Term rules for simple metal clusters

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Hund’s term rules are only valid for isolated atoms, but have no generalization for molecules or clusters of several atoms. We present a benchmark calculation of Al2 and Al3, for which we find the high and low-spin ground states \( ^3\Pi_u \) and \( ^1\Sigma^+ \), respectively. We show that the relative stabilities of all the molecular terms of Al2 and Al3 can be described by simple rules pertaining to bonding structures and symmetries, which serve as guiding principles to determine ground state terms of arbitrary multi-atom clusters.

The ground state terms (spin and angular momenta) of isolated atoms are determined by Hund’s rules1, which are explained by the lowering of the electronuclear attraction energy2–5. For molecules and clusters, such term rules do not exist. Group theory allows us to determine the possible \( ^2S^+1\Xi \) molecular terms, where \( S \) denotes the total spin and \( \Xi \) the symmetry species, but there is no systematic way to figure out which of these is the ground state. Direct experimental observation or quantum chemical total energy calculation is only available for a few prototype systems.

Hund’s first rule of maximum spin multiplicity holds for many organic molecules6–9, but not all9. Diatomic molecules on the other hand, tend to have spin singlet ground states with the exception of \( \text{O}_2 \) and \( \text{B}_2 \) (see e.g. refs 10–19 for diatomic molecules of main group elements). These molecules tend to have ground states that minimize the internuclear bond length, which may be associated with a lowering of the electronuclear attraction energy, but whether or not such discussion generalizes to metallic clusters remains unknown. Moreover, recent attempts to generalize Hund’s rules for molecules8,20 or clusters21–23 only focus on a spin multiplicity rule, and trends or rules for \( \Xi \) (symmetry) terms remain completely uncharted territory.

Simple Al clusters emerge as the ideal model system to study term rules. Bulk Al is paramagnetic, but in low dimensional structures Al atoms may spontaneously align their spins. For example, strained quasi-1D chains of Al may exhibit ferromagnetism24,25, and Aln clusters with even \( n = 2, 4, 6, 8 \) have spin-triplet ground states26–29. Al1 on the other hand has spin-doublet (low-spin) and spin-quadruplet (high-spin) configurations, but which one of these is the ground state remains unresolved28. The present benchmark study confirms that Al2 has the \( ^3\Pi_u \) high-spin ground state and unambiguously shows that Al3 has the low-spin \( ^1\Sigma^+ \) ground state. The Al2 high-spin state is stabilized by Fermi correlation, which is not overcome by Coulomb correlation that tends to increase the stability of low-spin terms. For Al3, however, the high-spin term has a symmetry broken geometry that preempts effective Coulomb correlation from taking place, thus un-stabilizing the high-spin term. Such symmetry lowering can debilitating high-spin terms of any multi-atom system. Moreover, fear each spin state, we find a simple rule for the \( \Xi \) terms. The \( \Xi \) term with least node wavefunction is most stable, and for terms with equal number of nodes, the one with most bonds is most stable. Notice that for diatomic molecules, \( \Xi \) is the angular momentum (\( \Xi = \Lambda^{(\pm)}_{0/\pm} \)) along the internuclear axis, which can be either minimized or maximized by this rule.

Results

Al2 has five stationary states, \( ^1\Sigma^+_g, ^1\Pi_u, ^1\Delta_g, ^3\Pi_u \) and \( ^3\Sigma^-_g \), corresponding to the occupation of different molecular orbitals by two \( 3p \) electrons. Al3 has three stationary states, \( ^3\Sigma^-_g, ^1\Sigma^+_u \) and \( ^1\Pi_u \), corresponding
to the occupation of different molecular orbitals by three \(3p\) electrons. Their equilibrium nuclear geometries and corresponding total energies \(E\) are shown in Table 1. Hartree-Fock (HF) calculation predicts \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\) to have \(^3\Pi_u\) and \(^4\Delta_g\) high-spin ground states, respectively. Inclusion of Coulomb correlation by CAS-SCF (see Methods) maintains the high-spin ground state of \(\text{Al}_2\), but stabilizes the \(^2\Delta'_1\) low-spin ground state of \(\text{Al}_3\). At the same time, high-spin terms of \(\text{Al}_2\) \((^3\Pi_u, ^3\Sigma_g^-)\) and \(\text{Al}_3\) \((^4\Delta_g, ^4\Sigma_g^-)\) become nearly degenerate; the energy difference between them is smaller than 0.01 \(\text{a.u.}\). The \(^3\Pi_u\) ground state for \(\text{Al}_2\) is consistent with experiment\(^{34}\), and our prediction of the ground state of \(\text{Al}_3\) is corroborated by the Stern-Gerlach experiment\(^{30}\). More importantly, the ground state of \(\text{Al}_2\) is consistent with both Hund’s first and second rules, whereas \(\text{Al}_3\) violates both of them.

### Potential energy components

Traditionally, Hund’s rules have been interpreted as an energy gain due to the inter-electron repulsion potential energy \(V_{\text{ee}}\)\(^{35–37}\), and more recently as an energy gain due to the electron-nuclear attraction \(V_{\text{en}}\)\(^{2,4,5,7,8}\). In order to analyze whether or not similar energy lowering mechanisms can be invoked for \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\), we decompose the total energies given in Table 1 into potential energy components shown in Fig. 1. In both HF (dashed lines) and CAS-SCF (solid lines) calculations for each stationary state of \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\), repulsion terms \(V_{\text{ee}}\) (red lines) and \(V_{\text{en}}\) (blue lines; inter-nuclear repulsion) are positive and the attraction term \(V_{\text{en}}\) (purple lines) is negative. The total energies \(E\) of \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\) calculated by CAS-SCF always lie lower than those calculated by HF. For both \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\), upon inclusion of Coulomb correlation by CAS(6, 26) and CAS(9, 18), respectively, the individual potential energy components can be decomposed as follows: both \(V_{\text{ee}}\) and \(V_{\text{en}}\) decrease. The correlation energies \(E^c = E^{\text{CAS}} - E^{\text{HF}}\), along with \(V^c, V^e_{\text{ee}}, V^e_{\text{en}}\), and \(V^e_{\text{en}}\) defined similarly, are unique to each molecular term; \(E^c < 0\) always, and for the components we find \(V^e_{\text{en}} < 0, V^e_{\text{en}} > 0,\) and \(V^c > 0\).

For \(\text{Al}_2\) both HF and CAS-SCF predict

\[
E^{\text{HF/CAS}}(^3\Pi_u) < E^{\text{HF/CAS}}(^3\Sigma_g^-) < E^{\text{HF/CAS}}(^3\Sigma_g^+) < E^{\text{HF/CAS}}(^3\Pi_u) < E^{\text{HF/CAS}}(^1\Delta_g).
\]

The correlation energies, however, exhibit the different trend

\[
E^c(^1\Delta_g) < E^c(^3\Sigma_g^-) < E^c(^3\Sigma_g^+) < E^c(^3\Pi_u) < E^c(^3\Pi_u)
\]

making the excitation energies smaller. For \(\text{Al}_3\), HF predicts

\[
E^{\text{HF}}(^4\Delta_g) < E^{\text{HF}}(^4\Sigma_g^-) < E^{\text{HF}}(^2\Delta'_1)
\]

and CAS-SCF predicts

\[
E^{\text{CAS}}(^2\Delta'_1) < E^{\text{CAS}}(^4\Sigma_g^-) < E^{\text{CAS}}(^4\Delta_g)
\]

i.e. the level ordering is altered by correlation effects. For correlation energies we find

\[
E^c(^2\Delta'_1) < E^c(^4\Delta_g) < E^c(^4\Sigma_g^-) < E^c(^4\Sigma_g^-).
\]

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### Table 1. Total energies and equilibrium structures of \(\text{Al}_2\) and \(\text{Al}_3\).

| \(\text{Al}_n\) | HF | CAS(6, 18) | CAS(6, 26) | HF | CAS(9, 12) | CAS(9, 18) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \(^3\Pi_u\) | \(-483.7824(0)\) | \(-483.8939(23)\) | \(-483.9082(23)\) | \(-483.8915(15)\) | \(-483.7647(1)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) |
| \(^3\Sigma_g^-\) | \(-483.7700(2)\) | \(-483.8877(14)\) | \(-483.8915(15)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) | \(-483.7627(1)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) |
| \(^3\Sigma_g^+\) | \(-483.7647(1)\) | \(-483.8830(21)\) | \(-483.8915(15)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) | \(-483.7627(1)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) |
| \(^2\Delta'_1\) | \(-483.7369(6)\) | \(-483.8760(28)\) | \(-483.8915(15)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) | \(-483.7627(1)\) | \(-483.8925(8)\) |
| \(^1\Pi_u\) | \(-725.6995(25)\) | \(-725.7969(63)\) | \(-725.8496(67)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) | \(-725.7962(63)\) | \(-725.8496(67)\) |
| \(^1\Sigma_g^-\) | \(-725.7007(27)\) | \(-725.7962(63)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) | \(-725.7962(63)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) |
| \(^1\Sigma_g^+\) | \(-725.6780(30)\) | \(-725.7962(63)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) | \(-725.7962(63)\) | \(-725.8554(64)\) |
For both Al$_2$ and Al$_3$, the strongest correlation effect, i.e. greatest correlation energy $E_c$, is observed for the $^1\Delta_g$ and $^2A'$ low-spin terms, respectively. For Al$_3$, this correlation effect is strong enough to alter the level ordering of the molecular terms, but for Al$_2$ not. Thus, the relative stability of the Al$_2$ molecular
terms can be discussed based on Fermi correlation (Pauli’s exclusion principle) and HF calculations, but for Al₃, Coulomb correlation included by CAS-SCF is crucial for the description of molecular terms.

For Al₂, Hund’s first and second rules predict

\[ E (^{3}Π_{u}) < E (^{3}Σ^{-}_{g}) < E (^{1}Δ_{g}) < E (^{4}Π_{u}) < E (^{3}Σ^{+}_{g}), \]

which is valid only for the spin-triplet terms. The spin-singlet terms exhibit an opposite trend to Hund’s second rule. Term stabilities have earlier been interpreted by either \( V_{en} \) or \( V_{en} \), which imply that total energy differences are dominated by one potential energy component \( V(i=ee, en, or mn) \), i.e., the total energy should follow the trend of this dominant \( V \). Figure 1, however, shows that

\[ (\pm) V_{i}(^{3}Σ^{-}_{g}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{1}Δ_{g}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{3}Π_{u}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{4}Π_{u}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{3}Σ^{+}_{g}), \]

which is different to Eq. (1). Here the + sign corresponds to \( i=en \) and the − sign to \( i=ee \) and \( i=mn \). Clearly total energy trends do not follow any one particular potential energy component. Although the highest spin multiplicity (Hund’s first) rule does not follow any of the potential energy components \( V_{en} \) or \( V_{mn} \), the \( Ξ \) terms, when observed for spin-triplet and spin-singlet states individually, exhibit the following trends

\[ (\mp) V_{i}(^{3}Π_{u}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{3}Σ^{-}_{g}) \]  \hspace{1cm} \text{(8a)}

\[ (\pm) V_{i}(^{1}Σ^{+}_{g}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{3}Π_{u}) < (\pm) V_{i}(^{1}Δ_{g}). \]  \hspace{1cm} \text{(8b)}

Note that Eq. (8a) has the opposite sign convention to Eqs (7) and (8b). Thus, for a given spin multiplicity, the potential energy components follow the same trend as total energies, but the sign may vary case by case!

**Fermi correlation and bond structure.** Since clear term rules cannot be described based on the individual energy components discussed above, we turn our attention to the bond structures given in Table 2 for each molecular term. For Al₂, inclusion of Coulomb correlation via CAS-SCF does not alter the relative stability of the Al₂ terms, so the relative term stabilities can be understood purely based on Fermi correlation (Pauli exclusion principle). This leads to a simple description based on the bond structures of the different terms, i.e., the nodal structure of the wavefunction. Al₂ has 3σ̄, 3π, and 3π bonding orbitals, and for the spin-singlet and spin-triplet terms, the most stable \( Ξ \) term has an occupied 3σ̄ orbital, i.e., the least node configuration. The stability of the spin-triplet \( ^{3}Π_{u} \) against the spin-singlet \( ^{1}Σ^{+}_{g} \) term also follows from HF theory. Starting from the nodeless \( ^{1}Σ^{+}_{g} \) wavefunction, moving one electron from the 3σ̄ into a 3π orbital with parallel spin (forming the \( ^{1}Π_{u} \) term) lowers the total energy in three steps: (i) for fixed orbitals and Al–Al bond length, \( V_{en} \) is lowered for spin parallel electrons; (ii) relaxing the electronic orbitals lowers the total energy further; and (iii) relaxing the Al–Al bond length lowers the total energy further still. Repeating steps (ii) and (iii) obviously keeps lowering the total energy until convergence is found; these steps can be roughly associated to changes in \( V_{en} \) and \( V_{mn} \) respectively, but as seen in Fig. 1, for Al₂ \( V_{en} \) and \( V_{mn} \) actually increase despite the initial lowering of \( V_{en} \) in step (i). For the \( Ξ \) terms we find that for a given spin multiplicity, the total energy increases as the number of nodes in the wavefunction increases.

**Coulomb correlation and bond structure.** The above discussion fails for Al₃. Inclusion of Coulomb correlation via CAS-SCF un-stabilizes the spin-quadruplet terms despite their possession of two electrons in 3π type orbitals (\( a_1 \) and \( b_2 \) for \( ^{4}A_{2} \) and two \( a_1 \)s for \( ^{4}B_{1} \)) on the Al₃ molecular plane. We analyze the effects of Coulomb correlation based on the electron density distribution change defined by

### Table 2. Electronic configurations of valence electrons of Al₂ and Al₃.

| Al₂   | Al₃   |
|-------|-------|
| \(^{3}Π_{u}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄13π̄1 |
| \(^{3}Σ^{-}_{g}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄1 |
| \(^{1}Δ_{g}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄1 |
| \(^{3}Π_{u}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄1 |
| \(^{3}Σ^{-}_{g}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄1 |
| \(^{1}Δ_{g}\) | \(3σ\)3π̄1 |

\[ [3σ] \text{represents the configurations of 3s electrons in Al₂, [3σ] = 3σσ}(a_1)^23σσ(c')^2 \text{ for } ^{3}A_1 ', \text{ and [3σ] = 3σσ}(a_1)^23σσ(c')^2 \text{ for } ^{3}B_1 '. \]
$\rho_c = \rho_{\text{CAS}} - \rho_{\text{HF}}$, where $\rho_{\text{CAS}}$ and $\rho_{\text{HF}}$ are the total electron densities calculated by CAS-SCF and HF, respectively. The crucial Coulomb correlation that alters the $\text{Al}_3$ term stabilities occurs at CAS(9, 12), and therefore we evaluate $\rho_{\text{CAS}}$ for $\text{Al}_2$ and $\text{Al}_3$ using CAS(6, 18) and CAS(9, 12), respectively. The $\rho_c$ shown in Figs 2 and 3 for $\text{Al}_2$ and $\text{Al}_3$, respectively, are evaluated at the equilibrium nuclear configurations obtained by CAS(6, 18) and CAS(9, 12), respectively.

$\text{Al}_2$. The Coulomb correlation effects are analyzed based on the bonding $3p\sigma_g$ and $3p\pi_u$ orbitals shown in panel (a) of Fig. 2. Panels (b)–(e) of Fig. 2 show the electron density differences $\rho'$ for the $3\Pi_u$, $3\Sigma_g^-$, $1\Pi_u$, and $1\Sigma_g^+$ terms in the planes $P_1$ and $P_2$ corresponding to the $3p\sigma_g$ and $3p\pi_u$ bonding orbitals. The blue areas indicate a depletion of electron density, and the yellow–orange–red areas an increase of electron density. For the $3\Sigma_g^-$ terms, these $P_1$ and $P_2$ planes are equivalent. The $\rho'$ analysis is omitted for the $1\Delta_g$ term, which is not correctly represented in the HF calculation.

The CAS(6, 18) calculation includes various configurations including up to 3$d$ orbitals, but the essence of the Coulomb correlation effects can be described based on the mixing of the bonding $3p\sigma_g$ and $3p\pi_u$ orbitals. As shown in panels (b)–(e) of Fig. 2, the electron density distribution corresponding to orbitals occupied in HF theory (Table 2) is depleted, and increases corresponding to bonding orbitals not occupied in HF theory. For the $3\Pi_u$, $1\Pi_u$, and $1\Sigma_g^+$ terms that in HF have an occupied $3p\sigma_g$ orbital, there is a
depletion in $\rho^c$ along the bond axis, and for the $3\Sigma_2^-$ that in HF does not have an occupied 3$p_\sigma$ orbital, there is an increase. Likewise, $\rho^c$ is negative in the regions corresponding to 3$p_\pi$ orbitals occupied in HF theory, and positive in the regions where the 3$p_\pi$ orbitals are not occupied in HF theory. Because all these Coulomb correlation effects essentially occur among the same set of orbitals, all of which are bonding, the effects are similar. Because the Coulomb correlation effects are similar for all terms, Coulomb correlation does not alter the relative stability of them, and the discussion above of term stability based on Fermi correlations and wavefunction nodal structure is sufficient.

**Figure 3.** Schematic of bonding orbitals (a) and Coulomb correlation induced electron density distribution change $\rho^c$ for stationary states of Al$_3$ (b–d). Here $\rho^{CAS}$ is evaluated at CAS(9, 12).
Al₅. Al₅ has the 2A′₁ low-spin ground state, against expectations from Hund’s first rule or the spin-state stabilization mechanism for Al₅ pertaining to HF theory. Thus, the energy lowering effect of Coulomb correlations is different for the low-spin 2A′₁ term and the high-spin 2A₁ and 2B₁ terms. The effect of these Coulomb correlations is discussed based on the 3pσ and 3pπ orbitals shown in panel (a) of Fig. 3. Panels (b)–(d) of Fig. 3 show the electron density differences ρ for the 2A′₁, 2A₁, and 2B₁ terms in the plane P₁ of the nuclei of Al₅, and its perpendicular plane P₂, which is a reflection symmetry plane of Al₅. Notice that the nuclei of the spin-doublet 2A′₁ term form equilateral triangle, whereas the spin-quadruplet terms 4A₂ and 2B₁ correspond to isosceles triangles. Ensuingly, the bonding orbitals for the low-spin and high-spin terms are quite different.

2A′₁ has a doubly occupied aπ bonding orbital, a singly occupied aπ orbital, and a doubly degenerate e′ LUMO. The aπ orbital is a π bond where the plane of nuclei is a nodal plane, and the aπ is a σ bond with the charge density lobes in the center of the triangle. Both aπ and aπ orbitals have C₃v symmetry, resulting in an equilateral trimer with D₃h symmetry. The doubly degenerate e′ LUMO corresponds to a σ bond with charge density lobes at all three sides of the triangle. The main Coulomb correlation effect is similar to what was discussed above for Al₅. There is a depletion of electron in the regions corresponding to the aπ and aπ orbitals occupied in HF theory, and an increase in the region corresponding to the e′ orbitals, as seen in Fig. 3(b).

For the spin-quadruplet terms one of the aπ electrons occupies either one of the e′ orbitals. Individually these orbitals have the C₃v symmetry, yielding Jahn-Teller distorted isosceles triangles as described in Table 2. This changes the also symmetry species of the occupied aπ and aπ orbitals into b₁ and a₁, respectively, but these orbitals still maintain their nature as π and σ bonds with similar charge density lobes as described above for the equilateral triangle. The newly formed a₁ or b₁ orbitals for the 2B₁ or 2A₂ terms, have charge density lobes at the base or legs of the triangle, respectively, as shown in Fig. 3(a). The LUMO of the 4B₁ and 4A₂ terms are b₁ and a₁, respectively, i.e., the other one of the e′ orbitals for an equilateral triangle. For the spin-quadruplet terms, the main Coulomb correlation effect is the mixing of the a₁ or b₁ orbitals, which can be seen Fig. 3(c,d) as a depletion of electron density along the legs (base) of the triangle for 4A₂ (4B₁) and the corresponding along the base (legs) of the triangle.

Because of different symmetries, the Coulomb correlations for the low-spin and the high-spin terms of Al₅ are fundamentally different. For the spin-doublet term, the main Coulomb correlation is the mixing of two occupied states and an unoccupied doubly degenerate state, whereas for the spin-quadruplet terms, the main Coulomb correlation is due to the mixing of one occupied and one unoccupied state. Coulomb correlation acts strongly among states nearby in energy and real space, and for the spin-quadruplet terms, the Jahn–Teller distortion imposes a severe limitation on the availability of such nearby states for mixing. This, combined with the fact that Coulomb correlation (even without geometrical distortions) is larger for low-spin configurations in total stabilizes the Al₅ low-spin ground state. Thus, both Hund’s first rule and the mechanism that stabilizes the high-spin ground state of Al₅ are violated because the breaking of symmetry of the Al₅ spin-quadruplet configurations reduces their Coulomb correlation. Note that Hund’s maximum spin multiplicity rule is violated under exactly the opposite conditions as postulated by Kutzelnigg and Morgan.

Larger clusters. Application of the term rules described above for other clusters is straightforward. We illustrate this generalization by predicting ground state terms for Al₄ and Al₆. For both clusters, we consider previously described planar and pyramidal structures, incidentally, our discussion below offers a new interpretation for why planar geometries are favored against pyramidal ones. We predict 3B₁u and 2B₁g ground states for Al₄ and Al₆, respectively, well in agreement with previous works. The structures and spin multiplicities agree also with density-functional calculations, which however give no information of the symmetry species Ξ.

Al₆. Al₆ can have spin-singlet, spin-triplet, and spin-quintet states due to different configurations of four 3p electrons, shown in Table 3. The HOMO of any of the Al₆ terms with pyramidal structure (3-fold degenerate 2t₁ orbitals) do not form σ-type bonds, so for any spin multiplicity, the least node wavefunctions corresponds to a planar geometry. The planar Al₆ spin-quintet terms (high spin) always have at least one occupied antibonding molecular orbital, such as 2b₃₃, 2b₃₃, 2b₃₃, and 2b₃₃, whereas the spin-triplet and singlet terms 2B₁u, 2A₁u, 2B₁g, and 1A₂ have valence electrons occupying in bonding orbitals (1b₁g, 1b₁g, and 3a₁). Thus, Fermi correlation stabilizes the spin-triplet terms with possession of most-occupied σ-type bonding orbitals, i.e., 2B₁u state. Coulomb correlation, which enhances the electron density on the nodal plane of HOMO(s), makes Al-Al bonds on the molecular plane stronger for both 3B₁u and 1A₂ states. As seen in stability of Al₆’s spin triplets terms, such Coulomb correlation effect cannot reverse the relative stability for 1B₁u and 1A₂, and thus we predict 1B₁u as the ground state term of Al₆.

Al₆. Al₆ can have spin multiplicities up to spin-sixtet due to different configurations of five 3p-electrons. All pyramidal, and the planar spin-sixtet terms have at least one electron in antibonding or nonbonding orbitals (see Table 4), and thus cannot be more stable than the planar spin-doublet or spin-quadruplet terms. The planar spin-quadruplet terms (intermediate spin state) only have partial bonds, such as 3b₁,
4b₁, and 2b₁, which leaves only spin-doublet terms with strong σ-type bonds. Thus for Al₅, we predict the planar ²B₁ spin-doublet term, which has the least node structure ground state.

Discussion
Our benchmark first principles calculation predicts the ³Πₗ (high-spin) and ⁴A₁’ (low-spin) ground states for Al₂ and Al₃, respectively. Detailed analysis of potential energy components of the total energy reveal that previous interpretations, attributing atomic or molecular term stabilization to either V_{ee}^{35,36} or V_{en}^{2,5,8} are, in general, not valid for multi-atom systems. The relative stability of the Ξ terms for a given spin multiplicity for either Al₂ and Al₃ follows simple arguments based on bonding structures: For a given spin multiplicity the Ξ term possessing the most-occupied σ bonding orbitals (least node structure) is stabilized within the one-electron orbital picture according to Hartree-Fock (HF) theory. In addition, HF theory tends to stabilize the high-spin term due to Fermi correlation (Pauli exclusion principle). Coulomb correlation lowers the energy by mixing some of the orbitals occupied in HF theory with nearby unoccupied orbitals. For Al₂, the Coulomb correlation effects are similar for all terms, but for Al₃, Coulomb correlation alters the relative term stability. For Al₃, breaking of symmetry of the spin-quadruplet terms significantly limits the orbital mixing and energy lowering by Coulomb correlation. The high symmetry of the spin-doublet term, on the other hand, allows for mixing with degenerate levels followed by a much larger energy lowering by Coulomb correlation, stabilizing the low-spin ⁴A₁’ ground state of Al₃. These stabilization mechanisms are not specific for Al clusters, and serve as simple term rules to determine the ground state of arbitrary multi-atomic systems. We demonstrate this predictive power by predicting ³B₁, and ²B₁ ground states for Al₄ and Al₅, respectively.

Methods
The total energy E of the ²S₁/² term of an Alₙ cluster in the Born-Oppenheimer approximation is given by \( E \equiv \sum_{\text{all orbitals}} |\phi\rangle \langle \psi| \), where \( |\phi\rangle \) and \( |\psi\rangle \) are the many-electron wavefunctions of the cluster and the molecule, respectively.

| Geometry | Electronic configuration | Schematic molecular orbitals |
|----------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Planar  | ³B₁     | [3s] 1b₁ ² 1b₁ ² 3a₁ ² 2b₁ ² 2b₁ ² 2b₁ ² 2b₁ ² 3a₁ ² |
|         | ³A₁     | [3s] 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ 2a₂ ³ |

Table 3. Electronic configurations of valence electrons for planar and pyramidal geometries for Al₄. Here \([3s]=1a₁ ² 1b₁ ² 1b₁ ² 2a₂ ² 2a₂ ²\) for the planar, and \([3s]=1a₁ ² 1b₁ ² 1b₁ ² 2a₂ ² 2a₂ ²\) for the pyramidal geometries.

| Geometry | Electronic configuration | Schematic molecular orbitals |
|----------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Planar  | ⁴A₁     | [3s] 1b₂ ² (3a₁/a₁) \(\approx 2c/\sqrt{3}\) |
|         | ⁴A₂     | [3s] 1b₂ ² 1b₁ ² 3a₁ ² 4a₁ ² 3b₁ ² 2b₁ ² |
|         | ²B₁     | [3s] 1b₁ ² 4a₁ ² |
|         | ²B₂     | [3s] 1b₁ ² 4b₁ ² |
|         | ²A₁     | [3s] 1b₂ ² 1b₂ ² (3b₁/2b₂)² 4a₁ ² |

Table 4. Electronic configurations of valence electrons for planar and pyramidal geometries for Al₅. Here \([3s]=1a₁ ² 1b₁ ² 2a₂ ² 3a₁ ²\) for the planar, and \([3s]=1a₁ ² 1b₁ ² 2a₂ ² 3a₁ ²\) for the pyramidal geometries.
tion and the operators $\hat{O}$ give the electron kinetic energy, the inter-nuclear repulsion, the electronuclear attraction, and the inter-electron repulsion, respectively. The expectation values $\langle 2^{n+1}S_g/u | \hat{O} | 2^{n+1}S_g/u \rangle$ for each operator $\hat{O}$, henceforth denoted as $O(2^{n+1}S_g/u)$, are calculated using the GAMESS package. We use both Hartree-Fock (HF) method and complete active space self-consistent field (CAS-SCF) method. Our CAS-SCF many-electron wavefunctions contain configuration interactions among the 3s and 3p valence shells and empty 3d-derived orbitals: CAS(6, 26) and CAS(9, 18) for Al, and Al$_2$, respectively. CAS(n, m) stands for a CAS-SCF calculation with $n$ active spaces and $m$ active electrons. Atomic orbitals are expanded within the aug-cc-pVTZ basis set, and all nuclear positions are relaxed. This gives a virial ratio of $V/T = 2.00000 \pm 0.00003$ for each molecular term $2^{n+1}S_g/u$.

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**Author Contributions**

D.Y. conducted the calculations, D.Y. and H.R. analysed the results. H.R. wrote the manuscript. Both authors reviewed the manuscript.

**Additional Information**

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Erratum: Term rules for simple metal clusters

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In the Methods section of this Article, all instances of 'g/u' should have been removed. The Methods section should read:

The total energy $E$ of the $^{2S+1}\Xi$ term of an Al$_n$ cluster in Born-Oppenheimer approximation is given by

$$
^{2S+1}\Xi \left[ T + V_{nn} + V_{en} + V_{ee} \right],
$$

where $^{2S+1}\Xi$ is a many-electron wavefunction and the operators $\hat{O}$ give the electron kinetic energy, the inter-nuclear repulsion, the electronuclear attraction, and the inter-electron respectively. The expectation values $\langle ^{2S+1}\Xi \mid \hat{O} \mid ^{2S+1}\Xi \rangle$ for each operator $\hat{O}$, henceforth denotes as $O(^{2S+1}\Xi)$, are calculated using the GAMESS package.\(^{40}\) We use both Hartree-Fock (HF) method and complete active space self-consistent field (CAS-SCF) method. Our CAC-SCF many-electron wavefunctions contain configuration interactions among the 3s and 3p valence shell and empty 3d-derived orbitals: CAS(6,26) and CAS(9,18) for Al$_2$ and Al$_3$, respectively. CAS(n,m) stands for a CAS-SCF calculation with $n$ active spaces and $m$ active electrons. Atomic orbitals are expanded within the au-cc-pVTZ basis set, and all nuclear positions are relaxed. This gives a virial ratio of $-V/T = 2.00000 \pm 0.00003$ for each molecular term $^{2S+1}\Xi$.

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