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Denis Kuznetsov, Jiayu Peng, Livia Giordano, Yuriy Román-Leshkov, Yang Shao-Horn

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Bismuth substituted strontium cobalt perovskites for catalyzing oxygen evolution

Denis A. Kuznetsov,1,2,7 Jiayu Peng,2,3,7 Livia Giordano,1,2,4,6 Yuriy Román-Leshkov,5 and Yang Shao-Horn1,2,3,4,8,*

1Research Laboratory of Electronics, 2Electrochemical Energy Laboratory, 3Department of Materials Science and Engineering, 4Department of Mechanical Engineering, 5Department of Chemical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA
6Dipartimento di Scienza dei Materiali, Università di Milano-Bicocca, Milano 20126, Italy
7These authors contributed equally
8Lead Contact
*Correspondence: shaohorn@mit.edu

SUMMARY

In this study, we employ the strategy of substitution with more electronegative/acidic A-site ions in the cobalt perovskites to alter O 2p-band center, surface hydroxide affinity, and oxygen evolution reaction (OER) activity and stability in the basic electrolyte. Galvanostatically charged Bi0.2Sr0.8CoO3-δ (δ close to zero) was shown to exhibit record OER specific activity exceeding not only La1-xSr0.03δ (δ close to zero), one of the most active oxide OER catalysts reported so far. The enhanced OER activity of charged Bi0.2Sr0.8CoO3-δ can be attributed to greater hydroxide affinity facilitating the deprotonation of surface bound intermediates due to the presence of strong Lewis acidic A-site Bi3+ ions, while the high stability can result from lowered O 2p-band center relative to the Fermi level. This work provides a novel example in the rational design of highly active oxide catalysts for OER by leveraging the inductive effect.
INTRODUCTION

The distribution and on-demand use of electrical energy from sustainable resources, such as solar energy, requires storage technologies that are cost effective and involving earth-abundant elements. Solar energy can be stored in the form of chemical bonds by electrochemical water splitting to produce hydrogen,\textsuperscript{1,2} or CO\textsubscript{2} reduction to CO, methanol and hydrocarbons\textsuperscript{3,4} as energy carriers, where oxygen evolution reaction (OER) is required to accompany above cathodic transformations. These technologies are advantageous to lithium ion batteries for large-scale storage as they have high gravimetric energy,\textsuperscript{5,6} and chemical bonds used for energy storage involve elements (such as O, H, C) that are among the most abundant in the planet. In contrast, energy storage with current Li-ion batteries
requires storing each electron using one transition metal ion, and thus powering the planet with this technology is limited by the availability of metals such as cobalt and nickel in the earth crust.\textsuperscript{7} The efficiency of the storage technologies based on H\textsubscript{2}/CO/CH\textsubscript{3}OH/C\textsubscript{n}H\textsubscript{2n+2} production is, however, severely limited to a significant extent by the sluggish reaction kinetics of OER,\textsuperscript{8–10} which is catalyzed by precious metal catalysts such as RuO\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{11,12} and IrO\textsubscript{2}.\textsuperscript{11,13,14} The development of active OER electrocatalysts composed of earth-abundant elements\textsuperscript{15} is therefore crucial for the large-scale implementation of these technologies.\textsuperscript{16}

Late first-row transition metal oxides\textsuperscript{17–22} based on cobalt,\textsuperscript{23,24} nickel\textsuperscript{25–28} and iron\textsuperscript{29,30} are reported to be the most active to catalyze OER in basic solution. Experimental and computational studies in the past decade have been focusing on elucidating OER mechanisms\textsuperscript{8,9} and identifying activity and stability descriptors,\textsuperscript{31–33} which can be used to design better catalysts. Perovskites (ABO\textsubscript{3−δ}) with immense structural, chemical and electronic flexibility associated with vast selections of A-site and B-site metal ions and oxygen deficiency\textsuperscript{34} have been used to develop design principles of OER activity\textsuperscript{33,34} and stability.\textsuperscript{35,36} Recent work\textsuperscript{37} has shown that lowering charge-transfer gap or increasing metal-oxygen covalency in perovskites can improve the OER kinetics, which is facilitated by first lowering the energetic barrier of electron transfer for the semiconducting oxides, reducing adsorption strength of oxygenated intermediates of OER\textsuperscript{38} and then decreasing the energetic barriers\textsuperscript{34,37} associated with OER steps on the surface of metallic oxides including the most active catalysts. Unfortunately, reducing the charge-transfer gap of these perovskites also lowers the Fermi level on the absolute energy scale, making it below the OER redox potential in the basic solution for the most active catalysts such as La\textsubscript{0.5}Sr\textsubscript{0.5}CoO\textsubscript{3−δ}.\textsuperscript{37} This can generate more negatively charged surface and therefore result in weaker hydroxide affinity,\textsuperscript{17,39,40} which can impede surface deprotonation during OER in basic solution (such as M-OH\textsubscript{ad} + OH\textsuperscript{−} → M-O\textsubscript{ad} + H\textsubscript{2}O + e\textsuperscript{−}).\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, tuning the
affinity towards hydroxide ions on these highly active oxide surfaces (e.g. by phosphate functionalization) represents new opportunities to further enhance the OER performance.

In this work, we explored the substitution of A-site ions with high electronegativity or Lewis acidity in the cobalt perovskites to maintain high Co-O covalency by the inductive effect, and potentially increase hydroxide affinity on the surface by introducing highly Lewis acidic ions to facilitate OER kinetics. This argument is supported by the enhanced OER kinetics previously observed for LnNiO₃ perovskite series upon the substitution of La³⁺ with more electronegative Gd³⁺ and Eu³⁺. Herein we examine the OER activity of bismuth-substituted strontium cobalt perovskites, Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ, where the Bi³⁺ substituents possess the highest Lewis acidity (i.e. highest electronegativity) among 2+/3+ A-site ions, with a pK₅ value of 1.58 much lower than that of other commonly used A-site metals in cobalt-based perovskite oxides (e.g. pK₅([Sr²⁺(H₂O)ₙ]) = 13.18, pK₅([La³⁺(H₂O)ₙ]) = 9.06, pK₅([Pr³⁺(H₂O)ₙ]) = 8.55). Remarkably, Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ that was galvanostatically charged to minimize oxygen vacancies was shown to exhibit an exceptionally low Tafel slope (~25 mV decade⁻¹) and higher intrinsic OER activity than La₁₋ₓSrₓCoO₃₋δ and charged SrCoO₃₋δ (one of the most active catalysts reported to date) at high current densities (> ~1 mA cm⁻² oxide). The record intrinsic OER activity can be rationalized by stronger affinity towards hydroxide during surface deprotonation associated with more acidic Bi³⁺ than La³⁺ and Sr²⁺, and comparable Co-O covalency to SrCoO₃₋δ as shown from density functional theory (DFT) calculations. In addition, no amorphization or changes in the composition were observed for the surface of charged Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ after OER, with such high structural stability being attributed to the lowered O 2p-band center relative to the Fermi level of Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ than that of SrCoO₃₋δ. Tuning of the electronic structure and surface acid-base chemistry through inductive effect associated with rational metal substitution represents a new strategy for enhancing the activity and stability of OER catalysts.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ was synthesized through a conventional solid-state route starting from Bi$_2$O$_3$, CoO and SrCO$_3$ precursors$^{45}$ as detailed in Supplemental Experimental Procedure. Higher levels of bismuth substitution were not explored due to previously reported solubility limit of ~20%$^{45}$ and the need to have high Co oxidation state (close to 4+) to achieve high OER activities.$^{46}$ Refinement of the powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) pattern (Figure 1) confirmed a cubic structure with Pm-3m space group and a unit cell parameter of 3.896 Å (Table S1), which is comparable to that reported in the original study (~3.9 Å)$^{45}$. As previous neutron diffraction refinements and cobalt oxidation state (~3) based on iodometric titrations$^{45}$ revealed the oxygen vacancy content, $\delta \approx 0.4$, for pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$, we estimated $\delta \approx 0.4$ for the oxygen deficiency for our as-synthesized pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ sample. This argument is further supported by the Co K-edge X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS). The cobalt oxidation state of ~2.96 for pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ determined from the position of Co K-edge (Figure S1) is in qualitative agreement with the estimated oxygen vacancy level ($\delta \approx 0.4$).

We further reduced the oxygen deficiency in Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ by galvanostatic charging in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH (Figure S2), as having high covalency for Co-O bonds associated with the presence of Co$^{4+}$ is needed to obtain high intrinsic OER activity.$^{37,38}$ Electrochemical oxygen intercalation into the perovskite structure can take place during galvanostatic charging to fill the oxygen vacancies in oxygen-deficient perovskites,$^{47,48}$ such as SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$,$^{38,49}$ upon slow oxidation in basic solutions. During charging, two voltage plateaus were observed for thin-film Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ deposited on glassy carbon (GC) electrodes, similar to those reported for La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$,$^{38}$ and SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$,$^{38,47}$ (plateaus more defined in the latter case, Figure S3), which can be attributed to the filling of oxygen vacancies ($\text{Bi}_{0.2}\text{Sr}_{0.8}\text{CoO}_{3-\delta} + 2\delta\text{OH}^- \rightarrow \text{Bi}_{0.2}\text{Sr}_{0.8}\text{CoO}_3 + \delta\text{H}_2\text{O} + 2\delta\text{e}^-$). These redox events
were reflected by the two redox peaks centered at ~1.1 and ~1.3 V vs. reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE) in the cyclic voltammetry (CV) measurements (Figure 2). Similar redox features have been reported for other Co-based catalysts such as CoOOH (in 1 M KOH),\textsuperscript{23} and LiCoO\textsubscript{2} (in 0.1 M KOH),\textsuperscript{50,51} which have been attributed to Co\textsuperscript{2+}/Co\textsuperscript{3+} and Co\textsuperscript{3+}/Co\textsuperscript{4+} redox couples, respectively. The oxygen intercalation into the bulk structure of Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} upon charging is supported by the reduction in the lattice parameter of the perovskite structure for Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} pellet electrodes (without carbon and binder) after galvanostatic charging as revealed by PXRD analysis (Figure 1), indicative of increased Co oxidation state associated with oxygen deficiency reduction. Charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} (with one electron passed per formula unit at a C-rate of C/50 or C/20, Figure S2) was found to have smaller unit cell parameters $a = 3.835$ Å (C/50 charging) and $a = 3.838$ Å (C/20 charging) than that of pristine Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} ($a = 3.896$ Å). Although the exact value of oxygen deficiency $\delta$ on the surface of charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} during OER is not known, it is proposed that $\delta$ value is close to zero, especially for the C/50 sample. This hypothesis is supported by the following observations. First, ~0.8 e\textsuperscript{-} per formula unit passed before the OER plateau at 1.4 V vs. RHE\textsuperscript{38} (Figure S3), which would result in a fully stoichiometric perovskite structure based on the oxygen deficiency level in pristine Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} ($\delta \approx 0.4$). Second, the slower galvanostatic charging typically imparts smaller oxygen deficiency in Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} and other perovskites.\textsuperscript{38} As the oxygen intercalation kinetics and oxygen ion transport in perovskites are slow, the surfaces of charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} can have even smaller $\delta$ than the bulk for given charging rates. Third, C/50 galvanostatically charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} was found to have much greater OER activity than pristine Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} (Figure S3). This enhanced OER kinetics can be attributed to greater Co oxidation state on the surface, which is expected from the previously reported correlations\textsuperscript{32,37,38,44,49} demonstrating that lowering the cobalt 3d band with respect to the oxygen 2p-band center (i.e. lowering the charge-transfer gap) by
increasing the nominal oxidation state of cobalt is correlated with increasing specific OER activity of cobalt-based perovskites. Therefore, we will focus on the OER kinetics of C/50 charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ further in this work.

**Figure 1. Powder X-ray Diffraction (PXRD) Spectra**

PXRD patterns of pristine oxygen-deficient Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ powder, as well as Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.4}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ galvanostatically charged at 6.1 mA g$^{-1}$ for 20 hr (C/20), and at 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50). Patterns were indexed in a cubic unit cell with space group Pm-3m. All spectra were collected for powder samples (~0.3 g), in a continuous scan mode with a scan rate of 2 degrees per min, and a scan range from 15° to 65°. Lattice parameters as assessed by PXRD are consistent with those reported previously. The samples were quenched to room temperature after every heat treatment during the solid-state synthesis to minimize the presence of the minor secondary phase of Bi$_2$Sr$_2$Co$_3$O$_y$, which could be detected by peaks between 24° and 30° on the PXRD spectra (with estimated volume fraction of less than 1.7%). Galvanostatic charging experiments were performed for pelletized Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ powder (60 mg, 5 mm diameter pellet) attached to a graphene sheet (0.120 mm thickness) in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte. Inset shows the schematic representation of the crystal structure of Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$.
Figure 2. Electrochemical Redox Behavior of Co-Based Oxides

CV curve of C/50 charged thin-film Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ supported on glassy carbon electrode (0.25 mg$_{\text{oxide}}$ cm$^{-2}$$_{\text{disk}}$) compared with previously reported CV curves of LiCoO$_2$ (0.1 M) and CoOOH (1 M) in O$_2$-saturated KOH solutions (scan rate: 10 mV s$^{-1}$).

The OER kinetics of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ (thin films on GC, C/50 charging in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH, Figure S3) were assessed in O$_2$-saturated KOH solutions at different pHs through steady-state galvanostatic measurements (i.e. chronopotentiometry) instead of CV, as the contributions of current from electrochemical oxygen intercalation in bulk cannot be excluded from OER kinetic currents when using the CV measurements$^{38}$ The specific activity was obtained by normalizing iR-corrected kinetic currents to the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) specific oxide surface area. The specific OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ is much higher than those of LaCoO$_3$, charged La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ and Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ in both 0.1 M and 1 M KOH (Figures 3A and S4), which can be attributed to greater Co-O covalency associated with higher Co oxidation state$^{32,34,37,38,44}$ expected for charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ (\(\delta\) close to zero for all these charged perovskites). Remarkably, the specific OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ was found to be comparable to charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ at low current densities, and much greater at high current densities due to an exceptionally low Tafel slope of \(~25\) mV decade$^{-1}$ as compared to other oxide catalysts$^{20,25,33}$ (e.g. \(~60\) mV decade$^{-1}$ for charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$).$^{38}$ Moreover, charged
Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ exhibited pH-dependent OER activity on the RHE scale, where the specific activity increased with increasing pH (Figures 3B and S6). Similar pH-dependent OER kinetics have been reported for charged La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ and SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$, which cannot be explained by the conventional OER mechanism with four concerted proton-coupled electron transfer (PCET) steps. Instead, OER kinetics on these highly active and covalent oxides are limited by proton transfer, which is decoupled from electron transfer. In contrast, less active LaCoO$_3$ exhibits pH-independent OER activity on the RHE scale expected from the conventional concerted PCET pathways. Notably, charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ exhibits OER currents one order of magnitude higher than those of fully charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ at 1.55 V vs. RHE for all pHs examined (Figure 3B). Possible physical origins for the record high OER activity are discussed below together with processes responsible for its pH-dependent OER activity on the RHE scale.

![Figure 3. Record and pH-Dependent Intrinsic OER Activity of Fully Charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$](image)

(A) Tafel plots for selected Co-based perovskite oxides. Measurements were performed in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}_{disk}$. Data points were all extracted from steady-state galvanostatic OER measurements. Data for LaCoO$_3$, galvanostatically charged La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ and SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ (having $\delta$ close to zero) were taken from our previous work. (B) Specific OER activity at 1.55 V vs. RHE as a function of KOH concentration measured for glassy carbon electrodes with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}_{disk}$. Data for fully charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ were extracted from the OER Tafel plot shown in Figure S6. Data points for 0.3 M and 1 M KOH were obtained by the extrapolation of linear Tafel regions to higher potentials.
The high OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ exceeding that of charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ can be attributed in part to having comparable Co-O covalency to SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ due to the inductive effect introduced by substituting Sr$^{2+}$ with strongly Lewis acidic Bi$^{3+}$ ($\text{pK}_a$ for [Bi(H$_2$O)$_n$]$^{3+}$ ions is 1.58). Despite the fact that having lower nominal Co oxidation state in charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ (3.8+) than charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ (4+) is expected to impart lower OER activity than SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ based on previous reported correlation, Bi$^{3+}$ ions with much higher electronegativity can pull more electron density from cobalt than other divalent/trivalent A-site ions with lower electronegativity (e.g., Sr$^{2+}$, La$^{3+}$), lowering the energy of cobalt 3d band (i.e. antibonding orbitals of cobalt-ligand bonds) and thus leading to retained high Co-O covalency upon bismuth substitution (Figures 4A and 4B). This argument is supported by our computed density of states for fully stoichiometric Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$ and Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ (Figure S9), where the energy difference between the Co 3d-band center and the O 2p-band center, a measure of the covalency for the cobalt-oxygen bonds, remains unchanged relative to stoichiometric SrCoO$_3$ (Figure 4B). Having high metal-ligand covalency for perovskite oxides is key to promote OER kinetics by enabling the surface deprotonation of reaction intermediates by hydroxide ions decoupled from electron transfer which limits the OER kinetics. Moreover, the lattice oxygen sites of oxides on the surface can be possibly activated and participate in OER in addition to surface metal ions.
Figure 4. Bulk Electronic Structures of Fully Charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$–δ

(A) Schematic illustration of the changes in electronic structures upon bismuth substitution from charged SrCoO$_3$–δ to charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$–δ (both having δ ≈ 0).

(B) Difference between the Co 3d-band center and the O-2p band center versus the O-2p band center relative to the Fermi level for different stoichiometric cobalt-based perovskites computed at DFT + U level. Both oxygen 2p-band and cobalt 3d-band centers were determined by taking the centroid of the projected density of states of O 2p and cobalt 3d states (both occupied and unoccupied states) relative to the Fermi level. The calculation results of LaCoO$_3$, La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$ have been reported in our previous work. The calculation results of La$_{0.75}$Sr$_{0.25}$CoO$_3$ have been reported in our previous work.

(C) Computed oxygen vacancy formation energy (E$_{\text{vac}}$ vs. vacuum, relative to O$_2$) compared to the computed oxygen 2p-band center relative to the Fermi level for LaCoO$_3$, La$_{0.75}$Sr$_{0.25}$CoO$_3$, La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$, SrCoO$_3$, and Ba$_{0.6}$Sr$_{0.4}$Co$_{0.2}$Fe$_{0.8}$O$_3$ with full oxygen stoichiometry, showing the nearly linear correlation between oxygen vacancy formation energetics and the oxygen 2p-band center relative to the Fermi level. This trend can be rationalized by the energetics associated with the creation of oxygen vacancies in the perovskite structure (Figure S15). The calculation results of LaCoO$_3$, La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$, SrCoO$_3$ (E$_{\text{vac}}$ only), and Ba$_{0.6}$Sr$_{0.4}$Co$_{0.2}$Fe$_{0.8}$O$_3$ have been reported in our previous work.
results of La$_{0.75}$Sr$_{0.25}$CoO$_3$ have been reported in our previous work. The oxygen vacancy formation energy for fully stoichiometric Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$ and Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ was further projected following the linear correlation and with the computed oxygen 2p-band centers of these two compounds.

Employing Bi$^{3+}$ with high electronegativity or Lewis acidity can increase hydroxide affinity on the oxide surface, which can facilitate OER kinetics as the reaction kinetics on highly covalent oxides are limited by processes associated with the deprotonation of surface reaction intermediates. Like other perovskites with high Co-O covalency, charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$ has the oxide Fermi level much lower than the thermodynamic OER redox potential energy in the basic solution (Figures 5A and 5B), which results in negatively charged oxide surfaces when equilibrated with the electrolyte. This negative charge on the surface of oxides can come from surface adsorption of hydroxide ions from the solution and/or redistribution of the electron density from the bulk to the surface. Specifically, high Co-O covalency and lowered charge-transfer gap increase bulk electron mobility leading to accumulation of the negative charges on the interface with electrolyte solution, making this mechanism favored over hydroxide adsorption, thus imparting weaker hydroxide affinity to the oxide surface under equilibrium conditions. The presence of strongly electronegative Bi$^{3+}$ at the oxide surface of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$ can enhance affinity towards hydroxide ions as compared to SrCoO$_3$, increase ionicity of the O-H bonds, and therefore facilitate chemical/electrochemical surface deprotonation during OER in basic solution (such as M-OH$_{ad}$ + OH$^-$ → M-O$_{ad}$ + H$_2$O + e$^-$). This argument is in agreement with the observed pH-dependent OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$ on the RHE scale (Figures 3B and S6), which can be rationalized by pathways involving acid-base equilibrium before the rate-limiting step, and/or rate-limiting proton transfer decoupled from electron transfer. Similar pH-dependent OER activity has been reported for Ni-Fe oxyhydroxides, which has been attributed to the non-concerted metal oxidation coupled with surface hydroxides deprotonation leading to formation of
negatively charged intermediates.\textsuperscript{57} Here we argue that increasing pH (i.e. increasing hydroxide ion concentration in the solution) would promote the deprotonation of surface species like M-OH\textsubscript{ad} by OH\textsuperscript{-} via mechanisms including either acid-base equilibrium before the rate-limiting step\textsuperscript{55} or proton transfer decoupled from electron transfer as the rate-limiting step,\textsuperscript{37} and/or electrochemical surface deprotonation with non-integer electron transfer,\textsuperscript{58–60} which would lead to increased OER activity on the RHE scale with increasing pH. Further support came from the A-site-independent OER kinetics for those less covalent LnCoO\textsubscript{3} perovskites (Ln = La, Nd, Gd, Sm, Eu), where the OER kinetics are limited by electron transfer,\textsuperscript{37} and having more Lewis acidic A-site ions did not induce any changes in the OER activity beyond experimental uncertainty (Figure S4).

![Figure 5. pH-Dependent Pre-OER Cobalt Redox of Fully Charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ}
(A) Trends in the Fermi level positions of perovskite oxides and corresponding hydroxide affinity at the oxide-electrolyte interface, which were estimated from X-ray spectroscopic data under rigid band assumption and have been reported in our previous work.\textsuperscript{37} The hydroxide affinity is defined as the position of Fermi level relative to the O\textsubscript{2}, H\textsubscript{2}O/OH\textsuperscript{-} redox potential energy. With high metal-oxygen covalency, the oxide Fermi level lies below the OER potential energy, leading to negatively charged oxide surface when equilibrated with the electrolyte.
(B) Schematic illustration of the oxide-electrolyte interface and the electrochemical process that corresponds to the pre-OER Co\textsuperscript{3+}/Co\textsuperscript{4+} redox of fully charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ}.
(C) Position of the average redox peak center prior to OER (left, red) and the OER overpotential (right, blue) estimated as the potential required to achieve ~0.06 mA cm\textsuperscript{-2} oxide OER current as assessed from galvanostatic...
OER measurements for fully charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$, as a function of the KOH electrolyte concentration. CV measurements at different KOH concentrations were performed for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ galvanostatically charged for 50 h in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{\text{oxide}}$ cm$^{-2}$$_{\text{disk}}$.

The proposed explanation for the unprecedentedly high and pH-dependent OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ is in agreement with its pH-dependent redox peak features at ~1.3 V vs. RHE immediately prior to OER (Figures 5C, S10 and S11), which might suggest pH-dependent binding of OER reaction intermediates on the RHE scale. The redox peaks at ~1.3 V vs. RHE can be assigned to the Co$^{3+}$/Co$^{4+}$ redox reaction associated with electrochemical deprotonation of surface reaction intermediates such as M-OH$_{\text{ad}}$ by OH$^-$ in the solution to form M-O$_{\text{ad}}$ species.$^{61,62}$ Similar shifts for pre-OER redox peaks have been found for Ni-Fe oxyhydroxides (up to -60 mV pH$^{-1}$),$^{57}$ RuO$_2$ (101), (001), (001) surfaces (up to -27 mV pH$^{-1}$)$^{63}$ and IrO$_2$ (110) surface (~-7.5 mV pH$^{-1}$),$^{64}$ which have been attributed to the oxide-water interface structure changes at different pHs$^{65}$ or non-integer number of electrons transferred during this step.$^{58-60}$ Here we relate this pH-dependent redox peak shift to the energetics of hydroxide affinity established recently.$^{37}$ With decreasing pH, the electron energy associated with OER redox decreases on the absolute energy scale and moves closer to the oxide Fermi level (Figure 5A),$^{37}$ which reduces the accumulation of negative charges on the oxide surface and results in stronger hydroxide affinity and more effective surface deprotonation associated with Co$^{3+}$/Co$^{4+}$ redox (Figure 5B), in agreement with the negative redox peak shift with increasing pH (~-40 mV pH$^{-1}$). Lastly, the Tafel slope (~25 mV decade$^{-1}$) for charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ is considerably lower than the Tafel slopes of other highly covalent Co-based perovskites such as charged La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ and SrCoO$_3$-$\delta$ (~60 mV decade$^{-1}$),$^{38}$ but comparable to those of perovskites that are known to amorphize upon leaching out A-site ions during OER (~40 mV decade$^{-1}$)$^{66}$ and Ni-Fe oxyhydroxides (~30 mV decade$^{-1}$).$^{67}$ Such a low Tafel slope has been attributed previously$^{68}$ to having a chemical deprotonation as the rate-
limiting step for catalysts with high surface coverage of surface hydroxide (M-OH\textsubscript{ad}). Further in situ electrochemical diffraction\textsuperscript{69} and spectroscopic\textsuperscript{70,71} studies are needed to provide detailed insights into the surface species and reaction mechanisms as a function of potential.

**Figure 6. High Surface Stability of Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} After Galvanostatic Charging and OER**

(A and B) HR TEM images of (A) pristine oxygen-deficient Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} powder, and (B) charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} followed by OER measurements. Galvanostatic charging were performed for oxides films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode at 2.4 mA g\textsuperscript{-1} for 50 hr in O\textsubscript{2}-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg\textsubscript{oxide cm\textsuperscript{-2 disk}}.

(C) Representative high-angular annular dark-field scanning transmission electron microscopy (HAADF-STEM) imaging and corresponding EDX analysis of fully charged and cycled Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ}. Quantification of the EDX results is shown on the HAADF images. More EDX results for both pristine Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} and also fully charged and cycled Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} can be found in Figure S12.

(D) The bulk and surface Bi, Sr and Co metal composition in both pristine Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} and also charged and cycled Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ} as determined by EDX. The error bars represent the standard deviation of at least eight spots.
Neither structural transformation (e.g. amorphization) nor compositional changes (e.g. metal leaching) were detected for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ after galvanostatic charging and OER. We performed high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) imaging and energy-dispersive X-ray (EDX) elemental analysis (Figures 6 and S12) of Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ before and after galvanostatic charging (to ~1.4 V vs. RHE at C/50, Figure S3) and OER measurements. No surface amorphization of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ after OER was detected from HRTEM analysis (Figure 6B), Raman spectroscopy (Figure S13) and O K-edge XAS spectra (Figure S14), where the surface remained crystalline like the pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ powder (Figure 6A). Such high surface stability of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ after OER is in contrast to the rapid surface amorphization and the formation of surface hydroxides comprised of edge-sharing octahedra clusters found for Ba$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$Co$_{0.8}$Fe$_{0.2}$O$_{3-\delta}$ and SrCo$_{0.8}$Fe$_{0.2}$O$_{3-\delta}$ at OER potentials. In addition, Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ after galvanostic charging and OER appeared to be more stable than SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ as few nanometers of amorphous layers were detected on SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ particles after charging and OER measurements as reported recently. Moreover, EDX elemental analysis (Figures 6C, 6D and S12) confirmed no A-site or B-site metal leaching after charging and OER, in contrast to the notable A-site metal leaching found in Ba$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$Co$_{0.8}$Fe$_{0.2}$O$_{3-\delta}$,SrCo$_{0.8}$Fe$_{0.2}$O$_{3-\delta}$, and Sr$_x$Ca$_{1-x}$FeO$_{3-\delta}$ (x = 0, 0.5 or 1). Both bulk and surface metal ratios between A-site (Bi and Sr) and B-site (Co) metals of Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ before and after charging and OER measurements were found to be close to 1:4:5 as expected from the nominal stoichiometry. The high surface stability of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ at OER potentials can be attributed to its lowered O 2p-band center with respect to the Fermi level (Figure 4C) in comparison to other highly active Co-based and Fe-based perovskites (such as SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ and Ba$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$Co$_{0.8}$Fe$_{0.2}$O$_{3-\delta}$). The computed oxygen 2p-band centers of Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$ and Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ were moved down by ~0.10 eV and ~0.25 eV relative to the Fermi level when compared with stoichiometric SrCoO$_3$ (Figures 4B and 4C), respectively, which can
be attributed to the reduction of the nominal cobalt oxidation state (e.g. from +4 in SrCoO$_3$ to +3.875 in Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$ and +3.75 in Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$) and thus the increase of cobalt 3d-band filling and the Fermi level (Figure 4A). Given that the O 2p-band center relative to the Fermi level can correlated to the formation enthalpy of oxygen vacancies in perovskite oxides (Figure 4C), lower O 2p-band centers of Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$ and Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ relative to the Fermi level would have higher energy penalty for the creation of oxygen vacancies in the perovskite structure than that of SrCoO$_3$, indicative of greater structural stability (Figure S15).

In this study, we report the record intrinsic OER activity and high surface stability of the fully charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ ($\delta \approx 0$) perovskite oxide in alkaline electrolyte. We show that the inductive effect associated with rational bismuth substitution results in marked increase of the intrinsic OER catalytic activity, exceeding those of other Co-based perovskite oxides reported to date, including charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$, at high current densities (> ~1 mA cm$^{-2}$ oxide). Although Bi$^{3+}$ substitution (i.e. replacing Sr$^{2+}$ with Bi$^{3+}$) reduced the cobalt oxidation state and thus lowered the oxygen 2p band relative to the Fermi level, DFT computations show that high Co-O covalency maintained due to the inductive effect from Bi$^{3+}$ and is comparable with charged SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$. As the OER kinetics of highly covalent oxides are limited by the chemical or electrochemical deprotonation at the oxide surface due to weak hydroxide affinity, the high OER activity of charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ can be attributed to the enhanced affinity towards hydroxide ions due to the presence of strongly Lewis acidic A-site Bi$^{3+}$ ions on the perovskite surface. In addition, the observed pH dependence of the pre-OER redox peaks and OER activity on the RHE scale implies non-concerted proton-electron transfer pathways and pH-dependent binding of intermediates, however further in-situ diffraction and spectroscopic studies are needed to provide further detailed insights into the surface species and rate-limiting step. Moreover, neither structural or chemical changes have been found for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ after galvanostatic charging and
OER, and the high surface stability can be attributed to higher energy penalty for the creation of oxygen vacancies due to the lower oxygen 2p band relative to the Fermi level. Demonstrating how leveraging the inductive effect associated with metal substitution enhances the specific activity of highly OER-active cobalt-based perovskites through maintaining high metal-oxygen covalency and strengthening hydroxide affinity without the expense of surface stability, this work highlights new prospects for the rational design of novel catalysts for electrochemical energy conversion and storage.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES
For full details please refer to Supplemental Experimental Procedure.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION
Supplemental Information includes Supplemental Experimental Procedures, 16 figures, and 2 tables and can be found with this article online.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
Y.S.-H. and D.A.K. conceived the project. D.A.K., Y.S.-H. and J.P. designed the experiments. D.A.K. carried out the synthesis and structural characterization. D.A.K. and J.P. performed the electrochemical measurements. J.P. performed the TEM analysis. J.P. and L.G. carried out the DFT calculations. D.A.K. and J.P. prepared the initial draft. All authors contributed to the discussions and revisions of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
The authors declare no competing interests.

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Supplemental Information for:

Bismuth substituted strontium cobalt perovskites for catalyzing oxygen evolution

Denis A. Kuznetsov,1,2,7 Jiayu Peng,2,3,7 Livia Giordano,1,2,4,6 Yuriy Román-Leshkov,5 and Yang Shao-Horn1,2,3,4,8,*

1Research Laboratory of Electronics, 2Electrochemical Energy Laboratory, 3Department of Materials Science and Engineering, 4Department of Mechanical Engineering, 5Department of Chemical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA
6Dipartimento di Scienza dei Materiali, Università di Milano-Bicocca, Milano 20126, Italy
7These authors contributed equally
8Lead Contact
*Correspondence: shaohorn@mit.edu
Figure S1. (A) Co K-edge X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) of pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$. The XANES of CoO and Co$_3$O$_4$ are shown as reference standards. (B) Linear interpolation plot for determination of oxidation state of cobalt in the as-synthesized pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ sample.
Figure S2. Galvanostatic charging curves for Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-\textdelta} held at constant current density 6.1 mA g\textsuperscript{-1} for 20 hr (C/20), or at 2.4 mA g\textsuperscript{-1} for 50 hr (C/50). Galvanostatic charging experiments were performed for oxides films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode in O\textsubscript{2}-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg\textsubscript{oxide} cm\textsuperscript{-2\textsubscript{disk}} (referred to as “ink”) or for pelletized Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-\textdelta} powder (60 mg, 5 mm diameter pellet) attached to a graphene sheet (0.120 mm thickness) in O\textsubscript{2}-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte (referred to as “pellet”).
Figure S3. (A) CV curves for as-synthesized pristine oxygen-deficient and C/50 galvanostatically charged Bi_{0.2}Sr_{0.8}CoO_{3-δ}, recorded with scan rate of 10 mV s\(^{-1}\). (B) Galvanostatic charging curves for pristine oxygen-deficient SrCoO_{3-δ} (with oxygen deficiency \(δ \approx 0.5\), as reported in previous work\(^1\)) and Bi_{0.2}Sr_{0.8}CoO_{3-δ} recorded in O\(_2\)-saturated 1 M KOH at C/50. Galvanostatic charging was performed for oxides films (containing Na\(\text{f}i\)n and acetylene black carbon) supported on a glassy carbon electrode in O\(_2\)-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg\(_{\text{oxide}}\) cm\(^{-2}\)\(_{\text{disk}}\). During galvanostatic charging, Bi_{0.2}Sr_{0.8}CoO_{3-δ}-containing films were held at constant current density 2.4 mA g\(^{-1}\) for 50 hr.
Figure S4. Oxygen evolution reaction (OER) Tafel plots for selected perovskite oxides and RuO$_2$ (110)-oriented thin film. Measurements were performed in O$_2$-saturated 0.1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}_{disk}$ for perovskites. Data points were extracted from galvanostatic OER measurements. Data for La$_{0.5}$Sr$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$, Pr$_{0.5}$Ba$_{0.5}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$, SrCoO$_{3-\delta}$ are taken from Grimaud et al.$^1$ Data for RuO$_2$ are taken from Stoerzinger et al.$^2$
Figure S5. OER Tafel plots for galvanostatically charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ (C/50) and La$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$. Measurements were performed in O$_2$-saturated 0.1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{\text{oxide}}$ cm$^{-2}_{\text{disk}}$ for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ and an oxide loading of 15.3 μg$_{\text{oxide}}$ cm$^{-2}_{\text{disk}}$ for La$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$. The Tafel curves for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ and La$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ are both taken from CV measurements, with a scan rate of 10 mV s$^{-1}$ and a rotation speed of 1600 rpm. Data for La$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ was taken from Mefford et al.$^3$ We want to note that oxygen intercalation in these oxygen-deficient oxides also contributes to the OER current measured by CV. This leads to overestimated OER activities in the Tafel plot here for both Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$ and La$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-δ}$. Therefore, steady-state techniques, i.e. galvanostatic and potentiostatic measurements, provide more accurate determination of the OER activities of oxygen-deficient perovskites.
Figure S6. pH dependence of OER activity from galvanostatic measurements for fully charged Bi\textsubscript{0.2}Sr\textsubscript{0.8}CoO\textsubscript{3-δ}. Error bars represent standard deviation from at least three independent measurements as shown in Figures S7 and S8.
Figure S7. Representative independent cyclic voltammetry (CV) and galvanostatic OER experiments for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ electrodes galvanostatically charged at constant current density 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50) in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH. OER measurements were performed for oxide films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}$ disk.
Figure S8. Representative independent CV and galvanostatic OER experiments for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ electrodes galvanostatically charged at constant current density 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50) in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH. OER measurements were performed for oxide films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode in O$_2$-saturated 0.1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{\text{oxide}}$ cm$^{-2}_{\text{disk}}$. 
Figure S9. Projected density of states (DOS) on Co 3d and O 2p states of stoichiometric SrCoO$_3$, Bi$_{0.125}$Sr$_{0.875}$CoO$_3$, Bi$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ and La$_{0.25}$Sr$_{0.75}$CoO$_3$ perovskites. Dashed grey lines correspond to the position of the Fermi level. Dashed blue lines provide guides for the shift of Co 3d-band centers.
Figure S10. Representative CV curves for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ electrodes galvanostatically charged at constant current density 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50) in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH. Measurements were performed for oxide films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode in O$_2$-saturated 0.1 M KOH electrolyte with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}_{disk}$. Dashed lines show the positions of the redox peak centers.
Figure S11. Relationship between onset potential (measured at ~0.06 mA cm$^{-2}_{\text{oxide}}$ OER current) and position of the average redox peak center prior to OER for fully charged Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$. Dashed line provides guide for the trend.
Figure S12. The bulk and surface Bi, Sr and Co metal composition of individual Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ particles before and after C/50 galvanostatic charging and subsequent OER measurements as determined by energy dispersive X-ray (EDX) spectroscopy.
Figure S13. Raman spectra of pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ powder and Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ galvanostatically charged at constant current density 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50) in O$_2$-saturated 1 M KOH, both deposited on glassy carbon electrodes. Galvanostatic charging experiments were performed for oxides films containing Nafion and acetylene black carbon supported on a glassy carbon electrode with an oxide loading of 0.25 mg$_{oxide}$ cm$^{-2}_{disk}$. 
Figure S14. O K-edge X-ray absorption spectra (XAS) of selected ACoO₃ perovskites. Data for LaCoO₃, La₀.₅Sr₀.₅CoO₃₋δ, Pr₀.₅Ba₀.₅CoO₃₋δ are taken from Hong et al.⁴ Data for SrCoO₃₋δ are taken from Karvonen et al.⁵ Peak at ~532 eV for Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ (C/50) originates from the surface carbonate species⁶ on Bi₀.₂Sr₀.₈CoO₃₋δ deposited with acetylene black carbon and Nafion on glass carbon electrodes after C/50 charging in 1 M KOH.
Figure S15. Schematic illustration of rigid band diagrams and corresponding energetics associated with the creation of oxygen vacancies in the perovskite structure. When oxygen is removed from the lattice, the oxygen 2p states decrease in density with respect to the transition metal cation 3d states and along with an upshift of Fermi level. Therefore, the energy difference between the Fermi level and oxygen 2p band describes the reaction energetics associated with the formation of oxygen vacancies.
Figure S16. Calibration of Hg/HgO reference electrode versus reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE). CV scans were recorded at scan rate 10 mV s\(^{-1}\) in three-electrode setup with 5 mm diameter polycrystalline platinum working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode and Hg/HgO reference electrode in H\(_2\)-saturated 1 M KOH electrolyte with different rotation rates. The analogous procedure was adopted for the calibration of Hg/HgO reference electrode in 0.1 M, 0.3 M KOH electrolytes. For 0.03 M KOH electrolyte, Ag/AgCl reference electrode was used instead of Hg/HgO.
**Table S1.** Crystal structure and refined lattice parameters of Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ in different charging states.

| Compound | Space Group | a (Å)  |
|----------|-------------|--------|
| pristine | Pm-3m       | 3.896  |
| C/20     | Pm-3m       | 3.838  |
| C/50     | Pm-3m       | 3.835  |

**Table S2.** Specific surface area determined by Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) analysis and corresponding galvanostatic charging currents of Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$.

| BET (m$^2$/g) | C/20 (mA/cm$^2$) | C/50 (mA/cm$^2$) | C/20 (mA/g) | C/50 (mA/g) |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 0.36          | 17.1              | 42.8              | 6.1          | 2.4          |
Supplemental Experimental Procedures:
Synthesis and Characterization

Bi$_2$O$_3$ (99.999%, Sigma), CoO (99.99%, Sigma), Co$_3$O$_4$ (99.9985%, Alfa Aesar), SrCO$_3$ (99.9%, Sigma), Sr(NO$_3$)$_2$ (99.965%, Alfa Aesar), Bi(NO$_3$)$_3$·5H$_2$O (99.999%, Sigma), La$_2$O$_3$ (99.99%, Sigma), Sm$_2$O$_3$ (99.9%, Fisher), Gd$_2$O$_3$ (99.9%, Sigma), Nd$_2$O$_3$ (99.99%, Sigma), Eu$_2$O$_3$ (99.99%, Fisher), EDTA (99.995%, Sigma), citric acid hydrate (99.5%, Alfa Aesar) were used without further purification, except that Bi$_2$O$_3$ and Ln$_2$O$_3$ oxides (Ln = lanthanide) were heated in air at 600-800°C for 6 hr for dehydration. Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ was synthesized using solid-state route starting from Bi$_2$O$_3$, CoO and SrCO$_3$ precursors. Stoichiometric amount of powders were thoroughly ground in agate mortar, pelletized and fired in air at temperatures 850, 900 and finally 950°C for 15 hr each with intermediate regrinding. The samples were quenched to room temperature after every heat treatment in order to minimize the presence of the secondary phase of Bi$_2$Sr$_2$Co$_3$O$_y$,$^7$,$^8$ which could be detected by peaks between 24° and 30° on the powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) spectra. The volume fraction of the minor impurity Bi$_2$Sr$_2$Co$_3$O$_y$ is less than 1.7% estimated from the integrated area of the maximum impurity peak (with integration range from 26.0° to 26.7°) relative to the integrated area of the maximum Bi$_{10.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_3$-$\delta$ peak (with integration range from 32.2° to 33.3°). LnCoO$_3$ oxides (Ln = La, Nd, Sm, Gd, Eu) were synthesized using solid-state route starting from Ln$_2$O$_3$ and Co$_3$O$_4$ precursors. Stoichiometric amount of powders were thoroughly ground in agate mortar, pelletized and heated in oxygen flow for 40 hr at 1200°C with intermediate regrinding.

PXRD patterns were recorded with a Bruker Advance II diffractometer equipped with a 0/20 Bragg-Brentano geometry and Ni-filtered CuK$\alpha$ radiation ($K\alpha_1 = 1.5406$ Å, $K\alpha_2 = 1.5444$ Å, $K\alpha_1/K\alpha_2 = 0.5$). The tube voltage and current were 40 kV and 40 mA, respectively. Spectra were collected for powder samples (~0.3 g), in continuous scan mode with a scan rate of 2 degrees per min, and the scan range was from 15° to 65°. Lattice parameters as assessed by PXRD measurements are consistent with those reported previously.$^7$ The specific surface area of each oxide sample was determined using BET analysis on a Quantachrome ChemBET Pulsar from a single-point BET analysis performed after 12 hr outgassing at 150°C.

TEM imaging was conducted on a JEOL 2010 transmission electron microscope operated at 200 keV, which is equipped with a field-emission electron gun and an ultrahigh resolution pole piece, resulting in a point-to-point resolution of 1.9 Å, with the ability to image lattice fringes at 1.4 Å resolution. JEOL 2010F transmission electron microscope (TEM) equipped with the ultrahigh resolution polepiece was used to collect high-angular annular dark-field scanning transmission electron microscopy (HADDF-STEM) images and EDX spectra in this work, which has a point resolution of 0.19 nm. Parallel-beam EDX results were collected and analyzed using INCA (Oxford Instruments) software. For each sample, at least three different spots with a diameter of ~2 nm were used to collect the bulk
chemical compositions and surface chemical compositions. Error bars of elemental compositions obtained from EDX data represent the standard deviation of the results on at least three spots. Samples of pristine Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ were prepared by sonicating Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ powder in THF for a few minutes. The dispersion was then drop casted on a lacy carbon grid. Samples of charged electrode were prepared by swabbing the glassy carbon surface, which was previously washed with ethanol to remove KOH remaining on the surface after charging and OER experiments.

**Electrochemical Measurements**

Electrodes used for galvanostatic charging, CV and galvanostatic OER measurements were prepared by drop-casting ink containing oxide catalyst powder on a glassy carbon electrode following the previous protocol. The glassy carbon electrode surface (0.196 cm$^{-2}$) was loaded with 0.25 mg oxide cm$^{-2}$$_{disk}$ using the mass ratio of 5:1:1 (oxide catalyst: acetylene black carbon: Nafion). Alternatively, electrodes for galvanostatic charging were also prepared by attaching pelletized powder (60 mg, 5 mm diameter) to a graphene sheet (0.12 mm thickness) using carbon paste. Galvanostatic charging was performed using a current density set at a C-rate of C/20 or C/50, meaning the exchange of 1 mole of electrons per mole of oxide in 20 or 50 hr. Pellet was carefully ground after galvanostatic charging experiments (Figure S2), and the powder was examined by PXRD.

OER measurements were performed with a rotating disk-electrode setup in oxygen-saturated KOH using a glass electrochemical cell with Ag/AgCl reference electrode (for 0.03 M KOH electrolyte) or Hg/HgO reference electrode (for 0.1 M, 0.3 M and 1 M KOH electrolyte) and Pt counter electrode. 0.03 M, 0.1M, 0.3 M and 1 M KOH (99.99% purity, Sigma-Aldrich) electrolyte solutions were prepared using deionized water (> 18 MΩ cm). The potential was controlled using a Biologic SP-300 potentiostat. Representative independent CV and galvanostatic OER experiments for Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ electrode preliminary held at constant current density 2.4 mA g$^{-1}$ for 50 hr (C/50) in O$_2$-saturated 1M and 0.1 M KOH were shown in Figure S7 and S8, respectively. A scan rate of 10 mV s$^{-1}$ was used for all CV and rotation was set to 1600 rpm. The Ag/AgCl and Hg/HgO reference electrodes were calibrated in the corresponding KOH electrolyte before OER experiments where the point of zero current from hydrogen oxidation/evolution at a platinum electrode at different rotation rates was defined as 0 V versus RHE, as shown in Figure S16.

OER kinetic currents from CV were obtained by taking the average between forward and backward scans to remove capacitive current contribution, which were then corrected for ohmic losses. Ohmic losses were corrected by subtracting the ohmic voltage drop from the measured potential, using an electrolyte resistance determined by high-frequency alternating current impedance, where iR-corrected potentials are denoted as E - iR (i as the current and R as the electrolyte resistance). Galvanostatic measurements of OER activity were performed on the Bi$_{0.2}$Sr$_{0.8}$CoO$_{3-\delta}$ (C/50) sample by applying incrementally increased
currents, and the potentials corresponding to the plateau on E-t curve were used for calculations. Error bars represent standard deviation from at least three independent measurements.

**Density Functional Theory (DFT) Calculations**

DFT calculations with Hubbard U correction\(^{10,11}\) for the Co 3d electrons were performed with the Vienna Ab-initio Simulation Package (VASP)\(^{12,13}\) using the projector-augmented plane-wave method\(^{14}\) with a cutoff of 450 eV. U\(_{\text{eff}}\) value of 3.3 eV was used for Co 3d states, as optimized by fitting the formation enthalpies of oxides.\(^{11}\) Energy convergence was within 3 meV per perovskite formula unit using a Monkhorst-Pack 4×4×4 k-point mesh. The soft O\(_s\) oxygen pseudopotential was employed for oxygen. Exchange-correlation was treated in the Perdew-Wang-91 generalized gradient approximation (GGA).\(^{15}\) Fully relaxed stoichiometric bulk perovskite calculations were simulated with 2×2×2 perovskite supercells. All calculations were performed in the ferromagnetic state, in order to use a consistent and tractable set of magnetic structures. Both O 2p-band and Co 3d-band centers were determined by taking the centroid of the projected density of states of O 2p and Co 3d states (both occupied and unoccupied states) relative to the Fermi level.\(^{1}\)

**X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy**

Oxygen K-edge XAS data were collected at Beamline 10ID-2 of the Canadian Light Source. The experiments were performed with the samples at room temperature under ultra-high vacuum (UHV) conditions (10\(^{-9}\) Torr), with the linear polarization of the incident beam 45° to the sample surfaces. The O K-edge spectra were collected in partial fluorescence yield (PEY). The O K\(_{\alpha 2}\) and K\(_{\alpha 3}\) line at ~521 eV were used to obtained the O K-edge XAS with an integration width of 120 eV. The data was normalized to the incident beam intensity using the current of a gold mesh placed before the sample stage. The oxygen K-edge data was background subtracted by fitting a straight line between 520 and 525 eV and subtracting it from the data. Furthermore, the average of the last 20 eV (from 550 to 570 eV) was taken and was used to normalize the spectra for comparison.

Cobalt K-edge XAS data were collected in fluorescence yield mode at Beamline 6-2b of the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory. The energy scale was calibrated by glitch of Si(111) monochromator. The position of the absorption edge was determined as the inflection point given by the first maximum in the first derivative curve of the calibrated and normalized XANES spectra. The Co oxidation state was calculated by relating the edge position with the known oxidation states of single-phase CoO and Co\(_3\)O\(_4\) reference standards using linear regression.
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