



# Quantum Chemical Investigation of the Photovoltaic Properties of Conjugated Molecules Based Oligothiophene and Carbazole

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## Abstract

The research in the organic  $\pi$ -conjugated molecules and polymers based on thiophene has become one of the most interesting topics in the field of chemistry physics and materials science. These compounds have become the most promising materials for the optoelectronic device technology. The use of low band gap materials is a viable method for better harvesting of the solar spectrum and increasing its efficiency. The control of the band gap of these materials is a research issue of ongoing interest. In this work, a quantum chemical investigation has been performed to explore the optical and electronic properties of a series of different compounds based on thiophene and carbazole. Different electron side groups were introduced to investigate their effects on the electronic structure. The theoretical knowledge of the HOMO and LUMO energy levels of the components is basic in studying organic solar cells so the HOMO, LUMO and Gap energy of the studied compounds have been calculated and reported. These properties suggest these materials as a good candidate for organic solar cells.

**Keywords:**  *$\pi$ -conjugated molecules, Thiophene, Carbazole, Organic solar cells, DFT, Low band-gap, Electronic properties.*

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## Introduction

During the past decade, thiophene-based electronic materials have been extensively investigated. The ease in the chemical modification of their structures can potentially allow us to fine-tune their optical and electronic properties [1]. These properties strongly depend on the degree of electronic delocalisation present in these materials, effective conjugation length, and the introduction of substitutes. Whereas obtained polymers as highly amorphous, oligomers are not amorphous and can be synthesized as well defined compounds. Recently, many researchers have become interested in synthesizing short-chain OLED compounds based on conjugated oligomers [2]. These materials offer advantages over polymeric systems in terms of easy synthesis and purification, and generally exhibit high charge carrier mobility. Therefore designing and synthesizing molecules with interesting properties play a crucial role in technology. At the same time it is important to understand the nature of the relationship between the molecular structure and the electronic properties to provide guidelines for the development of new materials.

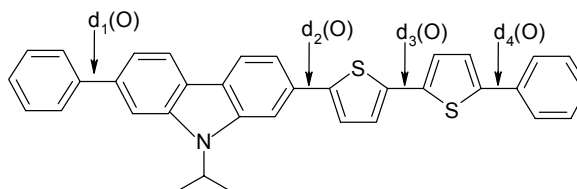
Theoretical analysis of the electronic structure of conjugated systems can establish the relationships between molecular structure and electronic properties [3]. Theoretical studies on the electronic structures of  $\pi$ -conjugated

compounds have given great contributions to the rationalization of the properties of known materials and to the properties prediction those of yet unknown ones. In this context, quantum-chemical methods have been increasingly applied to predict the band gap of conjugated systems [4]. We note that theoretical knowledge of the HOMO and LUMO energy levels of the components is crucial in studying organic solar cells [5]. So, we can save time and money by choosing the adequate organic materials to optimize photovoltaic device's properties. The HOMO and LUMO energy levels of the donor and of the acceptor components for photovoltaic devices are very important factors to determine whether the effective charge transfer will happen between donor and acceptor. The offset of band edges of the HOMO and LUMO levels will prove responsible for the improvement of all photovoltaic properties of the organic solar cells.

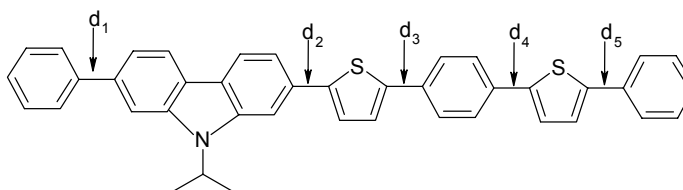
Recently, Marrocchi et al. [6] have described the synthesis of a series of compounds based on thiophene and carbazole (Figure 1). Oligothiophene and carbazole derivatives may exhibit large charge carrier mobility and excellent stability. To the best of your knowledge a systematic theoretical study of such compounds has not been reported. The theoretical knowledge of the HOMO and LUMO energy levels of the components is a basis in studying organic solar cells As

the HOMO, LUMO and Gap energy of the reported. Their properties suggest they are studied compounds have been calculated and good candidates for organic solar cells.

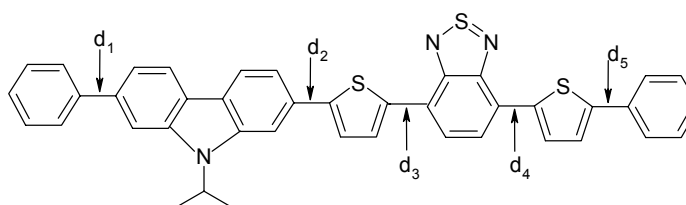
PCDT :



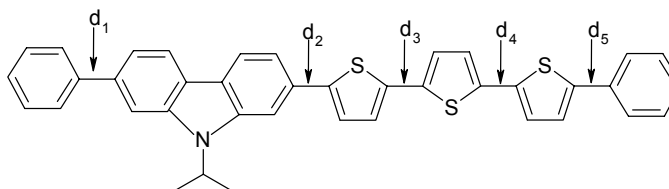
PCDTB :



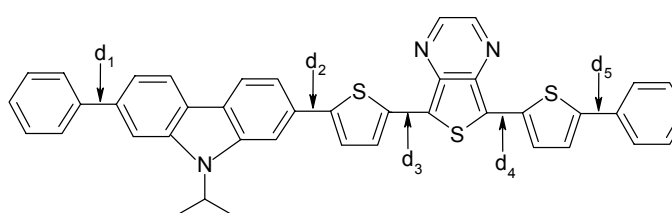
PCDTBT :



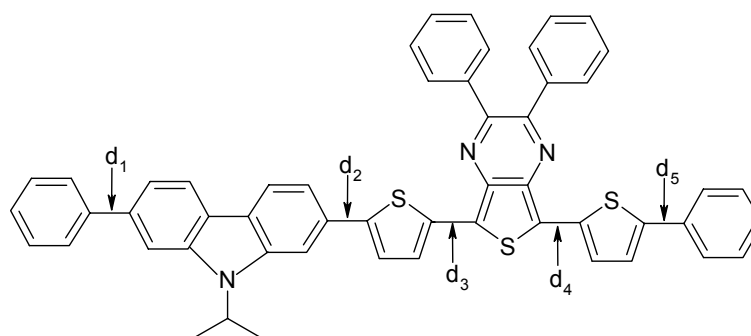
PCTTT :



PCTPY :



PCTPYPP :



**Figure 1.** The sketch map of studying structures (PCDT, PCDTB, PCDTBT, PCTTT, PCTPY, PCTPYPP).

### Theoretical methodology

DFT method of three-parameter compound of Becke (B3LYP) [7] was used in all the study of the neutral and polaronic compounds. The 6-31G(d) basis set was used for all calculations [8]. To obtain the charged structures, we start from the optimized structures of the neutral form. The calculations were carried out using the *GAUSSIAN 03* program [9]. The geometry structures of neutral and doped molecules were optimized under no constraint. We have also examined HOMO and LUMO levels; the energy gap is evaluated as the difference between the HOMO and LUMO energies. The ground state energies and oscillator strengths were investigated using the ZINDO/s, calculations on the fully optimized geometries. In fact, these calculation methods have been successfully applied to other conjugated polymers [10].

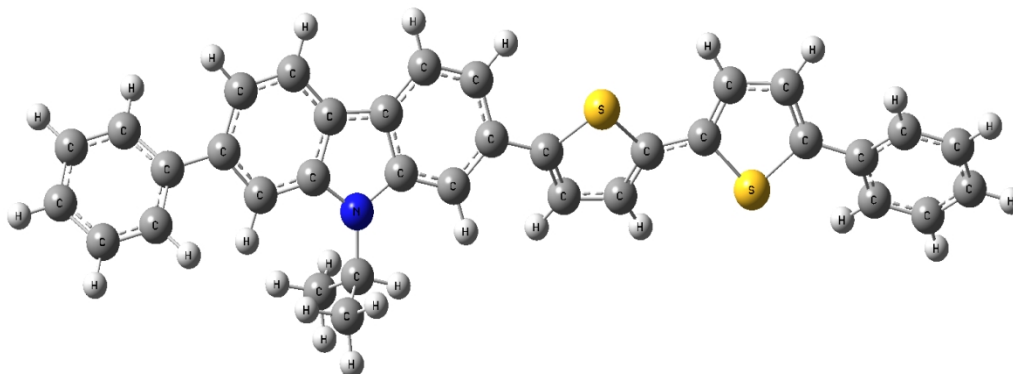
## Results and discussion

### Molecular design and geometry structures

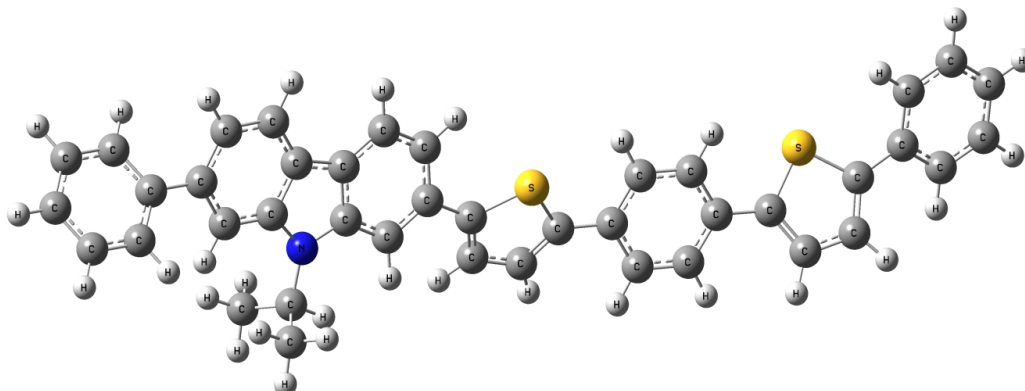
The optimized structures of all studied compounds are illustrated in figure 2. It's revealed that the

pi-electron delocalization between the different aromatic units is clear. For saying about the effect of increasing additional  $\pi$ -bridge conjugated thiophene, PCDT, PCDTB, PCDTBT, PCTTT, PCTPY, PCTPYPP are studied. Molecules PCTTT and PCDTB are designed in order to examine the effect of replacement of the thiophene ring by phenylene and finally in order to examine the effect of the number of additional thiophen, molecule PCDT and PCTTT are designed. All the molecular geometries have been calculated with the hybrid B3LYP function combined with 6-31G (d) basis sets using Gaussian 03 program. It was found in other works [11] that the DFT-optimized geometries were in excellent agreement with the data obtained from X-ray analyses. The results of the optimized structures for all studied compounds show that they have similar conformation (quasi planar conformation) (see Figure 2). We found that the consecutive units have similar dihedral angles and inter-ring distances means that the incorporation of several groups does not change these parameters.

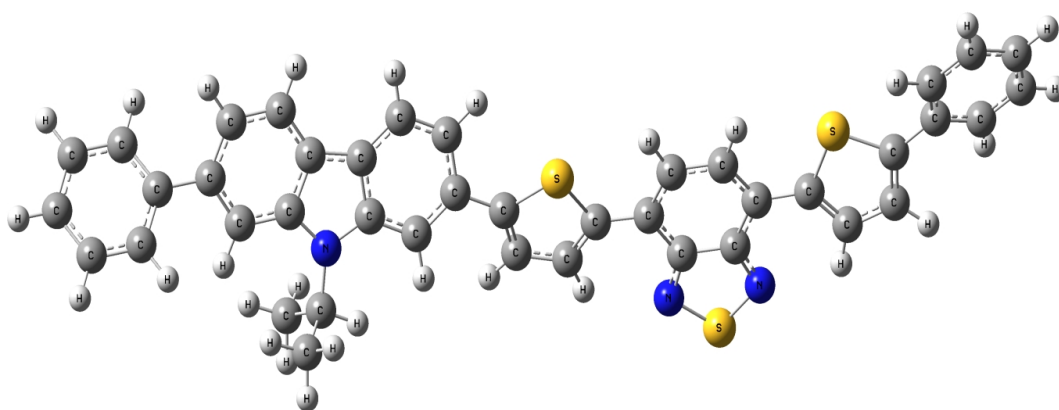
PCDT :



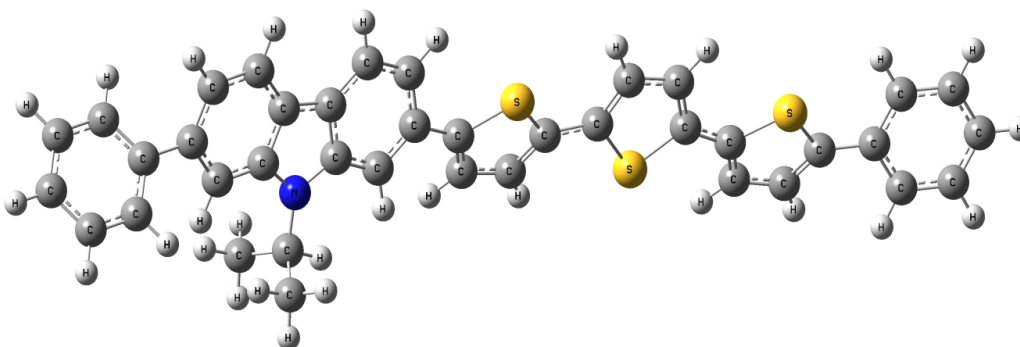
PCDTB :



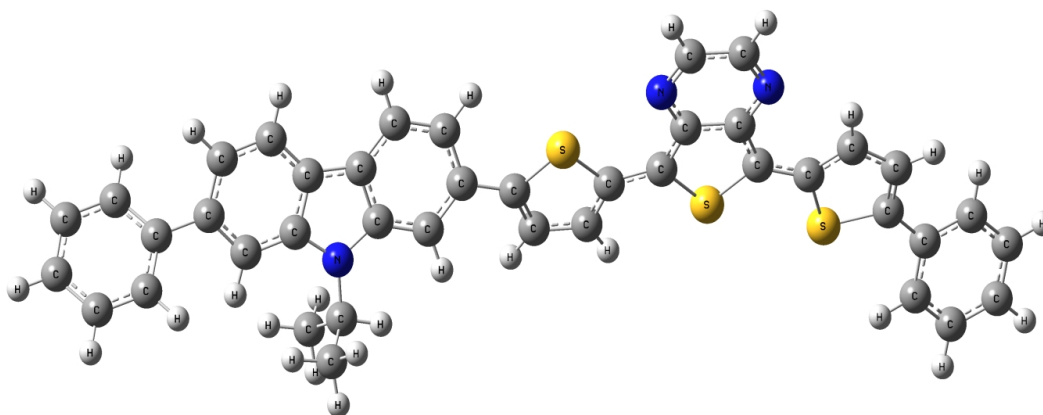
PCDTBT :



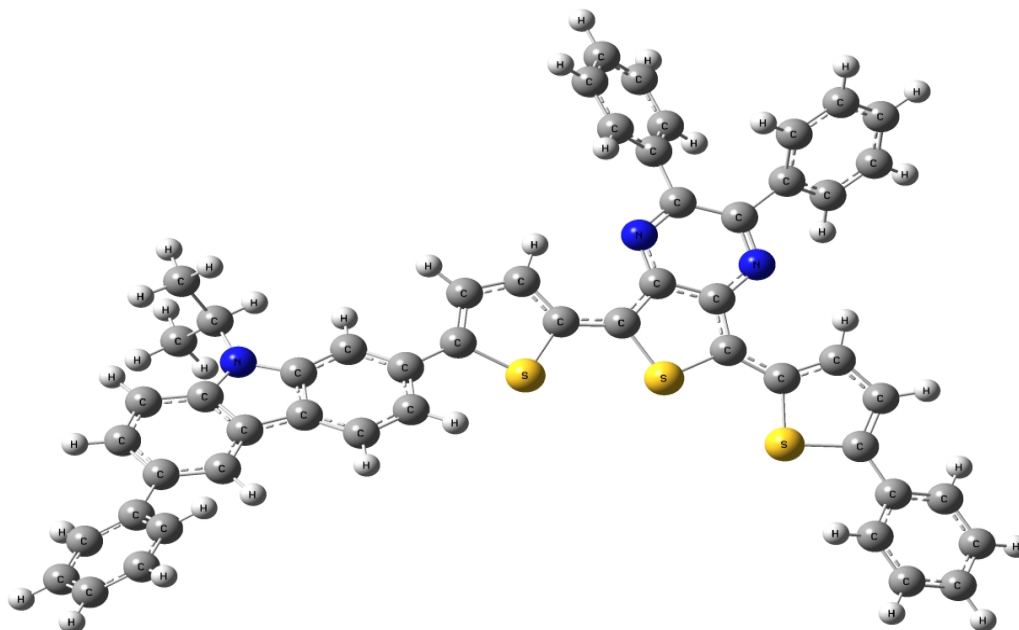
PCTTT :



PCTPY :



PCTPYPP :



**Figure 2.** Optimized structure of the studied compound obtained by B3LYP/6-31G level.

**Table 1.** Geometrical parameters of study compounds C<sub>1</sub> to C<sub>6</sub> obtained by B3LYP/6-31G(d) in their neutral (N) and doped (D) states.

PCDT				PCDTB			
d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.485	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	38.39	d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.48559	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	38.19
d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.465	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	27.69	d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.46601	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	26.86
d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.445	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	17.58	d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.46328	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	23.95
d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.466	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	26.92	d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.46363	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	24.25
				d <sub>5</sub> (Å)	1.46679	Θ <sub>5</sub> (°)	25.41
PCDTBT				PCTTT			
d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.485	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	38.19	d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.485	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	38.48
d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.465	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	27.14	d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.465	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	27.67
d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.454	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	5.791	d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.444	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	15.71
d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.455	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	4.916	d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.444	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	16.34
d <sub>5</sub> (Å)	1.466	Θ <sub>5</sub> (°)	25.37	d <sub>5</sub> (Å)	1.465	Θ <sub>5</sub> (°)	25.60
PCTPY				PCTPYPP			
d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.485	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	38.79	d <sub>1</sub> (Å)	1.489	Θ <sub>1</sub> (°)	59.01
d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.46450	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	26.34	d <sub>2</sub> (Å)	1.473	Θ <sub>2</sub> (°)	41.41
d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.43450	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	1.563	d <sub>3</sub> (Å)	1.436	Θ <sub>3</sub> (°)	5.564
d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.43684	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	1.834	d <sub>4</sub> (Å)	1.440	Θ <sub>4</sub> (°)	6.494
d <sub>5</sub> (Å)	1.46437	Θ <sub>5</sub> (°)	24.71	d <sub>5</sub> (Å)	1.480	Θ <sub>5</sub> (°)	74.38

On the other hand, it is interesting to study how the p-doped  $\pi$ -conjugated molecule becomes the ultimate responsible of charge transport. As said before, to obtain oxidized optimized structure, we started from the optimized structure of the neutral form. We can conclude that during the doping process and for all studied compounds the simple bonds become shorter, while the double ones become longer (Table 2). The inter-rings bonds are longer than normal double bonds. A quinoid-like distortion emerges as a result of the oxidation. These results are consistent with the

ab-initio HF and DFT calculations performed by J. Casado et al. [12] and S.M Bouzzine et al [13] for substituting oligothiophenes. The optimized geometry of the cationic compound indicates the formation of the positive polaron defect localized in the middle of the molecule and extending over the adjacent repeat units. The charged species are characterized by a reversal of the single double C-C bond pattern; the geometry process thus induces the appearance of a strong quinoid character within the molecule.

**Table 2.** Comparison between di and  $\Theta$ i forms PCTPYPP neutral and doped.

	PCTPYPP neutral	PCTPYPP doped
$d_1(\text{\AA})$	1.489	1.482
$d_2(\text{\AA})$	1.473	1.443
$d_3(\text{\AA})$	1.436	1.403
$d_4(\text{\AA})$	1.440	1.411
$d_5(\text{\AA})$	1.480	1.456
$\Theta_1(^{\circ})$	59.01	37.27
$\Theta_2(^{\circ})$	-41.41	11.77
$\Theta_3(^{\circ})$	5.56	1.12
$\Theta_4(^{\circ})$	6.49	3.37
$\Theta_5(^{\circ})$	74.38	19.95

#### *Electronic and photovoltaic properties*

Electronic structures are fundamental to the interpretation and understanding of the absorption spectra. The calculated frontier orbital energies (four occupied orbitals and four unoccupied orbitals) and energy gaps between the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) are listed in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, one remark that all studied molecules (PCDT, PCDTB, PCDTBT, PCTTT, PCTPY, PCTPYPP) exhibit stabilization HOMO levels

in comparison with those of compound PCDT. The HOMO and LUMO energies of PCDT to PCTPYPP change significantly, (respectively: -4.96 eV and -1.67 eV ; -5.00 eV and -1.68 eV ; -4.97 eV and -2.60 eV ; -4.86 eV and -1.86 eV ; -4.71 eV and -2.63 eV ; -4.64 eV and -2.57 eV). It can also be found that, the HOMO and LUMO energies of the studied compounds are slightly different. This implies that different structures play key roles on electronic properties. In addition, the energies of  $E_{gap}$  of differing slightly from 3.32 eV to 2.07 eV depending

on the different structures. They are studied in the following order PCDTB>PCDT>PCTTT>PCDTBT>PCTPY>PCTPYPP. For the comparison between PCDT (HOMO: -4.96eV, LUMO: -1.67eV) and PCTTT (HOMO: -4.86eV, LUMO: -1.86 eV) compounds, it can be seen a net stabilization of LUMO energies and destabilization of the energies of HOMO. The energy gap between HOMO and LUMO of PCTTT is also lower than that of

PCDT with a lower energy gap (3.00eV). This may be attributed to the presence of an additive thiophene ring in PCTTT. On the other hand, the comparison between PCTTT and PCDTB shows that the replacement of thiophene ring by phenylene causes an increase of band gap accompanying with a net stabilization of HOMO and destabilization of LUMO levels. This is in agreement with what was found in experimental results [6].

**Table 3.** Values of HOMO (eV), LUMO (eV) and Egap (eV) energies calculated for the studied compound obtained by B3LYP/6-31G(d).

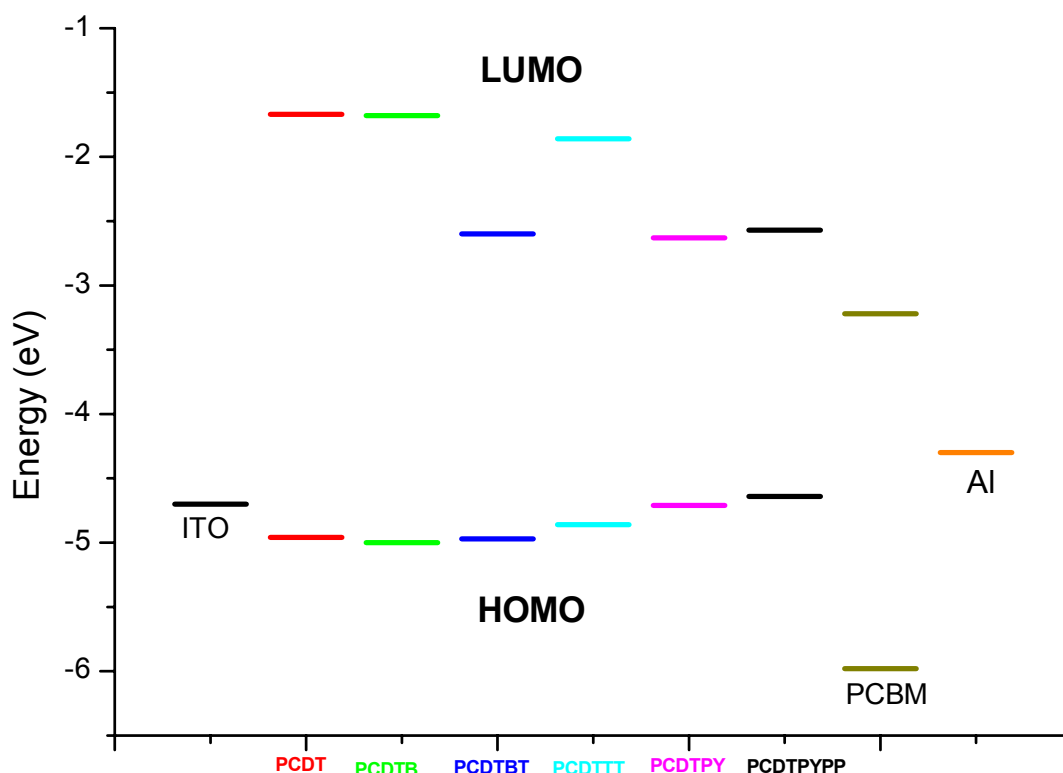
Compounds	E(LUMO) (eV)	E(HOMO) (eV)	Egap (eV)
PCDT	-1.67	-4.96	3.29
PCDTB	-1.68	-5.00	3.32
PCDTBT	-2.60	-4.97	2.36
PCTTT	-1.86	-4.86	3.00
PCTPY	-2.63	-4.71	2.07
PCTPYPP	-2.57	-4.64	2.07

The calculated band gap Egap of the studied compound increases in the following order PCDTB>PCDT>PCTTT>PCDTBT>PCTPY>PCTPYPP. Figure 3 shows detailed data of absolute energy of the frontier orbitals for studying compounds, ITO, PCBM and aluminum (Al) is included for comparison purposes. It is deduced that substitution pushes up/down the HOMO/LUMO energies in agreement with their electron acceptor character. To evaluate the possibilities of electron transfer from the excited studied molecules to the conductive band of PCBM,

the HOMO and LUMO levels were compared. As shown in Table 4, the change of molecular structure shows a great effect on the HOMO and on the LUMO levels. The experimental phenomenon was quite consistent with previous literature [14], which reported that the increase of the HOMO levels may suggest a negative effect on organic solar cell performance due to the broader gap between the HOMO level of the organic molecules and the LUMO level of PCBM ( $V_{oc}$ ). As shown in figure 3, both HOMO and LUMO levels of the studied molecules agreed well with the



requirement for an efficient photosensitizer. On the one hand, the HOMO levels of the studied compounds were higher than that of PCBM. Knowing that in organic solar cells, the open circuit voltage is found to be linearly dependent on the HOMO level of the donor and the LUMO level of the acceptor [15]. The difference between the energy of conduction band (LUMO) of PCBM and the energy of HOMO of the studied molecules range from 1.42 eV to 1.78 eV, these values are sufficient for a possible efficient electron injection. Therefore, all the studied molecules can be used as sensitizers because the electron injection process from the excited molecule to the conduction band of PCBM and the subsequent regeneration is possible in an organic sensitized solar cell.



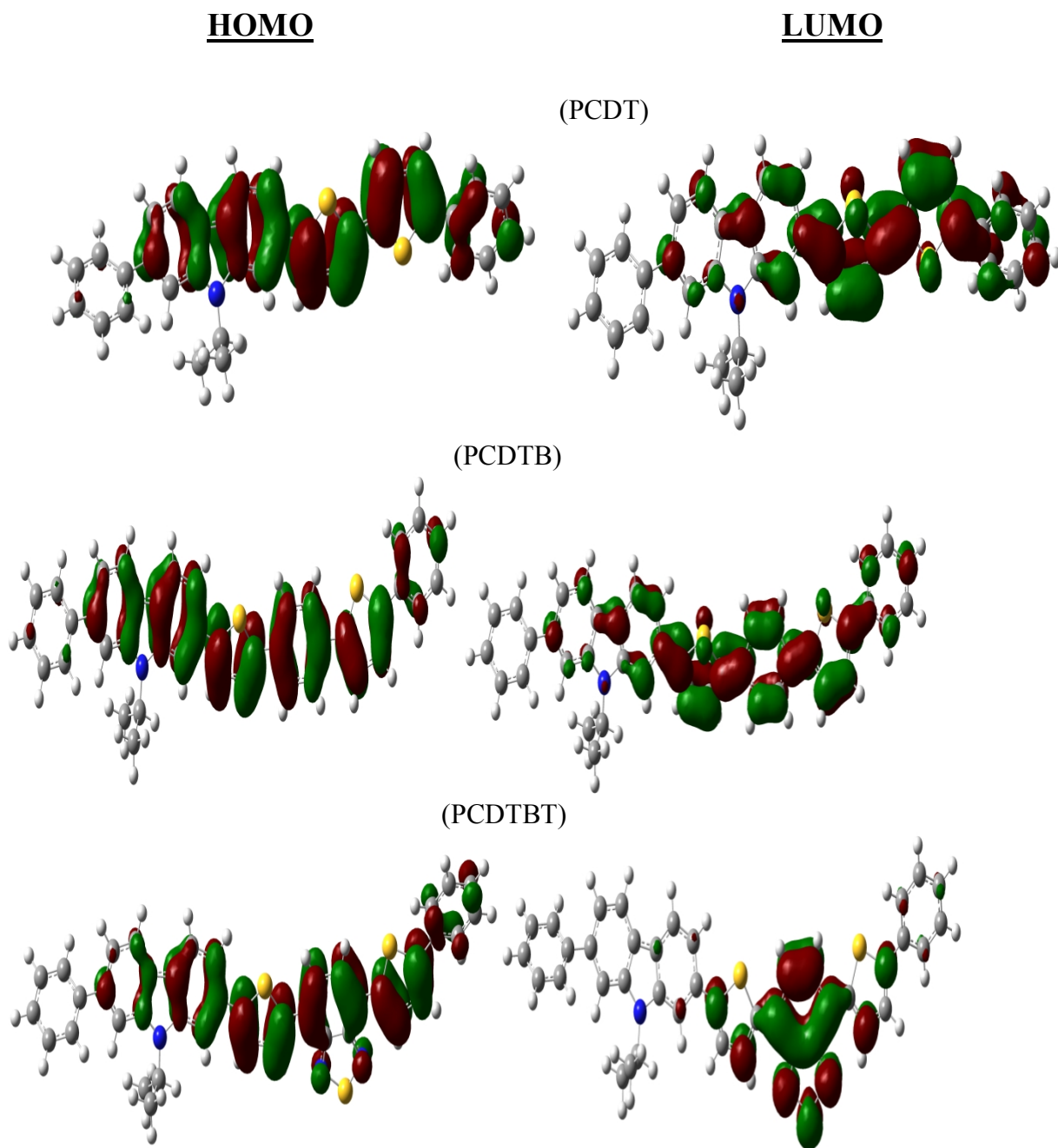
**Figure 3.** Data of the absolute energy of the frontier orbitals HOMO and LUMO for the studied molecules and ITO, PCBM and the aluminum (Al).

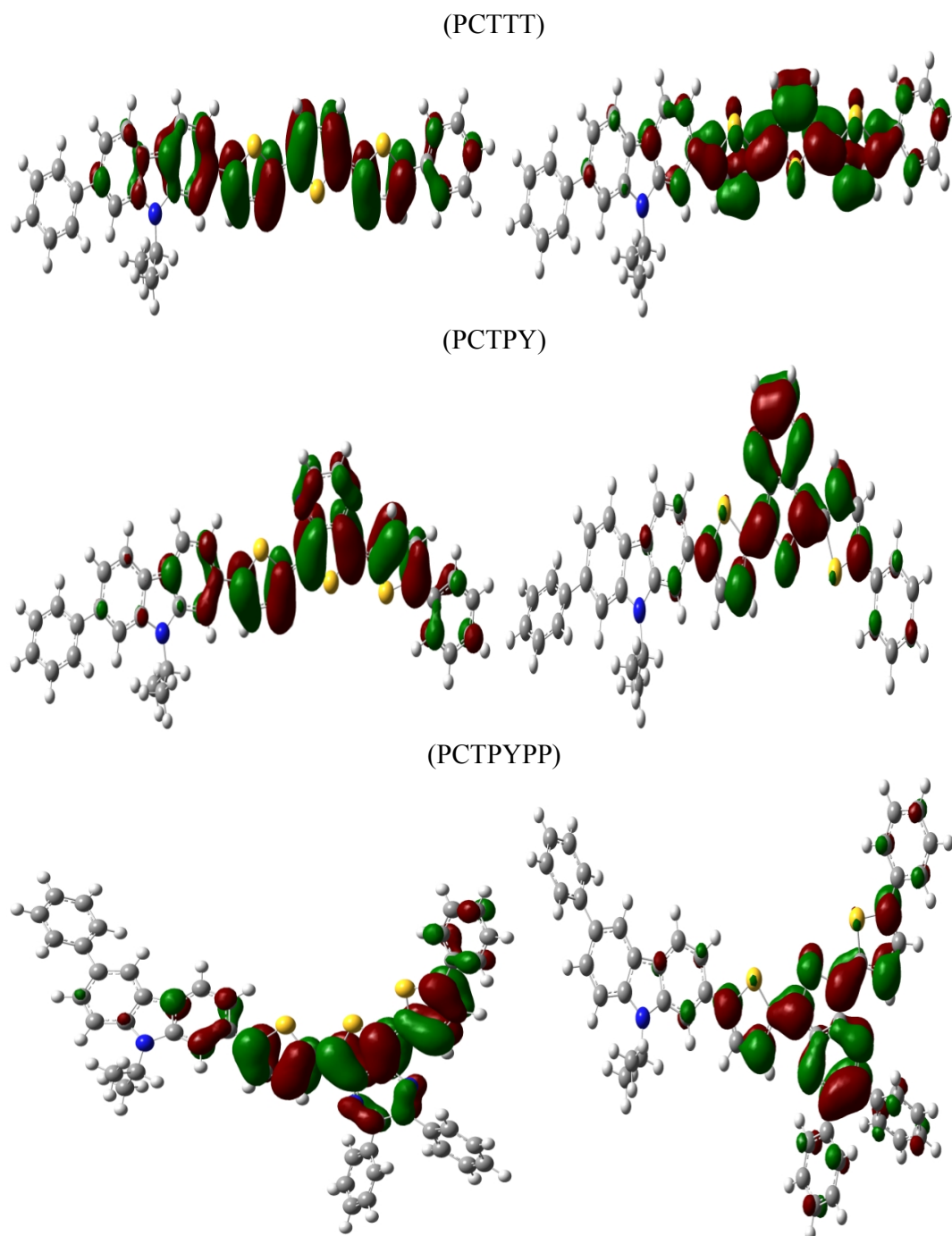
**Table 4.** Energy values of  $E_{\text{LUMO}}$  (eV),  $E_{\text{HOMO}}$  (eV) and the open circuit voltage  $V_{\text{oc}}$  (eV) [16].

Compounds	$E_{\text{LUMO}}$ (eV)	$E_{\text{HOMO}}$ (eV)	$\alpha_f$ (eV)	$V_{\text{oc}}$ (eV)
<b>PCDT</b>	-1.67	-4.96	1.55	1.74
<b>PCDTB</b>	-1.68	-5.00	1.53	1.78
<b>PCDTBT</b>	-2.60	-4.97	0.62	1.74
<b>PCTTT</b>	-1.86	-4.86	1.36	1.63
<b>PCTPY</b>	-2.63	-4.71	0.59	1.48
<b>PCTPYPP</b>	-2.57	-4.64	0.65	1.42
<b>PCBM</b>	-3.22	-5.98		

Finally, it is important to examine the HOMO and the LUMO for these compounds because the relative ordering of occupied and virtual orbitals provides a reasonable qualitative indication of excitations properties [17]. In general, as shown in Figure 4 (LUMO, HOMO), the HOMOs of these oligomers in

the neutral form possess a  $\pi$ -bonding character within subunit and a  $\pi$ -antibonding character between the consecutive subunits while the LUMOs possess a  $\pi$ -antibonding character within subunit and a  $\pi$ -bonding character between the subunits whereas it is the opposite in the case of doped forms.





**Figure 4.** The contour plots of HOMO and LUMO orbitals of study compounds PCDT to PCTPYPP in neutral form.

#### *Absorption and electronic properties*

Based on the optimized molecular structures with B3LYP/6-31G(d) method. We have calculated the UV-vis spectra of the studied compounds PCDT, PCDTB, PCDTBT, PCTTT,

PCTPY, PCTPYPP using ZINDO/s method. As illustrated in Table 5, we can find the values of calculated wavelength  $\lambda_{\max}$  and oscillator strength (O.S) along with main excitation configuration of the studied compounds.

Excitation to the  $S_1$  state corresponds almost exclusively to the promotion of an electron from the HOMO to the LUMO orbital. The absorption wavelengths arising from  $S_0 \rightarrow S_1$  electronic transition increase progressively with the increasing of conjugation lengths. It is reasonable, since HOMO  $\rightarrow$  LUMO transition is predominant in  $S_0 \rightarrow S_1$  electronic transition; the results are a decrease of the LUMO and an increase of the HOMO energy. These values are calculated by ZINDO method starting with optimized geometry obtained at B3LYP/6-31G(d) level. However, we believe that the bulk of intermolecular effect must be taken into account. This effect is the source of the deviation between the calculation and the We can remark for comparing calculated and experimental results [13] a linear relationship between calculated and experimental results. Therefore, the DFT theoretical calculations

give a good description of the absorption properties of the studied compound and can be employed to predict the electronic characteristics of other materials. It should be noted that the difference between the theoretical and experimental value can be explained by the fact that the calculations assume that the molecules in the vapor state.

Another consider a point in that the position of  $\lambda_{\max}$  shows a bathochromic shift when passing from PCDT to PCTPYPP, which also can be seen respectively in PCDT(449.56nm), PCDTB (425.36nm), PCDTBT(622.68nm), PCTTT(495.80nm), PCTPY(739.50nm) and PCTPYPP (732.62nm) due to the increasing of the extended conjugation through the system of aryl groups and multiple bonds. Those interesting points are seen both in the theoretical and experimental results[6].

**Table 5.** Absorption  $\lambda_{\text{abs}}$  (nm) obtained by the ZINDO/s method.

Compound	Transition	$\lambda_{\max}$ (nm)	Eex(eV)	O.S	MO/character
PCDT	S0 /S1	449.56	0.65178	1.5806	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	345.49	0.48359	0.1405	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
	S0/ S3	337.10	0.38868	0.0127	HOMO-2 $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
PCDTB	S0 /S1	425.36	0.60567	2.0874	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	364.08	0.45522	0.1359	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
	S0/ S3	336.77	0.37485	0.0122	HOMO-2 $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
PCDTBT	S0 /S1	622.68	0.66374	0.9183	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	408.06	0.49008	0.8340	
	S0/ S3	396.50	0.38713	0.3806	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1 HOMO-1 $\rightarrow$ LUMO
PCTTT	S0 /S1	495.80	0.64860	1.7891	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	376.04	0.49076	0.0743	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
	S0/ S3	337.54	0.38921	0.0272	HOMO-1 $\rightarrow$ LUMO
PCTPY	S0 /S1	739.50	0.67882	0.9844	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	448.01	0.43195	0.7645	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+2
	S0/ S3	412.19	0.51179	0.0281	HOMO-1 $\rightarrow$ LUMO
PCTPYPP	S0 /S1	732.62	0.67973	0.8140	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO
	S0/ S2	453.21	0.44252	0.6735	HOMO $\rightarrow$ LUMO+1
	S0/ S3	432.21	0.49942	1.2279	HOMO-1 $\rightarrow$ LUMO

## Conclusion

This study, is a theoretical analysis of the geometries and electronic properties of three various compounds based on the oligothiophene and carbazole which displays the effect of substituted groups and on the structural and opto-electronic properties of these materials.

The concluding remarks are:

- The results of the optimized structures for all studied compounds so that they have similar conformations (quasi planar conformation). We found that the incorporation of several groups does not change the geometric parameters.
- The calculated frontier orbital energies HOMO and LUMO and energy gaps showed that the energy gaps of the studied molecules differs lightly from 2.07 eV to 3.32 eV depending on the different structures. The calculated band gap  $E_{gap}$  of the studied compound increases in the following order PCDTB > PCDT > PCTT > PCDTBT > PCTPY > PCTPYPP.
- The replacement of thiophene ring with phenyl encauses a decrease of band Gap and a net destabilization of both HOMO and LUMO levels
- All the studied molecules can be used as sensitizers because the electron injection process from the excited molecule to the conduction band of PCBM and the subsequent regeneration are feasible in the organic sensitized solar cell. This calculation procedure can be used as a model system for understanding the relationships between electronic properties and molecular structure

and also can be employed to explore their suitability in electroluminescent devices and in related application. Presumably, the procedures of theoretical calculations can be employed to predict and assume the electronic properties on yet prepared and efficiency proved the other materials, and further to design novel materials for organic solar cells.

## Acknowledgements

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