cation vacancy sites, which transfer to the nearest S atoms. Bader analysis indicates that the magnetisms are mainly distributed on the six S atoms nearest the vacancy, each of which has a magnetic moment of  $0.60\mu_B$  and  $0.45\mu_B$  in  $\text{SnS}_2$  and  $\text{ZrS}_2$ , respectively. The remaining magnetic moments of  $0.4\mu_B$  and  $0.35\mu_B$  are from the second neighbouring S atoms. In addition, due to the broad bandwidth of S-atoms  $p$  states, the magnetisms have an itinerant rather than localized character.

For the complex defects like V-MS6, the different defective monolayers exhibit contrasting magnetic and conductive properties. Specifically, V-SnS6 induces a net magnetic

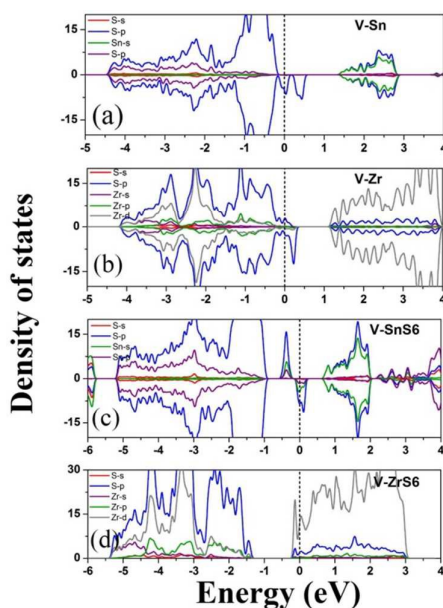


Fig. 3 Partial density of states for (a) V-Sn doped  $\text{SnS}_2$ , (b) V-Zr doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$ , (c) V-SnS6 doped  $\text{SnS}_2$ , and (d) V-ZrS6 doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayer. The Fermi levels are all set to zero, which are indicated by black dashed line.



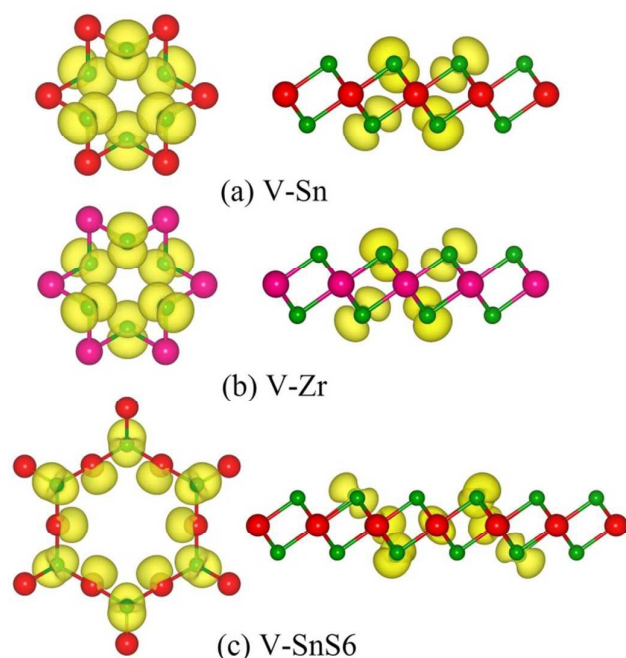


Fig. 4 Top (left) and side (right) views of the isosurface plot of the spin density for (a) V-Sn doped  $\text{SnS}_2$ , (b) V-Zr doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$ , and (c) V-SnS6 doped  $\text{SnS}_2$  monolayer. The yellow isosurface shows the positive spin density. The isosurface value is taken as  $0.003 \text{ eV}/\text{\AA}^3$ . The atoms colour coding is the same as in Fig. 1.

which are mainly distributed on the closest S and Sn atoms, as shown in Fig. 4(c). In contrast to the case of V-Sn, the spin-polarized defect states are now localized in the energy gap of the  $\text{SnS}_2$  monolayer [Fig. 2(a)], indicating the localized magnetic moment. However, the ground state of the V-ZrS6 decorated  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayer is nonmagnetic with n-type conductivity. The absence of magnetism in  $\text{ZrS}_2$  is due to the strong distortion around the defect site, which quenches the orbital moments of S and Zr. To demonstrate the effect of structural distortion, a spin polarized calculation with fixed atom positions is conducted for the V-ZrS6 doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$ . The results show the magnetic moments of  $0.77\mu_B$  and  $0.11\mu_B$  on each nearby Zr and S atoms, respectively. By further examining the partial density of states [Fig. 3(d)] and the charge density difference for the V-ZrS6 doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$  [Fig. S1 of supplementary material], it is found that the formation of such defect complex transfer  $0.16 e$  to the empty Zr d orbital, making  $\text{ZrS}_2$  n-type semiconductor.

### 3.3 Effects of strain on magnetic $\text{SnS}_2$ and $\text{ZrS}_2$ with vacancies

Since a single cation vacancy can induce large magnetic moments in both  $\text{SnS}_2$  and  $\text{ZrS}_2$ , it is interesting to know how the compressive and tensile strains can influence the electronic and magnetic properties. The calculation shows that the effect of tensile strain and compression can result in different properties in  $\text{SnS}_2$  and  $\text{ZrS}_2$  host monolayers with the cation vacancy. As shown in Fig. 5(a), the magnetism in  $\text{SnS}_2$  induced by V-Sn is robust against both compressive and tensile strains. It shows an average magnetic moment of  $4\mu_B$  under various lattice strains, demonstrating that the strain-

independent magnetic behaviour. In addition, the bandgaps of the defective  $\text{SnS}_2$  are preserved under different lattice compression [Fig. 5(b)], with no observation of the insulator-metal transition.

For the single cation vacancy in  $\text{ZrS}_2$ , the induced magnetic moments are observed to increase and decrease with respect to the applied tensile and compressive strain, respectively. With the application of tensile strain on the in-plane lattices, the electrons from the vacancy site become more delocalized. Subsequently, they are transferred to the S atoms adjacent to the defect site as revealed in the spin density calculations as shown in Fig. 6. Further examination of the partial density of states (PDOS) of the S-atoms  $p$  states [Fig. S2 of supplementary material] and the band structures [Fig. 7] shows that the increasing tensile strain creates an occupied spin-states while the spin-down states are partially occupied, thus results in a half metallic ground-state. Meanwhile, applying the compressive strain results in an insulator-to-metal transition, which occurs at  $-8\%$  of the compressive strain. Due to the shortened Zr-S bond lengths, moment of  $4\mu_B$  in the  $\text{SnS}_2$  host material, the delocalized S-atoms  $p$  states extend to Zr-atoms  $d$  orbital, thus resulting in a metallic character of the vacancy doped monolayer as demonstrated in Fig. 7.

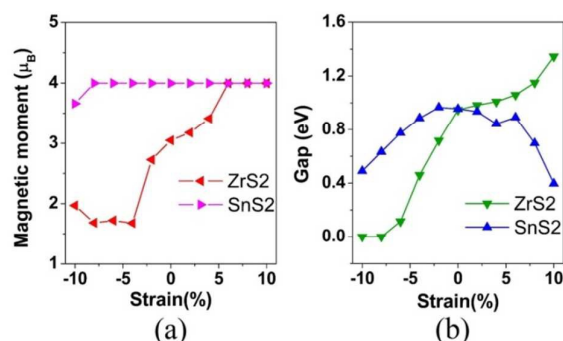


Fig. 5 Strain dependent (a) total magnetic moments and (b) band gaps for V-M doped  $\text{MS}_2$  monolayers.

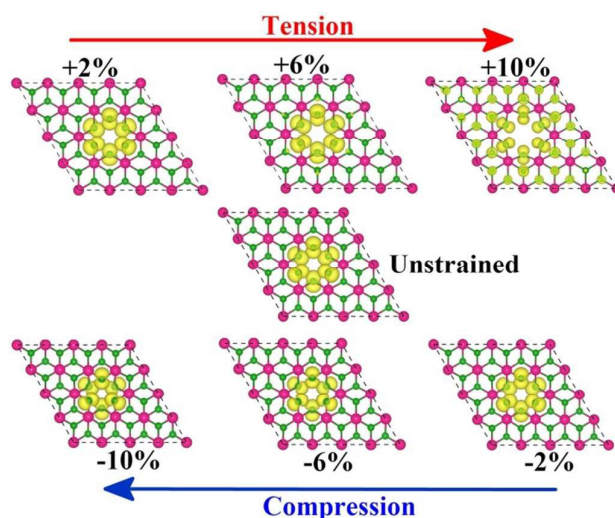


Fig. 6 Isosurfaces of the spin density for V-Zr doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayer at both compressive and tensile strains. The isosurface value is taken as 0.003

$\text{eV}/\text{\AA}^3$ . The yellow isosurface shows the positive spin density. The atoms colour coding is the same as in Fig. 1.

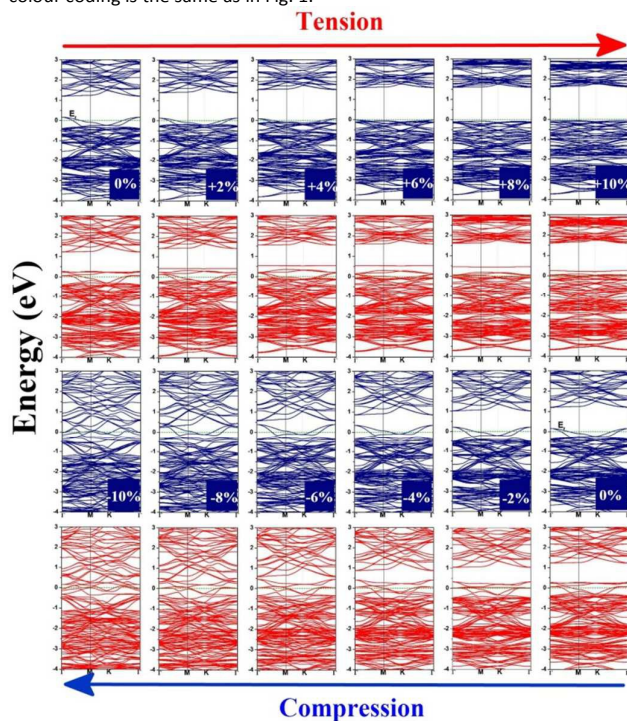


Fig. 7 Spin-polarized band structures of V-Zr doped  $\text{ZrS}_2$  monolayer under both compressive and tensile strains. The spin-up and down parts are represented by blue and red colours, respectively. The Fermi levels are all set to zero, which are indicated by green dashed line.

In addition, the charge contours of the electronic states at 0.1 eV below the Fermi level [Fig. S3 of supplementary material] reveal that the Zr-atoms  $d$  states are now occupied, which are accounted for the metallic character of compressive  $\text{ZrS}_2$ .

For the defect complex V-SnS6, the tensile strain is shown to have minimal effect on the defective monolayer as demonstrated in Fig. 8. The total magnetic moments are preserved to be  $4\mu_B$  with the localized character inside the bandgap. On the other hand, the electronic and magnetic properties are significantly modified under compressive strain. The total magnetic moments decrease to  $2\mu_B$  when the compressive strain reaches to -4%. The decreasing total magnetic moment can be understood through the charge transfer process between the defect site and the neighbouring Sn and S sites. The charge Bader analysis reveals that the decreased magnetism is mainly due to the decreasing moments in the nearest S and Sn sites. Due to the shortened bond length of Sn-S, more charges are transferred from the defect site to the S and Sn atoms surrounding the vacancy, thus resulting in the smaller and average magnetic moments of  $0.18\mu_B$  and  $0.10\mu_B$ , respectively. Although no semiconductor-to-metal transition occurs in our considered maximum compressive strain of -6%, the defect states are observed to move closer to the host valance band maximum along with the increasing compression.

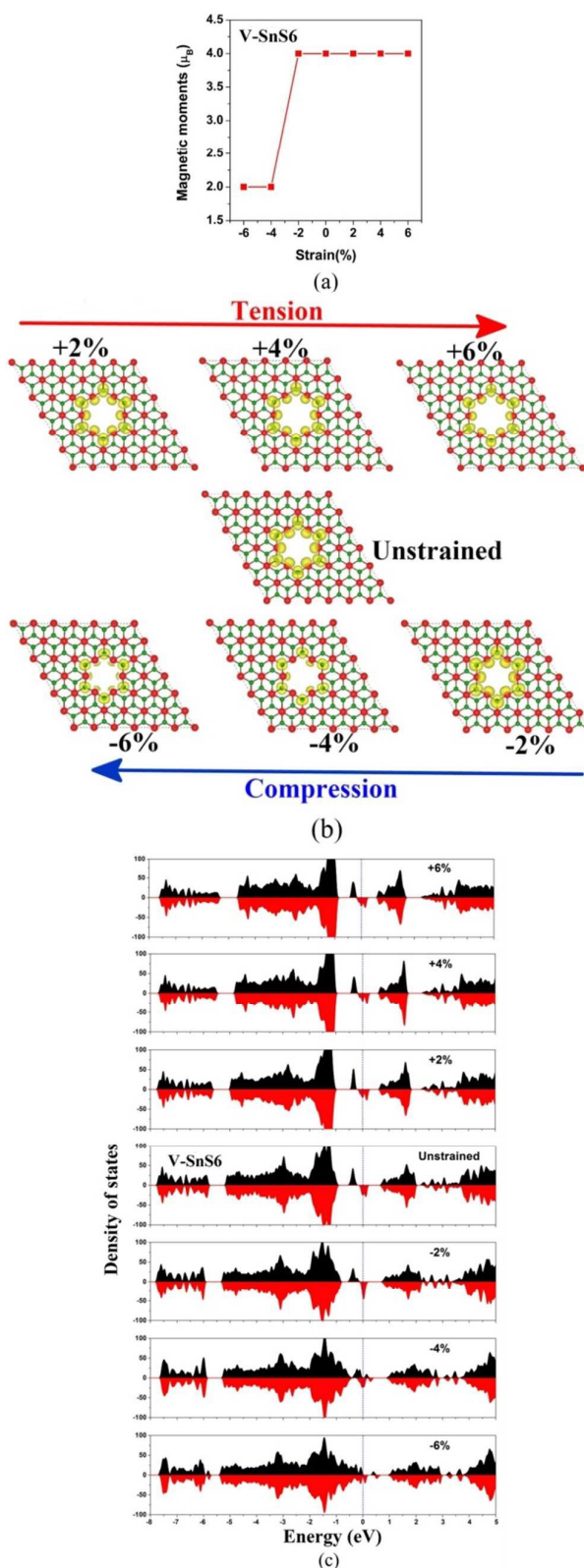


Fig. 8 Strain responses of V-SnS6 doped  $\text{SnS}_2$  monolayer: (a) total magnetic moments; (b) isosurfaces of the spin density in which the isosurface value is taken as  $0.003 \text{ eV}/\text{\AA}^3$  and the yellow isosurface shows the positive spin density; (c) the spin-resolved DOS in which both the colour coding and the setting of fermi level are the same as in Fig. 2.

## 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we have systematically investigated the effect of cation, anion vacancy and vacancy complex defects in SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> on the electronic and magnetic properties with the applied lattice strain. The results demonstrate that defects, such as V-Sn, V-Zr and V-SnS<sub>6</sub>, can induce magnetic ground state in these monolayers. Effective n-type doping can be achieved by the creation of V-SnS<sub>3</sub> in SnS<sub>2</sub> and V-S, V-ZrS<sub>3</sub>, V-ZrS<sub>6</sub> in ZrS<sub>2</sub>. In addition, the lattice strain can have different effects on SnS<sub>2</sub> and ZrS<sub>2</sub> decorated with the different vacancies. SnS<sub>2</sub> monolayer decorated with vacancy complex of V-SnS<sub>6</sub> is sensitive to the compressive strain but robust against tensile strain. While both tensile and compressive lattice strain can effectively modulate the electronic and magnetic properties of V-Zr doped ZrS<sub>2</sub>, V-Sn doped SnS<sub>2</sub> exhibits robust magnetism against strains. These different magnetic and electronic ground states are due to the nature of the different orbital contribution of the cation in the band structure. For ZrS<sub>2</sub> with V-Zr, lattice compression results in the occupation of the host empty d bands, inducing the insulator-to-metal transition. In addition, the lattice compression also tune the charge transfer process between the defect sites and the neighboring S atoms in ZrS<sub>2</sub> with V-Zr, and Sn/S sites in SnS<sub>2</sub> with V-SnS<sub>6</sub>, resulting in the reduction of total magnetic moments. On the other hand, tensile strain changes V-Zr doped ZrS<sub>2</sub> to a half metallic magnetic material due to the occupied p-orbital in the S sites. Consequently, through a combination of strain tuning and defect decorating, the magnetic and conductive properties can be engineered in these 2D d<sup>0</sup> materials for spintronic devices.

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