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RESULTS RELATED TO HUPPERT'S  $\varrho$ - $\sigma$  CONJECTURE

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*Abstract.* We improve a few results related to Huppert's  $\varrho$ - $\sigma$  conjecture. We also generalize a result about the covering number of character degrees to arbitrary finite groups.

*Keywords:* character degree; Huppert's conjecture

*MSC 2020:* 20C15

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Let  $\pi(n)$  denote the set of prime divisors of a positive integer  $n$ . Let  $G$  be a finite group and let  $\pi(G)$  denote the set of prime divisors of its order  $|G|$ . Let  $\text{Irr}(G)$  denote the set of irreducible characters of  $G$ . We set

$$\sigma(G) = \max\{|\pi(\chi(1))| : \chi \in \text{Irr}(G)\}$$

and

$$\varrho(G) = \{p \text{ prime} : p \mid \chi(1) \text{ for some } \chi \in \text{Irr}(G)\}.$$

Huppert's  $\varrho$ - $\sigma$  conjecture states that  $|\varrho(G)|$  can be bounded in terms of  $\sigma(G)$  and if  $G$  is solvable, then  $|\varrho(G)| \leq 2\sigma(G)$ . It is a problem of central importance in character theory. Many analogues of Huppert's conjecture were proposed and studied. In fact, the conjugacy class version of Huppert's conjecture was proposed by Huppert himself. The element order version of Huppert's conjecture was first introduced by Shi in [10]. Let  $g$  be an element in  $G$  and let  $\pi(o(g))$  denote the set of prime divisors

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of the order of  $g$ . We set

$$\sigma^e(G) = \alpha(G) = \max\{|\pi(o(g))| : g \in G\}$$

and

$$\varrho^e(G) = \{p \text{ prime} : p \mid o(g) \text{ for some } g \in G\}.$$

Shi asked in [10] if  $|\varrho^e(G)|$  is bounded by a function of  $\sigma^e(G)$  (we note that  $\varrho^e(G) = \pi(G)$ ). Answering Shi's question, Zhang in [13] proved that if  $G$  is solvable, then  $|\varrho^e(G)|$  is bounded by a quadratic function of  $\alpha(G)$  and that for arbitrary  $G$ ,  $|\varrho^e(G)|$  is bounded by a super-exponential function of  $\alpha(G)$ . The result for solvable groups was improved later by Keller (see [3]) to a linear bound. Keller showed that for  $C > 4$ , it is true that  $|\varrho^e(G)| \leq C\sigma^e(G)$  when  $\sigma^e(G) > \frac{1}{2}e^{6C/(C-4)}$ . Later, the constant of a solvable group was determined by Yang in [11]. Using this result, we can improve the element order version of Huppert's conjecture for arbitrary finite groups.

Character codegrees were first defined in [9]. Let the codegree of a character  $\chi$  be  $\text{codeg}(\chi) = |G : \ker \chi|/\chi(1)$ . Then, we set

$$\begin{aligned} \text{codeg}(G) &= \{\text{codeg}(\chi) : \chi \in \text{Irr}(G)\}, \\ \sigma(\text{codeg}(G)) &= \max\{|\pi(\text{codeg}(\chi))| : \chi \in \text{Irr}(G)\}, \\ \varrho(\text{codeg}(G)) &= \{p \text{ prime} : p \mid \text{codeg}(\chi) \text{ for some } \chi \in \text{Irr}(G)\}. \end{aligned}$$

The codegree version of Huppert's conjecture was studied in [7], [11], [12].

The following can be viewed as another alternative of Huppert's  $\varrho$ - $\sigma$  conjecture. Let  $G$  be a finite simple group and  $S$  be a subset of  $\text{Irr}(G)$ . Then  $S$  is called a *covering set* of  $G$  if for every  $p \in \pi(G)$  there is a character  $\chi$  in  $S$  such that  $p$  divides  $\chi(1)$ . The covering number of  $G$ , denoted by  $\text{cn}(G)$ , is defined as the minimal number of  $\text{Card}(S)$ , where  $S$  is a covering set of  $G$  and  $\text{Card}(S)$  is the cardinality of the set  $S$ , see [4]. We know that for an arbitrary finite group  $G$ , there might exist  $p \in \pi(G)$  that does not divide any irreducible character degree of  $G$ . Thus, in order to generalize the concept of covering number to arbitrary finite groups, we will consider the set  $\varrho(G)$  instead of  $\pi(G)$ . In this note, we generalize the main result of [4] to arbitrary finite groups.

We will prove the following three results.

**Theorem 1.1.** *Let  $G$  be an arbitrary finite group. Then  $|\varrho(\text{codeg}(G))| \leq \frac{43}{6}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$ .*

**Theorem 1.2.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group. Then  $|\pi(G)| < 168\alpha(G)^4$ .*

**Theorem 1.3.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group, then the covering number  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 6$ .*

## 2. PRELIMINARIES

**Lemma 2.1.** *Let  $G$  be a finite solvable group. Then  $|\varrho^e(G)| \leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G)$ .*

**Proof.** See [11], Theorem 1.1. □

**Lemma 2.2.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group with trivial solvable radical, then  $|\pi(G)| \leq \frac{3}{2}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$ .*

**Proof.** This is Theorem 1.3. of [7]. □

**Lemma 2.3.** *Suppose that  $K/F(K)$  is nilpotent and  $C \trianglelefteq K$ . Then there exists  $\mu \in \text{Irr}(C)$  such that  $\pi(\mu(1)) = \pi(C/F(K) \cap C)$ .*

**Proof.** This is Proposition 17.3 of [5]. In fact,  $\mu(1) = |C/F(C)| = |(C/(F(K) \cap C))|$ . □

We set  $\varrho_0(G) = \varrho(G) \setminus \{2, 3\}$  and  $\pi_0(G) = \pi(G) \setminus \{2, 3\}$ .

**Lemma 2.4.** *Suppose that  $M$  is a normal elementary abelian subgroup of the solvable group  $G$ . Assume that  $M = C_G(M)$  is a completely reducible  $G$ -module (possibly of mixed characteristic). Set  $V = \text{Irr}(M)$  and write  $V = V_1 \oplus \dots \oplus V_m$  for irreducible  $G$ -modules  $V_i$ . Write  $V_i = Y_i^G$  for primitive modules  $Y_i$  for each  $i$ . Assume that  $N_G(Y_i)/C_G(Y_i)$  is nilpotent by nilpotent for each  $i$ . If  $M \leq N \trianglelefteq G$ , there exist  $\theta_1, \theta_2 \in \text{Irr}(N)$  such that  $\theta_1(1)\theta_2(1)$  is divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(N/M)$ .*

**Proof.** First, we can write each  $V_i$  as a direct sum of the  $G$ -conjugates of  $Y_i$ ,  $i = 1, \dots, m$ . Thus,  $V = X_1 \oplus \dots \oplus X_n$  for subspaces  $X_i$  of  $V$  permuted by  $G$  (not necessarily transitively) with  $\{Y_1, \dots, Y_m\} \subseteq \{X_1, \dots, X_n\}$ . Furthermore, if  $N_i = N_G(X_i)$ ,  $C_i = C_G(X_i)$  and  $F_i/C_i = F(N_i/C_i)$ , then  $X_i$  is a primitive, faithful  $N_i/C_i$ -module and  $N_i/F_i$  is nilpotent.

Let  $K = \bigcap_i N_i \trianglelefteq G$  be the kernel of the permutation representation of  $G$  on  $\{X_1, \dots, X_n\}$ . Since  $\bigcap_i C_i = M$ , we have  $\bigcap_i F_i/M = F(K/M) \trianglelefteq G/M$ . Let  $H = \bigcap_i F_i$ , so that  $H/M = F(K/M)$ . Observe that  $K/H$  is nilpotent. Set  $C = K \cap N$  and  $F = H \cap N = C \cap H$ . By Lemma 2.3, there exists  $\theta \in \text{Irr}(C/M)$  such that  $\theta(1) = |C/F|$ . Since  $C \trianglelefteq N$ , there exists  $\theta_1 \in \text{Irr}(N)$  such that  $|C/F| \mid \theta_1(1)$ . Consequently it suffices to show that there exists  $\theta_2 \in \text{Irr}(N)$  with  $\theta_2(1)$  divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(N/C) \cup \pi_0(F/M)$ . To do this, we need just to find some  $\lambda \in V$  such that  $\pi_0(N : C_N(\lambda)) \supseteq \pi_0(N/C) \cup \pi_0(F/M)$ .

We can choose  $\Delta \subseteq \{X_1, \dots, X_n\}$  such that  $\text{stab}_N(\Delta)/(N \cap K) = \text{stab}_N(\Delta)/C$  is a  $\{2, 3\}$ -group by [5], Corollary 5.7. Assess that  $\Delta$  intersects each  $N$ -orbit non-trivially. Without losing generality,  $\Delta = \{X_1, \dots, X_l\}$  for some  $l \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ .

Set  $\lambda = \lambda_1 \dots \lambda_l \in V$  for nonprincipal  $\lambda_i \in X_i$ . Finally suppose that  $Q \in \text{Syl}_q(N)$  for a prime  $q \geq 5$  and  $Q$  centralizes  $\lambda$ . Thus,  $Q \leq \text{stab}_N(\Delta)$ . But  $\text{stab}_N(\Delta)/C$  is a  $\{2, 3\}$ -group. Thus,  $Q \leq C$ . The intersection  $F_i \cap C/C_i \cap C$  is isomorphic to a normal nilpotent subgroup of  $N_i/C_i$  and  $N_i/C_i$  acts irreducibly on  $X_i$  for each  $i$ . Thus,  $\lambda_i$  is not centralized by a nontrivial Sylow subgroup of  $F_i \cap C/C_i \cap C$  for  $i = 1, \dots, l$ . Since  $Q \cap F_i \in \text{Syl}_q(F_i \cap C)$ , we have that  $q \nmid |F_i \cap C/C_i \cap C|$  for  $i = 1, \dots, l$ . Each  $F_j/C_j$  ( $j = 1, \dots, n$ ) is conjugate to some  $F_i/C_i$  with  $i \in \{1, \dots, l\}$  by our choice of  $\Delta$ . Hence,  $q \nmid |F_j \cap C/C_j \cap C|$  for  $j = 1, \dots, n$ . Since  $\bigcap_i C_i = M$  and  $\bigcap_i (F_i \cap C) = F$ , we have that  $q \nmid |F/M|$ . We have already seen above that  $Q \leq C$  and so  $q \nmid |N/C|$ . Thus,  $|N : C_N(\lambda)|$  is divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(N/C) \cup \pi_0(F/M)$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.5.** *Suppose that  $M = C_G(M)$  is a normal elementary abelian subgroup of a solvable group  $G$  and a completely reducible  $G$ -module (possibly of mixed characteristic). Assume that  $G$  splits over  $M$ , then there exists  $\chi_1, \chi_2 \in \text{Irr}(G)$  such that  $\chi_1(1)\chi_2(1)$  is divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(G/M)$ .*

*Proof.* By induction on  $|M|$ . Write  $M = M_1 \oplus \dots \oplus M_n$  for  $n \geq 1$  irreducible  $G$ -modules  $M_i$ . Set  $V_i = \text{Irr}(M_i)$  so that each  $V_i$  is an irreducible  $G$ -module and  $V = V_1 \oplus \dots \oplus V_n$  is a faithful  $G/M$ -module by Proposition 12.1 of [5]. For each  $i$ , choose  $H_i \leq G$  and  $X_i$  to be an irreducible primitive  $H_i$ -module with  $X_i^G = V_i$ . If  $H_i/C_{H_i}(X_i) \leq \Gamma(X_i)$  for each  $i$ , the result follows from Lemma 2.4. We assess without losing generality that  $H_1/C_{H_1}(X_1) \not\leq \Gamma(X_1)$ .

Let  $K = C_G(M_1) \trianglelefteq G$ . Let  $H$  be a complement for  $M$  in  $G$  and let  $J = NH$ , where  $N = M_2 \oplus \dots \oplus M_n$ . Then  $J \cap M = N$ . Now  $J \cap K = N(H \cap K)$  acts on  $N$  and  $C_{J \cap K}(N) = N$ . By induction, there exist  $\mu_1, \mu_2 \in \text{Irr}(J \cap K)$  such that  $\mu_1(1)\mu_2(1)$  is divisible by the primes in  $\pi_0((J \cap K)/N) = \pi_0(K/M)$ , as  $(J \cap K)/N \cong K/M$ . Now  $J \cap K \trianglelefteq J$  and centralizes  $M/N \cong M_1$ . Thus,  $J \cap K \trianglelefteq KJ = G$  and  $K/N = M/N \times (J \cap K)/N$ . By the choice of  $M_1$ , there exists  $\lambda \in V_1$  such that  $\pi_0(G/K) = \pi_0(G : I_G(\lambda))$ . Set  $\beta_1 = \lambda \cdot \mu_1 \in \text{Irr}(K)$ ,  $\beta_2 = \lambda \cdot \mu_2 \in \text{Irr}(K)$ . Now  $I_G(\beta_1) \cup I_G(\beta_2) \subseteq I_G(\lambda)$ . Thus,  $\pi_0(G : I_G(\beta_1)) \cup \pi_0(G : I_G(\beta_2)) \supseteq \pi_0(G/K)$ . Choose  $\chi_i \in \text{Irr}(G \upharpoonright \beta_i)$  ( $i = 1, 2$ ), then, as  $K \trianglelefteq G$ , we have  $\pi(G/K) \cup \pi(\mu_1(1)) \cup \pi(\mu_2(1)) \subseteq \pi(\chi_1(1)) \cup \pi(\chi_2(1))$ . Since  $\mu_1(1)\mu_2(1)$  is divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(K/M)$ ,  $\chi_1(1)\chi_2(1)$  is divisible by each prime in  $\pi_0(G/M)$ .  $\square$

We note that the statements of Lemmas 2.4 and 2.5 are stronger than Lemmas 17.4 and 17.5 of [5], but the proof is similar.

**Lemma 2.6.** *Let  $G$  be a finite solvable group, then there exists  $\mu_1, \mu_2 \in \text{Irr}(G/\Phi(G))$  such that  $\pi_0(G/\Phi(G)) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^2 \pi_0(\mu_i(1))$ .*

**P r o o f.** Apply Lemma 2.5 with  $G/\Phi(G)$  and  $F(G)/\Phi(G)$ , respectively, in the role of  $G$  and  $M$ . Note that  $F(G/\Phi(G)) = F(G)/\Phi(G)$  is a completely reducible and faithful  $G/F(G)$ -module (possibly of mixed characteristic). Furthermore,  $G/\Phi(G)$  splits over  $F(G)/\Phi(G)$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.7.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group with trivial fitting subgroup, then the covering number  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 3$ . Especially, if  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  or  $J_1$  is not involved in  $G$ , then  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 2$ .*

**P r o o f.** This is Theorem 1.1 of [4].  $\square$

### 3. MAIN RESULTS

We now prove the first main result.

**Theorem 3.1.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group. Then  $|\varrho(\text{codeg}(G))| \leq \frac{43}{6}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$ .*

**P r o o f.** We note that  $\varrho(\text{codeg}(G)) = \pi(G)$  by [9], Lemma 2.4.

Let  $S$  be the largest solvable normal subgroup of  $G$ . By the main result of [8], we know that  $\sigma^e(S) \leq \sigma(\text{codeg}(S))$ . We also know that  $\sigma(\text{codeg}(S)) \leq \sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$  by [11], Lemma 2.2 (1). Thus, we have  $|\pi(S)| \leq \frac{17}{3}\sigma(\text{codeg}(S)) \leq \frac{17}{3}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$  by Lemma 2.1.

By Lemma 2.2, we know that  $|\pi(G/S)| \leq \frac{3}{2}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G/S))$ .

Since  $\sigma(\text{codeg}(G/S)) \leq \sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$  by [11], Lemma 2.2 (2), we have  $|\pi(G/S)| \leq \frac{3}{2}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G))$ . Thus, we have

$$|\pi(G)| \leq |\pi(S)| + |\pi(G/S)| \leq \left(\frac{17}{3} + \frac{3}{2}\right)\sigma(\text{codeg}(G)) = \frac{43}{6}\sigma(\text{codeg}(G)).$$

$\square$

We now are ready to prove the second main result.

**Theorem 3.2.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group. Then  $|\pi(G)| < 168\alpha(G)^4$ .*

**P r o o f.** First note that if  $\alpha(G) = 1$  then  $|\pi(G)| \leq 4$ . Therefore we may assume that  $\alpha(G) \geq 2$ . By Lemma 2.1, we know that  $|\pi(G)| \leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G)$  for every solvable group  $G$ .

Following the proof of Theorem A of [6] by Moret , let  $G$  be a minimal counterexample and introduce the series

$$1 = S_0 \leq R_1 < S_1 < R_2 < S_2 < \dots < R_m < S_m \leq R_{m+1} = G,$$

such that  $R_{i+1}/S_i$  is the largest normal solvable subgroup of  $G/S_i$  for every  $i \geq 0$  and  $S_i/R_i$  is the socle of  $G/R_i$  for every  $i \geq 1$ . Moret  then constructed a solvable

subgroup  $H$  of  $G$  in the following way. First, for each  $i = 1, \dots, m$ , it was proved that there is a prime divisor  $q_i$  of  $|S_i/R_i|$  that is relatively prime to  $|G/S_i||R_i|$ . Then, put  $H := Q_1 Q_2 \dots Q_m$ , where  $Q_i$  ( $i = 1, 2, \dots, m-1$ ) is a Sylow  $q_i$ -subgroup of  $R_{i+1}$  that is  $Q_{i+1} \dots Q_m$ -invariant, and  $Q_m$  is simply a Sylow  $q_m$ -subgroup of  $G$ . Note that the primes  $q_i$  are pairwise distinct and thus,  $|\pi(H)| = m$ . By Lemma 2.1, we have  $m \leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(H)$ , and thus,  $m \leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G)$ .

We now have

$$\begin{aligned} |\pi(G)| &\leq m \cdot \max_{1 \leq i \leq m} |\pi(S_i/S_{i-1})| + |\pi(G/S_m)| \\ &\leq m \cdot \max_{1 \leq i \leq m} \{|\pi(S_i/R_i)| + |\pi(R_i/S_{i-1})|\} + |\pi(G/S_m)| \\ &\leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G) \left( 28\alpha(G)^3 + \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G) \right) + \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G) < 168\alpha(G)^4, \end{aligned}$$

where the third inequality follows from  $\varrho(G) < 28\alpha(G)^3$  by [2], Theorem 3.2 and the fact that  $|\pi(G)| \leq \frac{17}{3}\alpha(G)$  for every solvable group  $G$ , and the last inequality comes from  $\alpha(G) \geq 2$ .  $\square$

**Remark 3.1.** After the paper has been submitted for publication, we noticed that the coefficient in Lemma 2.1 has been improved to 5 by [1], Theorem 1. In view of this, the coefficient in Theorem 3.1 can be improved to  $\frac{13}{2}$  and the coefficient in Theorem 3.2 can be improved to 141.

We now prove the third main result.

**Theorem 3.3.** *Let  $G$  be a finite solvable group, then there exist  $\chi_1, \chi_2, \chi_3 \in \text{Irr}(G)$  such that  $\varrho_0(G) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi_0(\chi_i(1))$ .*

**Proof.** By the Ito-Michler theorem a prime  $p$  does not divide the degree of any irreducible character of a group  $G$  if and only if  $G$  has a normal abelian Sylow  $p$ -subgroup. Thus,  $p \in \varrho(G)$  if and only if  $p \mid |G/F(G)|$  or  $F(G)$  has a nonabelian Sylow  $p$ -subgroup. Let  $\pi$  be the set of primes  $r$  for which  $O_r(G)$  is nonabelian and  $r \nmid |G/O_p(G)|$ . Then there exists  $\mu \in \text{Irr}(G)$  such that  $r \mid \mu(1)$  for all  $r \in \pi$ . By Lemma 2.6, there exists  $\chi_1, \chi_2 \in \text{Irr}(G/\Phi(G))$  such that  $\pi_0(G/F(G)) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^2 \pi_0(\chi_i(1))$ . Thus, we have

$$\varrho_0(G) = \pi_0(G/F(G)) \cup \pi \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^2 \pi_0(\chi_i(1)) \cup \pi_0(\mu(1)).$$

This completes the proof.  $\square$

**Theorem 3.4.** *Let  $G$  be a finite group, then the covering number  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 6$ .*

**Proof.** Let  $G$  be a solvable group, we have  $\varrho_0(G) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi_0(\chi_i(1))$  by Theorem 3.3, where  $\chi_1, \chi_2, \chi_3 \in \text{Irr}(G)$ . If 2 or 3 belongs to  $\varrho(G)$ , we can always find an irreducible character of  $G$  to cover it. Thus  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 5$ .

Let  $G$  be a nonsolvable group. Let  $S$  be the largest solvable normal subgroup of  $G$ . By Theorem 3.3, there exists  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 \in \text{Irr}(S)$  such that  $\varrho_0(S) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi_0(\beta_i(1))$ . By Lemma 2.7, there exists  $\mu_1, \mu_2, \mu_3 \in \text{Irr}(G/S)$  such that  $\pi(G/S) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi(\mu_i(1))$ .

It is easy to see that  $\varrho(G) = \pi(G/S) \cup \varrho(S)$ . Since the order of a nonabelian simple group is divisible by 2, we have  $2 \in \pi(G/S)$ . If  $3 \mid |G/S|$ , then  $3 \in \pi(G/S)$ . We have

$$\varrho(G) = \pi(G/S) \cup \varrho(S) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi(\mu_i(1)) \cup \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi_0(\beta_i(1)).$$

If  $3 \nmid |G/S|$ , then the only non-abelian simple groups involved in  $G/S$  will be  $Sz(q)$ . In this case, we have  $\text{cn}(G/S) \leq 2$  by Lemma 2.7. In other words, there exists  $\theta_1, \theta_2 \in \text{Irr}(G/S)$  such that  $\pi(G/S) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^2 \pi(\theta_i(1))$ . If  $3 \in \varrho(S)$ , then there exists  $\tau \in \text{Irr}(G)$  such that  $3 \mid \tau(1)$ . We have

$$\varrho(G) = \pi(G/S) \cup \varrho(S) \subseteq \bigcup_{i=1}^2 \pi(\theta_i(1)) \cup \bigcup_{i=1}^3 \pi_0(\beta_i(1)) \cup \pi(\tau(1)).$$

Therefore,  $\text{cn}(G) \leq 6$  for all finite groups. □

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