

Control of brain state transitions with a photoswitchable muscarinic agonist

Almudena Barbero-Castillo[†], Fabio Riefolo[†], Carlo Matera, Sara Caldas-Martínez, Pedro Mateos-Aparicio, Julia F. Weinert, Aida Garrido-Charles, Enrique Claro, Maria V. Sanchez-Vives^{5,}, and Pau Gorostiza^{5,*}*

Dra. Almudena Barbero-Castillo, Sara Caldas-Martínez, Dr. Pedro Mateos-Aparicio, Dr. Julia F. Weinert, Dr. Maria V. Sanchez-Vives
Institut d'Investigacions Biomèdiques August Pi i Sunyer (IDIBAPS), Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Fabio Riefolo, Dr. Carlo Matera, Dr. Aida Garrido-Charles, Dr. Pau Gorostiza
Institute for Bioengineering of Catalonia (IBEC), Barcelona Institute for Science and Technology (BIST), Barcelona, Spain.

Dr. Fabio Riefolo, Dr. Carlo Matera, Dr. Aida Garrido-Charles, Dr. Pau Gorostiza
Network Biomedical Research Center in Bioengineering, Biomaterials, and Nanomedicine (CIBER-BBN), Madrid, Spain.

Prof. Enrique Claro
Institut de Neurociències and Departament de Bioquímica i Biologia Molecular, Unitat de Bioquímica de Medicina, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Barcelona, Spain.

Dr. Maria V. Sanchez-Vives*, Dr. Pau Gorostiza*
Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA), Barcelona, Spain.

[†] Equal contribution

*E-mail: msanche3@clinic.cat (M.V.S.V.), pau@icrea.cat (P.G.)

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Abstract

The ability to control neural activity is essential for research not only in basic neuroscience, as spatiotemporal control of activity is a fundamental experimental tool, but also in clinical neurology for therapeutic brain interventions. Transcranial-magnetic, ultrasound, and AC/DC current stimulation are some available means of spatiotemporal controlled neuromodulation. There is also light-mediated control, such as optogenetics, which has revolutionized neuroscience research, yet its clinical translation is hampered by the need for gene manipulation. As a drug-based alternative, the effect of a photoswitchable muscarinic agonist (PAI) on a brain network is evaluated in this study. First, the conditions to manipulate M2 muscarinic receptors with light in the experimental setup are determined. Next, physiological synchronous emergent cortical activity consisting of slow oscillations—as in slow wave sleep—is transformed into a higher frequency pattern in the cerebral cortex, both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, as a consequence of PAI activation with light. These results open the way to study cholinergic neuromodulation and to control spatiotemporal patterns of activity in different brain states, their transitions, and their links to cognition and behavior. The approach can be applied to different organisms and does not require genetic manipulation, which would make it translational to humans.

Main Text

1. Introduction

All perceptions, memories and behaviors are based on the communication between the billions of neurons that constitute the brain.^[1–4] Individual neurons transmit information using chemical and electrical signals, and are organized in groups or circuits involved in different functions.^[3,5,6] The electrochemical interactions of neuronal ensembles result in electrical activity emerging from the brain, which can show synchrony across populations in the form of

brain rhythms and waves that propagate^[7-9] or asynchronous discharges, depending on the brain state.^[10] Different brain states (slow wave sleep, REM, wakefulness, anesthesia, etc.) are associated with specific network activity parameters such as brain rhythms of certain frequency and synchronization across areas, or particular functional connectivity patterns, while brain states are also associated with specific behaviors.^[1,11] Transitions across brain states are therefore linked to substantial changes in brain activity patterns.^[12] For example, deep sleep is dominated by large and synchronous brain waves, which transition towards a more desynchronized and higher frequency content with waking up.^[8,13,14] These changes in brain and behavioral states and the concomitant changes in electrophysiological activity are physiologically driven largely by neuromodulators, of which acetylcholine (ACh) is one.^[12,15] Indeed, it is known that the activation of cholinergic nuclei in the upper brainstem contributes to the transition from sleep to awake states^[16-18] and associated brain patterns.^[19] However, it is not fully understood how the different cells expressing ACh receptors contribute to the alteration of the global cortical state, or what the contribution of different muscarinic receptor subtypes to this transition is.

Cholinergic receptors include ionotropic nicotinic ion channels and muscarinic metabotropic G protein-coupled receptors. They modulate brain activity, and in particular the activity of the cerebral cortex,^[20] being involved in crucial neocortical functions such as attention,^[21-23] learning,^[24-26] memory,^[27] as well as sensory and motor functions.^[28-30] In the neocortex, ACh is released mostly at cholinergic terminals from neurons with somas in the basal forebrain nuclei. Electrical stimulation of the nucleus basalis can evoke the release of ACh in the neocortex, although in an unselective manner, as ascending projections from basal forebrain nuclei not only comprise cholinergic axons, but also GABAergic and glutamatergic axons.^[31]

Selective stimulation of cholinergic projections in the neocortex from basal forebrain nuclei has been demonstrated with optogenetics and has enabled the disruption of neocortical synchronous activity during certain sleep states.^[13] Optogenetic stimulation of basal forebrain cholinergic

neurons also revealed their influence in awake cortical dynamics: cholinergic neuromodulation was found to be relevant for visual discrimination tasks, modulating the encoding properties of V1 neurons and activating cortical transitions faster than previously presumed.^[13] However, optogenetics cannot target endogenous signaling as it is limited by the overexpression of microbial proteins using genetic manipulation, which can distort synaptic physiology.^[32,33] It also raises safety and regulatory concerns regarding therapeutic applications.^[32] Illumination can be applied locally with implanted devices like optical fibers and LEDs, or transcranially when using long wavelengths, which are less scattering and more penetrating in tissue.^[34,35] The control of neuronal signaling with photopharmacology is based on synthetic ligands that target endogenous proteins, and thus its physiological relevance spans from circuit to sub-cellular levels. Since neuronal receptors are highly conserved, photoswitchable ligands can generally be used in multiple species, and their safety and regulation can be established in the same manner as other drugs. Given that the cholinergic system is key to the modulation of a variety of CNS functions,^[20,36] the use of selective and photoswitchable cholinergic drugs to achieve a spatiotemporal modulation of cortical activity might have relevant scientific and clinical implications. We recently developed a photoswitchable agonist of M2 muscarinic acetylcholine receptors (mAChRs), Phthalimide-Azo-Iper (PAI),^[37] but its action on neuronal circuits and networks has never been explored.

Herein, we report that the cholinergic-dependent brain state transitions in the neocortex can be controlled and thus investigated in detail with light using photosensitive drugs. In particular, we have found that PAI enables the modulation of spontaneous emerging slow oscillations (SO) in neuronal circuits. PAI *cis*-to-*trans* photoisomerization decreases the Down state durations and increases oscillatory frequency in cortical slices. In addition, PAI allows the reversible manipulation of the cortical oscillatory frequency in anesthetized mice using light. Two different species, ferret (*in vitro*) and mouse (*in vivo*) were used in this study, since ferret cortical slices are more suitable than those of rodents to spontaneously generating network

activity under physiological conditions.^[38] Thus, we demonstrate that photopharmacology allows to selectively control SO both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, opening the way for the analysis of their spatiotemporal dynamics and their effects on brain and behavioral state transitions. Photoactivation of mAChR driven by PAI offers the potential to modulate neural circuits in numerous regions distributed throughout the neocortex. In this first work we studied the impact of global activation on the temporal dynamics of cortical patterns. Patterned illumination will allow us to carry out more spatially targeted studies in the future.

In our design, we considered that changes in cortical rhythms accompany behavioral state transitions, and endogenous ACh actions play a central role in such variations.^[11,39–46] It is known^[16–18] that ACh contributes to the shift of the neocortical network state from synchronous to asynchronous activity (associated with awake states), thus we hypothesized that a preparation expressing synchronized activity—physiological slow oscillations—would be an appropriate testbed to investigate the effect of muscarinic ligands, including the novel photosensitive agonist PAI.

2. Results

2.1. Non-specific activation of mAChRs evokes neuronal hyperexcitability in cortical slices.

We started by studying the effect of Iperoxo, a muscarinic non-selective agonist,^[47,48] on cortical SO spontaneously generated in cortical slices. The goal was to evaluate the potential of mAChRs to modulate the dynamics of the neocortical network, while avoiding the simultaneous activation of nicotinic cholinergic receptors (nAChRs).^[20] In addition, these experiments would allow validating if Iperoxo-based photoswitches like PAI could be useful photopharmacological tools to control neuronal activity, and characterizing their performance.

Ferret cortical slices spontaneously generate cortical SO,^[38] a hallmark of activity during deep sleep or anesthesia.^[38] We recorded this spontaneous oscillatory activity (control) and next, the activity under different concentrations (1, 10, 100 nM; $n=7$) of Iperoxo. Slow oscillations consist of alternating periods of activity or high neuronal firing (Up states) and periods of near silence (Down states). In order to quantify Up and Down state duration, firing rates and frequencies, we estimated the MUA (multiunit activity reflecting the activity of the local neuronal population) and ran an algorithmic separation of Up and Down states by establishing a threshold from a bimodal distribution of MUA that separates firing periods (Up states) from silent periods (Down states).^[7] A more detailed account of this quantification can be found in Methods. The activation of mAChRs by Iperoxo resulted in a global change in the network's dynamics in a dose-dependent way, displaying enhanced excitability (**Fig. 1A, B**). At 100 nM Iperoxo, the oscillatory frequency—or frequency of the Up/Down state cycle—significantly increased (from 0.85 ± 0.1 Hz in the control to 1.42 ± 0.18 Hz with 100 nM Iperoxo, $p\text{-value} = 3 \cdot 10^{-2}$), while the firing rate (FR; see Methods)^[49] during Up-states did not change significantly (from 0.97 ± 0.15 a.u. to 0.74 ± 0.09 a.u. with 100 nM Iperoxo) (**Fig. 1C**). At concentrations equal or higher than 100 nM Iperoxo, the oscillatory activity evolved to periods of full-blown epileptiform discharges (**Fig. 1A,B**), as previously characterized in this preparation^[49] and also described *in vivo* following muscarinic activation^[50,51], as in the pilocarpine model of epilepsy.^[52] Such epileptiform or seizure-like discharges are a clear sign of hyperexcitability, displaying intense firing for several seconds and long periods of silence, and characterized by a rather different spectrogram showing larger amplitudes in different frequency bands: slow (<1 Hz), delta (1–4 Hz) and alpha (7–12 Hz) frequency components, and including enhancement of beta (12–30 Hz) and gamma frequencies (30–100 Hz) (**Fig. 1D**). However, our interest was to avoid epileptiform discharges and to activate muscarinic receptors within the range of physiological activity, therefore with the activation achieved below 100 nM Iperoxo.

Figure 1 to be inserted here.

2.2. Effect of PAI isomers on slow and fast oscillations *in vitro*.

The hyperexcitable network state induced with Iperoxo reflects the impact of mAChR activation on cortical networks and brain states.^[14] In order to remotely control these states, we aimed at the muscarinic neuromodulation with light using PAI, a photoswitchable Iperoxo-derivative that allows the reversible activation of M2 mAChRs *in vivo*.^[37] The light-dependent behavior of PAI is achieved with a molecular switch in its structure that is based on azobenzene. PAI exists in two forms, *trans* and *cis*, which are in dynamic equilibrium with each other (**Fig. 2A**). A distribution of 87% in favor of the *trans* form (13% of the *cis*) is found in the dark or after illumination with visible light (white light (WL) for 2 minutes). After illumination with ultraviolet (UV) light (365 nm for 1 minute) the ratio between the two configurations rapidly changes to about 77% *cis* (23% *trans*). Both PAI isomeric mixtures (respectively termed “*trans*” and “*cis*” for simplicity) are thermally stable for hours and their biological effects have been characterized *in vitro* and *in vivo*.^[37] Despite the partial photoconversion (which is characteristic of azobenzene-based switches) the *trans*- and the *cis*-enriched forms of PAI display different pharmacological activity: the *trans* configuration is more potent to activate M2 receptors than the *cis*, allowing the reversible manipulation of muscarinic functions with light over many cycles.^[37] Prior to testing PAI in the brain, which shows high expression of both M1 and M2 receptors, we tested its activity profile in these two mAChR subtypes using *in vitro* GTPgammaS assays (**Fig. S1.2**) and calcium imaging assays (**Fig. 2B**) in cultured cell lines separately overexpressing M1 and M2 receptors. Our results show significant M2 selectivity (**Fig. 2B**) in agreement with the dualsteric design and *in vivo* properties of PAI.^[37] M2 receptors are highly expressed in cardiac tissue and in the brain, where they play a relevant role in several CNS disorders.^[36] Controlled spatiotemporal regulation of M2 mAChR activity and subsequent

effects on cortical neuronal networks may provide new therapeutic opportunities for diseases involving the cholinergic system. Note that subtype selectivity can be advantageous to interpret (photo)pharmacological experiments but muscarinic activation with light is sufficient for the aim of this work. We applied PAI to spontaneously active neocortical brain slices and recorded their oscillatory activity before and after photoactivating the drug. We first obtained dose-response curves of the two drug forms separately, *trans*- (dark-adapted state) and *cis*-PAI (pre-illuminated with UV light) with the purpose of identifying the concentration range displaying differences in brain activity with light. The baseline activity (characterized by SO) was recorded as a control, prior to bath-application of artificial cerebrospinal fluid (ACSF) with increasing PAI concentrations (10 nM, 100 nM, 300 nM, and 1 μ M, $n=6$ ferret brain slices for each PAI form, *trans* and *cis*) (**Fig. 2C**). Both *trans*-PAI and *cis*-PAI significantly modulated the Up- and Down-state sequence in a dose-dependent manner, with *cis*-PAI displaying weaker effects in agreement with the reported PAI properties in cells expressing M2 receptors^[37] (**Fig. 2C, D and E**; the quantification and significance versus control for each isomer are detailed in supplementary **Fig. S2**). The differences between *cis*-PAI and *trans*-PAI were significant for the oscillatory frequency at 100 nM and for the FR during Up-states at 1 μ M (**Fig. 2E**). Note that epileptiform activity was never observed with PAI up to concentrations of 1 μ M, in contrast to the effect of iperoxo.

These results obtained with a limited number of animals for each isomer ($n=6$) already suggested that intermediate concentrations between 100 nM and 300 nM might be suitable to produce changes in the oscillatory frequency and in the firing rate of the Up-states upon *cis-trans* photoisomerization (**Fig. 2E**). Thus, in subsequent experiments with light we expanded the sample ($n=17$) and focused on the concentration of 200 nM in order to photomodulate cortical SO using PAI.

Figure 2 to be inserted here.

2.3. PAI effectively light-modulates cortical slow oscillations *in vitro*.

Once the concentration range of drug to obtain different oscillatory activity evoked by *cis*- and *trans*-PAI was determined *in vitro* (**Fig. 2**), we moved on to control the rhythmic activity with light in cortical slices (**Fig. 3**). We took advantage of the thermal stability of both PAI forms to apply initially the less potent one (*cis*-PAI) at 200 nM in cortical slices ($n=17$), in the absence of WL to avoid photoconversion to *trans*-PAI during the recordings.^[37] As shown in **Fig. 3**, 200 nM *cis*-PAI evoked an increment of the oscillatory frequency (from 0.53 ± 0.04 Hz in the control to 1.04 ± 0.14 Hz with *cis*-PAI, $p\text{-value} = 2.8 \cdot 10^{-3}$), and no significant effects in the FR of the Up-states (from 0.98 ± 0.09 a.u. in the control to 0.86 ± 0.10 a.u. with *cis*-PAI, $p\text{-value} = 2.9 \cdot 10^{-1}$) in comparison to the control situation (**Fig. 3A,C**). Subsequent direct illumination of the slices with WL produced a robust increase in oscillatory frequency (from 0.53 ± 0.04 Hz in the control to 1.68 ± 0.13 upon illumination, $p\text{-value} < 10^{-4}$; from 1.04 ± 0.14 Hz with *cis*-PAI to 1.68 ± 0.13 upon illumination, $p\text{-value} = 1.1 \cdot 10^{-3}$), a significant decrease in FR of the Up-states (from control values of 0.98 ± 0.09 a.u. to 0.52 ± 0.06 a.u. upon illumination, $p\text{-value} = 2 \cdot 10^{-4}$; from 0.86 ± 0.10 a.u. with *cis*-PAI to 0.52 ± 0.06 a.u. upon illumination, $p\text{-value} = 2.2 \cdot 10^{-3}$), and a noticeable change in the activity regime of the network (**Fig. 3A,C**). The changes in the power spectrum in the population were incremental, as illustrated in **Fig. 3B,D**. These differences are in agreement with PAI photoconversion to the active form (*trans*). At this stage, the modulation of cortical activity was not reversible upon illumination with 365 nm light (to isomerize PAI to the *cis* form *in situ*) in slices, which could be due either to pharmacological irreversibility (which was ruled out in experiments *in vivo*, see next **section 2.4**) or to the reduced penetration of UV light in brain tissue.

Figure 3 to be inserted here.

2.4. PAI can reversibly modulate brain wave activity *in vivo*.

Having established the unique ability of PAI to alter cortical oscillatory activity with light in slices, we then aimed at obtaining a proof of concept of photocontrolling the cortical state *in vivo*. Cortical activity was recorded from C57BL6/JR mice ($n=8$) with an electrode inserted through a craniotomy across which we carried out the drug application and brain illumination (see Methods). Initially, we induced deep anesthesia in the animals, a state that is known to reproduce the slow wave sleep state,^[7,41,53] and which is characterized by the generation of cortical SO similar to the slow frequency waves observed in our experiments in slices under control conditions (**Figs 1–3**).^[7] Such SO activity in anesthetized mice was recorded for 500 s under WL illumination of the brain, and the characteristic parameters obtained (oscillatory frequency 0.60 ± 0.05 Hz, FR during the Up-states 0.80 ± 0.11 a.u.) were taken as the baseline, control condition *in vivo*. A 100 μ L drop of 1 μ M *cis*-PAI solution was initially applied to the brain surface in the absence of WL, to avoid *cis* to *trans* photoisomerization of PAI. The oscillatory frequency was not significantly altered by *cis*-PAI (0.58 ± 0.06 Hz) (**Fig. 4B**), while it caused only a minor increase in the FR during the Up-states (0.86 ± 0.14 a.u.) (**Fig. 4C**). Subsequent illumination with WL significantly increased the oscillatory frequency (from 0.60 ± 0.05 Hz in the control to 0.73 ± 0.06 Hz upon illumination, $p = 2.8 \cdot 10^{-2}$) (**Fig. 4B**), and induced an increment of the delta ($p = 1.6 \cdot 10^{-2}$) and gamma ($p = 2.3 \cdot 10^{-2}$) frequencies band compared with control conditions (**Fig. 4D**), while the FR during Up states was decreased to the control values (0.83 ± 0.09 a.u., **Fig. 4C**). This light-dependent increase in oscillatory frequency activity of PAI *in vivo* is in partial agreement with the *in vitro* results observed in ferret slices, which also displayed a reduction in FR (**Fig. 3**). The difference may be due to the integrity of the neural network and the cholinergic activity *in vivo*.

In brain cortical sections the effect of *trans*-PAI is not reversible using 365 nm light and we aimed to understand whether this was due to muscarinic activation mechanisms or just to the limited tissue penetration of UV wavelengths, which could hinder isomerization in deeper regions. The illumination of the mice brain using a more powerful 365 nm source (100 W bulb, see Experimental Section) did not significantly reduce the oscillatory frequency from the *trans*-PAI-excited situation ($n=4$, Supporting Information, **Fig. S4A**). Since tissue scattering cannot be avoided at this wavelength, we tried to revert the effect of *trans*-PAI by outcompeting it by direct application of its *cis* isomer, which binds to the same receptor site with similar strength that *trans* (see SI, competition binding experiments, **Fig. S1.1**) but causes weaker or no activation. For this purpose, we significantly increased the oscillatory frequency with 200 nM *trans*-PAI, and then applied 1 μ M *cis*-PAI. Indeed, we observed the return to the control-like oscillatory activity ($n=4$, Supporting Information, **Fig. S4BC**), demonstrating that the process is pharmacologically reversible and that the lack of reversibility is probably due to the limited penetration of UV light. Thus, the optimization of both the light delivery system and/or drug photophysical properties (e.g., photoswitching at less scattering wavelengths) have the potential to reversibly photocontrol neural muscarinic actions *in vivo*.

Figure 4 to be inserted here.

3. Discussion

Different brain states are associated with distinct brain emergent patterns and behaviors. In order to establish strong causal links between them, neural activity must be manipulated and recorded to observe the effects on specific behaviors. Pharmacological tools have proven very useful but they affect brain waves in a systemic way and have relatively slow dynamics.^[54]

Thus, understanding the mechanisms of brain and behavioral state transitions requires new techniques to manipulate neuronal activity^[1] that enable the neural modulation of specific brain regions and neuronal circuits in a fast and reversible way. They can be defined by a multimodal stimulation approach (e.g. electrical stimulation with implanted microelectrodes) and photostimulation with cell-specific optogenetics^[55–58] and with neurotransmitter-specific photopharmacology.^[59]

Electromagnetic stimulation pioneered the noninvasive modulation of brain activity and is used therapeutically to treat CNS diseases.^[60] For example, transcranial alternating current stimulation has been applied to modulate alpha and beta waves in the motor cortex ^[61] and transcranial magnetic stimulation has been used to modulate gamma oscillations in the prefrontal cortex.^[62] However, further improvements are required to enhance their spatiotemporal and spectral performance, both for fundamental research and therapeutic purposes.^[60] Optogenetics^[55–58] has emerged as an alternative to electromagnetic stimulation, allowing the activation or inhibition of specific cell populations. For example, photocontrolling the release of ACh, which modulates the transitions between different brain states,^[12,15] can be achieved by overexpressing photosensitive proteins in cholinergic neurons of mice neocortex.^[13,63] However, genetic manipulation is required in this approach, limiting so far its usability in humans.^[32] The photopharmacological approach presented here is, to date, the only way to directly photomodulate brain state transitions in intact tissue. We first studied the effect of the muscarinic agonist Iperoxo^[47] on isolated cortical slices (**Fig. 1**) in order to demonstrate that a slow oscillatory state can be controlled by selectively manipulating muscarinic receptors (including all M1-M5 subtypes) at their physiological location and context. The oscillatory frequency of the network was increased with 100 nM Iperoxo, eventually leading to seizure-like discharges, in agreement with the outcome of muscarinic stimulation using knockout mice and the pilocarpine-induced model of epilepsy.^[50,51] Photocontrol of muscarinic signaling was subsequently achieved *in vitro* and *in vivo* with the photochromic Iperoxo derivative PAI^[37]

(**Figs 2–4**). We showed that PAI is selective for M2 versus M1 subtype receptors and thus it only accounts for part of the effects of Iperoxo. In the experiments of **Fig. 2**, PAI was pre-illuminated in order to administer the inactive *cis* form, which is then stable over hours at 37 °C. This allowed comparing the activities of both forms at different concentrations and identifying 200 nM PAI as a suitable concentration for direct photoswitching of cortical activity *in vitro* (**Fig. 3**) and *in vivo* (**Fig. 4**). Overall, this proof-of-concept demonstration of photocontrol of brain waves has allowed to identify two important limitations of PAI that will be addressed in future drug designs. Namely, that PAI is active in the dark and that it is not readily photo-reversible in brain tissue due to the limited penetration of UV light. We have promising evidence that both limitations can be overcome, respectively using a “bridged” azobenzene to obtain a dark-inactive analog drug with equivalent pharmacology,^[64] and using tissue-penetrating infrared light from a pulsed laser.^[37] Other aspects of PAI that can be optimized include its activation wavelength under non-pulsed illumination, photosensitivity, reversibility, photoswitchable concentration range (“therapeutic window”), safety profile, and permeability to the blood-brain barrier. Still, as a small molecule, PAI is less likely to trigger adverse immune responses than the overexpression of microbial opsins.^[32,65] M2 mAChRs are involved in several CNS diseases like major depressive^[36,66] and bipolar disorders,^[36,67] Parkinson’s^[36,68] and Alzheimer’s^[36,68] diseases, but also in alcohol, smoking, and drug dependence.^[36,69] These disorders are thus susceptible to drug-based photomodulation *in vivo* without requiring genetic manipulation. We envisage that once a suitable drug concentration has been determined for optimal photoswitching, spatiotemporal patterns of stimulation can be applied to ask specific questions. For example, how does a focal, acute activation propagate in space and time? What is the behavioral outcome? How does it interfere with the ongoing (endogenous) wave activity? How does the size, duration, and location of the activated region relate to the behavioral outcome and its reversibility? Beyond the fundamental understanding of the mechanisms of brain waves, if these experiments could be performed with safe

photoswitchable drugs and using noninvasive transcranial illumination, these questions would gain great clinical relevance and feasibility. Beyond photoswitchable muscarinic agonists, these concepts could be also exploited with drug-like antagonists (Riefolo et al, in review) and adrenergic ligands^[70] among many others, eventually allowing us to build three-dimensional functional pharmacological charts that could be correlated with anatomical maps.

In summary, the manipulation of brain state transitions, by means of photocontrolling the frequency of cortical oscillations, has been achieved with a photoswitchable dualsteric agonist of M2 mAChRs. This result opens the way to (a) dissecting the spatiotemporal distribution and pharmacology of brain states, namely mapping how they depend on agonists, antagonists, and modulators of the different muscarinic subtypes expressed in the CNS, and (b) investigating the neuronal dynamics and causality that regulate brain state transitions in the cerebral cortex and beyond. In particular, two-photon stimulation of PAI using pulsed infrared light^[37] should enable deep penetration and subcellular resolution in three dimensions,^[71] as recently demonstrated with endogenous mGlu5.^[72] Compared to the local and often inhomogeneous expression patterns achieved with viral injections of optogenetic constructs, diffusible small molecules like PAI can in principle be applied to larger brain regions to control neuronal oscillations.^[73] Thus, remote control of brain waves based on the photopharmacological manipulation of endogenous muscarinic receptors may reveal the complex three dimensional molecular signaling underlying brain states and their transitions, in order to link them with cognition and behavior in a diversity of wild-type organisms.

4. Conclusion

A method for directly manipulating neural activity and brain rhythms with light is demonstrated. It is based on a photoswitchable muscarinic small molecule and does not require gene therapy.

The photocontrol of endogenous receptors and their functions in the central nervous system, such as the transition between different brain states, is an achievement for neuromodulation technologies that is useful as a tool in basic neuroscience research and in future brain therapies and stimulations. Thus, photopharmacological neuromodulation combined with implantable optoelectronic devices offers the ability to exploit the untapped potential of neuropharmacology, by controlling drug action in precise spatiotemporal patterns.

5. Experimental Section

Slice Preparation: for the *in vitro* experiments we used isolated cortical slices from ferret, because they robustly reproduce the cortical SO compared with other animal models.^[74] Twenty-seven ferrets (4- to 6-month-old) were anesthetized with sodium pentobarbital (40 mg/kg) and decapitated. The entire forebrain was rapidly removed and placed in oxygenated cold (4–10 °C) bathing medium.^[75] Ferrets were treated in accordance with protocols approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of the University of Barcelona, which comply with the European Union guidelines on the protection of vertebrates used for experimentation (Directive 2010/63/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 September 2010). Coronal slices (400 μ m thick) from primary visual cortex (V1) were used.^[76] To increase tissue viability we used a modification of the sucrose-substitution technique,^[77] such that during slice preparation, the tissue was placed in a solution in which NaCl was replaced with sucrose while maintaining the same osmolarity. After preparation, the slices were placed in an interface-style recording chamber (Fine Sciences Tools, Foster City, CA, USA). During the first 30 min the cortical slices were superfused with an equal mixture in volume of the normal bathing medium, artificial cerebral spinal fluid (ACSF) and the sucrose-substituted solution. Following this, normal bathing medium was added up to the recording chamber and

the slices were superfused for 1–2 h; the normal bathing medium contained (in mM): NaCl, 126; KCl, 2.5; MgSO₄, 2; Na₂HPO₄, 1; CaCl₂, 2; NaHCO₃, 26; dextrose, 10; and was aerated with 95% O₂, 5% CO₂ to a final pH of 7.4. Then, a modified slice solution was used throughout the rest of the experiment; it had the same ionic composition except for different levels of the following (in mM): KCl, 4; MgSO₄, 1; and CaCl₂, 1.^[75] Bath temperature was maintained at 34–36 °C.

Drug application and photostimulation in brain slices: Iperoxo and PAI, both prepared as previously reported from commercially available starting materials^[37] were bath-applied at the concentrations range of 1 nM to 100 nM for Iperoxo and 10 nM to 1 µM for PAI, as discussed in the Results section. We typically waited more than 1000 s after the application of the drug in order to let it act, to obtain a stable pattern of electrical activity, and to ensure a stable concentration in the bath, this being an interface chamber. PAI effectively photomodulates the activity of M2 receptors *in vitro* and *in vivo*: its dark-adapted state (*trans* form) behaves as a strong M2 agonist, then upon illumination with UV light (365 nm), PAI switches to its less active state (*cis* form). PAI can be switched back to its “full on-state” with WL, or using two-photon excitation with pulsed near-infrared light.^[37] The high thermal stability of PAI *cis* form allows the administration of the less active drug (inactive in the cerebral cortex at concentrations lower than 1 µM) and subsequent activation of M2 receptors in the target region with WL.^[37] We first investigated the efficacy of PAI in cortical neuronal circuits *in vitro* by obtaining the dose-response curves of *trans*- and *cis*-PAI solutions applied separately. The more active PAI isomer (*trans*) was tested by applying its dark-adapted form (87% of *trans*-PAI), and *cis*-PAI was obtained by illuminating 1 mM stock solutions with 365 nm light (77% of *cis*-PAI, which is the maximum that can be achieved at the photo stationary state). Because of the high concentration of the stock solution (1 mM) and for the sake of having the maximal possible photoconversion of PAI into the *cis* form, UV light irradiation (Vilber Lourmat™ Dual Wave

Length UV Lamps, 365 nm 6 W) was performed over 10 min, even if it was demonstrated that the maximal percentage of the *cis* can be reached by a shorter time exposure to UV light (2 min).^[37] Increasing concentrations of both *trans*- and *cis*-PAI (10 nM, 100 nM, 300 nM and 1 μ M) were bath applied in order to build up the dose-response curves.

LFP recording and data analysis from in vitro recordings: our objective in this study was to identify the modulation of network dynamics exerted by photoswitchable muscarinic agonists. To this end, we obtained multiple LFP recordings and their correspondent multiunit activity (MUA) in the way described below. No single units were identified since we aimed at capturing the dynamics of the population and not of individual neurons. The recordings started after allowing at least 2 h of recovery of the slices. Extracellular recordings were obtained with flexible arrays of 16-electrodes arranged in columns as in **Fig. 1A**. The multielectrode array (MEA) covered a large part of the area occupied by a cortical slice.^[78] It consisted of six groups of electrodes positioned to record electrophysiological activity from superficial and from deep cortical layers (692 μ m apart) and from what should correspond to three different cortical columns (1500 μ m apart). The unfiltered field potential (raw signal) was acquired at 10 kHz with a Multichannel System Amplifier (MCS, Reutlingen, Germany) and digitized with a 1401 CED acquisition board and Spike2 software (Cambridge Electronic Design, Cambridge, UK). The MUA was estimated from the power of the frequencies between 200 and 1500 Hz in 5 ms windows.^[7,49] The spectrum in this frequency band is a good estimate of the firing of the neuronal population, since it is proportional to the density of the Fourier components at high frequencies.^[79] The MUA signal values were logarithmically scaled to compensate for the high fluctuations in the firing of neurons that are very close to the electrode, thus obtaining the logMUA signal (which we refer to as firing rate; FR). A bimodal distribution of the MUA the two peaks of the distribution corresponded to the samples of the activity network belonging to the Up and Down state, respectively. Thus, a threshold value separating the two modes of the

distribution was set between the two peaks, such that samples belonged to the Up or to the Down states depending on their position with respect to this threshold. After Up and Down state detection, mean Up and Down state durations were obtained.^[7] The frequency of the SO was the inverse of the duration of the entire Up-Down cycle. The Up state detection necessary was performed by setting a threshold in the log(MUA) time series as previously described to quantify frequency of the SO.^[7,49] Firing rate (FR) of the Up states was quantified from the transformed log(MUA) signal as mean of absolute value of log(MUA). To study the variability of power spectral densities (PSD) of the local field potential, we used Welch's method with 50% overlapped Hamming window with a resolution of 1 Hz. All off-line estimates and analyses were implemented in MATLAB (The MathWorks Inc., Natick, MA, USA). All variables in the experimental conditions were compared with the control (no chemical added) condition.

The in vivo preparation: cortical electrophysiology experiments were carried out in 2-3-month-old C57BL6/JR mice ($n = 8$) in accordance with the European Union Directive 2010/63/EU and approved by the local ethics committee. Mice were kept under standard conditions (room temperature, 12:12-h light-dark cycle, lights on at 08:00 a.m). Anesthesia was induced by intraperitoneal injection of ketamine (30 mg/kg) and medetomidine (100 mg/kg). After this procedure, the mouse was placed in a stereotaxic frame, and air was enriched with oxygen. Body temperature was maintained at 37 °C throughout the experiment.^[7] A craniotomy was performed in each mouse: AP -2.5 mm, L 1.5 mm (primary visual cortex, V1).^[80] Cortical recordings were obtained from infragranular layers with 1–2 M Ω single tungsten electrode insulated with a plastic coating except for the tip (FHC, Bowdoin, ME, USA). Spontaneous local field potential (LFP) recordings from the V1 area provided information about the local neuronal population activity—within 250 μ m.^[81] MUA estimation, Up-state detection and quantification of relative FR was performed as previously described. All these parameters were

used to compare spontaneous activity during anesthesia (control), after application of the pre-illuminated, less active drug form (*cis*-PAI) and drug activation with WL (*trans*-PAI). *Cis*-PAI was locally delivered to the cerebral cortex surface and activity was recorded while applying a commercial red filter on the WL source to avoid the activation of the drug. The uncovered brain was illuminated from a 3 cm distance with a WL source (Photonic Optics™ Optics Cold Light Source LED F1) in order to activate the drug *in situ* (*trans*-PAI). The *trans*-to-*cis* photoconversion was performed by illuminating the brain from a 5 cm distance with a very powerful 365 nm lamp (Spectroline, Spectronics FC-100-F, 230V, 365nm 100 W Spot Bulb) in order to improve the penetration of light into the tissues. The electrophysiological signal was amplified with a multichannel system (Multi Channel Systems), digitized at 20 kHz with a CED acquisition board and acquired with Spike 2 software (Cambridge Electronic Design) unfiltered.^[82]

In vitro specific M1 and M2 muscarinic agonist functional assays: Subtype selectivity of *trans*-PAI was studied by comparing the amplitude of fluorescence calcium imaging responses of cells expressing M2-GqTOP and M1 mAChRs. Human M2-GqTOP mAChR was transfected as described in Riefolo et al. 2019.^[37] Human M1 mAChR (Addgene) was transfected with XtremeGENE 9 DNA Transfection Reagent (Roche Applied Science) following the manufacturer's instructions. The day after transfection, cells were harvested with accutase (Sigma-Aldrich) and seeded onto 16-mm glass coverslips (Fisher Scientific) pretreated with collagen (Sigma-Aldrich) to allow cell adhesion. Preconfluent cultures were used for experiments between 48 h and 72 h after transfection. *In vitro* single-cell calcium imaging was performed as described in Riefolo et al. 2019,^[37] pre-incubating cells with OGB-1AM (10 µM for 30 min) as calcium indicator. The subtype selectivity of 3 and 10 pM *trans*-PAI emerged by comparing the amplitude of fluorescence calcium imaging responses of cells expressing M1

(3 pM, n=232 cells; 10 pM, n=232 cells; IPX, n=258) or M2-GqTOP (3 pM, n=70 cells; 10 pM, n=200 cells; IPX, n=300) mAChRs. Cells transfected with M2 mAChR gave significantly higher responses than M1 mAChR expressing cells (33% for M2 compared to 8% for M1). Data were normalized over the maximum response obtained with the nonselective agonist iperoxo (IPX) at saturating concentration of 30 pM (t-test of two samples assuming equal variances. $p = 1.58 \cdot 10^{-3}$).

A preliminary comparison between mAChR subtypes was obtained using an *in vitro* muscarinic agonist functional assay (Eurofins GTPgammaS assay) which allows to estimate possible activation of M1 and M2 receptors (as expressed in the Eurofins specifications). In particular, different concentrations of the active isomer *trans*-PAI were tested on human recombinant M1 and M2 receptors expressed in CHO-K1 (Chinese hamster ovary) cells. Compound agonism is defined by quantitation measured of bound [³⁵S]GTPγS. PAI was preincubated with 0.045 mg/ml membranes and 3 μM GDP for 30 minutes at 30 °C in modified HEPES buffer pH 7.4 with SPA beads are added for another 60 minutes at 30 °C. The reaction is then initiated by the addition of 0.3 nM [³⁵S]GTPγS for 30 minutes. *Trans*-PAI-induced increase of [³⁵S]GTPγS binding by 50 percent or more (≥50%) relative to 1 mM (M1) or 1 μM (M2) oxotremorine M responses indicates possible M1 or M2 agonist activity, as indicated in the Eurofins assay specifications. Experiments were performed in duplicates (n=2) and were accepted in accordance with Eurofins Quality Control Unit's validation standard operating procedure.

Statistical analysis: *in vitro* and *in vivo* oscillatory frequency, firing rate (FR) during the Up-state, Power Spectral Density (PSD) of oscillatory activity values are reported as mean ± SEM. All the oscillatory frequency and FR during the Up-state analyses in brain slices of Iperoxo, PAI dose-response curves, and 200 nM PAI photoconversion experiments were performed with one-way ANOVA test (Brown-Forsythe and Welch test, unpaired t with Welch's correction) of GraphPad Prism 9. The analyses in brain slices between *trans*- and *cis*-PAI oscillatory

frequency and FR during the Up-state values were performed with multiple t-test (Mann-Whitney) of GraphPad Prism 9. All the *in vivo* statistical analyses of oscillatory frequency and firing rate (FR) during the Up-state were performed with one-way ANOVA test (repeated measures [RM], Geisser-Greenhouse correction –no sphericity- and uncorrected Fisher’s LSD) of GraphPad Prism 9. PSD statistical analysis *in vivo* was performed with Friedman test and the Wilcoxon post-hoc tests corrected for multiple comparisons of MATLAB R2020b. Calcium imaging analyses of cells expressing M2-GqTOP and M1 mAChRs responding to *trans*-PAI application were performed with t-test of two sample (assuming equal variances).

Supporting Information

Supporting Information is available from the Wiley Online Library or from the author.

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[†]Almudena Barbero-Castillo and Fabio Riefolo contributed equally to this work.

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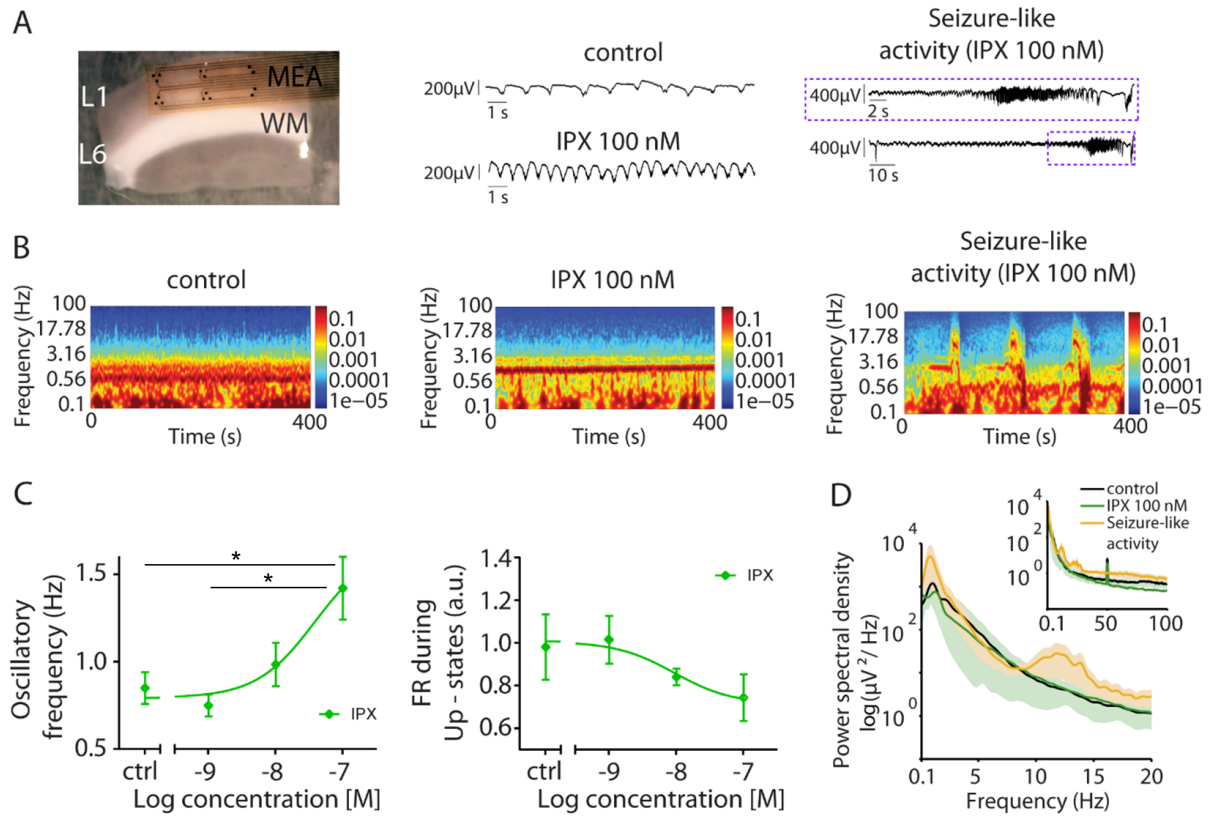


Figure 1. Activation of mAChRs with non subtype-specific agonist Iperoxo evokes neuronal hyperexcitability in cortical slices. (A) On the left, the experimental setup: 16-channel multielectrode array (MEA); WM, white matter; L1-L6, layer 1-6. On the right, raw local field potential (LFP) traces illustrating network activity showing the increase in oscillatory frequency corresponding to the spectrogram of panel B with 100 nM Iperoxo. (B) Spectrogram from the same time recording of LFP traces on panel A: control, 100 nM Iperoxo (IPX) and periods of seizure-like discharges. (C) oscillatory frequency (Hz) and FR (a.u.) during the Up-states in control (ctrl) conditions and after Iperoxo (1, 10, 100 nM ; $n=7$ ferret brain slices). Muscarinic activation of the brain slice with 100 nM Iperoxo produces a significant increase in oscillatory frequency compared to control conditions, and no significant changes in the FR during Up-states. $*p\text{-value} < 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$. (D) Averaged Power Spectral Density (PSD) of oscillatory activity showing low (<1 Hz), delta (1–4 Hz) and alpha (7–12 Hz) frequency component.

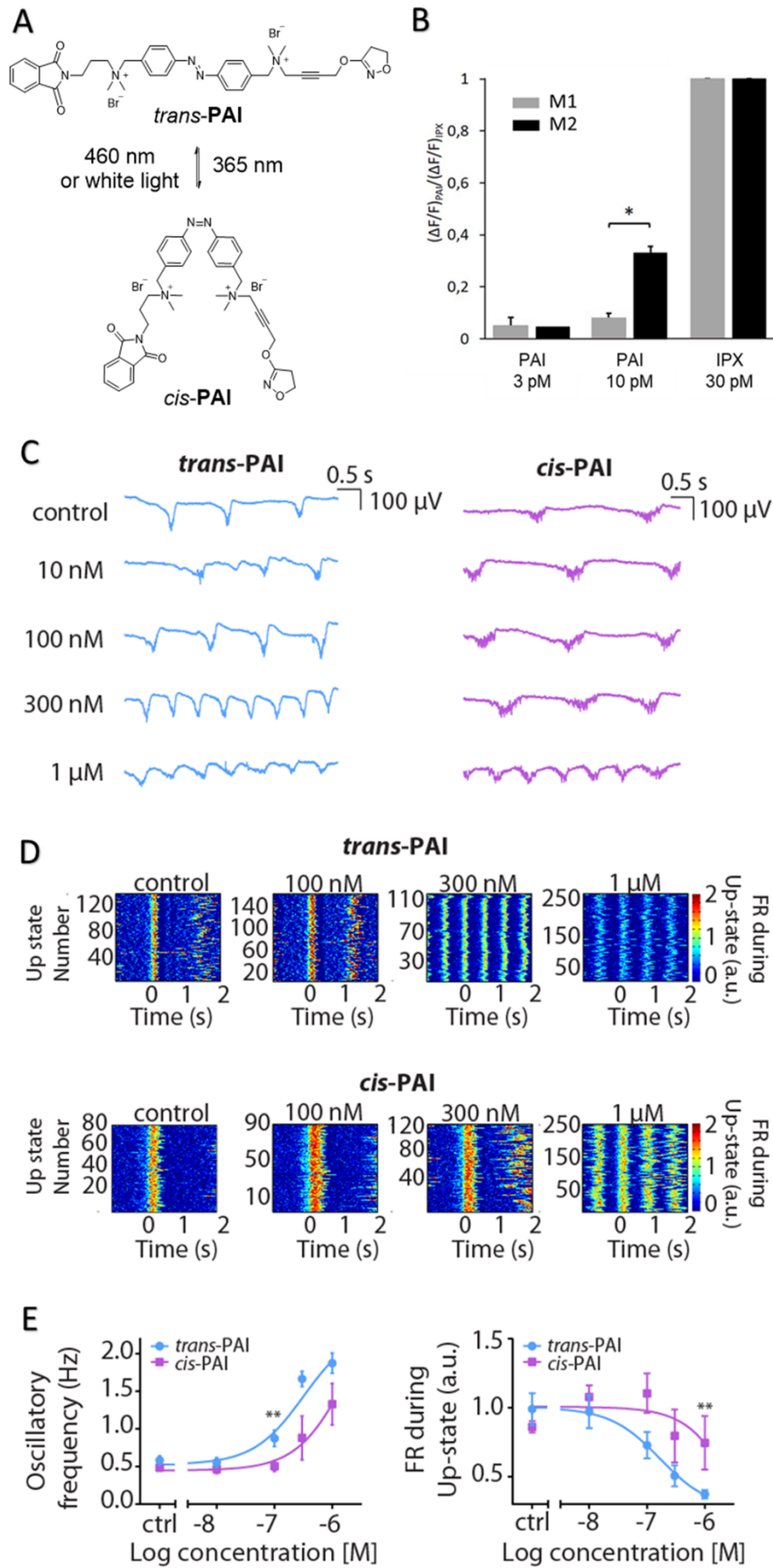


Figure 2. Effect on SO of mAChRs activation by *trans*-PAI (dark-relaxed) and *cis*-PAI (pre-illuminated with UV). (A) Chemical structures of *trans*- and *cis*-PAI. (B) Subtype selectivity of *trans*-PAI (3, 10 pM) was studied by comparing the amplitude of fluorescence calcium imaging responses of cells expressing M1 (3 pM, n=232 cells; 10 pM, n=232 cells; IPX, n=258) or M2-GqTOP (3 pM, n=70 cells; 10 pM, n=200 cells; IPX, n=300) mAChRs, using the procedure described in Riefolo et al. 2019^[37] and by pre-incubating cells with OGB-1AM (10 μ M for 30 min) as calcium indicator. M2 mAChR transfected cells gave a significantly higher response than M1 mAChR expressing cells (33% for M2 compared to 8% for M1). Data were normalized over the maximum response obtained with the nonselective orthosteric agonist IPX in saturation conditions at 30 pM. These results in cell lines are in agreement with previous reports (Riefolo et al., 2019),^[37] in which higher concentrations were required for cardiac assays *in vivo*. * $p < 5 \cdot 10^{-3}$). (C) Raw local field potential (LFP) example recordings showing the different ability of *trans*- and *cis*-PAI to increasing the oscillatory frequency. Note that *trans*-PAI is a stronger agonist of M2 mAChR than *cis*-PAI.^[37] (D) Raster plots showing the FR during the Up-states (color coded) under control conditions and different *trans*- and *cis*-PAI concentrations. (E) oscillatory frequency (Hz) and FR during the Up-states (a.u.) of the two different PAI isomers, *trans*- (blue, $n = 6$ ferret brain slices) and *cis*-PAI (pink, $n = 6$ ferret brain slices) at different concentrations. Significant differences between *cis*- and *trans*-PAI (** p -value $< 10^{-2}$) are observed in the oscillatory frequency at 100 nM and in the FR at 1 μ M. These experiments are aimed at estimating the concentration of effective photoswitching of cortical oscillations, which was set at 200 nM in subsequent experiments (see Figs. 3 and 4).

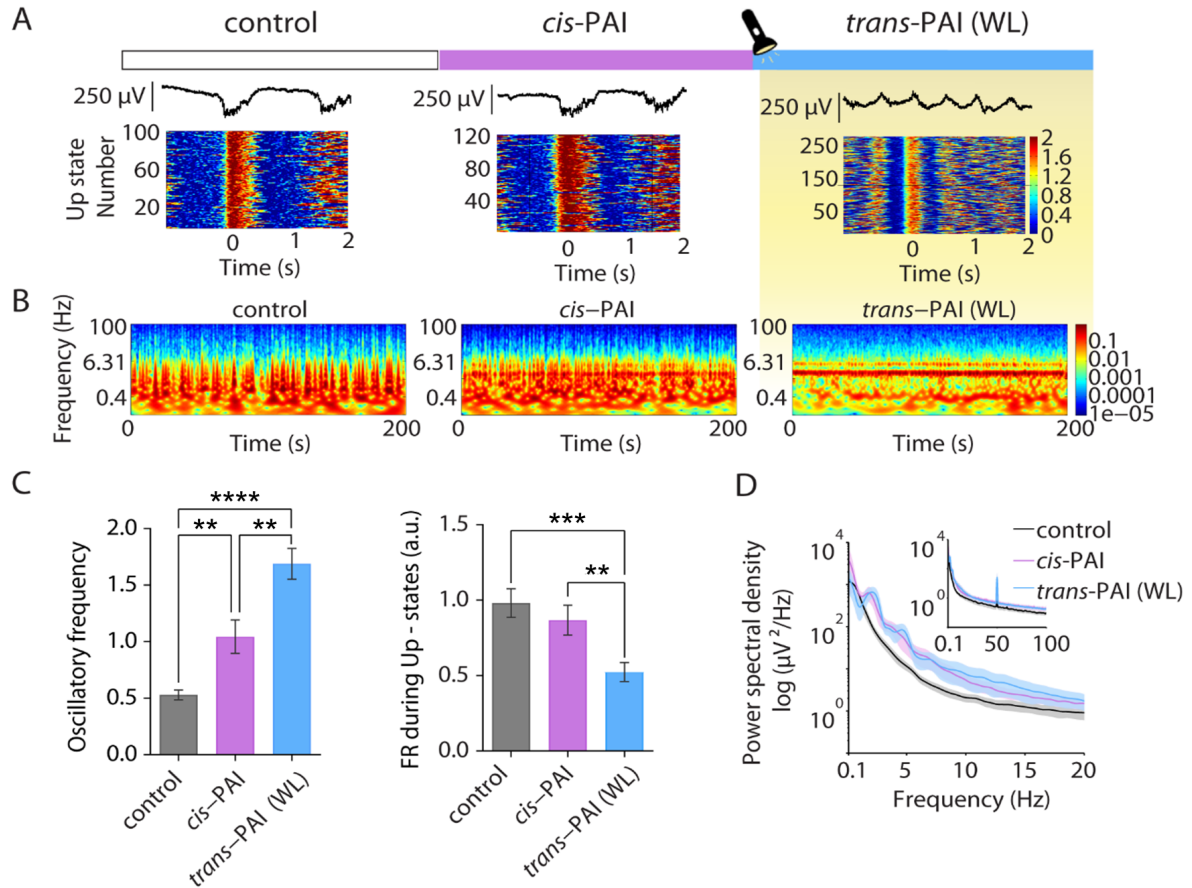


Figure 3. Photocontrol of brain waves *in vitro* using PAI and direct illumination with white light. (A) Representative local field potential (LFP) traces (top) and raster plots of firing rate (FR) during the Up-states under control conditions, 200 nM of *cis*-PAI and 200 nM *trans*-PAI after photoconversion with white light (WL) ($n=17$ ferret slices) (bottom). (B) Representative spectrogram under control condition, 200 nM of *cis*-PAI and 200 nM *trans*-PAI (WL). (C) Oscillatory frequency (Hz) and FR during the Up-states (a.u.) at 200 nM PAI after pre-illumination with 365 nm (*cis*-PAI), and photoswitching with WL (*trans*-PAI). (D) Averaged power spectral density (PSD) of oscillatory activity under control conditions, 200 nM of *cis*-PAI and 200 nM *trans*-PAI after WL activation (color code). ** p -value < 10^{-2} ; *** p -value < 10^{-3} , **** p -value < 10^{-4} .

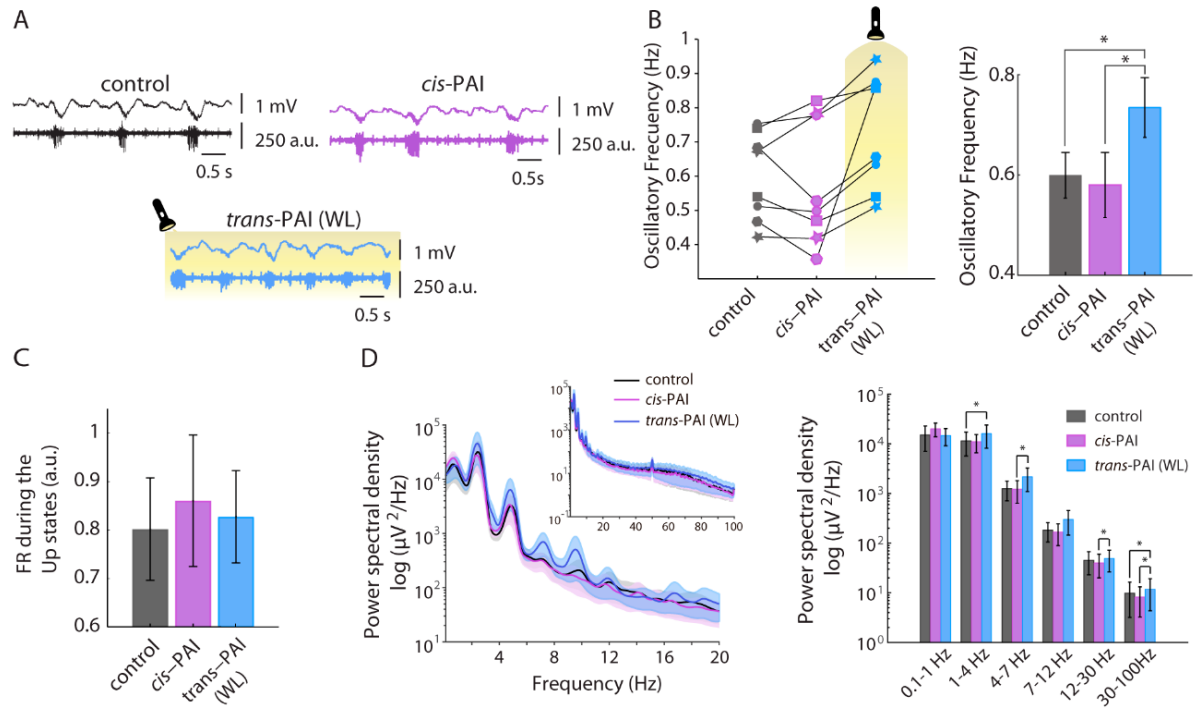
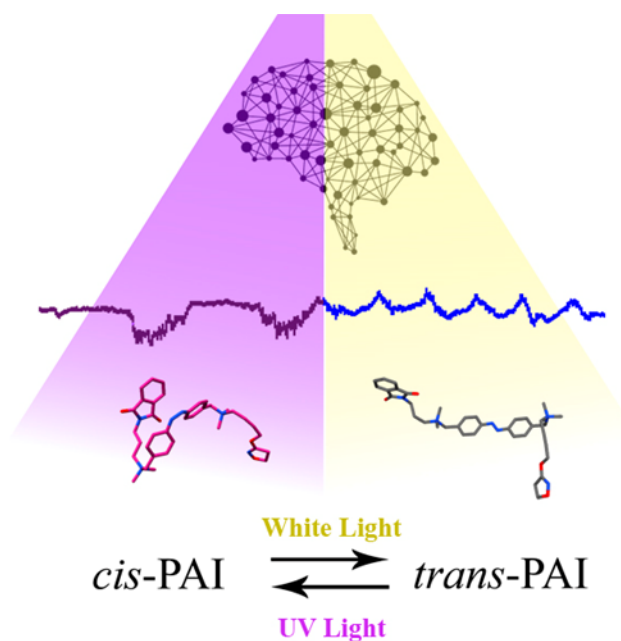


Figure 4. *In vivo* photomodulation of brain waves. (A) Representative raw traces of local field potential (LFP) (top, in mV) and multiunit activity (bottom, in arbitrary units), showing the differences in oscillatory frequency and firing rate (FR) during the Up-states between the control, 1 μ M *cis*-PAI (pre-illuminated with 365 nm), and *trans*-PAI after photoswitching with white light (WL). (B) Individual (left) and mean (right) quantification of oscillatory frequency (Hz) ($n=8$ mice), showing a significant increase upon illuminating *cis*-PAI with WL. * p -value $< 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$. (C) The mean quantification of FR during the Up-states (a.u.) is not significantly affected by illumination of *cis*-PAI ($n=8$). (D) Averaged power spectral density (PSD) of oscillatory activity at different concentrations displays significant enhancement at delta, theta, alpha and gamma frequency bands after WL activation (left). Mean quantification of PSD from D-left panel ($n=8$) (right). * p -value $< 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$.

Keyword: Neuromodulation

A. Barbero-Castillo[†], F. Riefolo[†], C. Matera, S. Caldas-Martínez, P. Mateos-Aparicio, J. F. Weinert, Aida Garrido-Charles, E. Claro, M. V. Sanchez-Vives^{5,*}, and P. Gorostiza^{5,*}

Control of brain state transitions with a photoswitchable muscarinic agonist



Brain pathologies often require drug treatments, however drugs act all over the central nervous system. Wouldn't it be good to determine where/when a drug should be active? Drugs can be made sensitive to light, to be activated at specific times and locations. This study demonstrates that a light-activated cholinergic drug can effectively modulate activity in the cerebral cortex network.

Supporting Information

Control of brain state transitions with a photoswitchable muscarinic agonist

Almudena Barbero-Castillo[†], Fabio Riefoło[†], Carlo Matera, Sara Caldas-Martínez, Pedro Mateos-Aparicio, Julia F. Weinert, Aida Garrido-Charles, Enrique Claro, Maria V. Sanchez-Vives^{5,}, and Pau Gorostiza^{5,*}*

- 1. Competition Binding and *in vitro* GTPgammaS assays**
- 2. Dose-Response curves of *trans*- and *cis*-PAI in ferret brain slices**
- 3. Autocorrelograms**
- 4. *Trans*-to-*cis* photoconversion and pharmacological competition of PAI effects *in vivo***

1. Competition binding and *in vitro* GTPgammaS assays

1.1 Competition binding experiments

1.1.1 Materials and Methods

Iperoxo (IPX) and Phthalimide-Azo-Iperoxo (PAI) were preliminarily assayed for their affinity to muscarinic receptors (mAChRs) by competition binding experiments in whole cortex of 3–4-month-old female Wistar rat brain membrane, which contained a high density of all the subtypes of mAChRs.^[1] [³H]Quinuclidinyl benzilate ([³H]QNB) is a muscarinic antagonist without subtype selectivity, which binds muscarinic receptors with high selectivity. [³H]QNB is recognized to be excellent for such binding experiments,^[2,3] and we performed them in order to test if IPX and PAI have the potential to modulate cortical brain states. Specific binding of IPX and PAI was defined by testing concentrations ranging from 10⁻⁹ to 10⁻⁴ M, and derivatizing the raw disintegrations per minute (dpm) data from the scintillation counter to obtain the total radioactivity values.^[1]

1.1.2 Results

Competition binding experiments can show that both IPX and PAI have an interesting high binding affinity for mAChRs orthosteric site. IPX was found to have an IC_{50} of 1.5 μ M, *trans*-PAI of 47 nM and *cis*-PAI of 118 nM (**Fig. S1.1**). Such preliminary results encouraged us to investigate further our muscarinic compounds activity on the dynamics of the isolated V1 cortical slices.

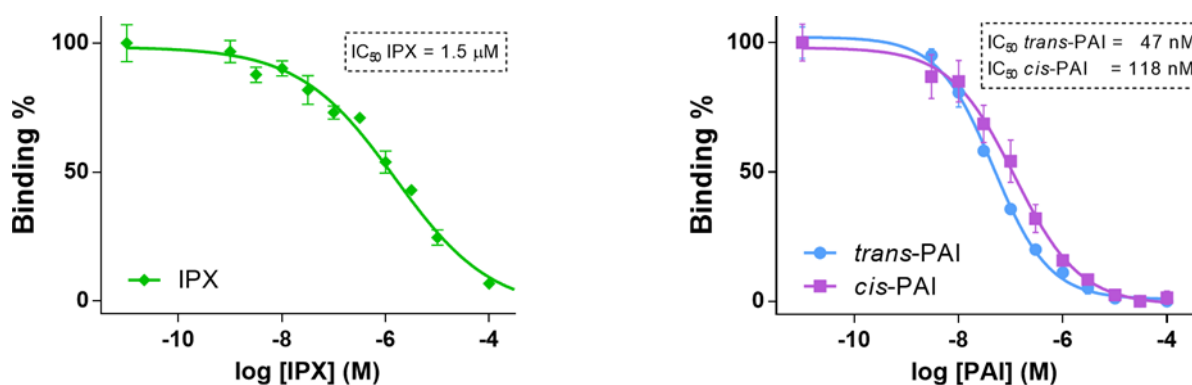


Figure S1.1. Competitive binding experiments of IPX and PAI to Wistar rats' whole cortex containing all the mAChRs. Competitive binding experiments of IPX and PAI to Wistar rats' whole cortex containing all the mAChRs. Competition for specific binding of 200 pM [3 H]QNB to 3-4 months-old female Wistar rats brain membranes (whole cortex) containing high density of all the five mAChRs by IPX and PAI ($n = 4$ for each isomer). Data points were fitted using the "log(inhibitor) vs. normalized response - Variable slope (four parameters)" function in GraphPad Prism 6.

1.2 *in vitro* GTPgammaS assay

1.2.1 Materials and Methods

The detailed description of GTPgammaS assay's materials and methods are reported in the main text (Experimental Section).

1.2.2 Results

An *in vitro* muscarinic agonist functional assay (Eurofins GTPgammaS assay) was used to preliminarily estimate possible activation of M1 and M2 receptors (as expressed in the Eurofins specifications). The active *trans*-PAI isomer showed M2 preference in a wide range of concentrations (1 nM to 10 μ M). M2 selectivity was demonstrated using a functional assay (calcium imaging) in cells overexpressing M1 and M2 receptors (**Fig. S1.2**).

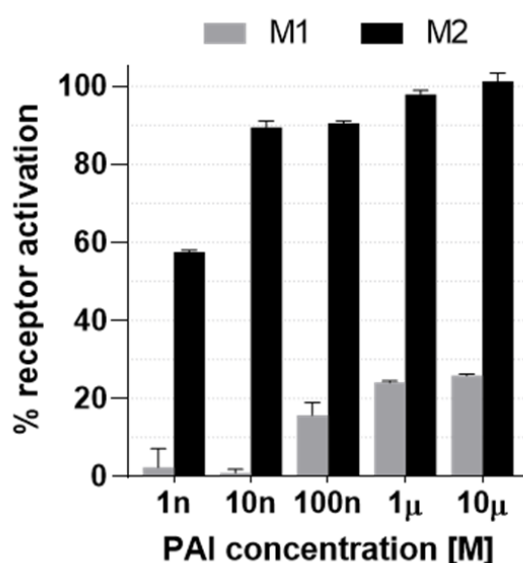


Figure S1.2. *In vitro* GTPgammaS functional assay for screening the *trans*-PAI-induced M1 and M2 mAChRs activation. Different concentrations (1, 10, 100 nM, and 1, 10 μ M) of the active *trans*-PAI isomer were tested on human recombinant M1 and M2 receptors expressed in CHO-K1 (Chinese hamster ovary) cells. *Trans*-PAI agonism is identified by quantitation measured of bound [35 S]GTP γ S. The increase of [35 S]GTP γ S binding by 50 percent or more ($\geq 50\%$) relative to 1 mM for M1 or 1 μ M for M2 oxotremorine M responses indicates possible agonist activity of *trans*-PAI. Experiments were performed in duplicates (n=2) and were accepted in accordance with Eurofins Quality Control Unit's validation standard operating procedure.

2. Dose-Response curves of *trans*- and *cis*-PAI in ferret brain slices

In a total of n=12 ferret brain slices, the baseline activity (characterized by SO) was recorded as a control, prior to bath-application of increasing PAI concentrations (10 nM, 100 nM, 300 nM, and 1 μ M, n=6 ferret brain slices for each PAI form, *trans* and *cis*).

100, 300 nM, and 1 μ M *trans*-PAI significantly increased the oscillatory frequency from control condition (0.58 ± 0.06 Hz) (**Fig. 2** and **Fig. S2**). In particular, 100 nM to 0.87 ± 0.11 Hz, 300 nM to 1.66 ± 0.10 Hz, and 1 μ M to 1.87 ± 0.13 Hz.

300 nM and 1 μ M *trans*-PAI also significantly decreased the FR during the Up-states from control condition (0.98 ± 0.11 a.u.) to 0.51 ± 0.08 a.u. and 0.37 ± 0.03 a.u. respectively (**Fig. 2** and **Fig. S2**).

Differently, *cis*-PAI at 100 nM and 300 nM did not significantly alter the spontaneous oscillatory frequency observed in control experiments (0.48 ± 0.037 Hz), in contrast to the obvious modulation in oscillatory activity obtained with 100 nM and 300 nM *trans*-PAI (**Fig. 2** and **Fig. S2**). Only at concentrations as high as 1 μ M did *cis*-PAI significantly alter the Up- and Down-state sequence in comparison to the control, increasing the oscillatory frequency to 1.32 ± 0.27 Hz (**Fig. 2S**).

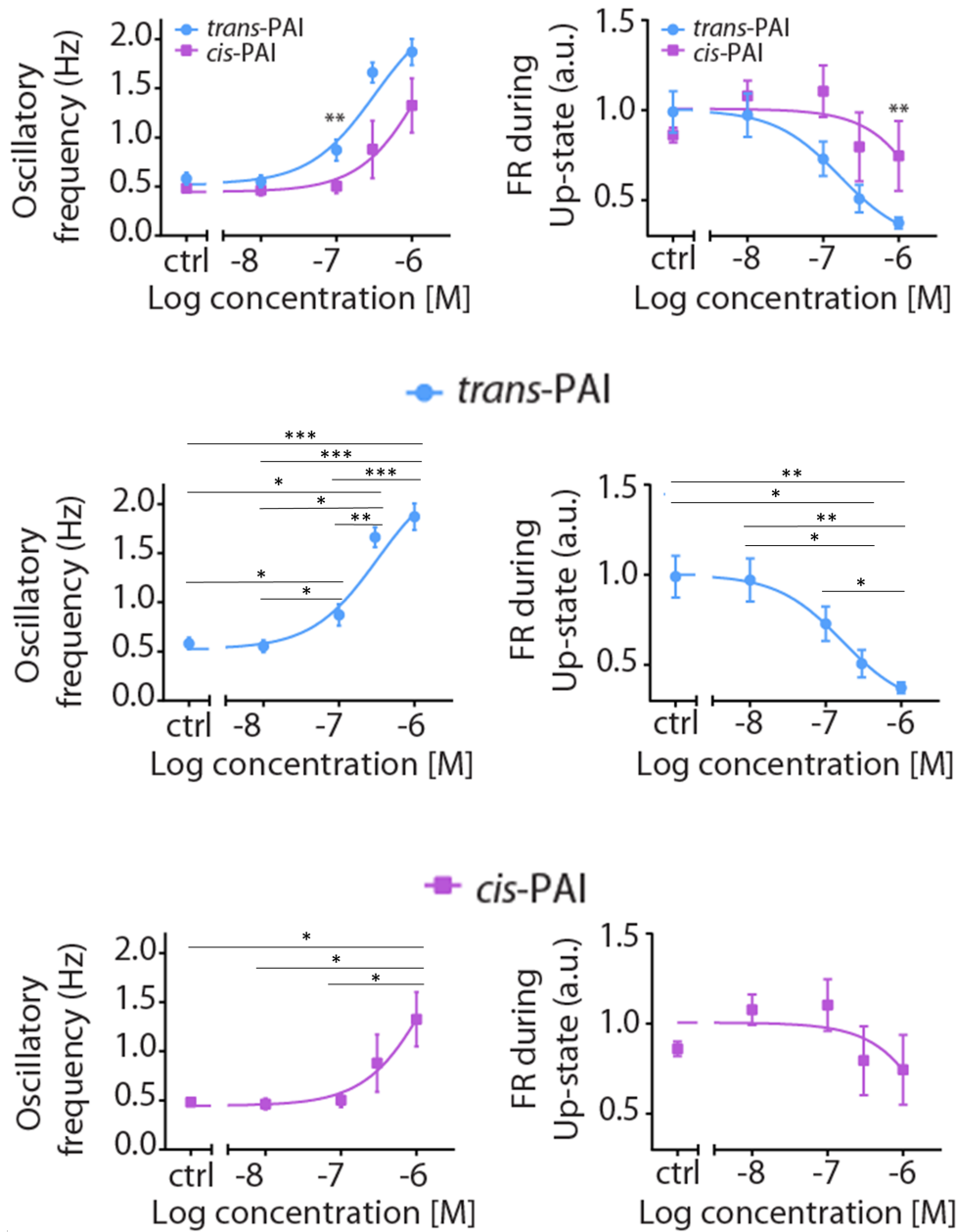


Figure S2. Effect on SO of mAChRs activation by trans-PAI (dark-relaxed) and cis-PAI (pre-illuminated with UV) in ferret brain slices. Oscillatory frequency (Hz) and FR during the Up-states (a.u.) of the PAI isomers, *trans*- (blue, $n = 6$ ferret brain slices) and *cis*-PAI (pink, $n = 6$ ferret brain slices) at different concentrations. Above, the panel E of Fig.2 is reported again to facilitate the discussion. Significant differences between *cis*- and *trans*-PAI (**p-value $< 10^{-2}$) are observed in the oscillatory frequency at 100 nM and in the FR at 1 μ M. In the middle and below, the same *trans*-PAI (blue) and *cis*-PAI (pink) values of the oscillatory frequency (Hz) and FR during the Up-states (a.u.) are separately reported in order to show the significant differences at different concentrations (p-values: * $< 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$; ** $< 10^{-2}$; *** $< 10^{-3}$). These experiments are aimed at estimating the concentration of effective photoswitching of cortical oscillations, which was set at 200 nM in subsequent experiments (Figs. 3 and 4).

3. Autocorrelograms

3.1 Autocorrelograms at 200 nM of PAI (switching of PAI activity)

PAI (200 nM) was first applied in its less active isomer (*cis*-PAI, pre-irradiation with 365 nm light). The activity of *cis*-PAI at 200 nM (pink line) in cortical slices evokes very slight changes in terms of oscillatory activity with respect to the basal control situation (black line; before PAI application, as is shown in the autocorrelograms (**Fig. S3.1**). After PAI application and white light (WL) illumination, PAI switches to its more active *trans* form (blue line), inducing obvious changes of the oscillatory activity (**Fig. S3.1**). The autocorrelograms were obtained by analyzing LFP from one channel.

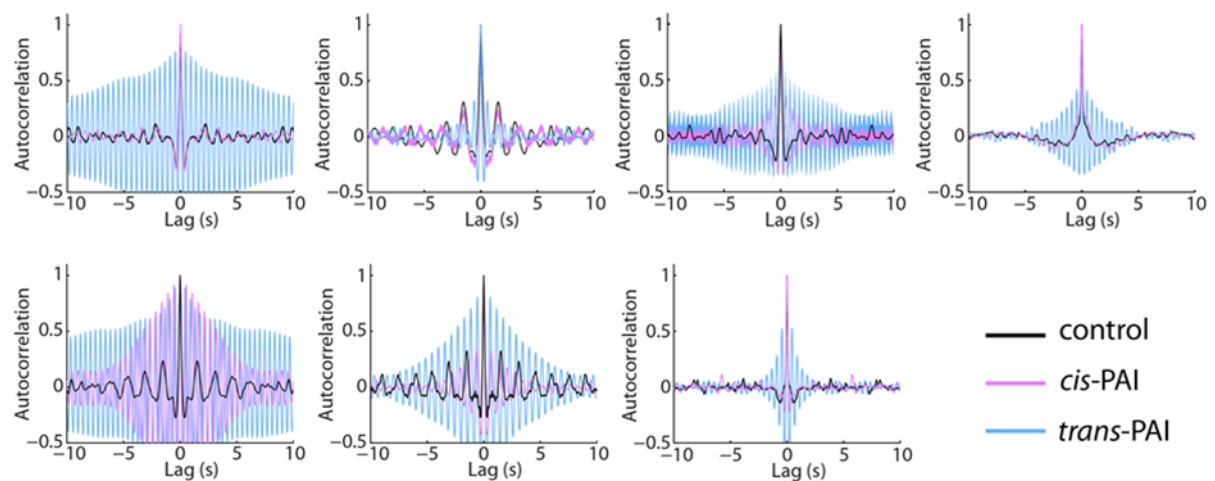


Figure S3.1 PAI can light-modulate the neuronal oscillatory activity in cortical ferret slices. Autocorrelograms of the rhythmicity of the neuronal oscillatory activity in basal condition (without PAI application, black line), under 200 nM *cis*-PAI application (pink line) and during white light irradiation (*trans*-PAI, blue line).

3.2 Autocorrelograms at 100 nM and 1 μ M of PAI

The activity of PAI at 100 nM and 1 μ M in cortical slices did not strongly differ between *trans* (Fig. S3.2) and *cis* (Fig. S3.3) in terms of oscillatory activity. 100 nM applications of *trans* and *cis* did not induce significant changes in neuronal firing in comparison to the basal control situation (black line), as is shown in the autocorrelograms (Fig. S3.2 and S3.3). At 1 μ M, both PAI isomers produce changes in the oscillatory activity (Fig. S3.2 and S3.3). The autocorrelograms graphs are obtained by analyzing LFP from one channel.

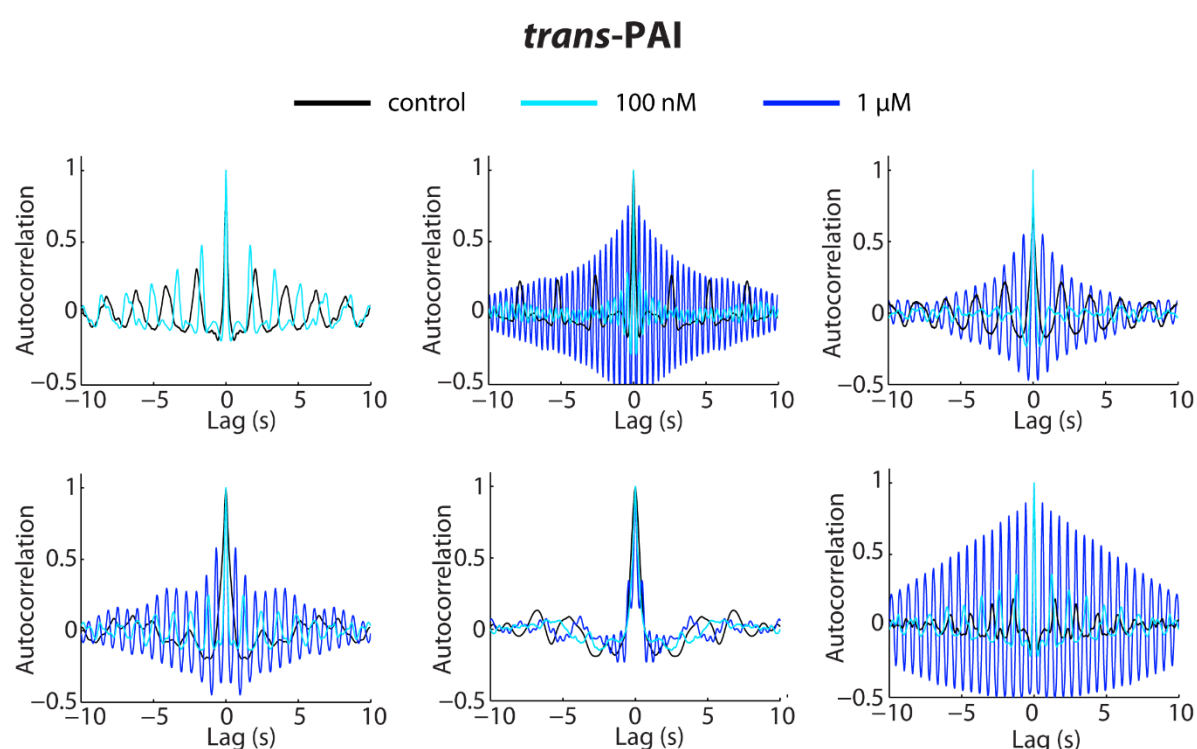


Figure S3.2 Autocorrelograms of the LFP illustrating the neuronal oscillatory activity in basal condition (without PAI application, black line), at 100 nM and 1 μ M of *trans*-PAI (light and dark blue lines) applications in six cortical slices.

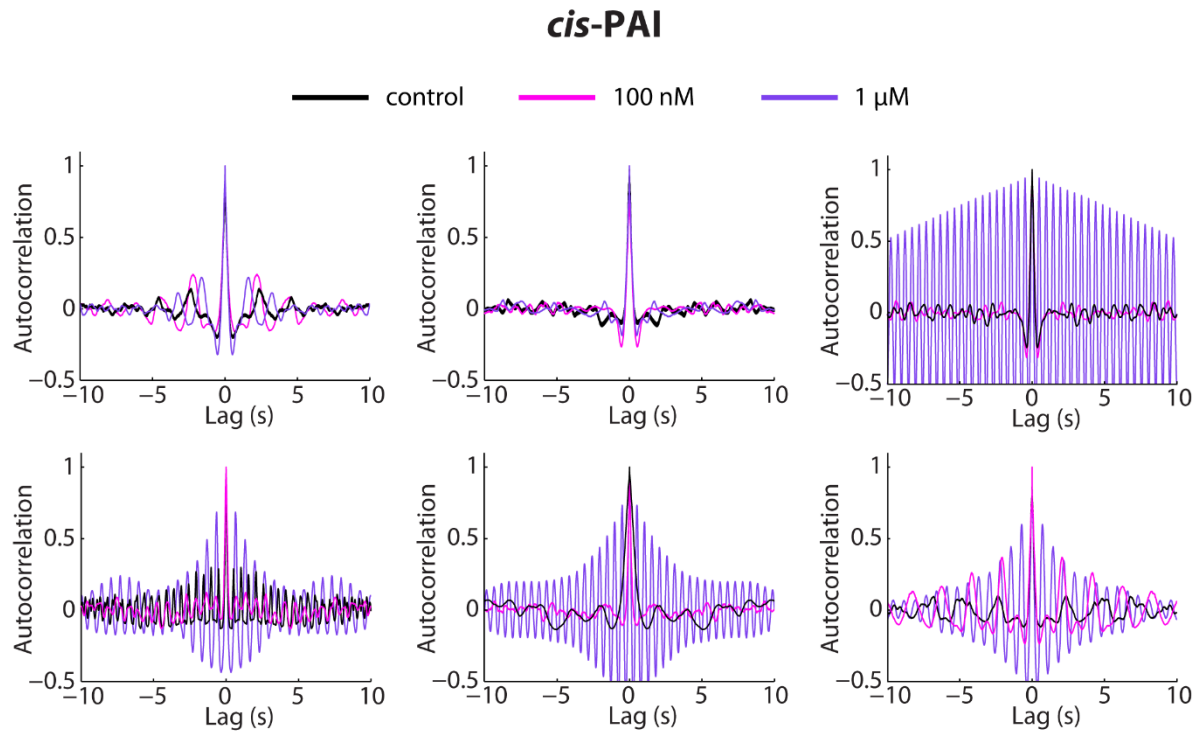


Figure S3.3. Autocorrelograms of the rhythmicity of the neuronal oscillatory activity in basal condition (without PAI application, black line), at 100 nM and 1 μ M of *cis*-PAI (pink and purple lines) applications in six cortical slices.

4. *Trans-to-cis* photoconversion and pharmacological competition of PAI effects *in vivo*

Two separated different approaches were used to try to revert the excited oscillatory frequency induced by *trans*-PAI *in vivo*: (a) the photoconversion ($n=4$) *in situ* with a powerful 365 nm light source, and (b) the pharmaco-competition by applying its inactive *cis* isomer ($n=4$). According to our description in **Fig. 4**, application of 1 μ M *cis*-PAI did not alter the oscillatory frequency (from 0.55 ± 0.07 Hz under control and 0.55 ± 0.09 Hz under *cis*-PAI) (**Fig. S4A**), while illumination with WL increased the oscillatory frequency (from 0.55 ± 0.09 Hz under *cis*-PAI to 0.64 ± 0.08 Hz upon WL illumination) (**Fig. S4A**). *Trans-* to *cis*-PAI photoconversion with a very powerful 365 nm lamp (Spectroline, Spectronics FC-100-F, 230V, 365nm 100 W Spot Bulb) did not produce a significant decrease in the oscillatory frequency *in vivo* (from 0.64 ± 0.08 Hz to 0.59 ± 0.05) (**Fig. S4A**, indicated with a violet flashlight). We reasoned that this could be due to (1) limited photoisomerization of PAI caused by poor tissue penetration of UV light, and (2) intrinsic pharmacological irreversibility of PAI effects caused by e.g. the intracellular signaling pathway of M2 mAChRs, by the neural circuits involved in cortical oscillations, or other reasons. We ruled out the second possibility with the following experiment *in vivo*. We applied 200 nM *cis*-PAI and observed again a significant increase of the OF upon illumination with white light (indicated with the first yellow flashlight in **Fig. S4B** and labeled $2 \cdot 10^{-7}$ M). We subsequently applied 1 μ M *cis*-PAI and observed a significant decrease in the OF back to the control level (indicated with the second violet bar in **Fig. S4B** and labelled 10^{-6} M). This result demonstrates that outcompeting *trans*-PAI (active isomer) with a 5-fold higher concentration of *cis*-PAI (less active isomer) fully reverts the effect of *trans*-PAI in cortical oscillations *in vivo*. The action of PAI is thus reversible pharmacologically and the fact that UV light cannot restore the OF to control levels (**Fig. S4A**) must be attributed to the limited penetration of UV light.

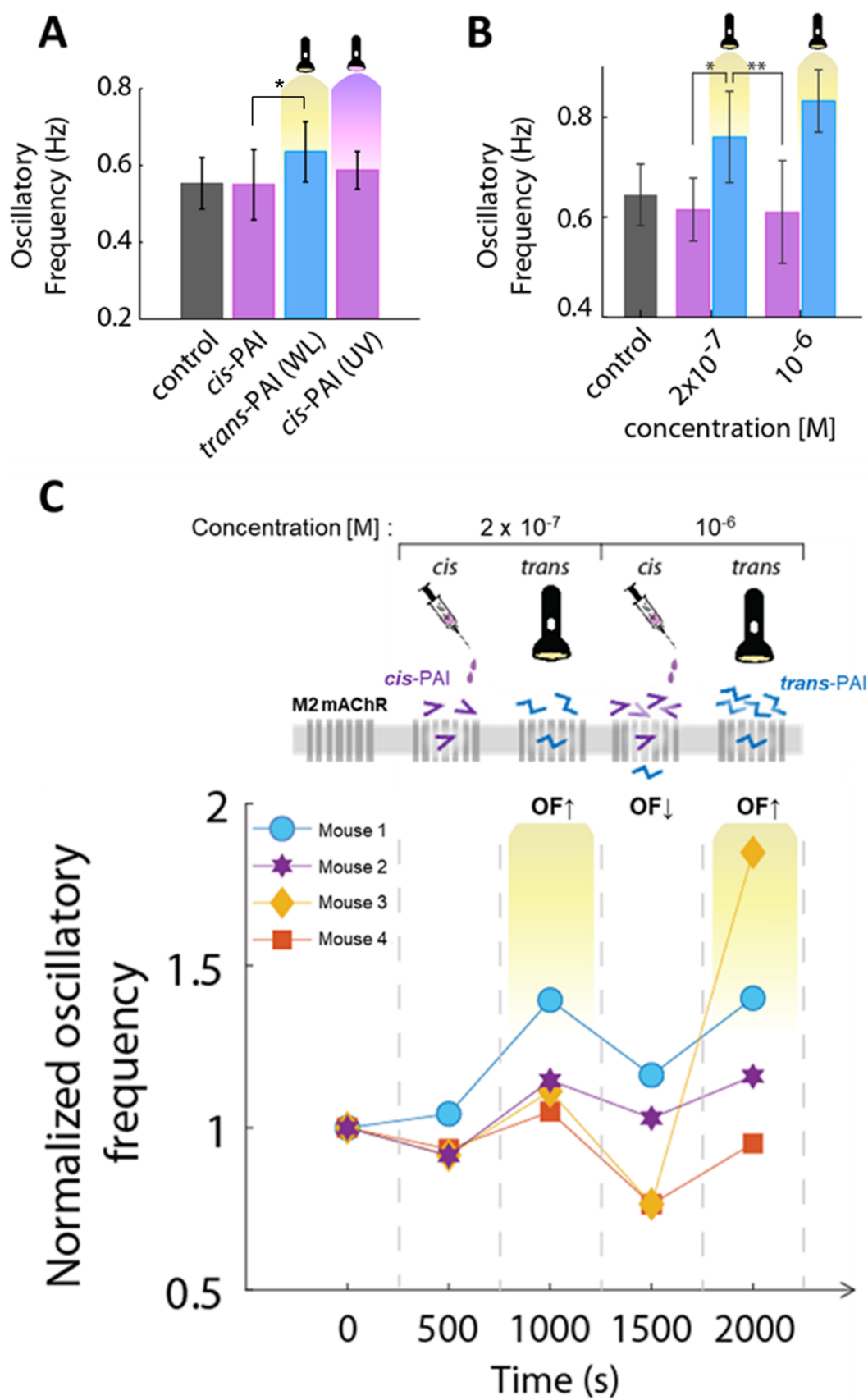


Figure S4. Reversibility of the photocontrol of cortical oscillations with PAI *in vivo* and cause of its limitations. (A) The increase in oscillatory frequency elicited by photoconverting *cis*-PAI to *trans*-PAI cannot be reverted with UV light. We applied 1 μ M *cis*-PAI, photoconverted it to *trans*-PAI with White Light (WL, yellow flashlight) and observed a significant increase in oscillatory frequency. This effect was not reversible upon illumination with a UV lamp (100 W, indicated by violet flashlight) ($n = 4$ mice). $*p\text{-value} < 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$. (B) The excited state evoked by photoisomerizing *cis*-PAI to *trans*-PAI is fully reversible by subsequent administration of *cis*-PAI. Pharmacological competition between 200 nM *trans*-PAI, after photoconversion with WL (indicated by first yellow flashlight), and 1 μ M *cis*-PAI ($n=4$ mice different from A). The application of 1 μ M *cis*-PAI significantly decreased the oscillatory frequency to that of the control condition. The lack of photo-reversibility in (A) is thus due to the poor penetration of UV light in brain tissue. $*p\text{-value} < 5 \cdot 10^{-2}$ and $**p\text{-value} < 10^{-2}$. Color code: *cis*-PAI = violet and *trans*-PAI WL = blue. (C) Time-course of normalized oscillatory frequency of the 4 individual mice during the *trans/cis*-PAI pharmacological competition experiments. Diagrams indicate an inactive muscarinic receptor in the presence of 10^{-7} M *cis*-PAI (depicted as a violet V-shape, added with a syringe), an activated receptor in the presence of 10^{-7} M *trans*-PAI (blue Z-shape, photoisomerized with a white flashlight), and again an inactive receptor in which the addition of 10^{-6} M *cis*-PAI (violet V-shape, indicated with a syringe) has outcompeted *trans*-PAI from the previous step.

Supporting Information References

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