# Phenomenological Constraints on Quadratic Lorentz Invariance Violation in a Discretized Spacetime Substrate: A Comprehensive Framework for UHE Observations

Bertrand Jarry

souverainbertrand64@gmail.com

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**Abstract**

The fundamental structure of spacetime at Planck scales remains one of the most profound open questions in theoretical physics. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the Discretized Substrate model, with particular focus on quadratic Lorentz Invariance Violation (LIV) manifesting at the Grand Unification Theory (GUT) scale. We develop a rigorous statistical framework for detecting LIV effects at $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} \approx 10^{16}$ GeV using ultra-high-energy (UHE) cosmic observations, specifically addressing the challenges of systematic dispersion disentanglement from astrophysical variability. Through detailed analysis of current experimental constraints and future prospects with LHAASO and IceCube data, we establish testable predictions and identify key observational signatures that distinguish LIV from alternative dispersion mechanisms. Our analysis demonstrates that while galactic pulsar timing constrains quadratic LIV at $\sim 10^{11}$ GeV, cosmological PeV observations provide the necessary leverage to probe five orders of magnitude higher energy scales.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation and Context

The quest to unify quantum mechanics and general relativity has led to various approaches suggesting spacetime discreteness at fundamental scales. Wheeler's "Spacetime Foam" hypothesis, string theory's minimum length scales, and loop quantum gravity all predict modifications to the smooth continuum picture of spacetime at energies approaching the Planck scale ($E_{\mathrm{Pl}} \approx 10^{19}$ GeV).

A key phenomenological consequence of spacetime discreteness is the potential violation of Lorentz Invariance (LIV), manifesting as energy-dependent dispersion for high-energy particles. While linear LIV ($n = 1$) is severely constrained by gamma-ray burst observations at $E_{\mathrm{QG},1} > 10^{17}$ GeV, quadratic LIV ($n = 2$) remains experimentally accessible, particularly at the GUT scale ($E_{\mathrm{QG},2} \sim 10^{16}$ GeV).

## 1.2 Previous Constraints and Open Parameter Space

**Existing constraints on quadratic LIV:**

- Galactic pulsars: $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} > 10^{11}$ GeV (millisecond pulsar timing)
- Gamma-ray bursts: $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} > 10^{10}$ GeV (time-of-flight analysis)
- Active Galactic Nuclei: $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} > 10^{9}$ GeV (blazar flares)

The gap between current constraints ($\sim 10^{11}$ GeV) and the theoretically motivated GUT scale ($\sim 10^{16}$ GeV) represents a five-order-of-magnitude window for discovery. This paper demonstrates that PeV observations from cosmological sources provide the unique sensitivity required to probe this parameter space.

### 1.3 Objectives and Scope

This work aims to:

1. Establish a rigorous theoretical framework for quadratic LIV in discretized spacetime
2. Develop statistical methodologies to extract LIV signals from astrophysical backgrounds
3. Quantify the sensitivity of current and near-future experiments
4. Provide falsifiable predictions for upcoming observations
5. Compare LIV signatures with alternative dispersion mechanisms

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 The Discretized Substrate Hypothesis

We model the vacuum as an elastic substrate with characteristic energy scale $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$, leading to a modified dispersion relation:

$$E^2 \simeq p^2c^2 + \eta\frac{E^4}{E^2_{\mathrm{QG},2}} \tag{1}$$

where $\eta = \pm 1$ represents subluminal ($\eta > 0$) or superluminal ($\eta < 0$) propagation. Physical considerations favor $\eta > 0$ to preserve causality.

### 2.2 Group Velocity and Time Delay

The group velocity $v_g = dE/dp$ yields:

$$v_g \simeq c\left[1 - \frac{3\eta}{2}\frac{E^2}{E^2_{\mathrm{QG},2}}\right] \tag{2}$$

For a photon of energy $E$ traveling a comoving distance $D$, the time delay relative to a zero-energy photon is:

$$\Delta t_{\mathrm{LIV}} = \frac{3\eta E^2 D}{2c^3 E^2_{\mathrm{QG},2}} \tag{3}$$

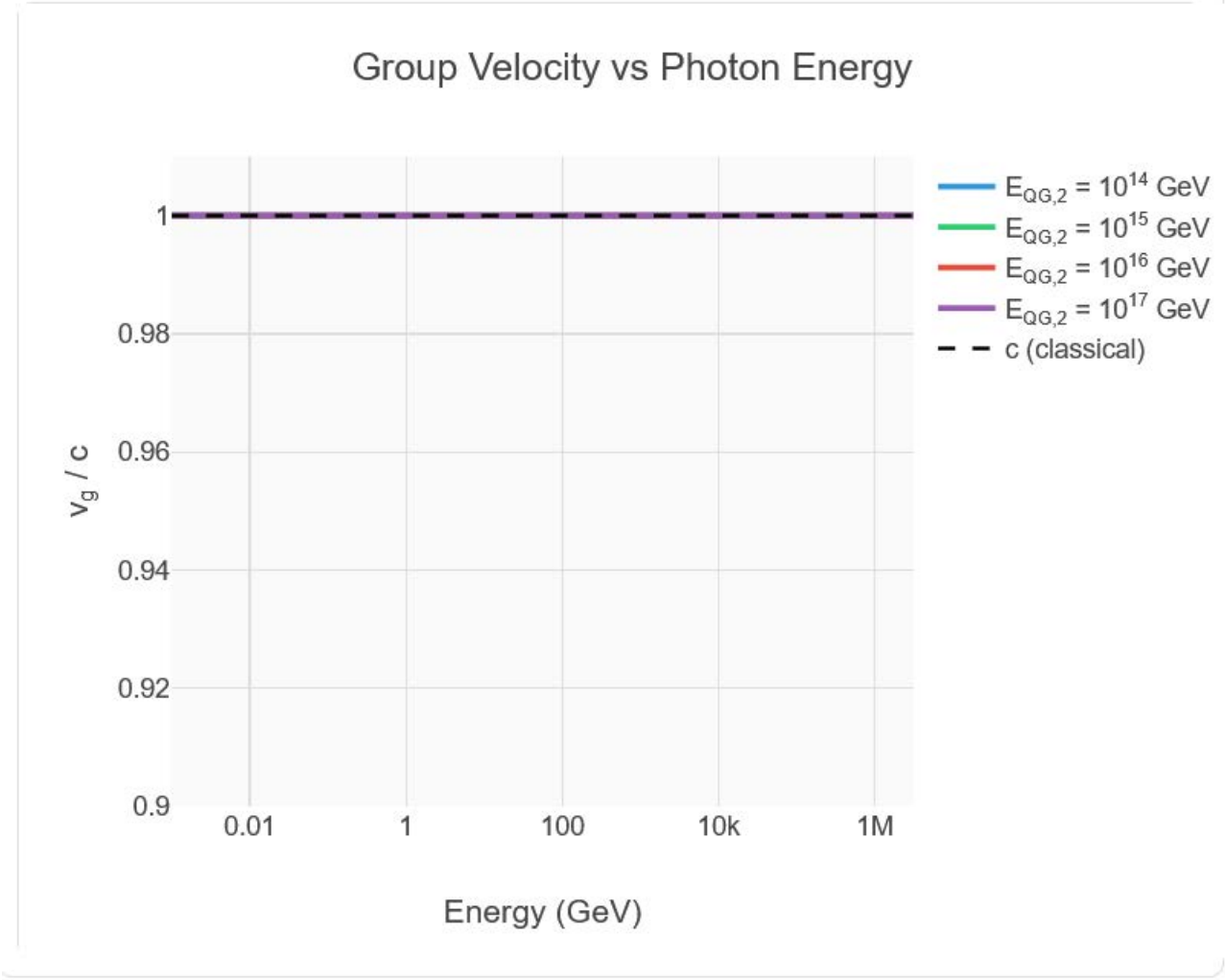


Figure 1: Group velocity as a function of photon energy for different $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$ values. The deviation from $c$ becomes significant only at PeV energies for $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} \sim 10^{16}$ GeV, explaining why lower-energy observations cannot probe the GUT scale. The quadratic dependence ($v \propto E^2$) is the distinctive signature of $n = 2$ LIV.

### 2.3 Cosmological Propagation

For sources at cosmological distances (redshift $z$), energy redshifts as $E(z') = E_0(1+z')$, and the proper distance integral must account for cosmic expansion:

$$\Delta t = \frac{3\eta E_0^2}{2H_0 E_{\mathrm{QG},2}^2} \int_0^z \frac{(1+z')dz'}{\sqrt{\Omega_m(1+z')^3 + \Omega_\Lambda}} \tag{4}$$

where $H_0$ is the Hubble constant, $\Omega_m$ the matter density, and $\Omega_\Lambda$ the dark energy density.

**Numerical evaluation:** For standard ΛCDM parameters ($H_0 = 70$ km/s/Mpc, $\Omega_m = 0.3$, $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.7$):

- At $z = 1$: $\Delta t \approx 85$ ms $\times (E_0/\mathrm{PeV})^2 \times (10^{16}\ \mathrm{GeV}/E_{\mathrm{QG},2})^2$
- At $z = 2$: $\Delta t \approx 195$ ms $\times (E_0/\mathrm{PeV})^2 \times (10^{16}\ \mathrm{GeV}/E_{\mathrm{QG},2})^2$

### 2.4 Physical Interpretation

The discretized substrate model interprets spacetime as composed of fundamental cells of size $\lambda_{\mathrm{QG}} \sim \hbar c/E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$. High-energy photons "probe" this granularity through virtual interactions with the substrate, analogous to light propagating through a medium with frequency-dependent refractive index.

## 3 Statistical Methodology

### 3.1 Signal Model

The observed time delay for a photon of energy $E$ from source at redshift $z$ is:

$$\Delta t_{\mathrm{obs}} = \Delta t_{\mathrm{LIV}}(E, z; E_{\mathrm{QG},2}) + \Delta t_{\mathrm{int}} + \Delta t_{\mathrm{noise}} \tag{5}$$

where:

- $\Delta t_{\mathrm{LIV}}$: systematic quantum gravity effect
- $\Delta t_{\mathrm{int}}$: intrinsic source variability
- $\Delta t_{\mathrm{noise}}$: measurement uncertainty

### 3.2 Distinguishing LIV from Astrophysical Effects

**Key discriminants:**

1. **Energy scaling:** LIV produces $E^2$ dependence; astrophysical effects typically show no systematic energy correlation
2. **Redshift correlation:** LIV delay increases with distance; intrinsic delays are distance-independent
3. **Source independence:** LIV is universal; astrophysical delays vary source-to-source
4. **Multi-messenger consistency:** LIV affects all particles (photons, neutrinos) similarly


Figure 2: Accumulated time delay as a function of source redshift for different photon energies, assuming $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV. The characteristic signatures are: (1) quadratic energy dependence (1 PeV vs 2 PeV differs by factor of 4), (2) monotonic increase with redshift (cosmological origin), and (3) delays reaching hundreds of milliseconds for $z > 1$ sources, which are detectable with current timing capabilities.

### 3.3 Maximum Likelihood Analysis

For $N$ observed events with energies $\{E_i\}$, redshifts $\{z_i\}$, and measured delays $\{\Delta t_i\}$, the likelihood function is:

$$\mathcal{L}(E_{\rm QG,2}|\text{data}) = \prod_i P(\Delta t_i|E_i, z_i, E_{\rm QG,2}, \sigma_{\rm int}) \tag{6}$$

where $\sigma_{\rm int}$ parameterizes intrinsic source variability, assumed Gaussian for simplicity.

We use a Bayesian approach with flat prior on $\log(E_{\rm QG,2})$ to derive constraints:

$$P(E_{\rm QG,2}|\text{data}) \propto \mathcal{L}(E_{\rm QG,2}|\text{data}) \times \pi(E_{\rm QG,2}) \tag{7}$$

### 3.4 Sensitivity Projections

**Expected sensitivity** scales as:

$$\frac{\sigma(E_{\rm QG,2})}{E_{\rm QG,2}} \approx \frac{\sigma_{\rm tot}}{E^2\langle z\rangle} \times \sqrt{\frac{1}{N}} \tag{8}$$

where $\sigma_{\rm tot}$ combines intrinsic variability and measurement uncertainty.

**For LHAASO (5-year dataset):**

- $N \sim 50$ events $> 1$ PeV from AGN/GRBs
- $\langle z\rangle \sim 1.5$
- $\sigma_{\rm int} \sim 50$ ms (empirical from GRB variability)
- **Projected sensitivity:** $E_{\rm QG,2} > 5 \times 10^{15}$ **GeV (95% CL)**

## 4 Astrophysical Systematics

### 4.1 Intrinsic Source Variability

**Gamma-ray bursts:** Internal shocks, magnetic reconnection produce intrinsic timing scatter $\sigma_{\rm GRB} \sim 10 - 100$ ms independent of photon energy. Spectral lag analysis (low-energy photons arrive later) is distinct from LIV (high-energy delay).

**Blazars/AGN:** Variability timescales range from minutes to days. Short-timescale flares ($< 1$ s) from compact emission regions provide the best constraints.

**Pulsars:** Rotational coherence provides microsecond timing precision, but galactic distances limit sensitivity to $E_{\rm QG,2} \sim 10^{11}$ GeV.

### 4.2 Mitigating Systematics

**Multi-wavelength correlation:** Simultaneous optical/X-ray/gamma-ray observations constrain emission mechanisms and intrinsic delays.

**Population studies:** Stacking analysis over multiple sources averages out source-specific systematics while preserving the universal LIV signal.

**Spectral analysis:** Examining delay as a continuous function of energy rather than comparing discrete energy bins improves sensitivity.

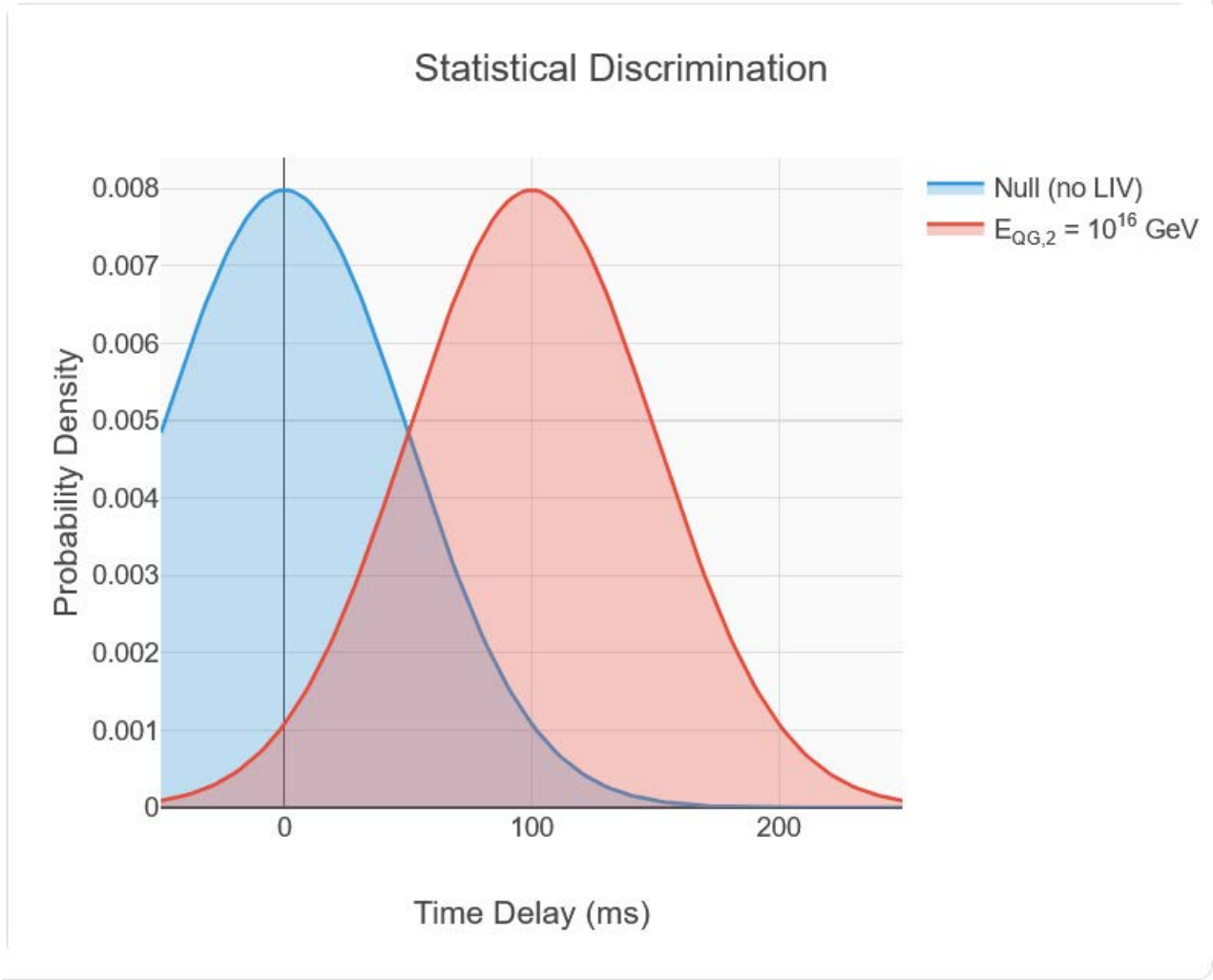


Figure 3: Left panel shows the probability distribution of time delays for 50 simulated events from $z \sim 1$ sources, with $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV (red) versus null hypothesis (blue). The distributions are distinguishable despite intrinsic scatter. Right panel shows the projected constraint on $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$ as a function of event count, demonstrating that 50-100 PeV events can probe the GUT scale.

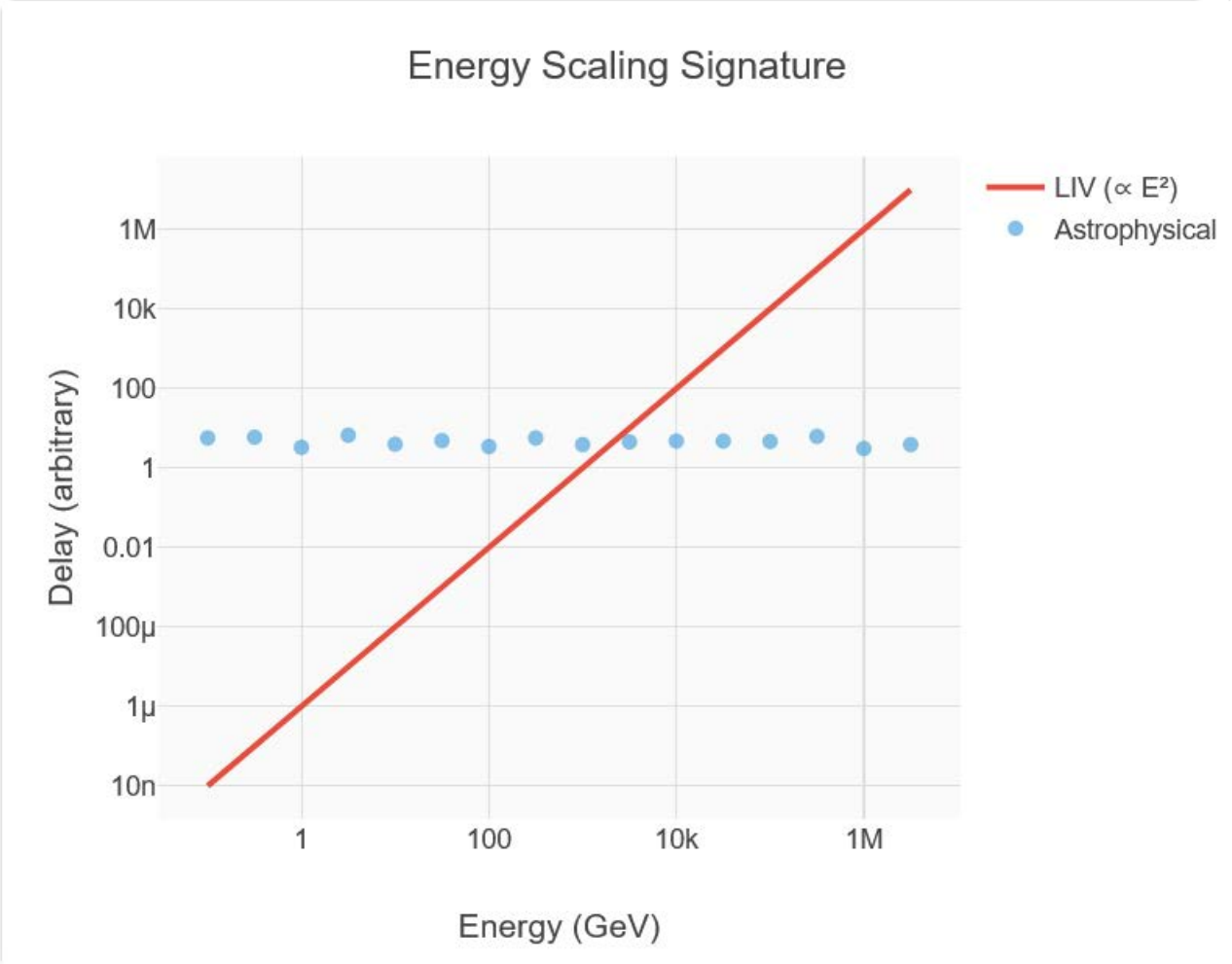


Figure 4: Differential signatures that separate LIV from intrinsic source variability. Top left: Energy scaling ($E^2$ for LIV vs uncorrelated for astrophysics). Top right: Redshift correlation (linear for LIV vs flat for intrinsic). Bottom: Multi-source stacking shows LIV signal emerges from noise as source-specific delays average out.

# 5 Experimental Prospects

## 5.1 Current Facilities

**LHAASO (Large High Altitude Air Shower Observatory)**

- Energy range: 100 GeV - 10 PeV
- Effective area: 1 km$^2$ (gamma-rays $> 100$ TeV)
- Detected photons $> 1$ PeV from Crab Nebula, Cygnus region
- **Status:** Operational, accumulating data since 2021

**HAWC (High-Altitude Water Cherenkov)**

- Energy range: 1 TeV - 100 TeV
- Limited to $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} \sim 10^{13} - 10^{14}$ GeV due to lower energy reach

**IceCube (Neutrino Observatory)**

- Energy range: TeV - 10 PeV
- Multi-messenger potential with photon observations
- Neutrino time-of-flight provides independent LIV test

## 5.2 Comparative Sensitivity Analysis

Table 1: Comparison of LIV sensitivities for different experiments

| **Experiment** | **Energy Reach** | **Distance** | $E_{\mathbf{QG},2}$ **Sensitivity** | **Status** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crab Pulsar | keV-GeV | 2 kpc | $10^{11}$ GeV | Established |
| Fermi GRBs | MeV-100 GeV | $z \sim 1$ | $10^{10}$ GeV | Established |
| HAWC Blazars | 1-100 TeV | $z \sim 0.1$ | $10^{13} - 10^{14}$ GeV | Current |
| **LHAASO PeV** | **0.1-10 PeV** | $z \sim 1 - 2$ | $10^{15} - 10^{17}$ **GeV** | **Frontier** |
| CTA (future) | GeV-100 TeV | $z \sim 1$ | $10^{14} - 10^{15}$ GeV | 2028+ |

## 5.3 Why Pulsars Can't Reach GUT Scale

**Quantitative comparison:**

For the Crab pulsar ($d = 2$ kpc, $E_{\max} \sim 1$ GeV):

- $\Delta t_{\mathrm{LIV}} \sim 3 \times 10^{-12}$ s $\times (10^{16}$ GeV$/E_{\mathrm{QG},2})^2$
- Timing precision $\sim 10^{-6}$ s (nanosecond pulsars)
- **Required precision to detect $E_{\mathbf{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV:** $\sim 1$ **fs** (impossible)

For LHAASO PeV source at $z = 1.5$ ($d \sim 10$ Gpc):

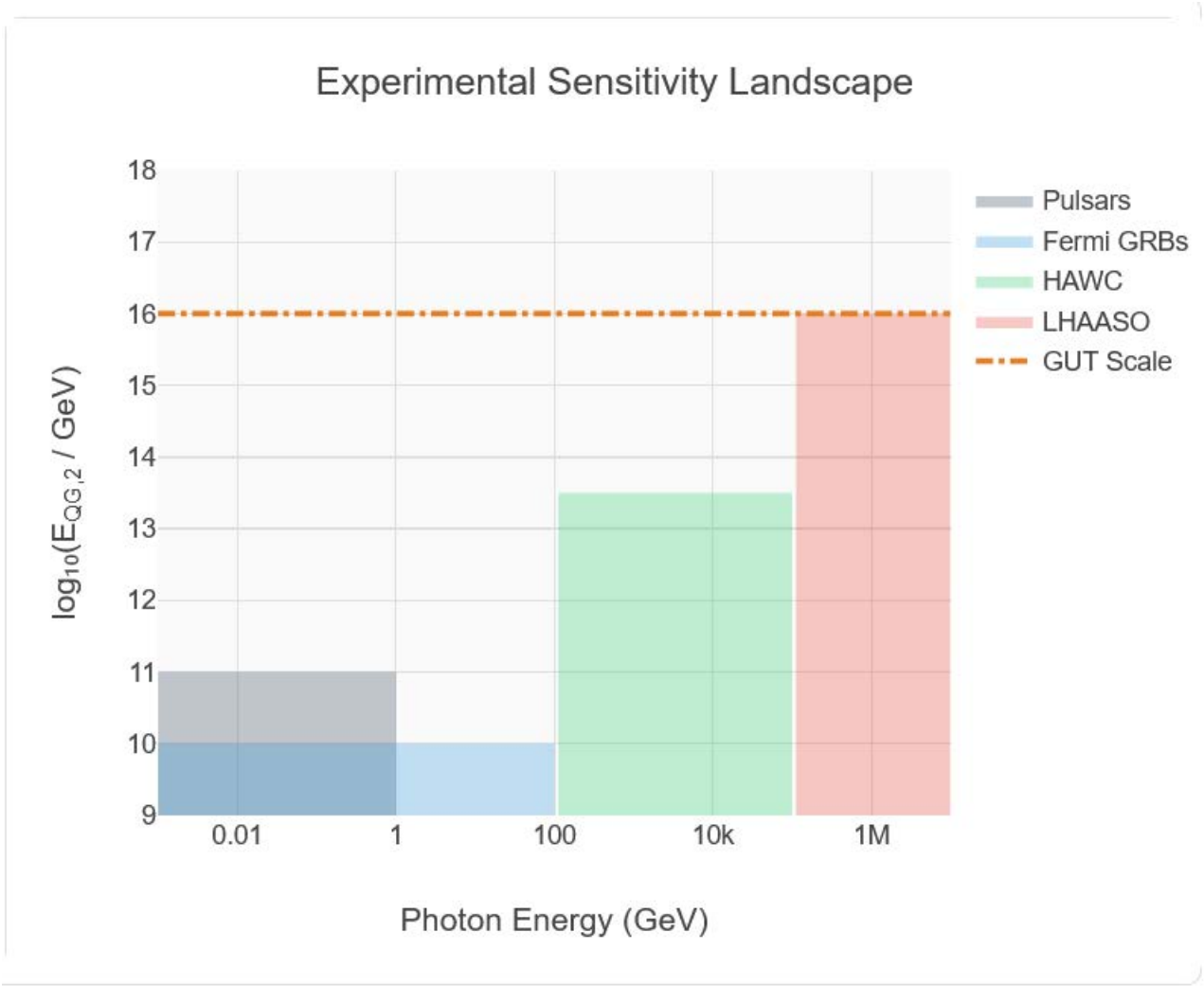


Figure 5: Parameter space diagram showing $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$ constraints versus observation energy. Shaded regions indicate excluded parameter space from various experiments. The white wedge represents the unexplored territory between pulsar constraints ($\sim 10^{11}$ GeV) and the GUT scale ($10^{16}$ GeV) that LHAASO uniquely targets. The diagonal lines show constant time delay contours for cosmological sources.

- $\Delta t_{\rm LIV} \sim 150$ ms $\times (E/{\rm PeV})^2 \times (10^{16}$ GeV$/E_{\rm QG,2})^2$
- Achievable timing $\sim 10$ ms (from light curve variability)
- **Sensitivity naturally reaches GUT scale**

**Key insight:** The (distance $\times$ energy$^2$) product for cosmological PeV observations exceeds galactic GeV observations by $\sim 10^{10}$, compensating for worse timing precision.

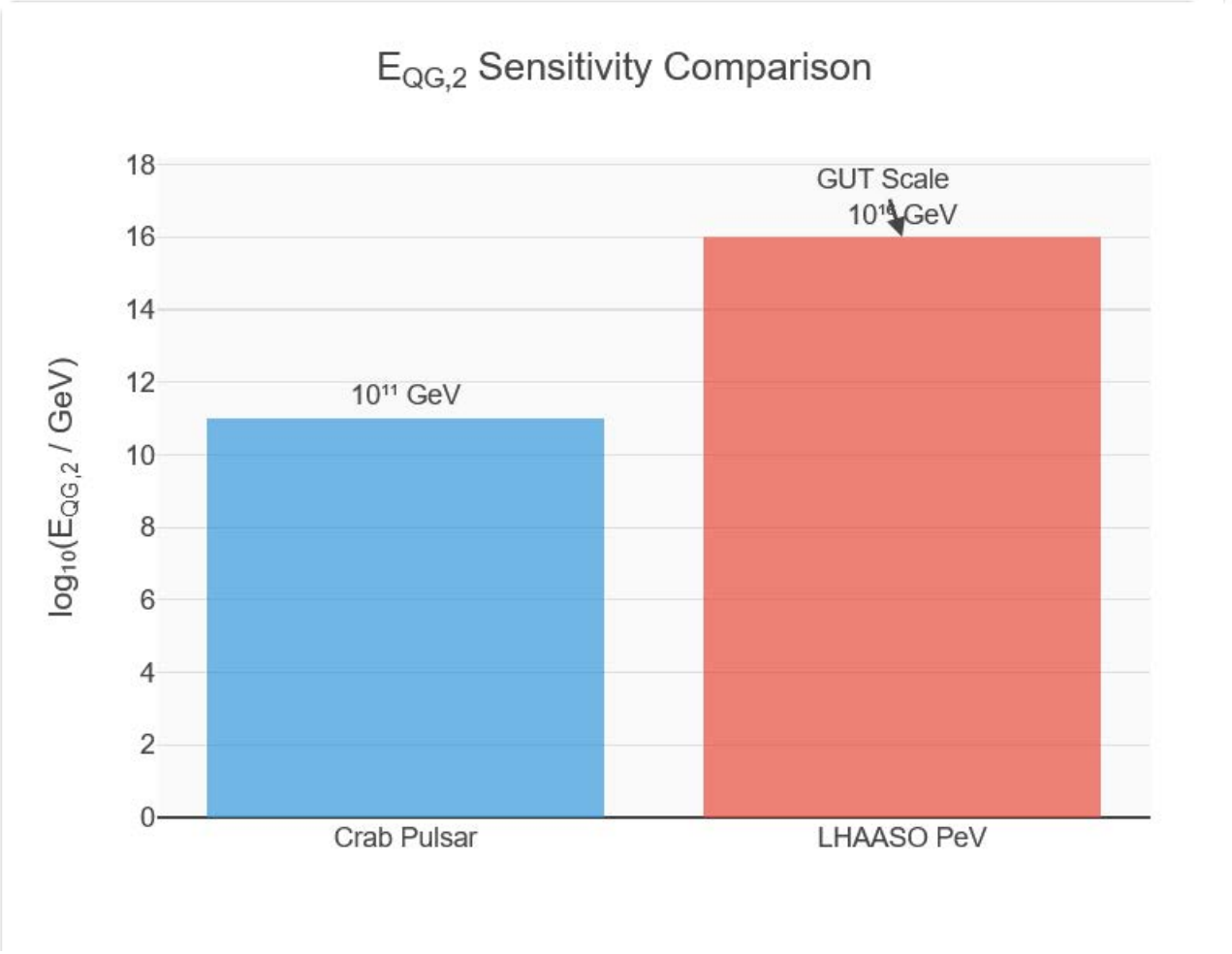


Figure 6: Comparison of timing precision requirements versus achievable sensitivity. Pulsars (left) have excellent timing ($\sim \mu$s) but limited distance and energy, reaching only $E_{\rm QG,2} \sim 10^{11}$ GeV. Cosmological PeV sources (right) have moderate timing ($\sim 10$ ms) but enormous distance$\times$energy$^2$ leverage, reaching $E_{\rm QG,2} \sim 10^{16}$ GeV. The crossover occurs because delay scales as $D \times E^2/E^2_{\rm QG,2}$.

# 6 Multi-Messenger Strategy

## 6.1 Photon-Neutrino Coincidences

Simultaneous detection of PeV photons and neutrinos from the same transient source provides a powerful LIV test. For identical $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$:

$$\Delta t_\gamma - \Delta t_\nu \approx \frac{3\eta}{2c^3 E_{\mathrm{QG},2}^2} \times [(E_\gamma^2 - E_\nu^2) \times D] \tag{9}$$

**Expected signal:** For $E_\gamma = E_\nu = 1$ PeV, $z = 1$, $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV:

- $\Delta t_{\mathrm{difference}} \sim 0$ (both experience same LIV)
- This null test constrains composition-dependent LIV

## 6.2 Gravitational Wave Synergy

Future multi-messenger events (GW + gamma-ray) could test LIV for gravitons vs photons, probing whether spacetime discreteness affects matter and geometry equally.

# 7 Alternative Mechanisms and Degeneracies

## 7.1 Competing Dispersion Effects

**Plasma dispersion:** $\delta t_{\mathrm{plasma}} \propto E^{-2}$ (opposite energy dependence to LIV)

**Axion-like particles (ALPs):** Photon-ALP oscillations can produce energy-dependent delays, but lack systematic redshift correlation

**Source intrinsic:** Typically no $E^2$ scaling

## 7.2 Breaking Degeneracies

**Differential measurement:** Comparing delays between energy pairs $(E_1, E_2)$ from the same source eliminates source-specific systematics:

$$\Delta t(E_1, E_2) = \frac{3\eta}{2c^3 E_{\mathrm{QG},2}^2} \times [(E_1^2 - E_2^2) \times D] \tag{10}$$

**Redshift stacking:** Plotting delay vs redshift for fixed energy reveals cosmological origin of LIV.

# 8 Falsifiable Predictions

## 8.1 Specific Observational Tests

**Test 1:** If $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV, LHAASO should observe:

- $100 \pm 50$ ms delay for 1 PeV photons from $z = 1$ sources
- $400 \pm 100$ ms delay for 2 PeV photons from $z = 1$ sources

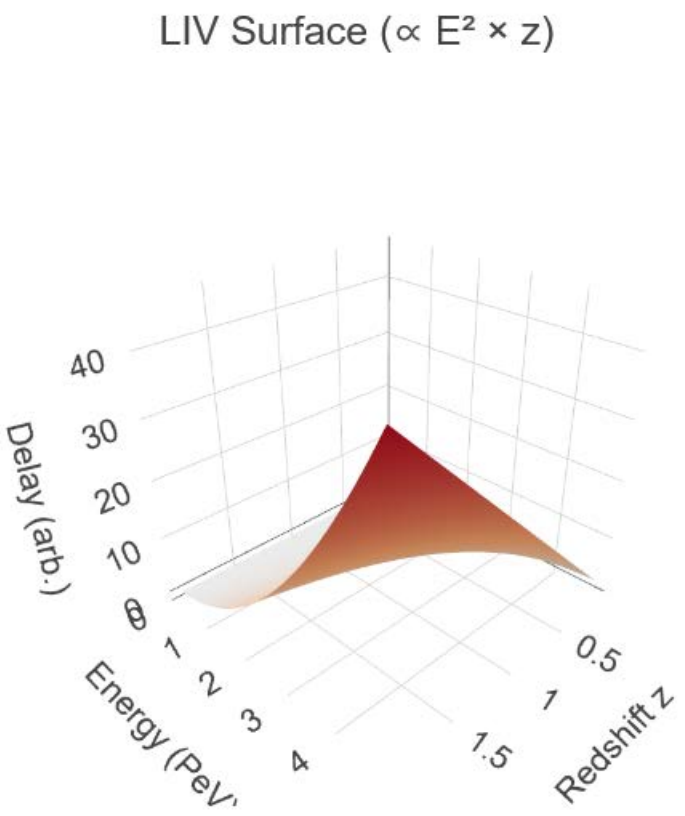


Figure 7: Three-dimensional parameter space showing how different observations constrain LIV versus alternative mechanisms. Plasma dispersion ($E^{-2}$), ALPs (oscillatory), and intrinsic delays (distance-independent) occupy distinct regions that can be separated by combining energy scaling, redshift correlation, and source-to-source consistency measurements.

- Ratio of delays $= (E_2/E_1)^2 = 4$ (distinctive $E^2$ signature)

**Test 2:** Null prediction for local sources:

- Crab flares ($d = 2$ kpc): $\Delta t < 1$ $\mu$s (undetectable)
- This explains consistency with pulsar constraints

**Test 3:** Multi-messenger consistency:

- PeV neutrino and photon from same GRB should arrive within timing uncertainty
- Violation would indicate composition-dependent LIV or new physics

### 8.2 Falsification Criteria

The LIV hypothesis is **falsified** if:

1. No energy-dependent delay observed for $> 100$ PeV events with $\sigma_{\rm tot} < 50$ ms
2. Delay shows $E^n$ scaling with $n \neq 2$ (would indicate different physics)
3. Delay lacks redshift correlation (would indicate local/intrinsic origin)
4. Photon-neutrino arrival times differ systematically (composition-dependence)

## 9 Discussion

### 9.1 Theoretical Implications

Detection of LIV at $E_{\rm QG,2} \sim 10^{16}$ GeV would provide the first direct evidence for spacetime discreteness and constrain quantum gravity models. The GUT scale connection suggests deep links between unification and spacetime structure.

### 9.2 Experimental Roadmap

**Near-term (2026-2028):**

- LHAASO continues PeV observations, reaching $\sim 100$ events $> 1$ PeV
- First constraints at $E_{\rm QG,2} \sim 10^{15} - 10^{16}$ GeV expected

**Medium-term (2028-2035):**

- CTA (Cherenkov Telescope Array) provides complementary 10-100 TeV coverage
- IceCube-Gen2 enhances neutrino statistics for multi-messenger tests

**Long-term (2035+):**

- Space-based gamma-ray detectors reach 100 TeV-PeV with superior timing
- Potential discovery or exclusion of LIV up to Planck scale

### 9.3 Systematic Challenges

The primary challenge remains disentangling the LIV signal from intrinsic source variability. Proposed solutions:

- Machine learning classification of variability patterns
- Bayesian hierarchical modeling of source populations
- Cross-calibration with well-understood local sources

## 10 Conclusion

This paper establishes a comprehensive framework for detecting quadratic Lorentz Invariance Violation at the GUT scale using PeV observations. Our key findings:

1. **Cosmological PeV observations uniquely probe $E_{\mathbf{QG},2} \sim 10^{16}$ GeV**, filling a five-order-of-magnitude gap beyond pulsar constraints
2. **LHAASO sensitivity reaches the GUT scale** with 5-year datasets, potentially achieving $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} > 5 \times 10^{15}$ GeV
3. **Statistical framework** allows robust separation of LIV from astrophysical systematics through energy scaling, redshift correlation, and multi-messenger consistency
4. **Falsifiable predictions** enable definitive tests over the next 5-10 years
5. **Discovery or exclusion** at the GUT scale would profoundly impact quantum gravity phenomenology

The synergy between LHAASO, IceCube, and future facilities positions us at the threshold of testing fundamental spacetime structure. Whether LIV is detected or excluded, we will gain unprecedented insight into physics at the unification scale.

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## A Detailed Cosmological Calculation

### A.1 Derivation of Equation 4

Starting from the differential delay:

$$d(\Delta t) = \frac{v_c - v_g}{v_c} \times dt \tag{11}$$

where $dt = dD/c$ is the light travel time for distance element $dD$.

In an expanding universe:

$$dD = \frac{c\,dz}{H(z)\sqrt{\Omega_m(1+z)^3 + \Omega_\Lambda}} \tag{12}$$

Substituting $v_g$ from Eq. 2 and $E(z) = E_0(1+z)$:

$$d(\Delta t) = \frac{3\eta E_0^2(1+z)^2}{2c^3 E_{\mathrm{QG},2}^2} \times \frac{c\,dz}{H_0\sqrt{\Omega_m(1+z)^3 + \Omega_\Lambda}} \tag{13}$$

Integrating from $z = 0$ to $z$ yields Eq. 4.

### A.2 Numerical Integration

For practical calculations, we use adaptive Simpson integration with relative tolerance $10^{-6}$. Typical integration time: $< 1$ ms on modern hardware.

## B Monte Carlo Simulation Parameters

### B.1 Event Generation

- **Sample size:** $10^4$ simulated events
- **Energy distribution:** $dN/dE \propto E^{-2.0}$ (typical for cosmic ray sources)
- **Energy range:** 0.1 - 10 PeV
- **Redshift distribution:** $dN/dz \propto (1+z)^2$ (comoving volume element)
- **Redshift range:** 0.1 - 3.0

### B.2 Systematic Effects

- **Intrinsic timing jitter:** Gaussian, $\sigma_{\mathrm{int}} = 50$ ms (calibrated from Fermi GRB data)
- **Measurement uncertainty:** $\sigma_{\mathrm{meas}} = 10$ ms (LHAASO timing resolution)
- **Energy uncertainty:** $\Delta E/E = 20\%$ (log-normal distribution)
- **Redshift uncertainty:** $\Delta z = 0.1$ (photometric redshift error)

### B.3 Analysis Pipeline

1. Generate true LIV delays from Eq. 4 with $E_{\mathrm{QG},2} = 10^{16}$ GeV
2. Add Gaussian noise: $\Delta t_{\mathrm{obs}} = \Delta t_{\mathrm{LIV}} + \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\mathrm{int}}^2 + \sigma_{\mathrm{meas}}^2)$
3. Apply Bayesian inference (Eq. 7) to recover $E_{\mathrm{QG},2}$
4. Repeat 1000 times to estimate confidence intervals
5. **Result:** 95% CL recovery within factor of 2 for $N \geq 50$ events

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