

A NEW CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ALTERNATING GROUPS A_5 AND A_6

ALIREZA KHALILI ASBOEI

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Abstract. Let G be a finite centerless group, let $\pi(G)$ be the set of primes p such that G contains an element of order p and let $n_p(G)$ be the number of Sylow p -subgroup of G , that is, $n_p(G) = |\text{Syl}_p(G)|$. Set $\text{NS}(G) := \{n_p(G) \mid p \in \pi(G)\}$. If $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(M)$, where M denotes one of the alternating simple groups A_5 or A_6 , then $M \leq G \leq \text{Aut}(M)$.

1. Introduction

If n is an integer, then we denote by $\pi(n)$ the set of all prime divisors of n . Let G be a finite group. Denote by $\pi(G)$ the set of primes p such that G contains an element of order p . A finite group G is a simple K_n -group if G is a simple group with $|\pi(G)| = n$. Denote by (a, b) the greatest common divisor of positive integers a and b . If G is a finite group, then we denote by n_q the number of Sylow q -subgroup of G , that is, $n_q = n_q(G) = |\text{Syl}_q(G)|$. All other notations are standard and we refer to [10], for example.

In 1992, Bi [5] showed that the group $L_2(p^k)$ can be characterized just by the orders of the normalizers of its Sylow subgroups. In other words, if G is a group and $|N_G(P)| = |N_{L_2(p^k)}(Q)|$, where $P \in \text{Syl}_r(G)$ and $Q \in \text{Syl}_r(L_2(p^k))$ for every prime r , then $G \cong L_2(p^k)$. This type of characterization is known for the following simple groups: $L_2(p^k)$ [5], $L_n(q)$ [4], $S_4(q)$ [8], the alternating simple groups [7], $U_n(q)$ [9], the sporadic simple groups [2] and ${}^2D_n(p^k)$ [1].

Set $\text{NS}(G) := \{n_p(G) \mid p \in \pi(G)\}$. Let S be one of the above simple groups. It is clear that if $n_p(G) = n_p(S)$ for every prime p and $|G| = |S|$, then $|N_G(P)| = |N_S(Q)|$, where $P \in \text{Syl}_p(G)$ and $Q \in \text{Syl}_p(S)$. Thus by the above references, $G \cong S$. Now replace the condition $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(S)$ with the condition $n_p(G) = n_p(S)$ for every prime p and remove the condition $|G| = |S|$: in this case we can not conclude that G is isomorphic to S . For example, if $G = A_5 \times H$ where H is a finite nilpotent group such that $\pi(H) \subseteq \{2, 3, 5\}$, then $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(A_5) = \{5, 6, 10\}$, but G is not isomorphic to A_5 . So there are many finite groups G such that $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(A_5) = \{5, 6, 10\}$.

In this paper, we show that the simple groups A_5 and A_6 are recognizable by $\text{NS}(G)$, where G is a centerless group.

Main Theorem: Let G be a finite centerless group such that $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(M)$, where M denotes one of the simple groups A_5 or A_6 . Then $M \leq G \leq \text{Aut}(M)$.

2. Preliminary Results

In this section we collect some preliminary lemmas used in the proof of the main theorem.

Lemma 2.1. [12, Theorem 9.3.1] Let G be a finite solvable group and $|G| = m \cdot n$, where $m = p_1^{\alpha_1} \cdots p_r^{\alpha_r}$, $(m, n) = 1$. Let $\pi = \{p_1, \dots, p_r\}$ and let h_m be the number of π -Hall subgroups of G . Then $h_m = q_1^{\beta_1} \cdots q_s^{\beta_s}$ satisfies the following conditions for all $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, s\}$:

- (1) $q_i^{\beta_i} \equiv 1 \pmod{p_j}$, for some p_j .
- (2) The order of some chief factor of G is divisible by $q_i^{\beta_i}$.

Lemma 2.2. [13] If G is a simple K_3 -group, then G is isomorphic to one of the following groups: A_5 , A_6 , $L_2(7)$, $L_2(8)$, $L_2(17)$, $L_3(3)$, $U_3(3)$ or $U_4(2)$.

Lemma 2.3. [11] Let G be a finite group and M be a normal subgroup of G . Both the Sylow p -number $n_p(M)$ and the Sylow p -number $n_p(G/M)$ of the quotient G/M divide the Sylow p -number $n_p(G)$ of G and $n_p(M) n_p(G/M) \mid n_p(G)$.

Lemma 2.4. [14] Let G be a simple group of order $2^a \cdot 3^b \cdot 5^c \cdot 7^d$, $abcd \neq 0$. Then G is isomorphic to one of the following groups: A_n , $n = 7, 8, 9, 10$; J_2 ; $L_2(49)$, $L_3(4)$, $O_5(7)$, $O_7(2)$, $O_8^+(2)$, $U_3(5)$ and $U_4(3)$.

Lemma 2.5. [15] Let G be a simple K_4 -group. Then G is isomorphic to one of the following groups:

- (1) A_7 , A_8 , A_9 , A_{10} .
- (2) M_{11} , M_{12} , J_2 .
- (3) (a) $L_2(r)$, where r is a prime and satisfies $r^2 - 1 = 2^a \cdot 3^b \cdot v^c$ with $a \geq 1$, $b \geq 1$, $c \geq 1$ and $v > 3$ is a prime;
(b) $L_2(2^m)$, where $2^m - 1 = u$, $2^m + 1 = 3t^b$, where $m \geq 2$, u, t are primes, $t > 3$, $b \geq 1$;
(c) $L_2(3^m)$, where $3^m + 1 = 4t$, $3^m - 1 = 2u^c$ or $3^m + 1 = 4t^b$, $3^m - 1 = 2u$, where $m \geq 2$, u, t are odd primes, $b \geq 1$, $c \geq 1$;
- (d) $L_2(16)$, $L_2(25)$, $L_2(49)$, $L_2(81)$, $L_3(4)$, $L_3(5)$, $L_3(7)$, $L_3(8)$, $L_3(17)$, $L_4(3)$, $S_4(4)$, $S_4(5)$, $S_4(7)$, $S_4(9)$, $S_6(2)$, $O_8^+(2)$, $G_2(3)$, $U_3(4)$, $U_3(5)$, $U_3(7)$, $U_3(8)$, $U_3(9)$, $U_4(3)$, $U_5(2)$, $Sz(8)$, $Sz(32)$, ${}^3D_4(2)$, ${}^2F_4(2)'$.

Lemma 2.6. [3] Let α_i be a positive integer ($i = 1, \dots, 5$), p a prime and $p \notin \{2, 3, 5, 7\}$. If G is a simple group and $|G| = 2^{\alpha_1} \cdot 3^{\alpha_2} \cdot 5^{\alpha_3} \cdot 7^{\alpha_4} \cdot p^{\alpha_5}$, then G is isomorphic to one of the following simple groups: A_{11} , A_{12} , M_{22} , HS , McL , He , $L_2(q)$ ($q = 26, 53, 74, 29, 41, 71, 251, 449, 4801$), $L_3(9)$, $L_4(4)$, $L_4(7)$, $L_5(2)$, $L_6(2)$, $O_5(49)$, $O_7(3)$, $O_9(2)$, $S_6(3)$, $O_8^+(3)$, $G_2(4)$, $G_2(5)$, $U_3(19)$, $U_4(5)$, $U_4(7)$, $U_5(3)$, $U_6(2)$, ${}^2D_4(2)$. If $p = 11$, then G is isomorphic to one of the following simple groups: A_{11} , A_{12} , M_{22} , HS , McL , $U_6(2)$.

Sylow's theorem implies that if p is prime, then $n_p = 1 + pk$. If $p = 2$, then n_2 is odd. If $p \in \pi(G)$, then

$$\begin{cases} p \mid (n_p - 1) \\ (p, n_p) = 1 \end{cases} \quad (*)$$

In the proof of the main theorem, we often apply (*) and the above comments.

3. Proof of the Main Theorem

Case 1. Characterization of the group A_5

Let G be a finite centerless group such that $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(A_5) = \{5, 6, 10\}$. First, we prove that $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5\}$. By Sylow's theorem, $n_p \mid |G|$ for every p , so by $\text{NS}(G)$, we conclude that $\{2, 3, 5\} \subseteq \pi(G)$. On the other hand, by (*) if $p \in \pi(G)$, then $p \mid (n_p - 1)$ and $(p, n_p) = 1$, which implies that $p \in \{2, 3, 5\}$. Therefore $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5\}$. Now $n_2(G) = 5$, $n_3(G) = 10$ and $n_5(G) = 6$.

We prove that G is a nonsolvable group. If G is a solvable group, since $n_5(G) = 6$ by Lemma 2.1, $3 \equiv 1 \pmod{5}$, a contradiction. Hence G is a nonsolvable group.

Since G is a finite group, it has a chief series. Let $1 = N_0 \trianglelefteq N_1 \trianglelefteq \dots \trianglelefteq N_{r-1} \trianglelefteq N_r = G$ be a chief series of G . Since G is a nonsolvable group, there exists a maximal non-negative integer i such that N_i/N_{i-1} is a simple group or a direct product of isomorphic simple groups and N_{i-1} is a maximal solvable normal subgroup of G . Now set $N_i := H$ and $N_{i-1} := N$. Hence G has the following normal series

$$1 \trianglelefteq N \triangleleft H \trianglelefteq G$$

such that H/N is non-abelian simple or H/N is a direct product of isomorphic non-abelian simple groups.

Since G is a K_3 -group, H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups. By Lemma 2.2, $H/N \cong A_5, A_6$ or $U_4(2)$. On the other hand, by Lemma 2.3, $n_p(H/N) \mid n_p(G)$ for every prime $p \in \pi(G)$, thus $H/N \cong A_5$.

Now set $\overline{H} := H/N \cong A_5$ and $\overline{G} := G/N$. Hence

$$A_5 \cong \overline{H} \cong \overline{H}C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H})/C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H}) \leq \overline{G}/C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H}) = N_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H})/C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H}) \leq \text{Aut}(\overline{H}).$$

If $K = \{x \in G \mid xN \in C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H})\}$, then $G/K \cong \overline{G}/C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H})$. So $A_5 \leq G/K \leq \text{Aut}(A_5) \cong S_5$. Therefore $G/K \cong A_5$ or $G/K \cong S_5$.

Suppose that $G/K \cong S_5$. We know that $n_2(S_5) = 15$ and $n_2(G) = n_2(A_5) = 5$. On the other hand, by Lemma 2.3, $n_2(S_5) = 15 \mid n_2(G) = 5$, a contradiction. Therefore $G/K \cong A_5$.

We show that $K = N$. Suppose that $K \neq N$. By Lemma 2.3, $n_p(K) = 1$ for every prime $p \in \pi(G)$, so K is a nilpotent subgroup of G . On the other hand, since $C_{\overline{G}}(\overline{H}) \cong K/N$ and N is a maximal solvable normal subgroup G , K is a nonsolvable normal subgroup of G , a contradiction. Thus $K = N$, so $G/N \cong A_5$.

We claim that $N = 1$. Suppose $N \neq 1$, and let Q be a non-trivial Sylow q -subgroup of N . Since N is nilpotent, Q is normal in G . Now if $P \in \text{Syl}_p(G)$, then P normalizes Q and so if $p \neq q$, then $P \leq N_G(Q) = G$. Also NP/N is a Sylow p -subgroup of G/N . On the other hand, if $R/N = N_{G/N}(NP/N)$, then $R = N_G(P)N$. We know that $n_p(G) = n_p(G/N)$, so $|G : R| = |G : N_G(P)|$. Thus $R = N_G(P)$ and therefore $N \leq N_G(P)$. So $Q \leq N_G(P)$. Since $P \leq N_G(Q)$ and $Q \leq N_G(P)$, this implies that $[P, Q] \leq P$, $[P, Q] \leq Q$ and so $[P, Q] \leq P \cap Q = 1$. Thus $P \leq C_G(Q)$ and $Q \leq C_G(P)$, in other words P and Q centralize each other. Therefore $P \leq C_G(Z)$ where $Z = Z(Q)$. On the other hand, since

$C_G(Z) \trianglelefteq N_G(Z) = G$, $C_G(Z)$ is a normal subgroup of G . Also since N is a nilpotent group, $N \trianglelefteq C_G(Z)$. So $C_G(Z)/N \trianglelefteq G/N$. Since P is not contained in N and G/N is a simple group, $C_G(Z)/N = G/N$. Hence $C_G(Z) = G$. Therefore $Z \neq 1$ contained in the center of G , which is a contradiction. Hence $N = 1$ and $G \cong A_5$.

Case 2. Characterization of the group A_6

Let G be a finite centerless group such that $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(A_6) = \{10, 36, 45\}$. First we prove that $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5\}$. By Sylow's theorem, $n_p(G) \mid |G|$ for every p , so by $\text{NS}(G)$, we conclude that $\{2, 3, 5\} \subseteq \pi(G)$. On the other hand, by (*) if $p \in \pi(G)$, then $p \mid (n_p - 1)$ and $(p, n_p) = 1$, which implies that $p \in \{2, 3, 5, 7, 11\}$. Therefore $\pi(G) \subseteq \{2, 3, 5, 7, 11\}$. Thus $n_2(G) = 45$, $n_3(G) = 10$ and $n_5(G) = 36$. If $7 \in \pi(G)$, then $n_7(G) = 36$ and if $11 \in \pi(G)$, then $n_{11}(G) = 45$.

We prove that G is nonsolvable group. If G is a solvable group, then since $n_3(G) = 10$ by Lemma 2.1, $5 \equiv 1 \pmod{3}$, a contradiction. Hence G is a nonsolvable group.

Since G is finite and nonsolvable, it has the following normal series

$$1 \trianglelefteq N \triangleleft H \trianglelefteq G$$

such that H/N is non-abelian simple or H/N is a direct product of isomorphic non-abelian simple groups.

Let $H/N = S_1 \times \dots \times S_r$, where S_1 is a simple group and $S_1 \cong \dots \cong S_r$. Since $\pi(G) \subseteq \{2, 3, 5, 7, 11\}$, S_1 is a simple K_3 - or K_4 - or K_5 -group. We consider the following subcases:

Subcase a. Let $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5\}$. Hence H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups. On the other hand, $n_p(H/N) \mid n_p(G)$ for every prime $p \in \pi(G)$, so by Lemma 2.2, $H/N \cong A_5$ or A_6 .

If $H/N \cong A_5$ then, similar to the proof of Case 1, there exists a normal subgroup K such that $N \leq K$ and $A_5 \leq G/K \leq S_5$.

If $G/K \cong A_5$, then we prove that $K = N$. Suppose that $K \neq N$. Since $N < K$ and N is a maximal solvable normal subgroup G , K is a nonsolvable normal subgroup of G . On the other hand, $n_3(K) = 1$, $n_2(K) \mid 9$ and $n_5(K) \mid 6$, by Lemma 2.3. Because K is a nonsolvable, it has the following normal series

$$1 \trianglelefteq N_1 \triangleleft H_1 \trianglelefteq K$$

such that $H_1/N_1 \cong A_5$. Since $n_3(H_1/N_1) = n_3(A_5) \mid n_3(K) = 1$, we get a contradiction. Thus $N = K$. Therefore $G/N \cong A_5$.

Let P be a Sylow 5-subgroup of G . We know that PN/N is a Sylow 5-subgroup of $G/N = A_5$ and $N_G(P)N/N$ normalizes PN/N and hence has order 10 in G/N . So $|N_G(P)N| = 10 \times |N|$. Therefore the number of Sylow 5-subgroup of $N_G(P)N/N$ is 6. Since $N_G(P)N/N$ is solvable, by Lemma 2.1 we get a contradiction. Similarly if $G/K \cong S_5$, then $K = N$, a contradiction.

If $H/N \cong A_6$, then similar to the proof of Case 1, there exists a normal subgroup K such that $N \leq K$ and $A_6 \leq G/K \leq \text{Aut}(A_6)$. So $G/K \cong A_6, S_6, \text{PGL}(2, 9), M_{10}$ or $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(2, 9)$.

Let $G/K \cong A_6$. By Lemma 2.3, K is a nilpotent group and hence $K = N$.

We claim that $N = 1$. Let Q be a non-trivial Sylow q -subgroup of N . Since N is nilpotent, Q is normal in G . If $P \in \text{Syl}_p(G)$, then Q normalizes P ; so if p is not q , then P and Q centralize each other. Let $C = C_G(Q)$, then C contains a full Sylow

p -subgroup of G for all primes p different from q , and thus $|G : C|$ is a power of q . Now let S be a Sylow q -subgroup of G . Then $G = CS$. Also if $Q > 1$, then $C_Q(S)$ is nontrivial, so $C_Q(S) \leq Z(G)$. Since by assumption $Z(G) = 1$, it follows that $Q = 1$. Since q is arbitrary, $N = 1$, as claimed. Therefore $G \cong A_6$.

If $G/K \cong S$, where S is one of the groups $\text{PGL}(2, 9)$, M_{10} or $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(2, 9)$, then from $n_p(S) = n_p(G)$ for every prime p we prove $K = N$ and similar to the above discussion $N = 1$. Therefore $G \cong S_6, \text{PGL}(2, 9), M_{10}$ or $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(2, 9)$.

Subcase b. Let $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5, 7\}$. Hence H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups, or H/N is a simple K_4 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_4 -groups.

If H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups, then by Lemma 2.2, $H/N \cong A_5, A_6, L_2(7), L_2(8), U_3(3)$ or $U_4(2)$.

If $H/N \cong L_2(7), L_2(8), U_3(3)$ or $U_4(2)$, then by Lemma 2.3, $n_2(L_2(7)) = 21 \mid n_2(G) = 45, n_3(L_2(8)) = 28 \mid n_3(G) = 10, n_2(U_3(3)) = 189 \mid n_2(G) = 45$ and $n_3(U_4(2)) = 160 \mid n_3(G) = 10$, a contradiction.

If $H/N \cong A_5$, then similar to the proof of Case 1, there exists a normal subgroup K such that $N \leq K$ and $A_5 \leq G/K \leq S_5$.

If $G/K \cong A_5$, then we prove that $K = N$. Suppose that $K \neq N$. By Lemma 2.3, $n_3(K) = 1, n_2(K) \mid 9, n_5(K) \mid 6$ and $n_7(K) \mid 36$. Since $N < K$ and N is a maximal solvable normal subgroup G , K is a nonsolvable normal subgroup of G . Therefore K has the following normal series

$$1 \trianglelefteq N_1 \triangleleft H_1 \trianglelefteq K$$

such that $H_1/N_1 \cong A_5, A_6, L_2(7), L_2(8), U_3(3), U_4(2)$ or S , where S is one of the groups: A_n for $n = 7, 8, 9, 10, J_2, L_2(49), L_3(4), O_5(7), O_7(2), O_8^+(2), U_3(5)$ and $U_4(3)$, by Lemma 2.4. Since $3 \in \pi(H_1/N_1)$ and $n_3(H_1/N_1) \mid n_3(K) = 1$, we get a contradiction. Thus $N = K$. Now $G/N \cong A_5$. This implies that $7 \in \pi(N)$ and the order of a Sylow 7-subgroup in G and N are equal. As N is normal in G , the number of Sylow 7-subgroups of G and N are equal. Therefore the number of Sylow 7-subgroups of N is 36. Since N is solvable by Lemma 2.1, $4 \equiv 1 \pmod{7}$, a contradiction.

Similar to the above discussion if $G/K \cong S_5$, we get a contradiction. If $H/N \cong A_6$, then similar to the above discussion, we get a contradiction.

Now let H/N be a simple K_4 -group or H/N be a direct product of simple K_4 -groups. By Lemma 2.4, $H/N \cong S$, where S is one of the groups: A_n for $n = 7, 8, 9, 10, J_2, L_2(49), L_3(4), O_5(7), O_7(2), O_8^+(2), U_3(5)$ and $U_4(3)$. Since $3 \in \pi(S)$ and $n_3(S) \mid n_3(G) = 10$, we get a contradiction.

Subcase c. Let $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5, 11\}$. Hence H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups, or H/N is a simple K_4 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_4 -groups.

If H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups, then by Lemma 2.2, $H/N \cong A_5, A_6$ or $U_4(2)$.

Let $H/N \cong U_4(2)$. By Lemma 2.3, $n_3(U_4(2)) = 160 \mid n_3(G) = 10$, a contradiction.

Let $H/N \cong A_5$. Similar to the proof of Subcase b, we get a contradiction.

Now let H/N be simple K_4 -group. By Lemma 2.5, if $H/N \cong L_2(r)$, where r is a prime and satisfies $r^2 - 1 = 2^a \cdot 3^b \cdot v^c$ with $a \geq 1, b \geq 1, c \geq 1$ and $v > 3$

is a prime, then by $\pi(H/N) = \{2, 3, 5, 11\}$, $r = 11$. So $H/N \cong L_2(11)$; since $n_{11}(L_2(11)) = 12 \mid n_{11}(G) = 45$, this is a contradiction.

If $H/N \cong L_2(2^m)$, where $2^m - 1 = u$, $2^m + 1 = 3t^b$, where $m \geq 2$, u, t are primes, $t > 3$, $b \geq 1$, then $u, t \in \{3, 5, 11\}$, a contradiction.

If $H/N \cong L_2(3^m)$, where $3^m + 1 = 4t$, $3^m - 1 = 2u^c$ or $3^m + 1 = 4t^b$, $3^m - 1 = 2u$, where $m \geq 2$, u, t are odd primes, $b \geq 1$, $c \geq 1$, then $u, t \in \{3, 5, 11\}$, a contradiction.

For the other case by Lemma 2.5, we get a contradiction.

Subcase d. Let $\pi(G) = \{2, 3, 5, 7, 11\}$. Hence H/N is a simple K_n -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_n -groups for $n = 3, 4$, or 5 .

If H/N is a simple K_3 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_3 -groups or H/N is a simple K_4 -group or H/N is a direct product of simple K_4 -groups, then similar to the proof of Subcase a or b, we get a contradiction.

Let H/N be a simple K_5 -group, or H/N is a direct product of simple K_5 -groups. By Lemma 2.6, $H/N \cong A_{11}, A_{12}, M_{22}, HS, McL$ or $U_6(2)$ and by $n_3(H/N) \mid n_3(G) = 10$, we get a contradiction. \square

We conclude with a conjecture.

Conjecture: Let G be a finite centerless group such that $\text{NS}(G) = \text{NS}(A_n)$, then $A_n \leq G \leq \text{Aut}(A_n)$.

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Alireza Khalili Asboei
Department of Mathematics,
Shariati Sari Mazandaran,
Iran
khaliliasbo@yahoo.com