## Supplementary Information for

# **Structure-evolution-designed amorphous oxides for dielectric energy storage**

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### **Supplementary Text 1**

As shown in the inset in Fig. 2, the monoclinic *P*21/*c* phase gives the best fit with a R-factor of 0.0065 in the EXAFS spectrum of the BHO12-RT film, indicating a highquality fitting. The fitting window is set to  $R = 1.0 \sim 4.0$  Å, which is typical for the EXAFS analysis of amorphous structure because (i)  $R < 1.0$  Å is meaningless since there is no interatomic distance shorter than  $1.0 \text{ Å}$  in actual crystals; (ii) the oscillation amplitude of EXAFS spectrum is too low to be fitted when  $R > 4.0$  Å since the amorphous structure only has short-range ordering. The extracted structural parameters, including the interatomic distance (*R*Hf-O(or Hf)), the coordination number (*N*Hf-O), and the disorder (Debye-Waller) factor  $(\sigma^2)$ , are listed in table below. The oscillation in  $R = 1.0$  $\sim$  2.2 Å, *i.e.*, the first shell, can be attributed to single-scattering paths from the nearestneighbor oxygen atoms at the *R*<sub>Hf-O</sub> of  $\sim$ 2.14 Å with the *N*<sub>Hf-O</sub> of  $\sim$ 6.35, while that in *R*  $= 2.0 \sim 3.5$  Å is due to the single-scattering paths from Hf atoms at the *R*<sub>Hf-Hf</sub> of  $\sim$ 3.43 Å in the second shell. The  $\sigma^2$  is 0.007 in the first shell. These results are in good agreement with the short-range structures reported previously in amorphous  $HfO<sub>2</sub>$  thin films.

However, the BHO12 exhibits two distinguished oscillations in 2.2  $\AA < R < 3.5 \AA$ , which is obviously different from the unannealed BHO12-RT. Such a doublet feature makes the fit by only the *P*21/*c* symmetry unavailable. The orthorhombic *Pca*21 symmetry shows a better fit and the best is obtained by combining the *P*21/*c* and *Pca*21 phases, in which the single-scattering paths from the Hf atoms at the  $R_{\text{Hf-Hf}}$  of  $\sim$ 3.42 Å (the  $P2_1/c$ ) and the oxygen atoms at the  $R_{\text{Hf-O}}$  of  $\sim$ 3.70 Å (the  $Pca2_1$ ) contribute to the doublet oscillations of the second shell together. The R-factor is 0.0092 for the fitting window of  $R = 1.0 \sim 4.0$  Å. In addition, the best fit also reveals that the oscillation in R  $= 1.0 \sim 2.2$  Å is attributed to the single-scattering paths from oxygen atoms at the *R*<sub>Hf-O</sub> of  $2.07 \sim 2.09$  Å with the *N*<sub>Hf-O</sub> of  $6.75 \sim 6.81$  in the first shell. Therefore, the BHO12 film exhibits a higher density compared to that prepared at room temperature since the Hf atoms are surrounded by more neighboring oxygen atoms with smaller coordination bond lengths. Also, due to the coexistence of *Pca*21 and *P*21/*c* symmetries, the BHO12 has a large disorder factor of ~0.011.





**Figure S1.** A sketch for the calculations of  $U_{\text{rec}}$  and  $\eta$  in the *P-E* hysteresis loop.

As shown in Fig. S1, the  $U_{\text{rec}}$  is calculated by  $\int_{P_{\text{r}}}^{P_{\text{m}}} E dP$ , indicated by the green area. The hysteresis area during a charging-discharging cycle is the *U*loss. Then the *η* is obtained by  $U_{\text{rec}}$ /( $U_{\text{rec}}$ + $U_{\text{loss}}$ ).



**Figure S2.** A comparison of the *E*b and *ε*r of the amorphous BHO12 to well-known dielectric materials for energy storage (BOPP: Biaxially oriented polypropylene; PVDF: Poly(vinylidene fluoride); PET: Poly(ethylene terephthalate); P(MDA/MDI): Aromatic polyurea (ploy(diaminodiphenylmethane dipheylmethane diisocyanate))).

Fig. S2 shows a comparison of the *E*b and *ε*r of the amorphous BHO12 to wellknown high-κ, ferroelectric, and polymer materials for dielectric energy storage. In dielectric materials, the *E*<sub>b</sub> is usually limited by  $\varepsilon_r$ , following  $E_b = K * \varepsilon_r^{-\alpha}$ , where *K* and  $\alpha$  are constants. In the model by McPherson et al., [1-3] the *K* and  $\alpha$  are 35.3 and 0.64 for the theoretical (the thick green curve) and 29.9 and 0.65 for the experimental (the thick blue curve), respectively. One can find that these dielectric materials are following this permittivity limitation. However, the breakdown strength of amorphous BHO12 is much higher than the upper-limit of its permittivity, overcoming the negative correlation between  $E_b$  and  $\varepsilon_r$ . In ref.1 of the main text, a comprehensive review of capacitive energy storage, the authors have also fitted the experimental *E*b and *ε*r of dielectric materials using  $E_b = K * \varepsilon_r^{-\alpha}$  and extracted the *K* and *α*, which are 25.09 and 0.559, respectively, very close to the model used in Fig. S2.



Figure S3. a, XRD patterns of the Sr-substituted HfO<sub>2</sub> thin films with increasing substitution concentration from 0 to 50 %. **b**, *P-E* hysteresis loops of the amorphous Pt/SHO30/LSMO capacitor at 10 kHz.

As shown in Fig. S3a, the amorphous Sr-substituted HfO2 (SHO*x*) thin films appear at the concentration of  $23\% \sim 30\%$ , which is narrower than that of the BHO, in agreement with that observed in the first-principles calculation. For the amorphous Pt/SHO30/LSMO capacitor, the *E*b is above 10 MV/cm (Fig. S3b), which is also much higher than that reported in the amorphous and crystalline HfO<sub>2</sub>-based capacitors. The *U*rec and *η* calculated by the *P-E* loop is 117 J/cm<sup>3</sup> and 76.8% at  $E = 10$  MV/cm.



Figure S4. a, XRD patterns of the Ca-substituted HfO<sub>2</sub> thin films with increasing substitution concentration from 0 to 50 %. **b**, *P-E* hysteresis loops of the amorphous Pt/CHO33/LSMO capacitor at 10 kHz.

As shown in Fig. S4a, the amorphous Ca-substituted HfO2 (CHO*x*) thin films appear at the Ca concentration of  $33\% \sim 36\%$ , which is narrower than that of the SHO and BHO, in agreement with that observed in the first-principles calculation. For the amorphous Pt/CHO33/LSMO capacitor, the *E*b is above 8.0 MV/cm (Fig. S4b), which is also much higher than that reported in the amorphous and crystalline HfO<sub>2</sub>-based capacitors. The *U*<sub>rec</sub> and *η* calculated by the *P-E* loop is 72 J/cm<sup>3</sup> and 82.4% at  $E = 8.3$ MV/cm.



**Figure S5.** HAADF image of the BHO02/LSMO/STO heterostructure to show the coexistence of *m*- and *o*-phase.



**Figure S6.** STEM characterizations of the BHO12/LSMO/STO heterostructure in a large scale to show the uniformity in amorphous structure (**a**) and element distributions (**b**, **c**). **b**, the EELS mappings for Hf, Ba, O, La, Mn, and Ti elements, respectively. **c**, the EDS (energy dispersive spectra) mappings for Hf, Ba, O, Sr, La, and Mn elements, respectively.

In Fig. S6a, one can find that the amorphous structure is uniform over a large area with the scale bar of 20 nm. Combined with the EELS (Fig. S6b) and EDS (Fig. S6c) mapping, one can find the element distributions are also uniform.



**Figure S7.** XPS spectra of O 1*s* core level for the BHO0, BHO02, BHO12, BHO20, and BHO50 thin films, respectively.

Fig. S7 shows XPS spectra of O 1*s* core level for the BHO thin films etched by Ar ions for 30 s to remove the adsorbed oxygen. In the HfO<sub>2</sub>-based films the peaks of  $V<sub>O</sub>$ are in general present at the binding energy of  $\sim$ 532 eV, higher than that of the lattice oxygen ions.<sup>[4,5]</sup> In Fig. S7, one can find that the  $V_{\text{OS}}$  in the BHO0 and BHO50, that is the HfO2 and BaHfO3, are negligible owing to the post-annealing in flowing O2. With the Ba substitution, the *V*<sub>OS</sub> appear in BHO02, BHO12, and BHO20, in agreement with the first-principle calculation. In addition, the relative concentration of  $V_{\text{OS}}$  increases from the BHO02 to the BHO12 and then decreases in the BHO20.



**Figure S8.** XPS spectra of Hf 4*f* and Ba 3*d* core levels of the BHO12 thin film.

In the XPS spectrum of Hf 4*f* core level, the peaks at 16.3 and 18.0 eV are Hf  $4f_{7/2}$ and Hf 4*f*<sub>5/2</sub>, which are attributed to the Hf<sup>4+</sup> of Hf-O bond. In the XPS spectrum of Ba 3*d* core level, the Ba 3*d*5/2 and 3*d*3/2 appear at 779.5 and 794.8 eV, respectively, separated by 15.3 eV, which correspond to the  $Ba^{2+}$  in Ba-O bond. There are no metallic Hf and Ba observed in the amorphous BHO12 thin film.



**Figure S9.** The  $E^f(V_O)$  at the first nearest-neighbor site as a function of  $Ba^{2+}$  substitution concentration in different phases.

In the main text, the Ba substitution induces strong effect on the oxygen instability in the *t*-phase HfO2, which is the high-temperature phase considering that the amorphous state is formed in the crystallizing process of the Ba-Hf-O system. However, the amorphous HfO2 films reported in literature are in general formed by lowtemperature deposition. In this case, the HfO2 is in a low symmetry, like the *m*- and *o*phases. We therefore calculate the  $E^f(V_O)$  in the *m*- and *o*-phase HfO<sub>2</sub> lattices, for comparison. As shown by the dashed and dotted curves in Fig. S9, the  $E^f(V_O)$  are always positive with increasing Ba concentration from 1/32 to 1/4, indicating that the Ba substitution yields weak effect on the oxygen instability in the *m*- and *o*-phases. These results also suggest that the low-temperature stacking of *A*/Hf and O atoms cannot generate the amorphous structure like the BHO films in the main text, in agreement with the short-range structures observed in the EXAFS spectra.



**Figure S10.** O 1*s* energy loss spectra of the BHO0, BHO02, BHO12, and BHO50 thin films.

Considering that the BHO thin films are grown on the LSMO/STO and the bandgap of BHO should be higher than that of the STO substrate, we adopted the O 1*s* energy loss spectra to estimate their bandgaps, which have been reported frequently in the band structure studies of high-κ thin films.[6,7] As shown in Fig. S10, the bandgaps of the representative BHO thin films are about 5.0 eV, regardless of crystalline or not. These results are reasonable since the bandgaps of HfO<sub>2</sub> and BaHfO<sub>3</sub> are about 4.0  $\sim$ 6.0 eV, as reported previously.[1,8,9]



**Figure S11.** *P-E* hysteresis loops of the Pt/BHO12-RT/LSMO capacitor measured at 10 kHz

As shown in Fig. S11, the capacitor based on the BHO12-RT thin film exhibits an  $E<sub>b</sub>$  of ~3.64 MV/cm, which is comparable with that reported in the amorphous HfO<sub>2</sub> thin films.[10]



**Figure S12. a**, The *E*b of BHO0, BHO02, BHO12, and BHO50 capacitors as a function of thin-film thickness. **b**, Replotted the thickness-dependent breakdown strength in 1/*E*<sup>b</sup> vs. ln*d*.

In the avalanche mechanism, the *E*b usually exhibits a thickness-dependence character, following an empirical formula  $E_b \propto d^{-\beta}$ , in which  $\beta$  is a constant and  $d$  is thickness. In Fig. S12a, one can find that the breakdown strengths of the crystalline BHO0, BHO02, and BHO50 capacitors are decreasing with increasing *d* from 10 to 50 nm, exhibiting the *β* of 0.29, 0.18, and 0.12, respectively. However, the *E*b of amorphous BHO12 capacitor is almost independent with the thickness. The thickness-dependent *E*b is further analyzed by the 40-generation-electron theory, which obeys

$$
E_{\rm b} = \frac{k}{\ln \left( \frac{d}{d_0} \right)} \tag{S1}
$$

where  $d_0 = 40/\alpha_0$  ( $\alpha_0$  is the ionization coefficient) and *k* is a parameter with the same unit of electric field. By linear fitting the  $1/E_b$  vs. lnd plots, the  $d_0$  and  $k$  can be extracted, which are 1.27 nm and 16 MV/cm, 0.11 nm and 34 MV/cm, and 0.008 nm and 43 MV/cm for the BHO0, BHO02, and BHO50 capacitors, respectively.



**Figure S13.** Current density-electric field curves of the BHO0, BHO02, BHO12, and BHO50 thin-film capacitors. Here, the noise of our facilities is also shown for comparison.

As shown in Fig. S13, the BHO12 capacitor exhibits the lowest leakage current density, which is even close to the current noise  $(\sim 1.0 \text{ pA})$  of our facilities. At  $E = 7.0$ MV/cm, the current density is still less than  $1 \times 10^{-6}$  A/cm<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure S14.** *ε*r and dielectric loss (tan δ) of the BHO0, the amorphous BHO12, SHO30, and CHO33, as well as the unannealed BHO12-RT, as a function of frequency.

As shown in Fig. S14, the *ε*r of amorphous BHO12, SHO30, and CHO33 thin-film capacitors are about  $18 \sim 21$  in the frequency range of  $1 \times 10^5 \sim 4 \times 10^6$  Hz, which is much larger than that of the unannealed BHO12-RT counterpart and even larger than the crystalline BHO0 (i.e., the undoped  $HfO<sub>2</sub>$ ) capacitor at high frequency. In addition, these amorphous hafnium-based oxides also exhibit very low dielectric loss.



**Figure S15.** *P-E* hysteresis loops of the BHO0, BHO02, BHO12, and BHO50 capacitors as functions of applied *E* (**a**), measurement frequency (**b**), charging/discharging cycling number (**c**), and temperature (**d**), respectively.

Fig. S15a-d are the corresponding *P-E* hysteresis loops of the data plotted in Fig.

4a-d, respectively. Here, we give a discussion on the BHO02 capacitor since it shows a large change in the  $\eta$  with the measurement conditions due to the ferroelectric behaviors. In Fig. S15a, the ferroelectric hysteresis becomes stronger with increasing *E*, resulting in the decrease of *η* (Fig. 4a). In Fig. S15c, the BHO02 capacitor shows a polarization fatigue phenomenon with increasing cycling number, in which the remanent polarization is decreased and thus the hysteresis is suppressed. It results in the increase of *η* with increasing cycling number in Fig. 4c. In Fig. S15d, the BHO02 exhibits a weak-up effect of ferroelectric polarization, resulting in the increase of hysteresis and the decrease of  $\eta$  with increasing temperature (Fig. 4d).

Table S1. The dielectric energy storage properties, including device structure, εr, Eb, Urec, and η, for representative thin-film capacitors fabricated by different material systems,[11-97] in which the symbols for dielectric capacitors plotted in Fig. 4e are indicated.



















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