SETS WITH FEW DIFFERENCES IN ABELIAN GROUPS

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Abstract. Let \((G, +)\) be an abelian group. In 2004, Eliahou and Kervaire found an explicit formula for the smallest possible cardinality of the sumset \(A + A\), where \(A \subseteq G\) has fixed cardinality \(r\). We consider instead the smallest possible cardinality of the difference set \(A - A\), which is always greater than or equal to the smallest possible cardinality of \(A + A\) and can be strictly greater. We conjecture a formula for this quantity, and prove the conjecture in the case that \(G\) is a cyclic group or a vector space over a finite field. This resolves a conjecture of Bajnok and Matzke on signed sumsets.

1. Introduction

Let \(G\) be a finite abelian group of order \(N\) written with additive notation. Given subsets \(A, B \subseteq G\), the sumset of \(A\) and \(B\) is defined as

\[ A + B = \{a + b \mid a \in A, b \in B\} \]

and the difference set of \(A\) and \(B\) is defined as

\[ A - B = \{a - b \mid a \in A, b \in B\}. \]

Let \(-A\) denote the difference set \(\{0\} - A = \{-a \mid a \in A\}\).

Given integers \(r\) and \(s\) with \(1 \leq r, s \leq N\), define

\[ \mu_G(r, s) = \min\{|A + B| \mid A, B \subseteq G, |A| = r, |B| = s\} \]

\[ \rho^+_G(r) = \min\{|A + A| \mid A \subseteq G, |A| = r\} \]

\[ \rho^-_G(r) = \min\{|A - A| \mid A \subseteq G, |A| = r\}. \]

We remark that taking \(B = A\) in (1) yields \(\mu_G(r, r) \leq \rho^+_G(r)\) and taking \(B = -A\) yields \(\mu_G(r, r) \leq \rho^-_G(r)\).

The functions \(\mu_G(r, s)\) and \(\rho^+_G(r)\) have held considerable interest for over 200 years. In 1813, Cauchy [4] proved the following classical result, which was rediscovered by Davenport [5] in 1935.

Theorem 1 (Cauchy-Davenport Theorem [4, 5]). Let \(G = \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}\) where \(p\) is prime. Then \(\mu_G(r, s) = \min\{r + s - 1, p\}\) for \(1 \leq r, s \leq p\).
In 2004, Eliahou and Kervaire [7] used a classical result of Kneser [8] to compute $\mu_G(r, s)$ and $\rho_G^+(r)$ for all finite abelian groups $G$.

**Theorem 2** (Eliahou and Kervaire, [7, Theorem 2, Proposition 7]). Let $G$ be a finite abelian group of order $N$. Then

$$\mu_G(r, s) = \min_{d \in D(N)} d \left( \left\lfloor \frac{r}{d} \right\rfloor + \left\lfloor \frac{s}{d} \right\rfloor - 1 \right)$$

for $1 \leq r, s \leq N$, where $D(N)$ denotes the set of positive divisors of $N$. Furthermore, we have $\rho_G^+(r) = \mu_G(r, r)$.

**Remark 1.** By Theorem 2, the quantities $\mu_G(r, s)$ and $\rho_G^+(r)$ depend on $N$, $r$, and $s$, but not the group structure of $G$.

However, there is no known explicit formula for $\rho_G^-(r)$. In [1, 2], Bajnok and Matzke considered an $h$-fold variant of this problem. A small adaptation of their proofs yields the following upper bound for $\rho_G^-(r)$, which we conjecture holds with equality.

**Theorem 3** (cf. [1, Theorem 5]). Let $G$ be a finite abelian group of order $N$. Let $e = \exp G$ be the exponent of $G$; that is, the least common multiple of the orders of the elements of $G$. For $1 \leq r \leq N$, define

$$D(N, e, r) = \{d_1d_2 \mid d_1 \in D(N/e), d_2 \in D(e), d_1e \geq r\}.$$ 

Then

$$\rho_G^-(r) \leq \min_{d \in D(N, e, r)} d \left( 2 \left\lfloor \frac{r}{d} \right\rfloor - 1 \right).$$

**Conjecture 1** (cf. [1, Conjecture 10]). The inequality in Theorem 3 holds with equality. That is, under the hypotheses of Theorem 3, we have

$$\rho_G^-(r) = \min_{d \in D(N, e, r)} d \left( 2 \left\lfloor \frac{r}{d} \right\rfloor - 1 \right).$$

**Remark 2.** We have the inequality $\rho_G^+(r) = \mu_G(r, r) \leq \rho_G^-(r)$, and it is possible that $\rho_G^+(r) < \rho_G^-(r)$. For example, if $G = (\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z})^2$, then $\rho_G^+(4) = 7$ and $\rho_G^-(4) = 9$. It is also worth noting that in contrast to $\rho_G^+(r)$ (see Remark 1), the quantity $\rho_G^-(r)$ cannot be determined from $N$ and $r$ alone.

The goal of this paper is to prove two important special cases of Conjecture 1.

First, consider the case that $G = \mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z}$ is a finite cyclic group. In this case, we have $e = \exp G = N$, so $D(N, e, r) = D(N)$ for $1 \leq r \leq N$. Thus, the statement of Conjecture 1 becomes Theorem 4 below.
Theorem 4 (cf. [1, Theorem 4]). Let $G = \mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z}$. Then
\[ \rho_G(r) = \min_{d \in D(N)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \]
for $1 \leq r \leq N$.

Second, consider the case that $G = (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d$ where $p$ is prime and $d \geq 0$. Then [Theorem 5] below, which is the main result of this paper, computes $\rho_G(r)$ for $1 \leq r \leq p^d$. We will verify in Section 4 that Theorem 5 agrees with the prediction given by Conjecture 1.

Theorem 5. Let $G = (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d$ where $p$ is prime and $d \geq 0$. Let $t$ and $r$ be integers with $0 \leq t \leq d$ and $p^t < r \leq p^{t+1}$. Then
\[ \rho_G(r) = p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}. \]

As a consequence of Theorem 5, we obtain the following result, which appears as Conjecture 18 in [2]. We use the notation $\rho_{\pm}(G, m, r)$ defined in [2].

Theorem 6 ([2, Conjecture 18]). Let $p > 2$ be a prime number, and let $c$ and $v$ be integers with $0 \leq c \leq p - 1$ and $1 \leq v \leq p$. Let $m = cp + v$.

(a) If $1 \leq c \leq (p - 3)/2$, then
\[ \rho_{\pm}((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) = (2c + 1)p. \]

(b) If $c = (p - 1)/2$ and $v \leq (p - 1)/2$, then
\[ \rho_{\pm}((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) = p^2 - 1. \]

In Section 2 we will prove Theorem 4. In Section 3 we will prove Theorem 5. In Sections 4 to 7 we will prove Theorem 5. Finally, in Section 8 we will prove Theorem 6.

2. THE CYCLIC CASE

The goal of this section is to prove Theorem 4 which computes $\rho_G(r)$ in the case that $G$ is a finite cyclic group. The proof closely follows that of [1, Theorem 4], though it should be noted that Theorem 4 does not follow directly from [1, Theorem 4] due to differences in the definitions of $2_{\pm}A$ and $A - A$.

Theorem 4 (cf. [1, Theorem 4]). Let $G = \mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z}$. Then
\[ \rho_G(r) = \min_{d \in D(N)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \]
for $1 \leq r \leq N$. 

Proof of Theorem 4. By Theorem 2, we have
\[ \rho^{-}_G(r) \geq \mu_G(r, r) = \min_{d \in D(N)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \]
so it remains to show that
\[ \rho^{-}_G(r) \leq \min_{d \in D(N)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) . \]

It suffices to show that
\[ \rho^{-}_G(r) \leq d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \]
for each \( d \in D(N) \). For this, we will construct a set \( A \subseteq G \) with \( |A| \geq r \) and
\[ |A - A| \leq d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right). \]

Let \( H \) be the subgroup of \( G \) of order \( d \), and let \( x \) be a generator for \( G/H \). Take \( A \) to be the “coset arithmetic progression”
\[ A = \bigcup_{i=0}^{\left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1} (H + ix). \]

We compute
\[ A - A = \bigcup_{i=1-\left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil}^{\left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1} (H + ix), \]
so \( |A| = d\left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil \geq r \) and
\[ |A - A| \leq d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right), \]
as desired. \( \square \)

Remark 3. By comparing the expressions in [Theorem 2] and [Theorem 4], we see that \( \rho^+_G(r) = \rho^{-}_G(r) = \mu_G(r, r) \) for \( 1 \leq r \leq N \) if \( G = \mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z} \) is a finite cyclic group.

3. An upper bound on \( \rho^{-}_G(r) \)

We shall now restate and prove Theorem 3. The proof very closely follows that of [1, Theorem 5].

Theorem 3 (cf. [1, Theorem 5]). Let \( G \) be a finite abelian group of order \( N \). Let \( e = \exp G \) be the exponent of \( G \); that is, the least common multiple of the orders of the elements of \( G \). For \( 1 \leq r \leq N \), define
\[ D(N, e, r) = \{ d_1d_2 \mid d_1 \in D(N/e), d_2 \in D(e), d_1e \geq r \}. \]
Then
\[ \rho_G(r) \leq \min_{d \in D(N,e,r)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right). \]

**Proof.** It suffices to show that
\[ \rho_G(r) \leq d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \]
for each \( d \in D(N,e,r) \). For this, we will construct a set \( A \subseteq G \) with \( |A| \geq r \) and
\[ |A - A| \leq d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right). \]

Write \( d = d_1d_2 \) for \( d_1 \in D(N/e) \), \( d_2 \in D(e) \), and \( d_1 \geq r \).

By the structure theorem for finitely generated abelian groups, the group \( G \) is isomorphic to a direct product \( H \times \mathbb{Z}/e\mathbb{Z} \) for some abelian group \( H \) with \( |H| = N/e \). Since \( d_1 \in D(N/e) \), we can find a subgroup \( A_1 \subseteq H \) with \( |A_1| = d_1 \). Let \( s = \lceil r/d_1 \rceil \). Then \( s \leq e \), so by Theorem 4 there is a subset \( A_2 \subseteq \mathbb{Z}/e\mathbb{Z} \) with \( |A_2| = s \) and
\[ |A_2 - A_2| \leq d_2 \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{s}{d_2} \right\rceil - 1 \right). \]

Take \( A = A_1 \times A_2 \subseteq H \times \mathbb{Z}/e\mathbb{Z} \cong G \). Then \( |A| = d_1s = d_1 \lceil r/d_1 \rceil \geq r \) and
\[ |A - A| = |(A_1 \times A_2) - (A_1 \times A_2)| \\
= |(A_1 - A_1) \times (A_2 - A_2)| \\
= |A_1 - A_1||A_2 - A_2| \\
\leq d_1 \left( d_2 \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d_1} \right\rceil - 1 \right) \right) \\
= d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right). \]
as desired. \( \Box \)

4. An outline of the proof of Theorem 5

Sections 4 to 7 of this paper will contain the proof of Theorem 5, which will proceed in four steps:

1. We will show that the bound given in Theorem 5 is achieved. That is, we will show that
\[ \rho_G(r) \leq p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}. \]
(2) We will show that for \( G = (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d \), the quantity \( \rho_G(r) \) only depends on \( r \) and \( p \) and not \( d \), as long as \( d \) is large enough that \( \rho_G(r) \) is defined (that is, \( r \leq p^d \)).

(3) By applying the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem (Theorem 1) repeatedly, we will prove Theorem 5 in the case that \( r \leq p^2 \).

(4) We will conclude the proof of the theorem by induction on \( r \).

We start with the following result, which is step (1) above.

**Lemma 1.** With the notation of Theorem 5, we have

\[
\rho_G(r) \leq p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}.
\]

**Proof.** Using the notation of Theorem 3, we have \( N = |G| = p^d \) and \( e = \exp G = p \), so

\[
D(N, e, r) = \{d_1d_2 \mid d_1 \in D(p^{d-1}), d_2 \in D(p), d_1p \geq r\}
= \{p^t, p^{t+1}, \ldots, p^{d-1}, p^d\}.
\]

By Theorem 3 we have

\[
\min_{d \in D(N, e, r)} d \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{d} \right\rceil - 1 \right) = \min \left\{ p^t \left( 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1 \right), p^{t+1}, \ldots, p^{d-1}, p^d \right\}
= p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\},
\]

as desired. \(\square\)

**Remark 4.** The proof of Lemma 1 given above shows that Theorem 5 agrees with the prediction given by Conjecture 1.

**Remark 5.** Here is an explicit example of a subset \( A \subseteq G \) achieving the bound of Lemma 1. Put a total order \( < \) on \( \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} \) by identifying it with \( \{0, 1, \ldots, p - 1\} \) in the usual way. Then, recall that \( (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d \) is totally ordered by the **lexicographic order**, which is defined as follows: we say that \( x = (x_1, \ldots, x_d) \) precedes \( y = (y_1, \ldots, y_d) \) in the lexicographic order if for some \( i \) we have \( x_i < y_i \) and \( x_j = y_j \) for \( j < i \). Let \( A \) be the set of the smallest \( r \) elements of \( (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d \) in the lexicographic order. Then one can easily verify that

\[
|A - A| = p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\},
\]

which provides an alternative constructive proof of Lemma 1. It is worth noting that by [6, Proposition 3.1], the same set \( A \) satisfies \( |A + A| = \rho^*_G(r) \).
5. Independence of Dimension

The following result is step (2) in the proof of Theorem 5.

Lemma 2. Let \( p \) be a prime and let \( d_1 > d_2 \geq 0 \) be integers. Let \( G = \left( \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} \right)^{d_1} \) and \( H = \left( \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} \right)^{d_2} \). Then \( \rho_G^{-}(r) = \rho_H^{-}(r) \) for \( 1 \leq r \leq p^{d_2} \).

Proof. It suffices to consider the case that \( d_1 = d_2 + 1 \). Since \( H \) embeds in \( G \) as a subgroup, we have \( \rho_G^{-}(r) \leq \rho_H^{-}(r) \), so it remains to show that \( \rho_H^{-}(r) \leq \rho_G^{-}(r) \).

Take a subset \( A \subseteq G \) with \( |A| = r \) and \( |A - A| = \rho_G^{-}(r) \). Considering \( G \) as a vector space of dimension \( d_1 = d_2 + 1 \) over the finite field \( \mathbb{F}_p \), there are \( \frac{p^{d_1} - 1}{p - 1} = 1 + p + \cdots + p^{d_2} \geq p^{d_2} \) lines containing 0 (that is, vector subspaces of dimension 1) in \( G \). On the other hand, there are only \( |A - A| - 1 \leq \rho_G^{-}(r) - 1 \leq \rho_H^{-}(r) - 1 < p^{d_2} \) nonzero elements of \( A - A \). Since no two distinct lines in \( G \) containing 0 share a nonzero element, we conclude that there is a line \( \ell \cap (A - A) = \{0\} \).

Considering \( H \) as a vector space of dimension \( d_2 = d_1 - 1 \) over \( \mathbb{F}_p \), fix an \( \mathbb{F}_p \)-linear transformation \( \pi : G \to H \) whose kernel is the line \( \ell \). Such a transformation \( \pi \) exists because

\[
\dim_{\mathbb{F}_p} \ell + \dim_{\mathbb{F}_p} H = 1 + d_2 = d_1 = \dim_{\mathbb{F}_p} G.
\]

We claim that the restriction \( \pi|_A \) is an injection. To show this, take \( x, y \in A \) with \( \pi(x) = \pi(y) \); we will show that \( x = y \). Since \( \pi \) is linear, we have \( \pi(x - y) = 0 \), so \( x - y \in \ker \pi = \ell \). Therefore, we have \( x - y \in \ell \cap (A - A) = \{0\} \). That is, we have \( x = y \), as desired.

Since \( \pi|_A \) is an injection, we have \( |\pi(A)| = |A| = r \), where \( \pi(A) \) is the image of \( A \) under the map \( \pi \). Therefore

\[
\rho_H^{-}(r) \leq |\pi(A) - \pi(A)| = |\pi(A - A)| \leq |A - A| = \rho_G^{-}(r)
\]

as desired. \( \square \)

6. The case \( r \leq p^2 \)

In this section, we show that the statement of Theorem 5 holds when \( r \leq p^2 \), which is step (3) in the proof of Theorem 5.
Lemma 3. Let $p$ be a prime and let $d$ be a nonnegative integer. Let $G$ be the group $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d$. Then
\[
\rho_G^{-}(r) = p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}
\]
for $1 \leq r \leq \min\{p^d, p^2\}$, where $t$ is the unique integer satisfying $p^t < r \leq p^{t+1}$.

The following lemma will be instrumental in the proof of Lemma 3.

Lemma 4. Let $p$ be a prime, and let $m$ and $n$ be integers with $n \geq 1$ and $n + 2 \leq m \leq (p - 1)/2$. Let $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_m)$ be a sequence of integers with $p \geq \lambda_1 \geq \cdots \geq \lambda_m > 0$ and $\sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \geq np + 1$. Let $\mu = (\mu_1, \ldots, \mu_{2m-1})$ be a sequence of integers such that $\mu_{i+j-1} \geq \min\{\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1, p\}$ for $1 \leq i, j \leq m$. Then
\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k \geq (2n + 1)p.
\]

Proof. We defer the proof to Appendix A. \qed

Proof of Lemma 3. By Lemma 1, we have
\[
\rho_G^{-}(r) \leq p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\},
\]
so it remains to show that
\[
\rho_G^{-}(r) \geq p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}.
\]

If $r \leq p$, then this follows directly from Lemma 2 and the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem. Thus, we may assume $r > p$.

By Lemma 2, we may assume that $d = 2$, so $G = (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2$. If $p = 2$, then the theorem follows easily from enumerating all possible values of $r$ and all sets $A \subseteq G$, so assume that $p > 2$. Let
\[
r' = \begin{cases} 
p \left\lceil \frac{r}{p} \right\rceil - 1 + 1 & \text{if } r \leq p(p - 1)/2 \\
p(p - 1)/2 + 1 & \text{if } r > p(p - 1)/2 \end{cases}
\]

Since $r \geq r'$, replacing $r$ with $r'$ cannot increase the left-hand side of (4), and it is easy to check that this replacement leaves the right-hand side unchanged. Therefore, we may assume that $r = np + 1$ where $1 \leq n \leq (p - 1)/2$. Take a subset $A \subseteq G$ with $|A| = r$; we will show that
\[
|A - A| \geq (2n + 1)p = p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lceil \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rceil - 1, p \right\}.
\]
Identify $G$ with the two-dimensional vector space $\mathbb{F}_p^2$ over the field $\mathbb{F}_p$. We will now count the two-element subsets of $A$ in two ways. By definition, the number of two-element subsets of $A$ is the binomial coefficient $\binom{np+1}{2}$. On the other hand, every two-element subset of $A$ is contained in a unique line (that is, affine subspace of $G$ of dimension 1), so we can count these subsets according to the lines containing them. This yields

\begin{equation}
\sum_{\ell \in G} \left( \frac{|A \cap \ell|}{2} \right) = \binom{np+1}{2}
\end{equation}

where the sum is over all lines $\ell \subset G$. Every line in $G$ is parallel to exactly one line $\ell' \subset G$ containing 0, so (5) can be rewritten as

\begin{equation}
\sum_{\ell' \subset G} \sum_{\ell \parallel \ell'} \left( \frac{|A \cap \ell|}{2} \right) = \binom{np+1}{2}
\end{equation}

where the outer sum is over all lines $\ell' \subset G$ containing 0, and the inner sum is over all lines $\ell \subset G$ parallel to $\ell'$. Since there are exactly $p+1$ lines in $G$ containing 0, there is a particular line $\ell_0 \subset G$ containing 0 such that

\begin{equation}
\sum_{\ell \parallel \ell_0} \left( \frac{|A \cap \ell|}{2} \right) \geq \frac{1}{p+1} \binom{np+1}{2}.
\end{equation}

We may assume, by applying an $\mathbb{F}_p$-linear change of coordinates, that $\ell_0$ is the line $\{(0, y) \mid y \in \mathbb{F}_p\} \subset \mathbb{F}_p^2 = G$. For any $x \in \mathbb{F}_p$, define the line

$$\ell_x = \{(x, y) \mid y \in \mathbb{F}_p\}.$$ 

Then, the lines in $G$ parallel to $\ell_0$ are exactly the lines $\ell_x$ for $x \in \mathbb{F}_p$. Let

$$m = \max_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} |A \cap \ell_x|.$$ 

Since

$$\sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} |A \cap \ell_x| = |A| = np+1,$$

we have $m \geq \lceil (np+1)/p \rceil = n+1$. We consider three cases, depending on whether $m \geq (p+1)/2$, or $m = n+1$, or $n+2 \leq m \leq (p-1)/2$.

**Case 1** ($m \geq (p+1)/2$):

Take $x \in \mathbb{F}_p$ such that $|A \cap \ell_x| = m$. Since $\ell_x$ is a translate of $\ell_0$, which is isomorphic as a group to $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$, the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem applies to the difference $(A \cap \ell_x) - (A \cap \ell_x) \subseteq \ell_0$, yielding

$$|(A - A) \cap \ell_0| \geq |(A \cap \ell_x) - (A \cap \ell_x)| \geq \min\{2m-1, p\} = p.$$
(Essentially, we are applying the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem only to the second coordinates of the elements of $A \cap \ell_x$, which lie in $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$.) That is, the line $\ell_0$ is a subset of $A - A$.

Now, take any line $\ell' \subset G$ containing 0. There is a line $\ell$ parallel to $\ell'$ such that $|A \cap \ell| \geq \lceil (np+1)/p \rceil = n+1$. Since $\ell$ is a translate of $\ell'$, which is isomorphic as a group to $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$, the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem again applies to the difference $(A \cap \ell) - (A \cap \ell) \subset \ell'$, yielding

$$|(A - A) \cap \ell'| \geq |(A \cap \ell) - (A \cap \ell)| \geq \min\{2(n+1) - 1, p\} = 2n + 1.$$ 

Since $G \setminus \{0\}$ is equal to the disjoint union

$$\bigcup_{\ell' \in G} \left( \ell' \setminus \{0\} \right)$$

over all lines $\ell' \subset G$ containing 0, we conclude

$$|A - A| = 1 + \sum_{\ell' \in G, \ell' \ni 0} (|(A - A) \cap \ell'| - 1)$$

$$\geq 1 + (p - 1) + p \cdot ((2n + 1) - 1)$$

$$= (2n + 1)p$$

which is the desired inequality.

**Case 2** ($m = n + 1$):

Let $S = \{x \in \mathbb{F}_p \mid |A \cap \ell_x| = n+1\}$ and let $s = |S|$. For each $x \in \mathbb{F}_p \setminus S$ we have $|A \cap \ell_x| \leq n$, so

$$\frac{1}{p+1} \binom{np+1}{2} \leq \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} \binom{|A \cap \ell_x|}{2}$$

$$= s \binom{n+1}{2} + \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p \setminus S} \binom{|A \cap \ell_x|}{2}$$

$$\leq s \binom{n+1}{2} + \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p \setminus S} \frac{n-1}{2} |A \cap \ell_x|$$

$$= s \binom{n+1}{2} + \frac{n-1}{2} ((np + 1) - (n+1)s),$$

$$|A - A| \geq 2n + 1.$$
Simplifying this inequality and using the bound $n \leq (p - 1)/2$, we obtain

\[
\begin{align*}
    s & \geq \frac{p + 1 - n \cdot np + 1}{p + 1} \\
    & \geq \frac{p + 1 - (p - 1)/2 \cdot (p(p - 1)/2 + 1)}{p + 1} \\
    & = \frac{p - 1}{2} + \frac{p^2 + 7}{2(p + 1)^2} \\
    & > \frac{p - 1}{2}.
\end{align*}
\]

Thus $s \geq (p + 1)/2$, so by the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem, we have $|S - S| \geq \min\{2s - 1, p\} = p$, so $S - S = \mathbb{F}_p$.

Now, take any $x \in \mathbb{F}_p$. Since $x \in S - S$, there is $y \in \mathbb{F}_p$ such that $y, x + y \in S$. By the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem again, we have

\[
|(A - A) \cap \ell_x| \geq |A \cap \ell_{x+y} - A \cap \ell_y| \geq \min\{2(n + 1) - 1, p\} = 2n + 1.
\]

Summing over all $x \in \mathbb{F}_p$ yields

\[
|A - A| = \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} |(A - A) \cap \ell_x| \geq (2n + 1)p
\]

as desired.

**Case 3** ($n + 2 \leq m \leq (p - 1)/2$):

For $1 \leq k \leq p$, define

\[
\begin{align*}
    \Lambda_k & = \{x \in \mathbb{F}_p \mid |A \cap \ell_x| \geq k\} \\
    M_k & = \{x \in \mathbb{F}_p \mid |(A - A) \cap \ell_x| \geq k\} \\
    \lambda_k & = |\Lambda_k| \\
    \mu_k & = |M_k|
\end{align*}
\]

By definition, we have $p \geq \lambda_1 \geq \cdots \geq \lambda_m > 0$ and $p \geq \mu_1 \geq \cdots \geq \mu_p \geq 0$. We have

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k = \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} |A \cap \ell_x| = |A| = ap + 1
\]

because each line $\ell_x$ contributes exactly $|A \cap \ell_x|$ to the sum. Similarly

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{p} \mu_k = \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_p} |(A - A) \cap \ell_x| = |A - A|.
\]
We claim that \( M_{i+j-1} \supseteq \Lambda_i - \Lambda_j \) for \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \). To show this, take \( x_1 \in \Lambda_i \) and \( x_2 \in \Lambda_j \); we will show that \( x_1 - x_2 \in M_{i+j-1} \). By the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem, we have
\[
|\{A \cap \ell_{x_1} - A \cap \ell_{x_2}\} \cap \ell_{x_1 - x_2}| \geq \min\{|A \cap \ell_{x_1}| + |A \cap \ell_{x_2}| - 1, p\}
\geq \min\{i + j - 1, p\}
= i + j - 1
\]
where the last equality follows from the bound \( i, j \leq m \leq (p - 1)/2 \).

That is, we have \( x_1 - x_2 \in M_{i+j-1} \), as desired.

By the Cauchy-Davenport Theorem again, we conclude
\[
\mu_{i+j-1} = |M_{i+j-1}| \geq |\Lambda_i - \Lambda_j| \geq \min\{\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1, p\}
\]
for \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \).

Therefore, the conditions of Lemma 4 are satisfied, so
\[
|A - A| = \sum_{k=1}^p \mu_k \geq (2n + 1)p
\]
as desired. \( \square \)

7. Completing the proof of Theorem 5

Before proceeding to the proof of Theorem 5, we prove a general lemma about sets in vector spaces over finite fields.

**Lemma 5.** Let \( p \) be a prime and let \( m \) be an integer. Let \( G \) be a vector space over the field \( \mathbb{F}_p \) of dimension \( d \geq 3 \), and let \( S \) be a subset of \( G \) such that
\[
|S \cap H| \geq mp^{d-2}
\]
for each vector hyperplane \( H \) (that is, vector subspace of dimension \( d - 1 \)) in \( G \). Then \( |S| \geq mp^{d-1} \).

**Proof of Lemma 5.** Assume for the sake of contradiction that \( |S| < mp^{d-1} \). We first claim that there is a \((d - 2)\)-dimensional vector subspace \( V_0 \subset G \) with \( |S \cap V_0| \leq mp^{d-3} \). To show this, take a \((d - 2)\)-dimensional vector subspace \( V \subset G \) uniformly at random. It is clear that \( V \) has \( p^{d-2} - 1 \) nonzero elements, that \( G \) has \( p^d - 1 \) nonzero elements, and that each nonzero element of \( G \) is in \( V \) with equal probability. Therefore, the probability that \( x \in V \) for a fixed \( x \in G \setminus \{0\} \) is
\[
\frac{p^{d-2} - 1}{p^d - 1}.
\]
Clearly, the probability that $0 \in V$ is 1. Therefore, by the linearity of expectation, the expected value of $|S \cap V|$ is given by
\[
\mathbb{E}[|S \cap V|] = 1 + (|S| - 1) \frac{p^{d-2} - 1}{p^d - 1}
\]
\[
< 1 + (mp^{d-1} - 1) \frac{p^{d-2} - 1}{p^d - 1}
\]
\[
= mp^{d-3} + \frac{(p^2 - 1)(p - m)p^{d-3}}{p^d - 1}
\]
\[
< mp^{d-3} + 1.
\]

Since $mp^{d-3}$ is an integer, we conclude that there is a particular $(d - 2)$-dimensional vector subspace $V_0 \subset G$ with $|S \cap V_0| \leq mp^{d-3}$.

Finally, consider the integer $N$ defined by the sum
\[
N = \sum_H |S \cap H|
\]
where $H$ ranges over all vector hyperplanes with $V_0 \subset H \subset G$. Such hyperplanes $H$ are in bijection with lines through the origin in the two-dimensional quotient space $G/V_0$, so there are $p+1$ of them. Therefore, by the assumption of the theorem, we have
\[
N \geq \sum_H mp^{d-2} = (p + 1)mp^{d-2}.
\]

On the other hand, the sum defining $N$ counts every element of $S \setminus V_0$ once and every element of $S \cap V_0$ exactly $p + 1$ times, so
\[
N = |S| + p|S \cap V_0|.
\]

Therefore, we have
\[
|S| = N - p|S \cap V_0| \geq (p + 1)mp^{d-2} - p \cdot mp^{d-3} = mp^{d-1},
\]
which contradicts our assumption that $|S| < mp^{d-1}$. \hfill \Box

We are now ready to restate and prove Theorem 5.

**Theorem 5.** Let $G = (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^d$ where $p$ is prime and $d \geq 0$. Let $t$ and $r$ be integers with $0 \leq t \leq d$ and $p^t < r \leq p^{t+1}$. Then
\[
\rho^{-}_G(r) = p^t \min \left\{ 2 \left\lfloor \frac{r}{p^t} \right\rfloor - 1, p \right\}.
\]

**Proof.** We proceed by induction on $r$. If $t < 2$, then the result follows from Lemma 3, so we may assume $t \geq 2$. By Lemma 2 we may also assume that $d = t + 1$. Let $m = \min\{2 \left\lfloor r/p^t \right\rfloor - 1, p\}$. We wish to show that $\rho^{-}_G(r) = mp^t$. By Lemma 1, we have $\rho^{-}_G(r) \leq mp^t$, so it remains...
to show that $\rho_G(r) \geq mp^t$. Let $A$ be a subset of $G$ with $|A| = r$; we will show that $|A - A| \geq mp^t$.

Consider $G$ as a vector space of dimension $d = t + 1 \geq 3$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$. By Lemma 5 applied to $S = A - A$, it suffices to show that $|(A - A) \cap H| \geq mp^{t-1}$ for each vector hyperplane $H \subseteq G$. For this, note that there are exactly $p$ distinct translates $H + x$, where $x \in G$, and that the entire space $G$ is the disjoint union of these $p$ translates. Therefore, there exists $x_0 \in G$ such that $|A \cap (H + x_0)| \geq \lceil r/p \rceil$. By the inductive hypothesis,

$$|(A - A) \cap H| \geq |(A \cap (H + x_0)) - (A \cap (H + x_0))| \geq \rho_H(\lceil r/p \rceil) = mp^{t-1}$$

as desired. □

8. Applications to signed sumsets

In this section, we prove Theorem 6. In particular, we will show that it is a consequence of the following more general result. The notations $\rho_\pm(G, m, r)$ and $r_\pm A$ used in this section are defined in [2].

Lemma 6. Let $G$ be a finite abelian group of order $N$. Then

$$\rho_\pm(G, m, 2) \geq \min\{\rho_G(m), \rho_G(2m) - 1\}$$

for $1 \leq m \leq N/2$.

Proof. Let $A \subseteq G$ be a subset with $|A| = m$. We will show that

$$2_\pm A \geq \min\{\rho_G(m), \rho_G(2m) - 1\}.$$  

We consider two cases, depending on whether or not $A \cap (-A) = \emptyset$.

Case 1 ($A \cap (-A) \neq \emptyset$):

Choose $x \in A \cap (-A)$. By definition, the signed sumset $2_\pm A$ contains $0 = x + (-x)$ and it contains the difference of any two distinct elements of $A$. Therefore, we have $A - A \subseteq 2_\pm A$. It follows that

$$|2_\pm A| \geq |A - A| \geq \rho_G(m) \geq \min\{\rho_G(m), \rho_G(2m) - 1\},$$

as desired.

Case 2 ($A \cap (-A) = \emptyset$):

Let $B = A \cup (-A)$. Then $|B| = 2|A|$. By definition, the signed sumset $2_\pm A$ contains $(B - B) \setminus \{0\}$, so

$$|2_\pm A| \geq |B - B| - 1$$

$$\geq \rho_G(2m) - 1$$

$$\geq \min\{\rho_G(m), \rho_G(2m) - 1\},$$

as desired. □
Now, we shall restate and prove Theorem 6.

**Theorem 6** ([2, Conjecture 18]). Let \( p > 2 \) be a prime number, and let \( c \) and \( v \) be integers with \( 0 \leq c \leq p - 1 \) and \( 1 \leq v \leq p \). Let \( m = cp + v \).

(a) If \( 1 \leq c \leq (p - 3)/2 \), then
\[
\rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) = (2c + 1)p.
\]

(b) If \( c = (p - 1)/2 \) and \( v \leq (p - 1)/2 \), then
\[
\rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) = p^2 - 1.
\]

**Proof.** (a) By Lemma 6 and Theorem 5, we have
\[
\rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) \geq \min\{\rho^-_G(m), \rho^-_G(2m) - 1\}
\]
\[
= \min\left\{\left(2c + 1\right)p, \left(4c + 2 \left\lceil \frac{2v}{p} \right\rceil + 1\right) p - 1\right\}
\]
\[
= \left(2c + 1\right)p.
\]

The reverse inequality \( \rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) \leq (2c + 1)p \) follows from [1, Theorem 5].

(b) By Lemma 6 and Theorem 5, we have
\[
\rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) \geq \min\{\rho^-_G(m), \rho^-_G(2m) - 1\}
\]
\[
= \min\{p^2, p^2 - 1\}
\]
\[
= p^2 - 1.
\]

The reverse inequality \( \rho_\pm((\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^2, m, 2) \leq p^2 - 1 \) follows from [1, Proposition 8].

\[\blacksquare\]

A. **Proof of Lemma 4**

In this appendix, we prove Lemma 4. The following lemma is essential to our proof of Lemma 4.

**Lemma A.1.** Let \( m > 1 \), and let \( \lambda = (\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_m) \) be a sequence of integers with \( \lambda_1 \geq \cdots \geq \lambda_m > 0 \) and \( \lambda_1 > 1 \). Define the sequence \( \mu = (\mu_1, \ldots, \mu_{2m-1}) \) by
\[
\mu_k = \max_{k=i+j-1} (\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1)
\]
for \( 1 \leq k \leq 2m - 1 \), where the maximum is over all \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \) with \( k = i + j - 1 \). Then
\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k \geq 3 \left( \sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \right) - 3.
\]
Proof. Let
\[ F(\lambda) = \{(x, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^2 | 0 \leq y \leq m - 1, 0 \leq x \leq \lambda_{y+1} - 1\} \subset \mathbb{Z}^2 \]
be the Ferrers diagram of \( \lambda \); that is, a set with \( m \) rows of points where the \( k \)th row from the bottom contains \( \lambda_k \) points for \( 1 \leq k \leq m \). Similarly, let
\[ F(\mu) = \{(x, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^2 | 0 \leq y \leq 2m - 2, 0 \leq x \leq \mu_{y+1} - 1\} \subset \mathbb{Z}^2 \]
be the Ferrers diagram of \( \mu \).
We claim that \( F(\mu) \) contains the sumset \( F(\lambda) + F(\lambda) \). To show this, take two elements \((x, y)\) and \((x', y')\) in \( F(\lambda) \); we wish to show that \((x + x', y + y')\) \( \in F(\mu) \). By the definition of \( F(\lambda) \) we have
\[
0 \leq y + y' \leq (m - 1) + (m - 1) = 2m - 2 \\
0 \leq x + x' \leq (\lambda_{y+1} - 1) + (\lambda_{y'+1} - 1) \leq \mu_{y+y'+1} - 1
\]
so \((x + x', y + y') \in F(\mu)\) as desired.

By assumption, both \( m > 1 \) and \( \lambda_1 > 1 \), so \( F(\lambda) \) contains the three non-collinear points \((0, 0), (1, 0), \) and \((0, 1)\). Therefore, by Freiman’s dimension lemma [12, Theorem 5.20],
\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k = |F(\mu)| \geq |F(\lambda) + F(\lambda)| \geq 3|F(\lambda)| - 3 = 3 \left( \sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \right) - 3
\]
as desired. \( \square \)

We shall now restate and prove Lemma 4.

**Lemma 4.** Let \( p \) be a prime, and let \( m \) and \( n \) be integers with \( n \geq 1 \) and \( n + 2 \leq m \leq (p - 1)/2 \). Let \( \lambda = (\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_m) \) be a sequence of integers with \( p \geq \lambda_1 \geq \cdots \geq \lambda_m > 0 \) and \( \sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \geq np + 1 \). Let \( \mu = (\mu_1, \ldots, \mu_{2m-1}) \) be a sequence of integers such that \( \mu_{i+j-1} \geq \min\{\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1, p\} \) for \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \). Then
\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k \geq (2n + 1)p.
\]

**Proof of Lemma 4.** We may assume that
\[
\mu_k = \max_{i+j-1} \min\{\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1, p\}
\]
for all \( k \). Let \( h \) be the maximum value of \( i + j - 1 \) over all integers \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \) with \( \lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1 > p \), or 0 if no such \( i \) and \( j \) exist. Then \( \mu_k = p \) for \( k \leq h \) and \( \mu_{i+j-1} \geq \lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1 \) for \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m \) as long as \( i + j - 1 > h \).

Proceed by induction on \( m \). We consider three cases, depending on whether \( h = 0 \) or \( h = 1 \) or \( h \geq 2 \).
Case 1 \((h = 0)\):
Then Lemma A.1 applies, so

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k \geq 3 \left( \sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \right) - 3 \\
\geq 3(np + 1) - 3 \\
\geq (2n + 1)p
\]

as desired.

Case 2 \((h = 1)\):
First assume \(n = 1\) and \(m = 3\). Then

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k = \mu_1 + \mu_2 + \mu_3 + \mu_4 + \mu_5 \\
\geq p + (\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 - 1) + (\lambda_1 + \lambda_3 - 1) + (\lambda_2 + \lambda_3 - 1) + 1 \\
\geq p + 2(\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3) - 2 \\
\geq p + 2(p + 1) - 2 \\
= 3p
\]

as desired.

Next assume \(n = 1\) and \(m \geq 4\). The assumption that \(h = 1\) implies that \(2\lambda_1 - 1 > p\), so \(\lambda_1 > (p + 1)/2\). Therefore \(\mu_k \geq \lambda_1 + \lambda_k - 1 > (p + 1)/2\) for \(1 < k < m\) and \(\mu_k \geq \lambda_m + \lambda_{k-m+1} - 1 \geq \lambda_{k-m+1}\) for \(k \geq m\), so

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k > p + \sum_{k=2}^{m-1} \frac{p + 1}{2} + \sum_{k=m}^{2m-1} \lambda_{k-m+1} \\
= p + (m - 2) \frac{p + 1}{2} + (np + 1) \\
> 3p
\]

as desired.
It remains to consider the case that \( n \geq 2 \). Because \( h = 1 \), Lemma A.1 applies to the sequences \((\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_m)\) and \((2p-1, \mu_2, \ldots, \mu_{2m-1})\). Therefore

\[
2^{m-1} \sum_{k=1}^{2m-2} \mu_k = p + \sum_{k=2}^{2m-1} \mu_k \\
= -p + 1 + \left( 2p - 1 + \sum_{k=2}^{2m-1} \mu_k \right) \\
\geq -p + 1 + 3(np + 1) - 3 \\
\geq (2n + 1)p
\]
as desired.

**Case 3** \((h \geq 2)\):
Define the sequence \( \lambda' = (\lambda'_1, \ldots, \lambda'_{m-1}) \) by \( \lambda'_k = \lambda_{k+1} \) for \( 1 \leq k \leq m - 1 \). Then, define \( \mu' = (\mu'_1, \ldots, \mu'_{2m-3}) \) by

\[
\mu'_k = \max_{k=i+j-1} \min\{\lambda'_i + \lambda'_j - 1, p\}
\]
for \( 1 \leq k \leq 2m - 3 \), where the maximum is over all \( 1 \leq i, j \leq m - 1 \) with \( k = i + j - 1 \). We have

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{m-1} \lambda'_k = \left( \sum_{k=1}^{m} \lambda_k \right) - \lambda_1 \geq (n - 1)p + 1,
\]
so by the inductive hypothesis we have

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-3} \mu'_k \geq (2n - 1)p.
\]

On the other hand, we have

\[
\mu_{k+2} = \max_{k+2=i+j-1} (\lambda_i + \lambda_j - 1) \geq \max_{k=i+j-1} (\lambda'_i + \lambda'_j - 1) = \mu'_k
\]
for \( 1 \leq k \leq 2m - 3 \), where the inequality follows from replacing \((i, j)\) with \((i-1, j-1)\). Therefore

\[
\sum_{k=1}^{2m-1} \mu_k = 2p + \sum_{k=1}^{2m-3} \mu'_k \geq (2n + 1)p
\]
as desired. \( \square \)
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