# INVARIABLE GENERATION OF PERMUTATION GROUPS

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Abstract. Let $G$ be a finite permutation group of degree $n$ and let $d = 2$ if $G = \mathrm{Sym}(3)$, $d = [n/2]$ otherwise. We prove that there exist $d$ elements $g_1, \dots, g_d$ in $G$ with the property that $G = \langle g_1^{x_1}, \dots, g_d^{x_d} \rangle$ for every choice of $(x_1, \dots, x_d) \in G^d$.

## 1. Introduction

Following [4] we say that a subset $S$ of a group $G$ invariably generates $G$ if $G = \langle s^{g(s)} \mid s \in S \rangle$ for each choice of $g(s) \in G$, $s \in S$. Any finite group $G$ contains an invariable generating set (consider the set of representatives of each of the conjugacy classes).

Several papers deal with the question of bounding the minimal cardinality $d_I(G)$ of an invariable generating set for a finite group $G$ together with an analysis of the probability that $d$ independently and uniformly randomly chosen elements of $G$ invariably generate $G$ with good probability (see for example [2], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [10], [14]).

Clearly $d_I(G)$ is not less than the minimal cardinality $d(G)$ of a generating set of the finite group $G$. On the other hand, it follows from [7, Proposition 2.5] and [3, Theorem 1] that the difference $d_I(G) - d(G)$ can be arbitrarily large. Many results in the literature provide bounds for $d(G)$ in relation with different structural properties of $G$, so it is an open and interesting problem to which extent results on $d(G)$, the smallest cardinality of a generating set, can be generalized to comparable results on the smallest cardinality $d_I(G)$ of an invariable generating set. In this paper we consider the question of bounding the cardinality of an invariable generating set of a permutation group in terms of its degree.

The best bound for the cardinality of a generating set of a permutation group is due to A. McIver and P. Neumann: the so call "McIver-Neumann Half-$n$ Bound" says that if $G$ is a subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(n)$ and $G \neq \mathrm{Sym}(3)$, then $d(G) \leq [n/2]$. This result is stated without a proof in [11, Lemma 5.2] and a sketch of the proof is given in [1, Section 4]. It cannot be improved without imposing more restrictive conditions (for example transitivity) as is shown by

$$G = \langle (1, 2), (3, 4), \dots, (2m-1, 2m) \rangle \leq \mathrm{Sym}(2m).$$

Despite the fact that the difference $d_I(G) - d(G)$ can be quite large, the McIver-Neumann Half-$n$ Bound remains true with respect to the invariable generation of finite permutation groups. Indeed we have:

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**Theorem 1.** *Let $G$ be a subgroup of* $\mathrm{Sym}(n)$*: either* $G = \mathrm{Sym}(3)$ *and* $d_I(G) = 2$ *or* $d_I(G) \leq [n/2]$.

## 2. Preliminaries

If $N$ is a normal subgroup of $G$, then clearly $d_I(G/N) \leq d_I(G)$ and we denote by $d_I(G, N)$ the difference $d_I(G) - d_I(G/N)$. When $N$ is a normal abelian subgroup of $G$, $d_G(N)$ denotes the minimal number of generators of $N$ as a $G$-module.

We collect in the following lemma some basic results on invariable generation.

**Lemma 2.** *Let $N$ be a normal subgroup of a group $G$.*

*(1)* $d_I(G, N) \leq d_I(N)$.
*(2) If $N$ is abelian, then* $d_I(G, N) \leq d_G(N)$.
*(3) If $N$ is a minimal normal subgroup, then* $d_I(G, N) \leq 1$ *if $N$ is abelian and* $d_I(G, N) \leq 2$ *if $N$ is non-abelian.*

*Proof.* Parts (1) and (2) follow from the proofs of [8, Lemma 2.8] and [8, Lemma 2.10], respectively. Part (3) is Theorem 3.1 in [7]. □

By a wreath product $H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$ we mean the usual semidirect product $W$ of the symmetric group $\mathrm{Sym}(s)$ and the $s$-fold direct power $H^s$ of the group $H$. The projection of $W$ onto $\mathrm{Sym}(s)$ corresponding to the semidirect decomposition will be denoted by $\pi$, the kernel $H^s$ of $\pi$ will be called base subgroup of $W$. If we consider $\pi$ as a permutation representation of $W$, a point stabiliser $W_i$ has a direct decomposition

$$W_i = H \times (H \wr \mathrm{Stab}_{\mathrm{Sym}(s)}(i)) \cong H \times (H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s-1));$$

we denote by $\pi_i$ the projection of $W_i$ onto the first direct factor $H$. Following [9] we will use the following definition.

**Definition 3.** *A subgroup $G$ of $W = H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$ is called* large *if*

- *$\pi(G)$ is transitive on $\{1, \ldots, s\}$,*
- *$\pi_1(G \cap W_1) = H$.*

Note that, since $\pi(G)$ is transitive, the condition $\pi_1(G \cap W_1) = H$ is equivalent to have that $\pi_i(G \cap W_i) = H$ for all $i \in \{1, \ldots, n\}$.

**Lemma 4.** *Let $A$ be a non-abelian minimal normal subgroup of $H$ and let $G$ be a large subgroup of $H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$. If $A^s \cap G \neq 1$, then $A^s \cap G$ is a minimal normal subgroup of $G$.*

*Proof.* Suppose $M = A^s \cap G \neq 1$ and let $L$ be a minimal normal subgroup of $G$ contained in $M$. Since $G$ is large and $A$ is a minimal normal subgroup of $H$, both $M$ and $L$ are subdirect products of $A^s$. In particular $M$ is a centerless completely reducible group and $L$ is a direct factor of $M$. On the other hand, $C_{A^s}(L) = 1$, since $L$ is a subdirect product of $A^s$, hence $C_M(L) = 1$. Therefore $M = L$. □

**Lemma 5.** *Let $G$ be a large subgroup of $H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$.*

*(1)* $d_I(G, G \cap H^s) \leq sa + 2b$ *where $a$ is the number of abelian factors in a composition series of $H$ and $b$ is the number of non-abelian factors in a chief series of $H$.*
*(2) If* $u = \max\{d_I(X) \mid X$ *subnormal subgroup of* $H\}$, *then* $d_I(G, G \cap H^s) \leq su$.

(3) *If $A$ is a minimal normal subgroup of $H$ of order $p^t$ for some prime $p$, then $d_I(G, G \cap A^s) \leq st - 1$.*

*Proof.* (1) We consider a chief series of $G$ passing through $G \cap H^s$ and we look at the factors $X/Y$ in this series with $X \leq G \cap H^s$. By Lemma 4 the number of the non-abelian factors is at most $b$. The number of the abelian factors is at most $sa$, since it is trivially bounded by the number of the abelian composition factors of $G \cap H^s$. Then we apply part 3 of Lemma 2.

(2) Let $K = \pi_1(G \cap H^s)$, and denote by $\tilde{\pi}_i$ the restriction of the projection $\pi_i$ to $G \cap H^s$, for $i = 1, \dots, s$. As $G$ is large, $K \trianglelefteq H$. Then $d_I(K) \leq u$ and, by part 1 of Lemma 2, we get

$$d_I(G \cap H^s) \leq d_I(K) + d_I(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1)) \leq u + d_I(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1)).$$

Now $\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1) \trianglelefteq G \cap H^s$, hence $\tilde{\pi}_2(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1))$ is a normal subgroup of $K = \tilde{\pi}_2(G \cap H^s)$, and therefore it is subnormal in $H$. Then $d_I(\tilde{\pi}_2(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1))) \leq u$ and thus

$$d_I(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1)) \leq u + d_I(\ker(\tilde{\pi}_1) \cap \ker(\tilde{\pi}_2)).$$

By a repeated use of these arguments and the fact that $\cap_{i=1}^s \ker(\tilde{\pi}_i) = 1$, we deduce that $d_I(G \cap H^s) \leq su$.

(3) Since $G$ is large and $A$ is minimal normal in $H$, if $G \cap A^s = A^s$, then $G \cap A^s$ is a cyclic $G$-module. Otherwise, $G \cap A^s < A^s$, hence $G \cap A^s$ has at most $st - 1$ abelian composition factors, and thus $d_G(G \cap A^s) \leq st - 1$. Therefore, by Lemma 2, $d_I(G, G \cap A^s) \leq d_G(G \cap A^s) \leq st - 1$.

□

Let $G$ be a subgroup of $H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$. If $U$ is an $\mathbb{F}_p H$-module, then $V = U^s$ can be viewed as an $\mathbb{F}_p G$-module by setting

$$(v_1, \dots, v_s)^{(h_1, \dots, h_s)\sigma} = (v_{1\sigma}^{h_{1\sigma}}, \dots, v_{s\sigma}^{h_{s\sigma}}),$$

where $(v_1, \dots, v_s) \in V$ and $(h_1, \dots, h_s)\sigma \in G$.

**Lemma 6.** *Let $G$ be a large subgroup of $H \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$ and let $U$ be an $\mathbb{F}_p H$-module. For any $\mathbb{F}_p G$-submodule $W$ of $V = U^s$ we have $d_G(W) \leq \frac{ds}{2}$, where $d$ is the dimension of $U$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$.*

*Proof.* Reverting to additive notation, we write $V = \sum_{1 \leq i \leq s} U_i$. Since $\pi(G)$ is transitive, there exists an element $g \in G$ such that $\pi(g)$ is fixed-point-free on $I = \{1, \dots, s\}$; $\pi(g)$ has $t$ orbits $I_1, \dots, I_t$ on $I$ with $t \leq [\frac{s}{2}]$. We can view $V$ as $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$-module, $x$ acting as $g$ does: $V$ is then the direct sum of the $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$-submodules $\tilde{U}_r = \sum_{i \in I_r} U_i$, $1 \leq r \leq t$ which have at most $d$ generators each, so that the $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$-module $V$ is $m$-generated for some $m \leq \frac{ds}{2}$; as $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$ is a principal ideal domain, the same is true for every submodule. Finally, if $W$ is an $\mathbb{F}_p G$-submodule of $V$, any set of $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$-generators of $W$ is also a set of $\mathbb{F}_p G$-generators.

□

## 3. Proof of Theorem 1

The case where $G$ is primitive follows from a bound on the length of a chief series.

**Proposition 7.** *Let $G$ be a primitive subgroup of degree $n$. Then $d_I(G) \leq 4 \log(n)$.*

*Proof.* By [12, Theorem 10.0.6], the chief length of a primitive subgroup of degree $n$ is at most $2\log(n)$. By Lemma 2 it follows that $d_I(G) \leq 4\log(n)$. □

**Corollary 8.** *Let $G$ be a primitive subgroup of degree $n \neq 3$. Then $d_I(G) \leq n/2$.*

*Proof.* For $n \geq 44$, by Proposition 7, $d_I(G) \leq 4\log(n) \leq n/2$. In the remaining cases, using the list of the primitive permutation groups of small degree, it is straightforward to check that $a+2b \leq n/2$ where $a$ in the number of abelian factors and $b$ is the number of non-abelian factors in a chief series of $G$ (and so we may conclude by Lemma 2), except when $G = \mathrm{Sym}(5)$ or $G = \mathrm{AGL}(1,5)$ and $n = 5$ or $G = \mathrm{Sym}(4)$ and $n = 4$. Then it is sufficient to check that Sym(5) is invariably generated by the set $\{(1,2),(1,2,3,4,5)\}$, Sym(4) is invariably generated by the set $\{(1,2,3),(1,2,3,4)\}$ and AGL(1,5) is invariably generated by any set consisting of an element of order 5 and an element of order 4. □

*Proof of Theorem 1.* Let $G$ be a finite permutation group of degree $n$. We have to show that

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{n+\epsilon}{2}$$

where $\epsilon = 1$ if $n = 3$, $\epsilon = 0$ otherwise.

The proof is by induction on $n$, the cases $n \leq 3$ being trivial.

The case where $G$ is primitive, is actually Corollary 8.

**Case $G$ intransitive.** Suppose that $G \leq \mathrm{Sym}(n)$ is intransitive. Let $s$ be the size of an orbit and identify $G$ with a subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(s) \times \mathrm{Sym}(n-s)$. Let $\rho = \rho_{/G}$ the restriction to $G$ of the projection of $\mathrm{Sym}(s) \times \mathrm{Sym}(n-s)$ on the second factor of the direct product; then $\rho(G) \leq \mathrm{Sym}(n-s)$ and $\ker(\rho) \leq \mathrm{Sym}(s)$. By Lemma 2,

$$d_I(G) \leq d_I(\rho(G)) + d_I(\ker(\rho)).$$

If both $s$ and $n-s$ are not 3, then the inductive hypothesis gives $d_I(G) \leq (n-s)/2 + s/2 = n/2$ and we are done.

Now assume $s = 3$. If $\ker(\rho)$ is cyclic, then $d_I(\ker(\rho)) = 1$ and we have $d_I(G) \leq (n-3+\epsilon)/2+1 \leq n/2$ as desired. Otherwise $\ker(\rho) = \mathrm{Sym}(3)$. This implies that $G$ is actually isomorphic to a direct product of Sym(3) and a subgroup $H \leq \mathrm{Sym}(n-3)$; clearly we can assume $H \neq 1$. Let $h_1, \ldots, h_t$ be invariable generators for $H$. Then the set

$$\{((1,2),1),\ ((1,2,3),h_1),(1,h_2),\ldots,(1,h_t)\}$$

invariably generates $G$. Indeed, let $g_1, g_2, \ldots, g_t \in G$, with $g_1 = (x_1, y_1)$ and $g_2 = (x_2, y_2)$, and define

$$\begin{aligned} X &= \{((1,2),1)^{g_1},\ ((1,2,3),h_1)^{g_2},(1,h_2)^{g_3},\ldots,(1,h_t)^{g_t}\} \\ &= \{((1,2)^{x_1},1),\ ((1,2,3)^{x_2},h_1^{y_2}),(1,h_2)^{g_3},\ldots,(1,h_t)^{g_t}\}. \end{aligned}$$

Since $X$ contains $((1,2)^{x_1},1)^{((1,2,3)^{x_2},h_1^{y_2})} = (((1,2)^{x_1})^{(1,2,3)^{x_2}},1)$ and this element is not equal to $((1,2)^{x_1},1)$, $X$ contains the whole subgroup $\mathrm{Sym}(3)\times\{1\}$. Then, as $h_1, \ldots, h_t$ invariably generate $H \cong X/(\mathrm{Sym}(3)\times\{1\})$, we conclude that $X = G$. Therefore, $d_I(G) \leq d_I(H) + 1 \leq (n-3+\epsilon)/2 + 1 \leq n/2$ and the case when $G$ is intransitive is complete.

**Case $G$ imprimitive.** Suppose $G \leq \mathrm{Sym}(n)$ is transitive and imprimitive. Let $\Delta$ be a minimal block containing 1; then $n = rs$ where $r = |\Delta|$ and $s$ is the number of blocks in the system of imprimitivity containing $\Delta$. We denote by

$$\pi : G \mapsto \mathrm{Sym}(s)$$

the representation of $G$ on the blocks of the system, by $T$ the image of $\pi$, by $N$ the setwise stabiliser of $\Delta$ in $G$ and by $H$ the image of the representation of $N$ on $\Delta$. Thus $G$ is isomorphic to a large subgroup of $H \wr T$, where $H \leq \mathrm{Sym}(r)$ is primitive and $T \leq \mathrm{Sym}(s)$ is transitive.

Let $a$ be the number of abelian factors in a composition series of $H$ and let $b$ be the number of non-abelian factors in a chief series of $H$. By point 1 of Lemma 5,

$$d_I(G, G \cap H^s) \leq sa + 2b.$$

The inductive hypothesis gives $d_I(G/G \cap H^s) \leq (s+\epsilon)/2$ where $\epsilon = 1$ if $s = 3$, $\epsilon = 0$ otherwise, hence

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{s+\epsilon}{2} + sa + 2b. \tag{3.1}$$

We want to prove that $d_I(G) \leq rs/2 = n/2$.

As $H$ is a primitive subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(r)$, by [13, Theorem 2.10] a composition series of $H$ has at most $\log(r)$ non-abelian factors and at most $3.25\log(r)$ abelian factors.

Then, by (3.1),

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{s+\epsilon}{2} + 2\log(r) + 3.25\log(r)s.$$

Note that $\epsilon/2 + 2\log(r) \leq s\log(r)$, hence

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{s}{2} + s\log(r) + 3.25\log(r)s = s(1/2 + 4.25\log(r)).$$

When $r > 48$ we have $1/2 + 4.25\log(r) \leq r/2$ and therefore

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{rs}{2} = \frac{n}{2},$$

as desired.

We are left with the case where $r \leq 48$. We note that

$$\text{if } \ l(H) \leq \frac{r}{2} - 1, \ \text{ then } \ d_I(G) \leq \frac{n}{2}, \tag{3.2}$$

where $l(H)$ is the composition length of $H$. Indeed, as $(s+\epsilon)/2 \leq s$,

$$d_I(G) \leq \frac{s+\epsilon}{2} + sa + 2b \leq s + sl(H) \leq s + s\left(\frac{r}{2} - 1\right) = \frac{sr}{2} = \frac{n}{2}.$$

It is straightforward to check that for all primitive subgroups of degree $r \leq 48$ and $r \neq 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16$, we have $l(H) \leq r/2 - 1$ and hence, by (3.2), $d_I(G) \leq n/2$.

We are left to prove that $d_I(G) \leq n/2$ in the cases where $r = 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16$, and $H$ is a primitive subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(r)$ with composition length $l(H) > r/2 - 1$.

**Cases $r = 5, 7, 9$.**

If $s \neq 3$, then by induction $d_I(G/(G \cap H^s)) \leq s/2$. As $r$ is odd and $r \neq 3$, every subnormal subgroup of $H$ is invariably generated by at most $[r/2] = (r-1)/2$

elements. By point (2) of Lemma 5, this implies that $d_I(G, G \cap H^s) \leq s(r-1)/2$ and we conclude that

$$d_I(G) \leq d_I(G/(G \cap H^s)) + d_I(G, G \cap H^s) \leq \frac{s}{2} + \frac{s(r-1)}{2} = \frac{sr}{2} = \frac{n}{2}.$$

Let now $s = 3$. If $r = 5$ and $l(H) > 5/2 - 1$, then $H \in \{D_{10}, C_{20}, \mathrm{Sym}(5)\}$. If $H = \mathrm{Sym}(5)$, then by formula (3.1), with $\epsilon = 1$, $a = 1$ and $b = 1$, it follows $d_I(G) \leq 2 + 3a + 2b \leq 7 \leq 15/2$. Otherwise $H$ has a minimal normal subgroup $A \cong C_5$ and $G/(G \cap A^3)$ is isomorphic to a subgroup of $C_4 \wr \mathrm{Sym}(3) \leq \mathrm{Sym}(12)$, hence, by induction, $d_I(G/(G \cap A^3)) \leq 12/2 = 6$. Moreover, $A^3$ is a completely reducible $G$-module, since the action is coprime, and hence $G \cap A^3$ is a cyclic $G$-module. Therefore, by point 2 in Lemma 2, $d_I(G) \leq 6 + 1 = 7 \leq 15/2$.

If $r = 7$ and $l(H) > 2$, then $H$ has a minimal normal subgroup $A \cong C_7$ with $G/(G \cap A^3)$ isomorphic to a subgroup of $C_6 \wr \mathrm{Sym}(3) \leq \mathrm{Sym}(18)$. By induction, $d_I(G/(G \cap A^3)) \leq 18/2 = 9$. As $A^3$ is a completely reducible $G$-module, $G \cap A^3$ is a cyclic $G$-module and thus $d_I(G) \leq 9 + 1 = 10 \leq 21/2$.

If $r = 9$ and $l(H) > 3$, then $H = C_3^2 \rtimes P$ where $P$ is a 2-group and every subgroup of $P$ is 2-generated. Then $A = C_3^2$ is a minimal normal subgroup of $H$ and by point (3) of Lemma 5 we have $d_I(G, G \cap A^3) \leq 3 \cdot 2 - 1 = 5$. By point 2 in Lemma 5, $G/(G \cap A^3) \leq P \wr \mathrm{Sym}(3)$ is invariably generated by $3 \cdot 2 + 2 = 8$ elements, and therefore it follows that $d_I(G) \leq 8 + 5 = 13 \leq 27/2$.

**Cases** $r = 2$.

The intersection $N = \mathrm{Sym}(2)^s \cap G$ is a $G$-submodule of $V = \mathrm{Sym}(2)^s$. By Lemma 6, $d_G(N) \leq [s/2]$. But then $d_I(G) \leq [s/2] + [(s+1)/2] = s$. □

**Case** $r = 3$.

Let $N = \langle (1,2,3) \rangle^s \cap G$. Notice that $G/N \leq C_2 \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$ so, by induction, $d_I(G/N) \leq s$. Moreover, by Lemma 6, $d_I(G, N) \leq d_G(N) \leq [s/2]$. Thus $d_I(G) \leq 3s/2$.

**Case** $r = 4$.

Consider the intersection $N = H^s \cap G$. By induction, $d_I(G/N) \leq (s + \epsilon)/2$. Let $A$ be the Klein subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(4)$.

If $N \leq A^s$, then by Lemma 6, $d_I(G, N) \leq d_G(N) \leq s$, and we are done.

From now on we will assume that $N > G \cap A^s$. For $1 \leq i \leq s$, consider the projection $\pi_i : H^s \to H$ and, for $i \geq 2$, call

$$N_i = N \cap \ker \pi_1 \cap \cdots \cap \ker \pi_{i-1},$$

and set $N_1 = N$. Note that each $N_i$ is a normal subgroup of $N$, hence, since $G$ is large, $\pi_i(N_i)$ is trivial, or a Klein subgroup, or $\mathrm{Alt}(4)$ or $\mathrm{Sym}(4)$; in particular, as $N > G \cap A^s$, $\pi_1(N_1)$ contains $\mathrm{Alt}(4)$.

Now set $x_{1,1} = (1,2,3)$, $x_{1,2} = (1,2,3,4)$ if $\pi_1(N) = \mathrm{Sym}(4)$, and $x_{1,2} = (1,2)(3,4)$ if $\pi_1(N) = \mathrm{Alt}(4)$. Let $\Omega = \{z_1, \ldots, z_t\}$ be a set of invariant generators of $G$ modulo $N$ with $t \leq (s + \epsilon)/2$. To this set we add two elements $y_{1,1}, y_{1,2} \in N$ with $\pi_1(y_{1,1}) = x_{1,1}$ and $\pi_1(y_{1,2}) = x_{1,2}$ and then, for each $i > 1$ with $\pi_i(N_i)$ non trivial, we add one element $y_i \in N_i$ whose image $x_i = \pi_i(y_i)$ is

- $(1,2)(3,4)$, if $\pi_i(N_i)$ is a Klein group;
- $(1,2,3)$, if $\pi_i(N_i) = \mathrm{Alt}(4)$;
- $(1,2)$, if $\pi_i(N_i) = \mathrm{Sym}(4)$.

In this way we get a set $\tilde{\Omega}$ containing at most $\frac{s+\epsilon}{2} + 2 + s - 1 \le 2s$ elements. We claim that they are invariable generators for $G$. Indeed let $\{g_\omega\}_{\omega\in\tilde{\Omega}}$ be any family of elements of $G$ and consider the subgroup $X = \langle \omega^{g_\omega} \mid \omega \in \tilde{\Omega}\rangle$ of $G$. Since $\tilde{\Omega}$ contains $\Omega$, we have that $XN = G$. To conclude that $X = G$, if suffices to prove that $\pi_i(X \cap N_i) = \pi_i(N_i)$ for each $i \in \{1, \dots, s\}$ with $\pi_i(N_i) \ne 1$. First notice that $X$ contains $\overline{y_{1,1}} = {y_{1,1}}^{g_1}$ and $\overline{y_{1,2}} = {y_{1,2}}^{g_2}$ for suitable $g_1, g_2 \in G$ and since $G = XN$ we may assume $g_1, g_2 \in N$. But then there exist $h_1, h_2 \in H$ such that $\pi_1(\overline{y_{1,1}}) = {x_{1,1}}^{h_1}$ and $\pi_1(\overline{y_{1,2}}) = {x_{1,2}}^{h_2}$. On the other hand $\langle {x_{1,1}}^{h_1}, {x_{1,2}}^{h_2}\rangle = \langle x_{1,1}, x_{1,2}\rangle = \pi_1(N)$, hence $\pi_1(X\cap N) = \pi_1(N)$. As $G = XN$, we have that $\pi(X)$ acts transitively on $H^s$ and consequently $\pi_i(X \cap N) = \pi_1(X \cap N) = \pi_1(N_1) \ge \mathrm{Alt}(4)$ for every $i$. Now let $i \ge 2$ with $\pi_i(N_i) \ne 1$. There exists $n \in N$ such that $y_i^n \in X \cap N_i$ and consequently $\pi_i(y_i^n) = x_i^m \in \pi_i(N_i \cap X)$ for some $m \in \pi_1(N)$. Since $X \cap N$ normalizes $X \cap N_i$ and $\pi_i(X \cap N) = \pi_1(N)$ we have that

$$\pi_i(X \cap N_i) \ge \langle x_i^l \mid l \in \pi_1(N)\rangle \ge \langle x_i^l \mid l \in \mathrm{Alt}(4)\rangle = \pi_i(N_i).$$

Therefore, $\pi_i(X \cap N_i) = \pi_i(N_i)$ for every $i \in \{1, \dots, s\}$.

**Case** $r = 8$.

We have three possibilities for $H$, where $H$ is a primitive group of degree 8 whose composition length is at least 4: $\mathrm{AGL}(1,8), \mathrm{A\Gamma L}(1,8), \mathrm{ASL}(3,2)$. In the first two cases every subnormal subgroup of $X$ can be invariably generated by 3 elements, so by Lemma 5, $d_I(G) \le 3s + (s+1)/2 \le 4s$. In the third case $H$ has a minimal normal subgroup $N$ of order $2^3$ and $H/N \cong \mathrm{SL}(3,2)$ is a non abelian simple group, so, by Lemma 5, $d_I(G) \le (3s-1) + 2 + (s+\epsilon)/2 \le 4s$.

**Case** $r = 16$.

There are four possibilities for $H$ being primitive of degree 16 and with $l(H) \ge 8$. In any case $H = V \rtimes X$ where $V \cong C_2^4$ and $X$ is a soluble irreducible subgroup of $\mathrm{GL}(4,2)$. More precisely

$$X \in \{\mathrm{Sym}(3)^2, \mathrm{Sym}(3)^2 \rtimes C_2, (C_3 \times C_3) \rtimes C_4, C_{15} \rtimes C_4.\}.$$

Let $N = V^s \cap G$. Since $N \le C_2^{4s}$ we have $d_I(G,N) \le d_I(N) \le 4s$, so it suffices to prove that $d_I(G/N) \le 4s$. We have that $G/N$ is a large subgroup of $X \wr \mathrm{Sym}(s)$. If $X \in \{\mathrm{Sym}(3)^2, \mathrm{Sym}(3)^2 \rtimes C_2\}$, then $X$ has a faithful permutational representation of degree 6, so $G/N$ can be identified with a subgroup of $\mathrm{Sym}(6s)$ and $d_I(G/N) \le 3s$ by induction. Otherwise it can be easily seen that every subnormal subgroup of $X$ can be invariably generated by 2 elements, so by Lemma, 5, $d_I(G/N, (H^s \cap G)/N) \le 2s$, while, by induction, $d(G/(H^s \cap G)) \le (s+1)/2$: we conclude that $d_I(G/N) \le 2s + (s+1)/2 \le 4s$.

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