Bull. Aust. Math. Soc. **110** (2024), 121–128
doi:10.1017/S0004972723001168

SOLVABLE GROUPS WHOSE NONNORMAL SUBGROUPS HAVE FEW ORDERS

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(Received 13 October 2023; accepted 26 October 2023; first published online 27 December 2023)

Abstract

Suppose that G is a finite solvable group. Let $t = n_c(G)$ denote the number of orders of nonnormal subgroups of G. We bound the derived length $dl(G)$ in terms of $n_c(G)$. If G is a finite p-group, we show that $|G'| \leq p^{2t+1}$ and $dl(G) \leq \lceil \log_2(2t+3) \rceil$. If G is a finite solvable nonnilpotent group, we prove that the sum of the powers of the prime divisors of $|G'|$ is less than t and that $dl(G) \leq \lfloor 2(t+1)/3 \rfloor + 1$.

2020 *Mathematics subject classification*: primary 20D10.

Keywords and phrases: solvable groups, nonnormal subgroups, derived length.

1. Introduction

A finite group is said to be a Dedekind group if all its subgroups are normal. Such groups were precisely classified by Dedekind in [6]. Groups having only a few nonnormal subgroups can be considered close to Dedekind groups. There are many results about such groups that characterise the structure of finite groups with a small number of conjugacy classes of nonnormal subgroups (see [3–5, 7, 9–11]). There are also explorations based on the number of orders of nonnormal subgroups.

Let G be a finite group. For convenience, we introduce the notation,

$$n_c(G) = \text{the number of orders of nonnormal subgroups of } G.$$

Obviously, $n_c(G) = 0$ if and only if G is a Dedekind group. Passman in [12] classified finite p-groups, all of whose nonnormal subgroups are cyclic, including finite p-groups with $n_c(G) = 1$. Later, Berkovich and Zhang in [2, 13] classified finite groups with $n_c(G) = 1$, and An in [1] classified finite p-groups with $n_c(G) = 2$. These results are mainly concerned with the structure of G. In particular, Passman in [12] gave several interesting properties of finite p-groups based on the orders of their nonnormal subgroups, which served as inspiration for this study.

This research is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Nos. 11971391, 12071376), by Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (SWU-XDJH202305) and the Postgraduate Research and Innovation Project of Southwest University (SWUB23034).

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0004972723001168 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The aim of this paper is to estimate the derived length of a finite solvable group G in terms of $n_c(G)$. We examine nilpotent groups (Section 2) and solvable nonnilpotent groups (Section 3). In fact, the derived length of a nilpotent group with $n_c(G) = t$ is less than the derived length of p-groups with $n_c(G) = t$. Therefore, we consider finite p-groups instead of nilpotent groups.

In [12], Passman showed that, for a finite p-group G, if the maximal order of nonnormal subgroups of G is p^m, then $|G'| \leq p^m$, and hence the nilpotent class $c(G) \leq m + 1$. Also, it is trivial that $n_c(G) \leq m$. We obtain the following result.

THEOREM 1.1. *Let G be a p-group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then $dl(G) \leq \lceil \log_2(2t + 3) \rceil$.*

Assume that G is a finite solvable nonnilpotent group. We establish an upper bound for the derived length $dl(G)$ in terms of $n_c(G)$.

THEOREM 1.2. *Let G be a solvable nonnilpotent group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then the derived length $dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2t + 2)/3 \rfloor + 1$.*

Let G be a finite solvable group with $|G| = \prod_{i=1}^{k} p_i^{\alpha_i}$. For convenience, we define

$$s_p(G) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \alpha_i.$$

For the remainder of this paper, all groups are finite and we refer to [8] for standard notation concerning the theory of finite groups.

2. The p-groups with $n_c(G) = t$

In this section, we bound the order of G' and the derived length $dl(G)$ for a p-group G in terms of the number of orders of nonnormal subgroups $n_c(G)$. We begin with four lemmas.

LEMMA 2.1 [2, Lemma 1.4]. *Let G be a p-group and let $N \trianglelefteq G$. If N has no abelian normal subgroups of G of type (p, p), then N is either cyclic or a 2-group of maximal class.*

LEMMA 2.2 [12, Lemma 1.4]. *Let N be a minimal nonnormal subgroup of a p-group P. Then N is cyclic.*

Suppose that G is a group and $N \trianglelefteq G$. Note that $n_c(G/N)$ is the number of orders of nonnormal subgroups of G containing N. The following lemma is easy but important, and it will frequently be used later in the paper.

LEMMA 2.3. *Let G be a group. Assume that N is a normal subgroup of G. Then $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G)$. Moreover, if $n_c(G/N) = n_c(G)$, then the orders of all nonnormal subgroups of G are divisible by the order of N.*

PROOF. Obviously, the projection of the nonnormal subgroups of G/N onto G are still nonnormal, and hence $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G)$. If there exists a nonnormal subgroup

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of G whose order is not divisible by $|N|$, then $n_c(G/N) < n_c(G)$. This completes the proof. □

Let G be a p-group. We say that $H_1 > H_2 > \cdots > H_k$ is a chain of nonnormal subgroups of G if each $H_i \ntrianglelefteq G$ and if $|H_i : H_{i+1}| = p$ for $1 \le i \le k-1$. Passman in [12] used $\mathrm{chn}(G)$ to denote the maximum of the lengths of the chains of nonnormal subgroups of G, and proved that if $\mathrm{chn}(G) = t$, then $s_p(G') \le 2t + \lfloor 2/p \rfloor$. It is trivial that $\mathrm{chn}(G) \le n_c(G)$. In the next lemma, we weaken the condition.

LEMMA 2.4. *Let G be a p-group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then $s_p(G') \le 2t + 1$.*

PROOF. Let G be a p-group and assume that $n_c(G) = t$. If G has no elementary abelian normal subgroup of order p^2, then, by Lemma 2.1, G is either a cyclic group or a 2-group of maximal class. It is easy to see that $s_p(G') \le n_c(G) + 1$ and the result follows.

Now, suppose that there exists an elementary abelian normal subgroup N of order p^2. In this case, we perform induction on t. If $t = 0$, clearly, G is Dedekind and $s_p(G') \le 1$, as required. Next, suppose that $t \ge 1$. We consider the factor group G/N. Assume that M is a nonnormal subgroup of minimal order of G. Then M is cyclic by Lemma 2.2. Let $|M| = p^m$. We claim that $n_c(G/N) \le t - 1$. If $p^m \le p^2$, it follows from Lemma 2.3 that $n_c(G/N) \le t - 1$. Conversely, if $p^m > p^2$, then G/N has no nonnormal subgroups of order p^{m-2}. Otherwise, there exists a noncyclic nonnormal subgroup of order p^m of G, which contradicts the minimality of M. Thus, according to Lemma 2.3, we have $n_c(G/N) \le t - 1$, as claimed. Here, by induction on t, it follows that $s_p((G/N)') \le 2(t-1) + 1$. Therefore,

$$s_p(G') \le s_p(N) + s_p((G/N)') \le 2t + 1.$$

The proof is complete. □

COROLLARY 2.5. *Let G be a nilpotent group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then $s_p(G') \le 2t + 1$.*

PROOF. Let $P_i \in \mathrm{Syl}_{p_i}(G)$ and assume that $G = P_1 \times P_2 \times \cdots \times P_k$ with $n_c(G) = t$. If $k = 1$, the result is trivial by Lemma 2.4. Now, let $k \ge 1$. We assume that $G = H \times P_k$. Since $n_c(G) = t$, we have $n_c(H) < t/2$ and $n_c(P_k) \le t/2$. By induction on k, it follows that $s_p(H') < t + 1$ and $s_p(P_k{}') < t + 1$. Therefore, $s_p(G') \le 2t + 1$. □

We denote by $c(G)$ the nilpotent class and use G_i and $G^{(i)}$ to denote the ith terms of the lower central series and the commutator series for a group G, respectively. We are now ready to prove Theorem 1.1

PROOF OF THEOREM 1.1. Let G be a p-group and assume that $n_c(G) = t$. By Lemma 2.4, we see that $|G'| \le p^{2t+1}$ and thus $c(G) \le 2t + 2$. It suffices to show that $G^{(i)} \le G_{2^i}$ for $i \ge 1$ since, by induction on i,

$$G^{(i)} = [G^{(i-1)}, G^{(i-1)}] \le [G_{2^{i-1}}, G_{2^{i-1}}] \le G_{2^i}.$$

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Note that $1 = G_{2t+3} = G^{(dl(G))} \leq G_{2^{dl(G)}}$. Consequently, $2^{dl(G)} \leq 2t+3$, that is, $dl(G) \leq \lceil \log_2(2t+3) \rceil$. This completes the proof. □

3. The solvable nonnilpotent groups with $n_c(G) = t$

In this section, we investigate the solvable nonnilpotent groups with $n_c(G) = t$ and prove the main result of this paper.

First, we state the characterisation of finite groups with $n_c(G) = 1$ and provide a basic fact about nilpotent groups.

LEMMA 3.1 [13, Theorem 2.3]. *Let G be a finite group. If all nonnormal subgroups of G possess the same order, then G is a finite p-group or $G = \langle a \rangle \rtimes \langle b \rangle$, where $o(a) = p_2$, $o(b) = {p_1}^{n_1}$, p_1, p_2 are primes with $p_1 < p_2$ and $[a, b^{p_1}] = 1$. Moreover, if $G = \langle a \rangle \rtimes \langle b \rangle$, as stated, then all nonnormal subgroups of G are of order ${p_1}^{n_1}$.*

LEMMA 3.2 [8, Lemma 5.1.2]. *Let G be a group and let $N \leq Z(G)$. Then G is nilpotent if and only if G/N is nilpotent.*

For solvable nonnilpotent groups, we have the following further conclusion based on Lemma 2.3.

LEMMA 3.3. *Let G be a solvable nonnilpotent group. Then there exists a minimal normal subgroup N such that $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G) - s_p(N)$.*

PROOF. By Lemma 2.3, $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G)$. First, we claim that there exists a minimal normal subgroup N of G such that $n_c(G/N) < n_c(G)$. Let $P_i \in \mathrm{Syl}_{p_i}(G)$. Noting that G is nonnilpotent, we may assume that P_1 is a nonnormal Sylow subgroup of G. If, for $i \geq 2$, there exists a Sylow subgroup P_i such that P_i is nonnormal, we may assume that P_2 is nonnormal. Then $n_c(G/N) < n_c(G)$ is always true for any minimal normal subgroup $N \neq 1$. Otherwise, by Lemma 2.3, the orders of both P_1 and P_2 are divisible by the order of N, so that $N = 1$, which is a contradiction. On the other hand, if $P_i \trianglelefteq G$ for all $i \geq 2$, we may take $N \leq P_2$. According to Lemma 2.3 again, $n_c(G/N) < n_c(G)$ since the order of P_1 is not divisible by the order of N. This proves the claim.

Since N is a minimal normal subgroup of G, it follows that N is an elementary abelian p-group and proper subgroups of N are nonnormal subgroups of G. There are $s_p(N) - 1$ nonnormal subgroups of G contained by N. Thus,

$$n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G) - (s_p(N) - 1).$$

Here, if $n_c(G/N) = n_c(G) - s_p(N) + 1$, then, similarly, both the orders of P_1 and P_2 are divisible by p, which is a contradiction. Hence, $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G) - s_p(N)$ and the proof is complete. □

The next crucial lemma establishes an upper bound on the order of G' in terms of $n_c(G)$ for a solvable nonnilpotent group G.

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LEMMA 3.4. *Let G be a solvable nonnilpotent group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then $s_p(G') \leq t$.*

PROOF. Assume that $n_c(G) = t$. The proof will be done by induction to t. If $t = 1$, then, by Lemma 3.1,

$$G = \langle a \rangle \rtimes \langle b \rangle,$$

where $o(a) = p_2$, $o(b) = {p_1}^{n_1}$ and p_1, p_2 are different primes. Since $G/\langle a \rangle$ is cyclic, we have $s_p(G') = 1$.

Now, let $t \geq 2$. According to the proof of Lemma 3.3, it suffices to show that there exists a minimal normal subgroup N such that $n_c(G/N) < t$.

Case 1: G/N is nonnilpotent.

In this case, since $n_c(G/N) < t$, it follows that $s_p((G/N)') \leq n_c(G/N)$ by induction on t. In addition, $|G'| = |G' \cap N||(G/N)'|$ because $(G/N)' \cong G'/(G' \cap N)$. Hence, $|N||(G/N)'|$ is divisible by $|G'|$. Therefore,

$$s_p(G') \leq s_p(N) + s_p((G/N)') \leq s_p(N) + n_c(G/N).$$

By Lemma 3.3, $n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G) - s_p(N)$, and hence

$$s_p(G') \leq s_p(N) + n_c(G/N) \leq n_c(G) = t.$$

This completes the proof in *Case 1*.

Case 2: G/N is nilpotent. In this case, we consider the following two situations.

Case 2a: there exists a minimal normal subgroup M such that $M \neq N$.

Since G is a nonnilpotent group, it follows that G/M is also nonnilpotent. Otherwise, since $G/(M \cap N) \lesssim G/M \times G/N$, we see that $G/(M \cap N)$ is nilpotent. However, $G/(M \cap N) \cong G$ is nonnilpotent, which is a contradiction. Now, assume that $|M| = p^m$ and $|N| = q^n$, where p, q are different primes. We consider two cases, namely, $m \geq 2$ and $m = 1$. If $m \geq 2$, since $N_1 M_1 \trianglelefteq G$ for all $1 < M_1 < M$ and $1 \leq N_1 \leq N$, then

$$n_c(G/M) \leq n_c(G) - (m-1)(n+1) \leq n_c(G) - m.$$

Here, it follows easily by induction that $s_p((G/M)') \leq n_c(G/M)$. This condition is similar to *Case 1* and it follows that

$$s_p(G') \leq s_p(M) + n_c(G/M) \leq n_c(G).$$

Now suppose that $m = 1$, that is, $|M| = p$. If there exists a nonnormal subgroup H such that $|H|$ is not divisible by p, then $n_c(G/M) \leq n_c(G) - 1$ from Lemma 2.3, and so $s_p((G/M)') \leq n_c(G/M)$ by induction. As before, the result holds. On the other hand, if, for every subgroup H of G whose order is not divisible by p, H is always normal, then we may assume that $G = KP$, where K is a Hall p'-subgroup of G. Obviously, all subgroups of K are normal and P is nonnormal. We consider the following two cases.

(i) If there exists a minimal normal subgroup T of G contained in K satisfying $T \neq N$, then G/T is nonnilpotent. It suffices to show that $n_c(G/T) \leq n_c(G) - 1$ by Lemma 2.3, and thus $s_p((G/T)') \leq n_c(G/T)$ by induction. As before, the result holds.

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(ii) If N is a unique minimal normal subgroup of G contained in K, then K is a group of prime power order. It follows from Lemma 2.1 that K is either a cyclic group or a 2-group of maximal class. In addition, since every subgroup of K is a normal subgroup of G, it follows that K is either a cyclic group or a quaternion group Q_8. We claim that K is cyclic. Otherwise, $K \cong Q_8$. Note that $N \leq Z(G) \cap Q_8$ and G/N is nilpotent. According to Lemma 3.2, G is nilpotent, which is a contradiction. Now, let K be a cyclic group of order q^r with $r \geq 2$. For $1 \leq K_1 \leq K$, it follows that K_1P_1 is nonnormal as $P_1 \leq P$ and $P_1 \trianglelefteq G$. Also, there exists a maximal subgroup M of P that is normal in P, but MK_1 is a nonnormal subgroup of G for $1 \leq K_1 < K$. Hence,

$$n_c(G/K)(r+1) + r \leq t.$$

By Lemma 2.4, $s_p((G/K)') \leq 2(t-r)/(r+1) + 1$. Note that $n_c(G) = t \geq 2r+1$ and $r \geq 2$. Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} s_p(G') \leq s_p(K) + s_p((G/K)') &\leq r + \frac{2(t-r)}{r+1} + 1 \\ &\leq \frac{r(r+1) + r(t-r) + (r+1)}{r+1} \leq \frac{r(t+1) + t - r}{r+1} = t. \end{aligned}$$

Case 2b: N is a unique minimal normal subgroup of G.

In this case, G/H is nilpotent for $1 \neq H \trianglelefteq G$. We can assume that $G/N = P_1 \rtimes P_2$ with $N \leq P_1$. Let $|N| = {p_1}^k$. Then there are $k-1$ nonnormal subgroups of G contained in N. Clearly, if NK is nonnormal in G for $K \leq G$, then $K \trianglelefteq G$. Note that $P_2N \trianglelefteq G$ but P_2 is a nonnormal subgroup of G. Moreover, we can always find $gN \in Z(G/N)$ such that $g \in G - N$ and $g^p \in N$ since G/N is nilpotent. Also, $\langle g \rangle N \trianglelefteq G$ but $\langle g \rangle$ is nonnormal in G. Therefore,

$$2n_c(G/N) + (k-1) + 1 + 1 \leq t.$$

It follows that $n_c(G/N) \leq (t-k-1)/2$ and, by Lemma 2.5, $s_p((G/N)') \leq t-k$. Hence,

$$s_p(G') \leq s_p(N) + s_p((G/N)') \leq k + t - k \leq t.$$

The proof is complete. □

Next, we will prove Theorem 1.2. To do this, we need the following lemma.

LEMMA 3.5. *Let G be a solvable group. If $s_p(G) = n$, then $dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2n+2)/3 \rfloor$.*

PROOF. We prove the result by induction on n. If $n = 1$, the result is trivially true. Assume that $n \geq 2$. If $s_p(G/G') \geq 2$, then $s_p(G') \leq n-2$. It follows that $dl(G') \leq \lfloor (2n-2)/3 \rfloor$ by the inductive hypothesis applied to G'. Hence,

$$dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2n-2)/3 \rfloor + 1 \leq \lfloor (2n+2)/3 \rfloor.$$

In this case, the proof is complete.

Now, let $s_p(G/G') = 1$, that is, $s_p(G') = n-1$. We may assume that $dl(G) = k+1$ where $k \geq 2$. Then $G^{(k)} > 1$. Also, suppose that N is a maximal abelian normal

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subgroup of G containing $G^{(k)}$. If $s_p(N) \geq 2$, we see that $s_p(G/N) \leq n-2$. Application of the inductive hypothesis to G/N yields $dl(G/N) \leq \lfloor (2n-2)/3 \rfloor$. Thus,

$$dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2n-2)/3 \rfloor + 1 \leq \lfloor (2n+2)/3 \rfloor,$$

and the result follows.

The remaining case is where $s_p(N) = 1$, which implies that $N = G^{(k)}$. Since $G/N = N_G(N)/C_G(N) \lesssim \mathrm{Aut}(N)$ is cyclic, it suffices to show that $N = G^{(k)} \leq Z(G')$. Hence,

$$N = G^{(k)} \leq Z(G^{(k-1)}).$$

Now $G^{(k-1)}$ is nonabelian since $G^{(k)} \neq 1$. We claim that $s_p(G^{(k-1)}) \geq 3$. Otherwise, $G^{(k-1)}$ is a nonabelian group of order pq with $p \neq q$. Since $G^{(k-1)}/G^{(k)}$ is cyclic, it suffices to show that $G^{(k-1)}$ is an abelian group, which is a contradiction. Hence, $s_p(G/G^{(k-1)}) \leq n-3$. Apply the inductive hypothesis to $G/G^{(k-1)}$. Then $dl(G/G^{(k-1)}) \leq \lfloor (2n-4)/3 \rfloor$. Therefore,

$$dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2n-4)/3 \rfloor + 2 = \lfloor (2n+2)/3 \rfloor.$$

The proof is complete. □

Finally, we are ready to prove Theorem 1.2.

PROOF OF THEOREM 1.2. Suppose that G is a solvable nonnilpotent group with $n_c(G) = t$. From Lemma 3.4, $s_p(G') \leq t$, and hence, by Lemma 3.5,

$$dl(G') \leq \lfloor (2t+2)/3 \rfloor.$$

Hence, $dl(G) \leq \lfloor (2t+2)/3 \rfloor + 1$. The proof is complete. □

In addition, if G be a solvable nonnilpotent group, the number of prime divisors of $|G|$ can be bounded by $n_c(G)$. For convenience, we use $\pi(G)$ to denote the number of prime divisors of $|G|$.

COROLLARY 3.6. *Let G be a solvable nonnilpotent group. If $n_c(G) = t$, then $\pi(G) \leq t+1$.*

PROOF. Assume that $\pi(G) \geq t+2$. Since G is a solvable group, G possesses a Sylow system $\mathcal{S}$. Suppose that $\mathcal{S} = \{P_1, P_2, \ldots, P_{t+2}, \ldots\}$. Note that G is nonnilpotent and we may assume that P_1 is a nonnormal Sylow subgroup of G. Let

$$\mathcal{T} = \{P_1P_2, P_1P_3, P_1P_4, \ldots, P_1P_{t+2}\}.$$

Obviously, for $1 \leq i \leq t+2$, P_1P_i is a subgroup of G. If, for the set $\mathcal{T}$, there are two or more normal subgroups of G, then P_1 is a normal subgroup, which is a contradiction. Thus, at most one normal subgroup is contained in the set $\mathcal{T}$ and it follows that $n_c(G) \geq t+1$. This contradicts the hypothesis and the proof is complete. □

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