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ON SERRE'S UNIFORMITY CONJECTURE FOR SEMISTABLE ELLIPTIC CURVES OVER TOTALLY REAL FIELDS

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ABSTRACT. Let K be a totally real field, and let S be a finite set of non-archimedean places of K . It follows from the work of Merel, Momose and David that there is a constant $B_{K,S}$ so that if E is an elliptic curve defined over K , semistable outside S , then for all $p > B_{K,S}$, the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible. We combine this with modularity and level lowering to show the existence of an effectively computable constant $C_{K,S}$, and an effectively computable set of elliptic curves over K with CM E_1, \dots, E_n such that the following holds. If E is an elliptic curve over K semistable outside S , and $p > C_{K,S}$ is prime, then either $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective, or $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{E_i,p}$ for some $i = 1, \dots, n$.

1. INTRODUCTION

Let K be a number field. We write $G_K = \text{Gal}(\bar{K}/K)$ for the absolute Galois group of K . For an elliptic curve E/K , we write $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ for the associated representation of G_K on the p -torsion of E :

$$\bar{\rho}_{E,p} : G_K \rightarrow \text{Aut}(E[p]) \cong \text{GL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p).$$

We recall the following celebrated theorem of Serre.

Theorem 1 (Serre [26, Théorème 2]). *Let K be a number field and E an elliptic curve over K without CM. Then there is a constant $C_{E,K}$ such that for all $p > C_{E,K}$ the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective.*

Serre's Uniformity Conjecture (originally formulated by Serre as a question [26, § 4.3] and [27]) asserts the existence of a constant C_K , depending only on K , such that if E is an elliptic curve over K without complex multiplication, and $p > C_K$ is a prime, then the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective. Mazur [21] proved that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible for any prime $p > 163$ and elliptic curve E over \mathbb{Q} . Recently, Bilu, Parent and Rebolledo [3] proved, for $p \geq 11$, $p \neq 13$, and E/\mathbb{Q} without complex multiplication, that the image of the representation is also not contained in the normalizer of a split Cartan subgroup of $\text{GL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p)$.

No analogues of the above-mentioned theorems of Mazur and of Bilu, Parent and Rebolledo are known for elliptic curves over general number fields. The strongest

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known result is Merel's Uniform Boundedness Theorem [22], which asserts the following: for $d \geq 1$, there is a constant B_d such that if E is an elliptic curve over a number field K of degree d , and $p > B_d$ is a prime, then $E(K)[p] = 0$. A number of irreducibility results are however known for semistable elliptic curves over number fields, whose proofs make essential use of Merel's Theorem. For example, Kraus [20, Appendix B] shows that if K is a number field that does not contain the Hilbert class field of an imaginary quadratic field, then there is a constant B_K such that for a prime $p > B_K$ and a semistable elliptic curve E/K , the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible.

As noted by Serre [21, Theorem 4], Mazur's Theorem cited above implies the following: if E/\mathbb{Q} is a semistable elliptic curve without complex multiplication, then the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective for any prime $p \geq 11$. To motivate our present work, it is appropriate to give a sketch of the argument. By Mazur's Theorem, we may suppose that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible. As \mathbb{Q} has a real embedding, $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is therefore absolutely irreducible (e.g. [25, Lemma 5]). If $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is not surjective, then its image is contained in the normalizer N_{ns} of non-split Cartan subgroup C_{ns} or the normalizer N_{s} of a split Cartan subgroup C_{s} . In either case, the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ induces a quadratic character $\psi : G_{\mathbb{Q}} \rightarrow N_*/C_* \cong \{\pm 1\}$. This character is unramified away from the archimedean and additive places. As E is semistable, we see that ψ is unramified away from ∞ , and as the narrow class number of \mathbb{Q} is 1, we have $\psi = 1$. It follows that the image of $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is contained in C_{s} or C_{ns} . These groups are absolutely reducible, giving a contradiction. Over a number field K , the argument breaks down. First the narrow class number of K maybe greater than 1. Moreover, let L be the narrow class field of K . If the image of $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is contained in the normalizer of a Cartan subgroup, then $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}(G_L)$ is contained in a Cartan subgroup: C_{s} or C_{ns} . If the former, then we can conclude the argument using (say) Kraus' result, provided L does not contain the Hilbert class field of an imaginary quadratic field. In the latter case, we do the same if L has some real embedding. It is clear, however, that the argument does not hold in general.

In this paper, we restrict ourselves to totally real fields K . This allows us to apply modularity and level lowering theorems to semistable elliptic curves E/K whose mod p image is contained in the normalizer of a Cartan subgroup.

Theorem 2. *Let K be a totally real field, and let S be a finite set of non-archimedean places of K . There are an effectively computable constant $C_{K,S}$, depending only on K and S , and a finite computable set E_1, \dots, E_n of elliptic curves over K with complex multiplication such that the following holds: if E is an elliptic curve over K semistable outside S , and $p > C_{K,S}$ is prime, then either $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective, or $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{E_i,p}$ for some $i = 1, \dots, n$.*

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2. IRREDUCIBILITY OF MOD p REPRESENTATIONS OF ELLIPTIC CURVES

To deal with the Borel images we shall invoke the following theorem due to Freitas and Siksek [13], but is in fact a corollary of the ideas of David [8] and Momose [23] building on Merel's Uniform Boundedness Theorem [22].

Theorem 3 ([13, Theorem 1]). *Let K be a totally real Galois number field of degree d , with ring of integers \mathcal{O}_K and Galois group $G = \text{Gal}(K/\mathbb{Q})$. Let $\mathfrak{S} = \{0, 12\}^G$, which we think of as the set of sequences of values 0, 12 indexed by $\tau \in G$. For $\mathbf{s} = (s_\tau) \in \mathfrak{S}$ and $\alpha \in K$, define the **twisted norm associated to \mathbf{s}** by*

$$\mathcal{N}_{\mathbf{s}}(\alpha) = \prod_{\tau \in G} \tau(\alpha)^{s_\tau}.$$

Let $\epsilon_1, \dots, \epsilon_{d-1}$ be a basis for the unit group of K (modulo ± 1), and define

$$A_{\mathbf{s}} := \text{Norm}(\gcd((\mathcal{N}_{\mathbf{s}}(\epsilon_1) - 1)\mathcal{O}_K, \dots, (\mathcal{N}_{\mathbf{s}}(\epsilon_{d-1}) - 1)\mathcal{O}_K)).$$

Let B be the least common multiple of the $A_{\mathbf{s}}$ taken over all $\mathbf{s} \neq (0)_{\tau \in G}, (12)_{\tau \in G}$. Then $B \neq 0$. Moreover, let $p \nmid B$ be a rational prime, unramified in K , such that $p \geq 17$ or $p = 11$. If E/K is an elliptic curve semistable at all $v \mid p$ and $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is reducible then $p < (1 + 3^{6dh})$, where h is the class number of K .

3. MODULARITY

Let K be a totally real number field, and let E be an elliptic curve over K . Recall that E is **modular** if there exists a Hilbert cuspidal eigenform \mathfrak{f} over K of parallel weight 2, with rational Hecke eigenvalues, such that the Hasse–Weil L-function of E is equal to the Hecke L-function of \mathfrak{f} . It is conjectured that all elliptic curves over totally real fields are modular, and, recently, modularity has been proved for elliptic curves over real quadratic fields, see [15].

For what follows, we need a suitable modularity lifting theorem. The following such theorem is derived in [15] as a relatively straightforward consequence of a deep theorem of Breuil and Diamond [5, Théorème 3.2.2], which builds on the work of Kisin [19], Gee [17], and Barnet-Lamb, Gee and Geraghty [1], [2].

Theorem 4 ([15, Theorem 2]). *Let E be an elliptic curve over a totally real number field K , and let $p \neq 2$ be a rational prime. Suppose $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is modular in the following sense: $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f},\varpi}$ for some Hilbert cuspidal eigenform over K of parallel weight 2, where $\varpi \mid p$. Suppose moreover that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}(G_{K(\zeta_p)})$ is absolutely irreducible. Then E is modular.*

Proposition 3.1. *Let K be a totally real field. Let $p \geq 7$ be a prime that is unramified in K . Suppose that E is semistable at some prime v of K above p , and that moreover $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible but not surjective. Then E is modular.*

Proof. Write $G := \bar{\rho}_{E,p}(G_K)$. As $v \mid p$ is unramified, we have $K \cap \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_p) = \mathbb{Q}$, and so $\det \bar{\rho}_{E,p} = \chi : G_K \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_p^*$ is surjective, where χ is the mod p cyclotomic character. By assumption $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible but not surjective, and so G does not contain $\text{SL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p)$. It follows [26, §2] that G is contained in the normalizer of a Cartan subgroup, or its projectivization $\mathbb{P}G := G/(G \cap \mathbb{F}_p^*)$ is isomorphic to A_4 , S_4 or A_5 . In particular, G does not contain elements of order p .

Write $I_v \subset G_K$ for the inertia subgroup at v . As E is semistable at v and v is an unramified prime, we have (using [26, §1.11, §1.12] and the fact that G does not contain elements of order p):

$$(1) \quad \bar{\rho}_{E,p}|_{I_v} \sim \begin{pmatrix} \chi & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{or} \quad \bar{\rho}_{E,p}|_{I_v} \otimes_{\mathbb{F}_p} \mathbb{F}_{p^2} \sim \begin{pmatrix} \omega & 0 \\ 0 & \omega^p \end{pmatrix};$$

here ω is a level 2 fundamental character $I_v \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_{p^2}^*$. More precisely, if E has good ordinary or multiplicative reduction at v then we are in the first case of (1), and

if E has good supersingular reduction at v then we are in the second case. We observe from (1) that $\mathbb{P}G$ contains an element of order $p - 1$ or $p + 1$. Since $p \geq 7$, we see that $\mathbb{P}G$ is not isomorphic to A_4 , S_4 and A_5 . It follows that G is contained in the normalizer N_* of a Cartan subgroup C_* . The representation $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible, and as K is totally real, $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ must be absolutely irreducible (e.g. [25, Lemma 5]). Thus the image G is contained in N_* but not in C_* .

Now, as $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ has solvable image, we can view it as a totally odd irreducible Artin representation. By a standard argument (c.f. [10, Proof of Lemma 4.2]), we have $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{f,\varpi}$, for some Hilbert modular form f over K , of parallel weight 2, and $\varpi \mid p$.

By Theorem 4, in order to show that E is modular it is sufficient to show that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}(G_{K(\zeta_p)})$ is absolutely irreducible. Suppose otherwise. It follows [15, Lemma 4.2] that $G^+ := G \cap \mathrm{GL}_2^+(\mathbb{F}_p)$ is absolutely reducible, where $\mathrm{GL}_2^+(\mathbb{F}_p)$ is the subgroup of $\mathrm{GL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p)$ consisting of matrices with square determinant. Suppose E has good ordinary or multiplicative reduction at v and so we are in the first case of (1). Let g be a generator of \mathbb{F}_p^* . Then, with a suitable choice of basis for $E[p]$, the image G contains all matrices of the form $A_r := \begin{pmatrix} g^r & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$; these share the eigenvectors $\mathbf{u} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$, $\mathbf{v} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$. As G is absolutely irreducible, it must contain some matrix B whose eigenvectors $\neq \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}$. It follows that G^+ contains the pair of matrices A_2, BA_s , where $s = 0$ or 1 according to whether $\det(B)$ is a square or non-square. It is easy to check that these do not have common eigenvectors, contradicting the absolute reducibility of G^+ . If E has good supersingular reduction at v then we are in the second case of (1). It is now easy to check, similarly to the above, that G^+ is absolutely irreducible, giving a contradiction. This completes the proof. \square

4. LEVEL LOWERING

In this section, K is a totally real field, and S a finite set of non-archimedean primes of K . Moreover, $p \geq 7$ is a rational prime that is unramified in K such that $v \notin S$ for all $v \mid p$.

Lemma 4.1. *Let E be an elliptic curve defined over K that is semistable outside S . Suppose that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible but not surjective. Then*

- (i) $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is unramified at all $\mu \notin S$, $\mu \nmid p$;
- (ii) $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is finite at all $v \mid p$.

Proof. Let $v \mid p$. We would like to prove (ii), which is certainly true if E has good reduction at v . By hypothesis, E is semistable at v , and so we may assume that E has multiplicative reduction at v . Write $G_v \subset G_K$ for the decomposition group at v . By the proof of Proposition 3.1, we know that $G = \bar{\rho}_{E,p}(G_K)$ does not contain any elements of order p . It immediately follows that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}|_{G_v}$ is “peu ramifié”, proving (ii).

Let μ be a non-archimedean prime of K , not in S , and not above p . Then E is semistable at μ , and so the inertia subgroup $I_\mu \subset G_K$ acts unipotently on $E[p]$. As G does not contain elements of order p , we have $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}(I_\mu) = 1$, proving (i). \square

Now let

$$\mathcal{M} = \prod_{\iota \in S} \Gamma^{2+6v_\iota(2)+3v_\iota(3)}.$$

Lemma 4.2. *Assume the hypotheses of Lemma 4.1. Then there exists a Hilbert eigenform \mathfrak{f} over K of parallel weight 2 and level dividing \mathcal{M} such that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f},\varpi}$ where $\varpi \mid p$ is a prime of $\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}}$, the field generated by the eigenvalues of \mathfrak{f} .*

Proof. Let \mathcal{N} be the conductor of E . The additive part of \mathcal{N} divides \mathcal{M} (e.g. [28, Theorem IV.10.4]). By Proposition 3.1 and Theorem 4, there is a Hilbert eigenform \mathfrak{f}_0 over K , with rational eigenvalues, level \mathcal{N} and parallel weight 2 such that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f}_0,p}$. By Lemma 4.1, we have $\bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f}_0,p}$ is finite at all $v \mid p$, and unramified at all $\mu \nmid \mathcal{M}$. Applying level lowering theorems due Fujiwara [16], Jarvis [18] and Rajaei [24], we may remove these primes from the level (without changing the weight); the argument is practically identical to that in [14, Theorem 7], and so we omit the details. \square

Remark. Chen [6] observes that if E is an elliptic curve over \mathbb{Q} , and $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ has image contained in the normalizer of a Cartan subgroup, then p is a congruence prime for the newform attached to E . Our Lemma 4.2 encompasses Chen's observation.

5. PROOF OF THEOREM 2

Assume the hypotheses of Theorem 2: in particular, let E be an elliptic curve semistable outside S . With the help of Theorem 3, we know that there is an effectively computable constant $C_{K,S}$ such that if $p > C_{K,S}$ then p is unramified in K , all the primes $v \mid p$ satisfy $v \notin S$, and $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is irreducible. Suppose $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is not surjective. We now apply Lemma 4.2 to deduce that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f},\varpi}$ for some cuspidal Hilbert eigenform of parallel weight 2 and level dividing \mathcal{M} . There are certainly only finitely many such eigenforms. We would like to increase $C_{K,S}$ by an effectively computable amount so that the conclusion of Theorem 2 holds. Crucial to the effectivity is the existence of an algorithm [9] for determining the eigenforms \mathfrak{f} of a given weight and level, as well as their Hecke eigenvalues at given primes, and the fields generated by these eigenvalues. We will eliminate all such eigenforms \mathfrak{f} with $\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}} \neq \mathbb{Q}$, where $\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}}$ is the field generated by the eigenvalues of \mathfrak{f} . So suppose that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f},\varpi}$ where $\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}} \neq \mathbb{Q}$. Let \mathfrak{l} be the prime ideal of smallest possible norm such that $\mathfrak{l} \notin S$ and $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) \notin \mathbb{Q}$. If $\mathfrak{l} \mid p$, then $p \mid \text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l})$ and so we obtain a contradiction by supposing that $C_{K,S} > \text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l})$. We may therefore suppose that $\mathfrak{l} \nmid p$. Comparing the traces of the images of Frobenius at \mathfrak{l} in the representations $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ and $\bar{\rho}_{\mathfrak{f},\varpi}$ we have either $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) \equiv a_{\mathfrak{l}}(E) \pmod{\varpi}$ if E has good reduction at \mathfrak{l} , or $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) \equiv \pm(\text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l}) + 1) \pmod{\varpi}$ if E has multiplicative reduction at \mathfrak{l} . In the former case, by the Hasse–Weil bounds, p divides

$$\prod_{|\mathfrak{l}| \leq B} \text{Norm}_{\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}}/\mathbb{Q}}(a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) - t), \quad B = 2(\text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l}))^{1/2}.$$

As $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) \notin \mathbb{Q}$, all the terms in the product are non-zero, and so this gives a bound on p . By taking $C_{K,S}$ larger than this product we obtain a contradiction. If E has multiplicative reduction at \mathfrak{l} , then p divides

$$\text{Norm}_{\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}}/\mathbb{Q}}(a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) - \text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l}) - 1) \cdot \text{Norm}_{\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}}/\mathbb{Q}}(a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{f}) + \text{Norm}_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{l}) + 1)$$

and again we obtain a contradiction by taking $C_{K,S}$ larger than this product. Thus we are reduced to finitely many forms \mathfrak{f} satisfying $\mathbb{Q}_{\mathfrak{f}} = \mathbb{Q}$.

So far we proved that there are an effectively computable constant $C_{K,S}$ and a finite computable set $\mathfrak{f}_1, \dots, \mathfrak{f}_n$ of Hilbert eigenforms over K of parallel weight 2 with \mathbb{Q} -rational eigenvalues such that the following holds: if E is an elliptic curve

over K semistable outside S , and $p > C_{K,S}$ is prime, then either $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is surjective, or $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{f_i,p}$ for some $i = 1, \dots, n$.

Next we have to show that the surviving forms f have CM, possibly after enlarging $C_{K,S}$ by an effective amount. In fact, by a theorem of Dimitrov ([12, Theorem 2.1], [11, § 3]), if f does not have CM, there is a constant B_f such that for $p > B_f$ and $\varpi \mid p$, the image of $\bar{\rho}_{f,\varpi}$ contains a conjugate of $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p)$. It is however unclear to us as to whether Dimitrov's proof can be made effective, and so we proceed in a more elementary manner.

By the proof of Proposition 3.1 the image of $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ is dihedral, and so there is a quadratic character ψ such that $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{E,p} \otimes \psi$. It is immediate from Lemma 4.1 that ψ is unramified away from S , the archimedean primes, and the primes $v \mid p$. Suppose $v \mid p$. Comparing the restriction of the representation to the inertia subgroup at v , displayed in (1), and the restriction of the twisted representation by ψ , it is easy to deduce that the quadratic character ψ is unramified at v . Hence, its conductor divides $\prod_{l \in S} l^{1+2v_l(2)}$ and so ψ belongs to a finite effectively computable set of characters.

Suppose $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{f,p}$ where now f has rational eigenvalues. Let $\mathfrak{g} = f \otimes \psi$. If $\mathfrak{g} = f$ then f has CM as desired. Thus we may suppose $\mathfrak{g} \neq f \otimes \psi$. Let \mathfrak{l} be the prime ideal of K of smallest possible norm so that $\mathfrak{l} \notin S$ and $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(f) \neq a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{g})$. As before, if $\mathfrak{l} \mid p$ or if E has multiplicative reduction at \mathfrak{l} , then we obtain a bound on p . We therefore suppose that $\mathfrak{l} \nmid p$ and E has good reduction at \mathfrak{l} . From the relations $\bar{\rho}_{E,p} \sim \bar{\rho}_{E,p} \otimes \psi$ and $\mathfrak{g} = f \otimes \psi$ we have $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(f) \equiv a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{g}) \pmod{p}$. As $a_{\mathfrak{l}}(f) \neq a_{\mathfrak{l}}(\mathfrak{g})$ we obtain a bound on p .

Now as the surviving forms f_i are CM Hilbert eigenforms over K of parallel weight 2 with \mathbb{Q} -rational eigenvalues. As explained in [4, § 2.2], they correspond to CM elliptic curves E_i over K . The conductors of E_i are the levels of f_i . As there is an effective algorithm to determine elliptic curves of a given conductor (c.f. [7]), the proof is complete.

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