



Cite this: *RSC Adv.*, 2019, 9, 27749

Diaminophosphinoboranes: effective reagents for phosphinoboration of CO₂†

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Received 23rd August 2019
 Accepted 27th August 2019

DOI: 10.1039/c9ra06638a

rsc.li/rsc-advances

The monomeric diaminophosphinoboranes readily react with CO₂ under mild conditions to cleanly form products of the general formula R₂P–C(=O)–O–B(NR'₂)₂ in the absence of a catalyst. The isolated products from the CO₂-phosphinoboration were fully characterized by NMR spectroscopy, IR spectroscopy, and X-ray diffraction. The mechanism of CO₂ phosphinoboration with diaminophosphinoboranes was elucidated by DFT calculations.

Introduction

Increasingly stringent environmental standards are prompting us to look for clean and efficient methods for the synthesis of organic compounds. In recent years, much attention has been focused on reactions employing simple, nonmetallic P,B-based^{1–6} systems that can activate waste gases such as CO,^{7,8} CO₂,^{9–13} NO_x,^{10,14} SO₂,^{14,15} or even H₂.^{5,9,16–19} These metal-free reactions not only involve easily accessible and inexpensive gaseous reagents as the feedstock but also enable the straightforward and efficient synthesis of organic compounds through the functionalization of small inorganic molecules.^{20–26} The resulting products can be directly used as substrates for the synthesis of more complex systems that are difficult or impossible to obtain by other means.

The largest portion of reports are those devoted to CO₂^{11,12,17,22,27} and its incorporation into organic molecules under mild conditions. While highly nucleophilic phosphines form stable adducts with CO₂,¹¹ boranes capture CO₂ only in the presence of a Lewis base¹² that can act as either a stoichiometric^{4,27} or catalytic²³ coreagent or as the site of the ambiphilic molecule. One of the most common systems of this kind is frustrated Lewis pairs (FLPs), involving inter- or intramolecular combinations of sterically encumbered Lewis acids and bases that cannot quench each other.¹⁸ In the reaction of P,B-based FLPs with CO₂, the synergistic interactions of the P-center with a carbon atom and the B-center with an oxygen atom lead to the formation of P–C and B–O bonds, respectively, giving zwitterionic products with the formula R₃P–C(O)–O–BR'₂.²⁷

In the vast majority of FLPs, the presence of highly electron-withdrawing substituents to increase the acidity of the B atom is crucial for efficient CO₂ fixation. However, it was shown that geminal FLPs, in which the donor and acceptor sites are separated by one atom, can activate CO₂ despite the mild Lewis acidity of the boron center.^{28,29}

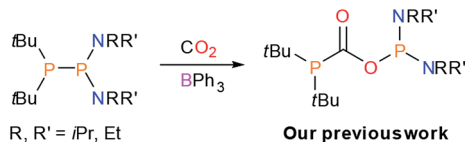
These reports inspired us to go one step further and investigate whether systems in which the B atom is directly bound to the phosphorus atom also activate CO₂. Hence, we focused on monomeric phosphinoboranes, which are another type of ambiphilic P,B-based molecules.^{30,31} A recent very comprehensive review³¹ by Pringle *et al.* classifies these species containing a single P–B bond with a pyramidal P atom and the general formula R₂P–BR'₂ as borylphosphines^{30,32,33} and those with a double P=B bond and trigonal planar P atom and the general formula R₂P=BR'₂ as phosphinoboranes.^{34–36} Notably, we found that there are a limited number of reports on the reactivity of P–B bond systems towards small molecules. Phosphinoboranes R₂P=B(C₆F₅)₂ (R = *t*Bu, Cy) exhibit FLP-like reactivity towards H₂.^{34,37} The Westcott group explored the chemistry of phosphinoboronate ester Ph₂P–Bpin³⁸ (pin = 1,2-O₂C₂Me₄), which effectively functionalizes a wide variety of heterorganic systems, such as carbonyls,^{38,39} N-heterocycles,⁴⁰ aldimines,^{38,39} carbo-diimides⁴¹ and isocyanates.⁴¹ Very recently Westcott and Stephan tested reactivity of R₂PBpin (R = Ph, *t*Bu), R₂PBMes₂ (R = Ph, *t*Bu), and R₂PBcat (R = Ph, *t*Bu, Mes) towards CO₂, where the reactions with the first and the second group of phosphinoboranes gave R₂PCO₂Bpin and R₂PCO₂BMes respectively, whereas the reaction involving R₂PBcat yielded (R₂P)₂CO and O(Bcat)₂.⁴²

As a part of our research program on applying P–P bond systems to the activation of small molecules, we recently reported the first example of CO₂ diphosphination by unsymmetrical diphosphanes⁴³ in the presence of BPh₃. Herein, a weak Lewis acid catalyzes the insertion of CO₂ into the P–P

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental, crystallographic, spectroscopic and computational details. CCDC 1906496 and 1906498–1906500. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c9ra06638a



Scheme 1 Diphosphination of CO₂ by unsymmetrical diphosphanes.⁴⁴

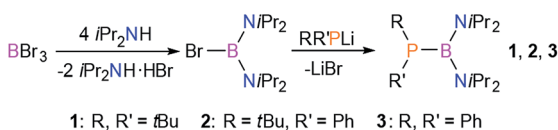
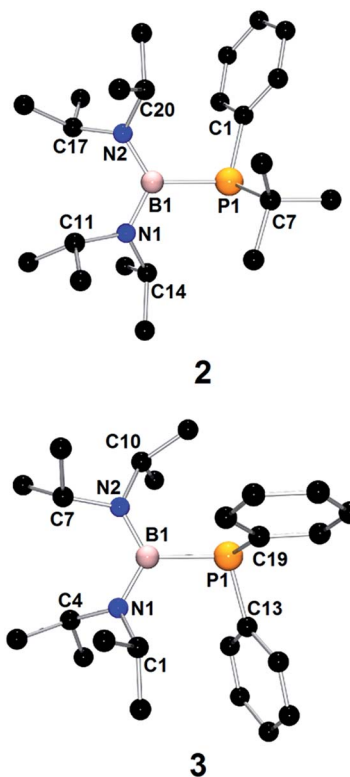
bond of the Lewis basic component with the formation of P–C and P–O bonds in a reversible manner (Scheme 1).⁴⁴

Our studies revealed that the presence of long and polarized P–P bonds is crucial for the activation of CO₂ by diphosphanes. Herein, we decided to apply this synthetic approach to trivalent phosphorus and boron compounds with direct P–B bonds.

Results and discussion

To this end, we designed and synthesized a series of new phosphinoboranes **1–3**, which are structural analogs of unsymmetrical diphosphanes where one P atom has been replaced by a B atom (Scheme 2). The first step of the synthesis was the reaction of BBr₃ with a four-fold excess of *i*Pr₂NH in petroleum ether with the elimination of an ammonium salt and formation of the bromo(diamino)borane. Then, the obtained product was used in the equimolar reaction with the corresponding lithium phosphide (RR'PLi) in toluene at –50 °C. Diaminophosphinoboranes **1–3** were isolated by removal of the LiBr followed by evaporation of the solvent, giving analytically pure products in high yields (83–88%).

The ³¹P{¹H} NMR spectra of **1**, **2** and **3** show broad singlets at –8.0 ppm, –26.2 ppm and –36.1 ppm, respectively. The upfield resonances in the ³¹P{¹H} NMR spectra of **1–3** indicate a lack of significant P–B π-interaction within these molecules. The ¹¹B NMR spectra of **1–3** each exhibit only one broad singlet (39.5 ppm (**1**); 40.4 ppm (**2**); and 38.8 ppm (**3**)) at values typical for trivalent R₂P–BR'₂ species.^{30,31} The broadness of the signals in the ³¹P{¹H} and ¹¹B spectra can be explained by the quadrupolar nature of boron. Moreover, the ¹J_{P–B} coupling is not visible likely because of the small value of this coupling constant and mentioned broadness of the signals. The crystallization from petroleum ether at –20 °C resulted in colorless crystals of **2** and **3**. The X-ray structures of **2** and **3** are presented in Fig. 1. The most characteristic structural features of **2** and **3** are the planar geometry of the N and B atoms with the sum of the angles being close to 360°, the pyramidal geometry of the P atom (sum 323.8° (**2**); 316.95° (**3**)) and the very long B–P distance (1.983(2) Å (**2**); 1.984(1) Å (**3**)). The B–P bond lengths in **2** and **3** are among the longest distances reported for phosphinoboranes,^{30,31} and they are even slightly longer than the sum of the single covalent bond radii of B and P (1.96 Å).⁴⁵

Scheme 2 Synthesis of diaminophosphinoboranes **1–3**.Fig. 1 Molecular structures of **2** and **3**.

Moreover, the shortening of the B–N bonds in **2** and **3** to B–N distances in the range of 1.425(1)–1.442(3) Å (sum of the single covalent bond radii of B and N: 1.56 Å; sum of the double covalent bond radii for B and N: 1.38 Å) was observed.^{45,46} This feature, together with the planar geometry of the N atom, indicates significant B–N π-bonding. NBO analysis of these species provided further insight into the electronic structures of **1–3**. The strong interaction between the lone pairs on the N atoms and the formally empty p-orbital of the B atom resulting from the formation of B–N π-bonds is clearly visible. Otherwise, donor–acceptor interactions between the P and B centers are very weak. Hence, the lone pair on the P atom is accessible for reactions with electrophilic compounds. The nucleophilic and electrophilic properties of **1–3** were studied by analysis of the condensed Fukui functions. In general, **1–3** have strong nucleophilic character with the nucleophilicity centered at the P atom. The nucleophilicity of the diaminophosphinoboranes increases in the order **3** < **2** < **1**, where the values of *f*_N for the P atoms are 0.175, 0.198 and 0.277, respectively. Interestingly, boron is neither a nucleophilic nor an electrophilic center; the values of both the *f*_N and *f*_E Fukui functions are close to zero. Taking into account the results of all the structural and NBO analyses, **1–3** can be described as nucleophilic borylphosphine-like species.

Next, we studied the reactivity of diaminophosphinoboranes **1–3** towards CO₂. The reactions of **1**, **2** or **3** with CO₂ (1 atm) at room temperature in toluene resulted in the formation of phosphinoboration products **1a**, **2a** and **3a**, respectively (Scheme 3). The reaction progress was monitored by ³¹P{¹H}



of **1a**. Although the values of the free energies (ΔG_{298}) confirmed that in the reaction with CO_2 , all three systems form stable products *via* exergonic processes, the kinetics of these reactions are notably different (Table 1).

In general, as the nucleophilicity of the phosphorus atom in **1–3** decreases, the energy barrier ΔG^\ddagger increases. A small aberration is observed for **2a**; PtBuPh is less nucleophilic than PtBu_2 but is also less sterically hindered, and therefore, the value of ΔG^\ddagger is slightly lower for **2a** (Fig. S41[†]). While **1** and **2** react with CO_2 in an analogous manner involving the generation of adduct **I**, a PES scan of **3a** revealed that the corresponding intermediate is not formed along the reaction path (Fig. S42[†]). In this case, the activation of CO_2 proceeds *via* a single four-membered ring transition state. This path requires the simultaneous interaction of both reactive centers with CO_2 , which in conjunction with the PPh_2 atom being the least nucleophilic, justifies the highest energy barrier and the extremely long reaction time for **3**.

We found it very interesting to compare the reactivities of trivalent species containing single and double boron-phosphorus bonds (Scheme 4). Stephan and coworkers revealed that phosphinoboranes $\text{R}_2\text{P}=\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2$ ($\text{R} = t\text{Bu}, \text{Cy}$) can activate dihydrogen^{34,37} (Scheme 4, bottom left); however, we did not find any reports on the reactivity of such species towards CO_2 .

For this reason, we reacted a representative species, $t\text{Bu}_2\text{P}=\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2$ (**A**), with CO_2 under the same conditions as described for **1**. The monitoring of the reaction mixture by ^{31}P $\{^1\text{H}\}$ and ^{11}B spectroscopy showed that compound **A** does not activate CO_2 . Furthermore, in the reaction of **1** with H_2 conducted under the same conditions, the $^{31}\text{P}\{^1\text{H}\}$ and ^{11}B NMR spectra revealed only signals of unreacted **1**. The differences in the reactivity of **1** and $t\text{Bu}_2\text{P}=\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2$ towards H_2 and CO_2 can be explained by their electronic structures. According to the

mechanism of H_2 activation proposed by Stephan, the reaction starts with the addition of H_2 (H-H bond acts as a Lewis base) to the Lewis acidic B-center of $t\text{Bu}_2\text{P}=\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2$.^{34,37} In the case of **1**, the Lewis acidity of boron is quenched due to the strong donation from both N atoms, which explains its lack of reactivity towards H_2 . In regard to CO_2 , our mechanistic study reveals that the presence of a strong nucleophilic P center with an accessible lone pair is crucial for the activation of electrophilic CO_2 . While compound **1** meets these conditions, in the case of $t\text{Bu}_2\text{P}=\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2$, the lone pair on the P atom is involved in a strong donor-acceptor interaction with the B atom, resulting in π -bonding.

Conclusions

We have synthesized a series of novel monomeric diamino-phosphinoboranes which are not only effective species for functionalization of CO_2 but are also promising systems for activation of other small molecules. Our studies revealed which factors are crucial for the activation of small molecules by trivalent phosphorus and boron species with direct P-B bond and how to design effective systems of this kind. Studies on the reactivity of diamino-phosphinoboranes towards a wide range of small, electrophilic molecules are currently in progress.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Acknowledgements

R. G., N. S., and A. O. thank the National Science Centre NCN, Poland (Grant 2016/21/B/ST5/03088) for their financial support. The authors thank TASK Computational Center for access to computational resources.

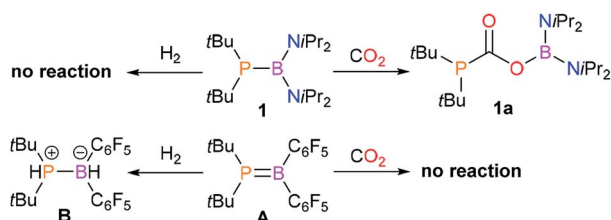
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Table 1 Free energies (ΔG) and activation free energies (ΔG^\ddagger) for the capture of CO_2 by **1–3**^a

Reaction	ΔG^\ddagger [kcal mol ⁻¹]	ΔG [kcal mol ⁻¹]
1a	27.3	−20.1
2a	26.4	−17.8
3a	30.2	−10.8

^a ωB97XD/6-31G+(d,p).



Scheme 4 Comparison of the reactivities of species possessing P-B or P=B bonds towards H_2 and CO_2 .



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