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7		Given Name JAGMOHAN	
8		Suffix	
9		Organization	Central University of Jharkhand, CTI Campus
10		Division	
11		Address	Ratu-Lohardaga Road, Brambe, Ranchi 835 205, India
12		e-mail	jagmohan.t@gmail.com
13		Author	Family Name THANGADURAI
14	Particle		
15	Given Name R		
16	Suffix		
17	Organization		Harish-Chandra Research Institute
18	Division		
19	Address		Chhatnag Road, Jhunsi, Allahabad 211 019, India
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Distribution of residues and primitive roots

JAGMOHAN TANTI¹ and R THANGADURAI²

¹Central University of Jharkhand, CTI Campus, Ratu-Lohardaga Road, Brambe,
Ranchi 835 205, India

²Harish-Chandra Research Institute, Chhatnag Road, Jhansi, Allahabad 211 019, India
E-mail: jagmohan.t@gmail.com; thanga@hri.res.in

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Abstract. Given an integer $N \geq 3$, we shall prove that for all primes $p \geq (N - 2)^2 4^N$, there exists x in $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$ such that $x, x + 1, \dots, x + N - 1$ are all squares (respectively, non-squares) modulo p . Similarly, for an integer $N \geq 2$, we prove that for all primes $p \geq \exp(2^{5.54N})$, there exists an element $x \in (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$ such that $x, x + 1, \dots, x + N - 1$ are all generators of $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$.

Keywords. Quadratic residues; primitive roots; finite fields.

1. Introduction

Let p be a prime number. The study of distribution of quadratic residues and quadratic non residues modulo p has been considered with great interest in the literature. One cannot expect to get consecutive squares in integers as the difference of two squares is at least twice of the least one. But, in modulo p , one can expect to get a string of consecutive squares (which are called quadratic residues). The same is true while dealing with quadratic nonresidues and primitive roots modulo p . Let $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ denote the group of residues modulo p and $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$ the multiplicative group of $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$. In this paper, we address the following question.

Question. For a given natural number $N \geq 2$, can we find a positive constant $p_0(N)$ depending only on N such that for every prime $p \geq p_0(N)$, there exists an element $x \in (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$ with $x, x + 1, x + 2, \dots, x + N - 1$ are all quadratic residues (respectively, quadratic non-residues) modulo p ? If $p_0(N)$ exists, then can we find the explicit value?

In 1928, Brauer [1] answered the above question and proved the existence of $p_0(N)$ for quadratic residues and non-residues cases using some refinement of van der Warden's theorem in combinatorial number theory. Therefore, in his proof, the constant $p_0(N)$ depends on the van der Warden number, which is very difficult to calculate for all N . For instance, recently, Luca and Thangadurai [8] proved that for all primes $p \geq \exp(2^{2^{N^2+10}})$, there exists x such that $x, x + 1, \dots, x + N - 1$ are all quadratic residues modulo p , using Gowers [3] bound for van der Warden theorem.

For a given prime p , the set of all non-residues modulo p can be further divided into two classes, namely the set of all primitive roots modulo p (or generators of $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$) and non-residues which are not primitive roots modulo p .

In 1956, Carlitz [2] answered the above question for the set of all primitive roots modulo p and proved the existence of $p_0(N)$ in this case. This was independently proved by Szalay [12,13]. Recently, Gun *et al* [4,5] and Luca *et al* [7] answered the above question for the complementary case and gave an explicit value of $p_0(N)$ in that case.

In this article, we shall prove the following theorems.

Theorem 1.1. *Let p be a prime. For all $p \geq 7$ (respectively for $p \geq 5$), there is a consecutive pair of quadratic residues (respectively for p nonresidues) modulo p .*

Theorem 1.2. *Let $N \geq 3$ be any positive integer. Then for all primes $p > (N - 2)^2 4^N$, we can find N consecutive quadratic residues (respectively quadratic nonresidues) modulo p .*

Theorem 1.3. *Let $N \geq 2$ be any positive integer. Then for all primes $p \geq e^{2^{5.54N}}$, we can find N consecutive primitive roots modulo p .*

Let p be an odd prime. It has been conjectured [10] that there exists an integer $g \leq p-1$ which is a primitive root modulo p and which is relatively prime to $p-1$. In 1976, Hausman [6] proved this conjecture for all sufficiently large primes p without giving an explicit bound. Here, we compute an explicit bound.

Theorem 1.4. *Let p be a prime number such that $p > e^{110.8} \sim 1.318 \times 10^{48}$. Then there exists an integer $1 < g \leq p-1$ such that g is a primitive root modulo p and $(g, p-1) = 1$. In particular, odd primitive root modulo p exists.*

2. Preliminaries

Lemma 2.1.

(i) *For any integer $n > 90$, we have*

$$\phi(n) > \frac{n}{\log n},$$

where $\phi(n)$ is the Euler Φ -function.

(ii) *Let $\omega(n)$ denote the number of distinct prime divisors of n . Then we have*

$$\omega(p-1) \leq (1.385) \frac{\log p}{\log \log p}$$

for all primes $p \geq 5$.

The first result was proved by Moser [9] in 1951 and the second result can be seen in page 167 of [11].

Lemma 2.2. *Let N be any positive integer. Then*

$$\binom{N}{2} + 2\binom{N}{3} + \cdots + (r-1)\binom{N}{r} + \cdots + (N-1) = (N-2)2^{N-1} + 1.$$

Proof. Differentiating

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$$(1+x)^N = 1 + \binom{N}{1}x + \binom{N}{2}x^2 + \cdots + \binom{N}{r}x^r + \cdots + x^N, \quad (2.1) \quad 66$$

we get

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$$N(1+x)^{N-1} = \binom{N}{1} + 2\binom{N}{2}x + \cdots + r\binom{N}{r}x^{r-1} + \cdots + Nx^{N-1}. \quad (2.2) \quad 68$$

Substituting $x = 1$, we get

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$$2^N = 1 + \binom{N}{1} + \binom{N}{2} + \cdots + \binom{N}{r} + \cdots + \binom{N}{N}, \quad 70$$

$$N2^{N-1} = \binom{N}{1} + 2\binom{N}{2} + \cdots + r\binom{N}{r} + \cdots + N\binom{N}{N}. \quad 71$$

Subtracting (2.1) from the (2.2), we get

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$$\binom{N}{2} + 2\binom{N}{3} + \cdots + (r-1)\binom{N}{r} + \cdots + (N-1) \quad 73$$

$$= (N-2)2^{N-1} + 1. \quad 74$$

□ 75

An element $\gamma \in (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$ is said to be a primitive root (mod p) if γ is a generator of $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$. Once we know a primitive root (mod p), all primitive roots (mod p) are given by the set

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$$\{\gamma^i : \gcd(i, p-1) = 1\}. \quad 79$$

Consider a non-principal character $\chi : (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^* \rightarrow \mu_{p-1}$, where μ_n denotes the subgroup of \mathbb{C}^* of n -th roots of unity. Then one sees that $\chi(\gamma)$ is a primitive $(p-1)$ -th root of unity if and only if γ is a primitive root (mod p). Let η be a primitive $(p-1)$ -th root of unity and assume that $\chi(\gamma) = \eta$. Since χ is a homomorphism, we have $\chi(\gamma^i) = \chi^i(\gamma) = \eta^i$. Hence by the above observation, it is clear that $\chi(\alpha) = \eta^i$ with $\gcd(i, p-1) = 1$ if and only if α is a primitive root (mod p).

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Let l be any non-negative integer. We define

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$$\alpha_l(p-1) = \sum_{i=1, (i, p-1)=1}^{p-1} (\eta^i)^l. \quad 87$$

Set $\chi_i = \chi^i$ for $1 \leq i \leq p-1$.

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Let

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$$f(x) = \frac{1}{2} \left(1 + \left(\frac{x}{p} \right) \right) \quad \text{for all } x \in (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^* \quad 90$$

and 91

$$g(x) = \frac{1}{2} \left(1 - \left(\frac{x}{p} \right) \right) \quad \text{for all } x \in (\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*, \quad 92$$

where $\left(\frac{\cdot}{p} \right)$ is the Legendre symbol. 93

Clearly 94

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } x \text{ is a quadratic residue } \pmod{p} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad 95$$

and 96

$$g(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } x \text{ is a quadratic nonresidue } \pmod{p} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad 97$$

Lemma 2.3. We have 98

$$\sum_{l=0}^{p-2} \alpha_l (p-1) \chi_l(x) = \begin{cases} p-1, & \text{if } x \text{ is a primitive root } \pmod{p} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad 99$$

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Proof. See Lemma 2 in [13]. □ 101

The following theorem was proved by Weil in [14]. 102

Theorem 2.4. For any integer l , $2 \leq l < p$ and for any non-principal characters χ_1, \dots, χ_l and distinct $a_1, \dots, a_l \in \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$, we have 103

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$$\left| \sum_{x=1}^p \chi_1(x+a_1) \chi_2(x+a_2) \cdots \chi_l(x+a_l) \right| \leq (l-1) \sqrt{p}. \quad 105$$

For a positive integer m , we denote $\omega(m)$ by the number of distinct prime factors of m . 106

Lemma 2.5. We have 107

$$\sum_{l=0}^{p-2} |\alpha_l (p-1)| = 2^{\omega(p-1)} \phi(p-1). \quad 108$$

Proof. See [13]. □ 109

Theorem 2.6. For any prime p , let N_p denote the number of integers $1 < g < p-1$ which are primitive roots modulo p and coprime to $p-1$. Then 110

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$$N_p = \frac{\phi^2(p-1)}{p-1} + \frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} E_p, \quad 112$$

where 113

$$|E_p| \leq 4^{\omega(p-1)} \sqrt{p} (\log p). \quad 114$$

Proof. The proof can be found in [6]. □ 115

3. Residues modulo p

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Q1 Let $Q(p, N)$ (respectively $N(p, N)$) be the number of N consecutive quadratic residues (respectively nonresidues) modulo p in $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$. Then, using properties of $f(x)$ and $g(x)$, we see that

$$Q(p, N) = \sum_{x=1}^{p-N} f(x)f(x+1)\cdots f(x+N-1) \quad 120$$

and

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$$N(p, N) = \sum_{x=1}^{p-N} g(x)g(x+1)\cdots g(x+N-1). \quad 122$$

We have the following technical lemma.

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Lemma 3.1. For any prime p and any positive integer $N \geq 3$, we have

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$$\left| Q(p, N) - \frac{p}{2^N} \right| \leq \frac{((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}}{2^N} \quad 125$$

and

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$$\left| N(p, N) - \frac{p}{2^N} \right| \leq \frac{((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}}{2^N}. \quad 127$$

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Proof. Consider

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$$Q(p, N) = \sum_{x=1}^{p-N} \left\{ \prod_{l=0}^{N-1} f(x+l) \right\} = \frac{1}{2^N} \sum_{x=1}^{p-N} \left\{ \prod_{l=0}^{N-1} \left(1 + \left(\frac{x+l}{p} \right) \right) \right\} \quad 130$$

$$\leq \frac{1}{2^N} \sum_{x=1}^p \left(1 + \left(\frac{x}{p} \right) \right) \left(1 + \left(\frac{x+1}{p} \right) \right) \cdots \left(1 + \left(\frac{x+N-1}{p} \right) \right). \quad 131$$

Set $x_l = \left(\frac{x+l}{p} \right)$ for $l = 0, \dots, N-1$. Since

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$$\prod_{l=0}^{N-1} (1 + x_l) = 1 + \sum_{l=0}^{N-1} x_l + \sum_{0 \leq l_1 < l_2 \leq N-1} x_{l_1} x_{l_2} + \cdots + x_0 x_1 \cdots x_{N-1}, \quad 133$$

we have

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$$Q(p, N) \leq \frac{p}{2^N} + \frac{1}{2^N} \left\{ \sum_{l=0}^{N-1} \sum_{x=1}^p \left(\frac{x+l}{p} \right) + \sum_{0 \leq l_1 < l_2 \leq N-1} \sum_{x=1}^p \left(\frac{x+l_1}{p} \right) \left(\frac{x+l_2}{p} \right) \right. \quad 135$$

$$\left. + \cdots + \sum_{x=1}^p \left(\frac{x}{p} \right) \left(\frac{x+1}{p} \right) \cdots \left(\frac{x+N-1}{p} \right) \right\}. \quad 136$$

By Theorem 2.4, we get

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$$\begin{aligned} \left| Q(p, N) - \frac{p}{2^N} \right| &\leq \frac{1}{2^N} \left\{ \sum_{0 \leq l_1 < l_2 \leq N-1} \sqrt{p} + \sum_{0 \leq l_1 < l_2 < l_3 \leq N-1} 2\sqrt{p} + \cdots + (N-1)\sqrt{p} \right\} & 138 \\ &= \frac{\sqrt{p}}{2^N} \left\{ \binom{N}{2} + 2\binom{N}{3} + \cdots + (N-1)\binom{N}{N} \right\}. & 139 \end{aligned}$$

Now applying Lemma 2.2, we get

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$$\left| Q(p, N) - \frac{p}{2^N} \right| \leq \frac{((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}}{2^N}, \quad 141$$

as desired.

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Replacing the function f by g , we get the required estimate for $N(p, N)$. \square

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Proof of Theorem 1.1. When $p = 7$, we clearly see that $(1, 2)$ is a consecutive pair of quadratic residue modulo 7. Assume that $p \geq 11$. If 10 is a quadratic residue modulo p , then we have $(9, 10)$ as a consecutive pair of quadratic residues modulo p , otherwise as $10 = 2 \times 5$, either 2 or 5 is a quadratic residue modulo p . Thus again either $(1, 2)$ or $(4, 5)$ serves as a consecutive pair of quadratic residues modulo p . Therefore, $Q(p, 2) > 0$ for all primes $p \geq 7$.

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Now when $p = 5$, we see that $(2, 3)$ is a consecutive pair of quadratic nonresidues and when $p = 7$, $(5, 6)$ serves the purpose. Assume that $p \geq 11$. Let $2 \leq a_1 < a_2 < \cdots < a_{\frac{p-1}{2}} \leq p-1$ be all the quadratic nonresidues. If there are no consecutive pairs then $a_1 \geq 2$, $a_2 - a_1 \geq 2$, and in general $a_{i+1} - a_i \geq 2$ for $1 \leq i \leq \frac{p-3}{2}$, with at least one i such that $a_{i+1} - a_i > 2$ as there exists a pair of consecutive quadratic residues. But this is impossible since we cannot fit $\frac{p-1}{2}$ numbers in $\{2, \dots, p-1\}$ such that no two are consecutive and there are atleast two at a distance larger than 2 apart. This proves the theorem. \square

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Proof of Theorem 1.2. By Lemma 3.1, we have

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$$-Q(p, N) + \frac{p}{2^N} \leq \left| Q(p, N) - \frac{p}{2^N} \right| \leq \frac{((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}}{2^N}. \quad 159$$

Clearly $Q(p, N) > 0$ if

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$$\frac{p}{2^N} > \frac{((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}}{2^N} \iff p > ((N-2)2^{N-1} + 1)\sqrt{p}. \quad 161$$

Thus if $p > (N-2)^2 4^N$, then $Q(p, N) > 0$.

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Similar arguments show that if $p > (N-2)^2 4^N$, then $N(p, N) > 0$. \square

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4. Primitive roots modulo p

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Let $P(p, N)$ be the number of N consecutive primitive roots modulo p in $(\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z})^*$. We have the following lemma.

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Lemma 4.1. For any prime p and any positive integer N , we have 167

$$\left| P(p, N) - p \left(\frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} \right)^N \right| \leq 2N \sqrt{p} 2^{N\omega(p-1)}. \quad 168$$

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Proof. Replace $\beta_\ell(p-1)$ by $\alpha_\ell(p-1)$ and put $\phi(p-1)$ in place of k in Lemma 4 of [5] to get the required result. We shall omit the proof here. □ 171

Proof of Theorem 1.3. Clearly, by Lemma 4.1, we have 172

$$p \left(\frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} \right)^N - P(p, N) \leq \left| P(p, N) - p \left(\frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} \right)^N \right| \leq 2N \sqrt{p} 2^{N\omega(p-1)}. \quad 173$$

Clearly $P(p, N) > 0$ if 174

$$p \left(\frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} \right)^N - 2N \sqrt{p} 2^{N\omega(p-1)} > 0 \iff \sqrt{p} \left(\frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} \right)^N > 2N 2^{N\omega(p-1)}. \quad 175$$

This last inequality is satisfied if $\log p - 2N \log \frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} > 2(\log 2N) + 2N\omega(p-1) \log 2$. 176

If $p > e^{4N}$, then we see that $\frac{\log p}{2} > 2N \log \frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1}$. Hence, if we prove that $\log p > 177$
 $4(\log 2N) + 4N\omega(p-1) \log 2$, then it follows that $P(p, N) > 0$ for all $p > e^{4N}$. 178

By Lemma 2, we have, $\omega(p-1) \leq (1.385) \frac{\log p}{\log \log p}$ holds for all prime $p \geq 5$. Thus 179
 for such primes the right-hand side of the above is bounded by 180

$$4 \log(2N) + 4N \times 1.385 \frac{\log p \log 2}{\log \log p}. \quad 181$$

So, if we prove 182

$$\left(1 - \frac{4N \times 1.385 \log 2}{\log \log p} \right) \log p > 4 \log(2N), \quad 183$$

we are done. Note that 184

$$\frac{4N \times 1.385 \log 2}{\log \log p} < 1 \iff \log \log p > \log 2^{4N \times 1.385} \iff p > \exp(2^{5.54N}). \quad 185$$

Also, we need 186

$$\log p > 4 \log(2N) = \log(2^4 \cdot N^4) \iff p > 16N^4. \quad 187$$

So if 188

$$p > \max \left\{ e^{2^{5.54N}}, 16N^4, e^{4N} \right\} = e^{2^{5.54N}} \quad 189$$

we have $P(p, N) > 0$. □ 190

Proof of Theorem 1.4. By Lemma 2.1(ii), we see that 191

$$4^{\omega(p-1)} \leq 4^{(1.385) \frac{\log p}{\log \log p}} < (6.83)^{\frac{\log p}{\log \log p}} = p^{\frac{\log 6.83}{\log \log p}}. \quad (4.3) \quad 192$$

Let $\epsilon > 0$ be such that $0 < \epsilon < 1/2$. Then for all primes 193

$$p \geq \exp \exp \left(\frac{2 \log 6.83}{1 - 2\epsilon} \right), \quad 194$$

we have 195

$$4^{\omega(p-1)} < p^{\frac{1}{2} - \epsilon}, \quad (4.4) \quad 196$$

which is an easy computation from (4.3) and (4.4). Therefore, $N_p \geq 1$ follows at once, if 197
we prove that 198

$$\frac{\phi^2(p-1)}{p-1} > \frac{\phi(p-1)}{p-1} p^{1-\epsilon} \log p \text{ for all } p > \exp \exp \left(\frac{2 \log 6.83}{1 - 2\epsilon} \right); \quad 199$$

or if we prove $\phi(p-1) > p^{1-\epsilon} (\log p)$ for all primes p satisfying 200

$$p > \exp \exp \left(\frac{2 \log 6.83}{1 - 2\epsilon} \right). \quad 201$$

Note that 202

$$\frac{p-1}{\log(p-1)} > p^{1-\epsilon} \log p \quad 203$$

is equivalent to 204

$$p > (\log(p-1) + 1)^{2/\epsilon}. \quad 205$$

Choose $\epsilon = 1/11$ and we check whether 206

$$\frac{p-1}{\log(p-1)} > p^{1-\epsilon} \log p \quad 207$$

is true for this choice of ϵ . (Lemma 2.1(i) says that it is enough to check this inequality 208
only to prove the theorem.) In fact, we get 209

$$\exp \exp \left(\frac{2 \log 6.83}{1 - 2\epsilon} \right) = \exp \exp(\log(6.83)^{2.45}) = \exp((6.83)^{2.45}) < e^{110.8}. \quad 210$$

Choose primes $p > e^{110.8}$ and we see that 211

$$\phi(p-1) > \frac{p-1}{\log(p-1)} > p^{10/11} \log p. \quad 212$$

Therefore, $N_p \geq 1$ for all $p > e^{110.8}$. This completes the proof. □ 213

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