

A Family of Implementation-Friendly BN Elliptic Curves

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Abstract. We describe a class of Barreto-Naehrig (BN) curves that are not only computationally very simple to generate, but also specially suitable for efficient implementation on the broadest possible range of platforms.

1 Introduction

Barreto-Naehrig (BN) curves are among the most versatile classes of pairing-friendly elliptic curves. Among other things, they are known [4] to (this list may not be complete):

- facilitate the deployment of bilinear pairings at the 128-bit level of security [8];
- enable all kinds of pairing-based cryptographic schemes and protocols (including short signatures) [12];
- be plentiful and easily found [23, Section 2.1.1];
- support a sextic twist [16], so the pairing parameters can be defined over relatively small finite fields \mathbb{F}_p and \mathbb{F}_{p^2} respectively;
- be amenable to twofold or threefold pairing compression [24];
- attain high efficiency for all pairing computation algorithms known, including the Tate [27], ate [16], eil [15], R-ate [19], X-ate [26] and optimal [31] pairings;
- admit optimizations based on endomorphisms and homomorphisms for all groups involved [11, 13], thereby enabling fast non-pairing operations as well;

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- be suitable for software and hardware implementations on a wide range of platforms [9, 14].

Recent research has focused on certain individual curves to attain exceptional performance gains [5, 25]. This is essential since pairings are usually the most computationally expensive operation in any pairing-based cryptographic scheme. On the other hand, one may argue that targeting fast pairings alone is insufficient, and can lead to annoying or unacceptable inefficiencies on certain highly constrained platforms like smart cards or wireless sensor networks. Indeed, because of the intrinsic high cost of pairings, many protocols are already designed to rely on them only when the corresponding protocol parties are assumed to have plentiful computational resources (e.g. server or clusters) while constrained parties only need to perform non-pairing operations [2, 6, 20, 32]. In such scenarios, parameters leading to fast (but still proportionally slow) pairings at the price of deteriorating performance elsewhere would be harmful rather than helpful.

A different line of research is that of obtaining parametrized curves with certain prescribed properties, so as to avoid computationally expensive tests during curve generation. In general, constructing BN curves needs primality tests, parametrized quadratic and cubic character tests to establish finite field representations, and full group arithmetic in the curves and their twists for order tests. While primality testing is likely to be unavoidable, devising subclasses of BN curves that make do without the last category of requirements has been carried out successfully [30]. In contrast, the choice of finite field representations has received only limited attention in the literature. Solutions are usually chosen *a priori*, based on features of supporting libraries and oblivious to the peculiar nature of BN curves, therefore lacking an overall unity and missing optimization opportunities for curve generation.

Our contribution in this paper is the description of a (rather large) subclass of BN curves that is particularly suitable for efficient construction and implementation, while retaining a very simple description. The proposed subclass favours efficiency of all typical arithmetic operations needed to instantiate cryptographic protocols

on the broadest possible landscape (targeting the widest possible range of platforms and applications).

We stress that it is not our purpose to evaluate optimization techniques that are exclusive to a particular platform, nor to focus on the particular operation of computing a pairing or on techniques that are only possible on a narrow set of circumstances. Rather, our goal is to explore a simple yet comprehensive theoretical setting that avoids most if not all general drawbacks and implementation hindrances, while offering and favoring the most optimization opportunities for complete pairing-based cryptosystems, regardless of particular platform idiosyncrasies. We point out, however, that the proposed techniques may be useful to obtain optimized parameters for other classes of pairing-friendly curves, particularly in the choice of extension field representations.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We introduce theoretical concepts related to bilinear maps and BN curves in Section 2. We describe the proposed implementation-friendly family of BN curves and discuss its features in Section 3. Concrete examples tailored for practical deployment are suggested in Section 4. We conclude in Section 5.

2 Preliminaries

Let p be a prime and let $m > 0$. The conjugates of $u \in \mathbb{F}_{p^m}$ are the elements u^{p^i} , $0 \leq i < m$. The norm of $u \in \mathbb{F}_{p^m}$ is the product of all its conjugates, $|u| := \prod_i u^{p^i}$. Whenever $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ the finite field \mathbb{F}_{p^2} can be represented as $\mathbb{F}_p[i]/(i^2 + 1)$, mimicking complex numbers. In this analogy, the conjugate of $\gamma = \alpha + i\beta \in \mathbb{F}_{p^2}$ is the field element $\bar{\gamma} = \gamma^p = \alpha - i\beta$.

Given three groups \mathbb{G}_1 , \mathbb{G}_2 , and \mathbb{G}_T of the same prime order n , a pairing is a feasibly computable, non-degenerate bilinear map $e : \mathbb{G}_1 \times \mathbb{G}_2 \rightarrow \mathbb{G}_T$. Usually \mathbb{G}_1 and \mathbb{G}_2 are written additively, while \mathbb{G}_T is written multiplicatively. In practice, the pairing groups \mathbb{G}_1 and \mathbb{G}_2 are most commonly determined by the eigenspaces of the Frobenius endomorphism ϕ_p on some elliptic curve E/\mathbb{F}_p of embedding degree k . Specifically, \mathbb{G}_1 is taken to be the 1-eigenspace $E[n] \cap \ker(\phi_p - [1]) = E(\mathbb{F}_p)[n]$, and \mathbb{G}_2 is taken to be the preimage $E'(\mathbb{F}_{p^d})[n]$ of

the p -eigenspace $E[n] \cap \ker(\phi_p - [p]) \subseteq E(\mathbb{F}_{p^k})[n]$ under a twisting isomorphism $\psi : E'(\mathbb{F}_{p^d}) \rightarrow E(\mathbb{F}_{p^k})$, $(x, y) \mapsto (\mu^2 x, \mu^3 y)$ for some $\mu \in \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$, where $d \mid k$ is as small as possible (or, equivalently, where the twist E' has the largest degree k/d). Typical pairing algorithms are based on Miller's algorithm [21] with a number of optimizations [1, 16, 19, 26, 31], most notably optimal pairings [31] which have loop order of length $\lceil \lg n \rceil / \varphi(k)$ in general (where φ is Euler's totient function), comparing well with the original Tate pairing which has loop order of length $\lceil \lg n \rceil$.

A Barreto-Naehrig (BN) curve [3] is an elliptic curve $E : y^2 = x^3 + b$ of prime order $n(u) = 36u^4 + 36u^3 + 18u^2 + 6u + 1$ over a finite field \mathbb{F}_p where $p(u) = 36u^4 + 36u^3 + 24u^2 + 6u + 1$ is prime for some $u \in \mathbb{Z}$. The BN field \mathbb{F}_p contains a primitive cube root of unity $\zeta(u) = 18u^3 + 18u^2 + 9u + 1$ as one can check by straightforward inspection. BN curves have embedding degree $k = 12$ and admit a sextic twist ($d = 6$), so that one can set $\mathbb{G}_2 = E'(\mathbb{F}_{p^2})[n]$. For BN curves the condition $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ holds if and only if u is odd, and the loop order of optimal pairings is $\omega = |6u + 2|$.

Since BN curves have j -invariant 0, it is relatively easy to find them when compared to pairing-friendly curves from other families (see [10] for an extensive survey). In particular, there is no need to resort to the CM method explicitly. To generate a BN curve, one chooses an integer u until p and n as given by the above polynomials are prime. The size of u is selected such that it yields a desired size for p and n . To find a corresponding curve, one chooses $b \in \mathbb{F}_p$ randomly until one finds a point on the curve $E : y^2 = x^3 + b$ that has order n [3]. For these steps, we need primality tests, possibly quadratic character tests and square root computations in \mathbb{F}_p to obtain a point in $E(\mathbb{F}_p)$, and finally a scalar multiplication to check for order n .

The corresponding twist E'/\mathbb{F}_{p^2} is usually selected by finding a non-square and non-cube $\xi \in \mathbb{F}_{p^2}$ and then checking via scalar multiplication whether the curve $E' : y^2 = x^3 + b'$ given by $b' = b/\xi$ or by $b' = b/\xi^5$ has order divisible by n . The element ξ can be used to represent the field extensions of \mathbb{F}_{p^2} contained in $\mathbb{F}_{p^{12}}$ since the polynomial $z^m - \xi$ is irreducible over $\mathbb{F}_{p^{2h}}$ for $m \in \{2, 3, 6\}$ and $h \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ whenever $\gcd(h, m) = 1$ [23, Lemma 2.14].

Example 1. Let $p^d \equiv 1 \pmod{6}$. For each $\xi \in \mathbb{F}_{p^d}$ that is neither a square nor a cube, one can represent $\mathbb{F}_{p^{6d}}$ as a tower extension of \mathbb{F}_{p^d} in these three different ways:

- $\mathbb{F}_{p^{6d}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^d}[u]/(u^6 - \xi)$;
- $\mathbb{F}_{p^{6d}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^{2d}}[v]/(v^3 - \xi)$ with $\mathbb{F}_{p^{2d}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^d}[s]/(s^2 - \xi)$;
- $\mathbb{F}_{p^{6d}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^{3d}}[w]/(w^2 - \xi)$ with $\mathbb{F}_{p^{3d}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^d}[t]/(t^3 - \xi)$.

The components of an element from $\mathbb{F}_{p^{6d}}$ in any of these can be extracted directly without the need to perform expensive computations. Thus: $a_0 + a_1u + a_2u^2 + a_3u^3 + a_4u^4 + a_5u^5 \leftrightarrow (a_0 + a_3s) + (a_1 + a_4s)v + (a_2 + a_5s)v^2 \leftrightarrow (a_0 + a_2t + a_4t^2) + (a_1 + a_3t + a_5t^2)w$, for $a_i \in \mathbb{F}_{p^d}$. \square

We will propose a subfamily of BN curves that does away with the quadratic and/or cubic character tests usually needed when deciding how to represent the finite fields extensions that occur in a typical implementation of pairing-based protocols. The following lemma captures an important property of the class of elliptic curves to which BN curves belong:

Lemma 1. ([23, Lemma 2.7]) *Any b that defines a curve $E : y^2 = x^3 + b$ of order n such that $2 \nmid n$ and $3 \nmid n$ is neither a square nor a cube in \mathbb{F}_p .*

Proof. For any $\gamma, \delta \in \mathbb{F}_p$, the point $(0, \gamma) \in E : y^2 = x^3 + \gamma^2$ has order 3 and hence $3 \mid n$, while the point $(-\delta, 0) \in E : y^2 = x^3 + \delta^3$ has order 2 and hence $2 \mid n$, either way contradicting the assumption that $2 \nmid n$ and $3 \nmid n$. \square

As a consequence, we arrive at this useful result:

Theorem 1. *Let $\xi \in \mathbb{F}_{p^d}$ and let $b = |\xi|$. If $E : y^2 = x^3 + b$ over \mathbb{F}_p has order n such that $2 \nmid n$ and $3 \nmid n$, then ξ is neither a square nor a cube in \mathbb{F}_{p^d} .*

Proof. If ξ were a square or a cube in \mathbb{F}_{p^d} , i.e. $\xi = \gamma^r$ for some $\gamma \in \mathbb{F}_{p^d}$ and $r \in \{2, 3\}$, then $b = \prod_j \xi^{p^j} = \prod_j (\gamma^r)^{p^j} = (\prod_j \gamma^{p^j})^r = |\gamma|^r$, i.e. b would be a square or a cube in \mathbb{F}_p , contradicting Lemma 1. \square

This means that testing for quadratic or cubic character is not necessary in either \mathbb{F}_p or \mathbb{F}_{p^d} . In particular, the element ξ specified in Theorem 1 can be used to define all extensions of \mathbb{F}_{p^d} that are of interest to pairing implementation, namely, $\mathbb{F}_{p^{md}} = \mathbb{F}_{p^d}[z]/(z^m - \xi)$ for $m \in \{2, 3, 6\}$, as shown in the example above. This choice also facilitates changes of representations in field towers. We remark that this choice of representation for finite field extensions may facilitate the implementation of other families of pairing-friendly elliptic curves (see [10]). Pursuing this possibility, however, transcends the scope of this paper.

The next result addresses the matter of avoiding order computation for sextic twists, by revealing immediately which one has the correct order. To that end we need one more property:

Lemma 2. *For any $\xi \in \mathbb{F}_{p^2}$ for a BN prime p , let $b = \xi\bar{\xi}$. Then b/ξ^5 is a cube.*

Proof. We first notice that the element $\eta := b/\xi^2$ is unitary, i.e. $|\eta| = \eta^{1+p} = 1 = \zeta^3$. Since $1 + p \equiv 2 \pmod{3}$ by virtue of p being a BN prime, η itself must be a cube, and hence $b/\xi^5 = \eta/\xi^3$ is a cube, as claimed. \square

We are finally in a position to state the following theorem:

Theorem 2. *Given a BN curve of form $E : y^2 = x^3 + b$ with $b = |\xi|$ for some $\xi \in \mathbb{F}_{p^2}$, the particular sextic twist $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + \xi$ satisfies $\#E(\mathbb{F}_p) \mid \#E'(\mathbb{F}_{p^2})$.*

Proof. The sextic twist E' of E has one of only two possible orders [16, Proposition 2]. It is known [3, Section 3], on the one hand, that the correct order is $n' := (p-1+t)(p+1-t)$, which is a multiple of the order $n = p+1-t$ of $E(\mathbb{F}_p)$, and on the other hand, that for any $\bar{\xi} \in \mathbb{F}_{p^2}$ that is neither a square nor a cube, the correct twist is either $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + b/\bar{\xi}$ or $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + b/\bar{\xi}^5$ (the choice between ξ and $\bar{\xi}$ here is purely a matter of notation convenience). Substituting the BN parameters $p(u)$ and $t(u)$ yields $n'(u) \equiv 1 \pmod{2}$, i.e. n' must be odd. But since $b = |\xi| = |\bar{\xi}|$ the value $b/\bar{\xi}^5$ is a cube by Lemma 2. This means that $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + b/\bar{\xi}^5$ has a point of order 2, and hence that the order of that particular twist is even. By elimination, $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + b/\bar{\xi}$ is the twist one seeks. Notice that $b/\bar{\xi} = \xi$. \square

3 The proposed family of curves

We propose to use BN curves of form $E_\ell : y^2 = x^3 + b$ where $b = c^4 + d^6$ for some $c, d \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$, the BN prime p satisfies $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$, the Hamming weights of the (signed) binary representations of the loop order ω of optimal pairings and the BN parameter u are minimal (or near-minimal) for each bit length $\ell := \lceil \lg p \rceil$, and b is as small as possible (preferably in the form $2^j + 1$ for some j). Notice that the choice of b is consistent with both Theorem 1 and Theorem 2.

The rationale for our proposal is summarized as follows.

Pairing efficiency

First and foremost, pairing computation must be as efficient as possible, since this is the most expensive operation in any pairing-based protocol. Low-weight ω minimizes the cost of the Miller loop in optimal pairings, while low-weight u minimizes the cost of the final exponentiation [29]. Small values of b favor faster pairing computation [7], especially if b has the overall form $b = 2^j + 1$ for some j (hence, either c or d is a power of 2 and the other is 1), which is clearly possible with the prescribed form we suggest. The best situation arises when $b = 2$ and $\xi = 1 + i$, since multiplications by b are most efficient on all platforms (not only on those where a dedicated multiplication by a small constant is readily available, but also those where it has to be emulated with simpler operations like shifts or additions) and the computation of conjugates, which involves multiplications by ξ , incurs the least overhead.

Overall efficiency

All operations involved in pairing-based protocols must be as efficient as possible. Works like [5] only consider pairing computation speed as a metric, disregarding operations like generating random points or hashing to the pairing groups \mathbb{G}_1 and \mathbb{G}_2 which are essential to most cryptographic schemes based on pairings. For BN curves, this means there must be a very efficient method to compute square roots in \mathbb{F}_p and \mathbb{F}_{p^2} . This is least expensive when $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ and $p^2 \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$, since the Cippolla-Lehmer method simplifies to one quadratic character test and one exponentiation for square

roots in \mathbb{F}_p , namely, $\sqrt{a} = a^{(p+1)/4}$, and the KCYL [18] method applies to the computation of square roots in \mathbb{F}_{p^2} , taking one quadratic character test and 1.5 exponentiation. The case $p^2 \equiv 17 \pmod{32}$ is almost as efficient, taking one quadratic character test and 2 exponentiations to extract roots in \mathbb{F}_{p^2} with the method of [22].

Uniform finite field arithmetic

Arithmetic in all finite fields involved must be efficient. Operations in \mathbb{G}_1 and \mathbb{G}_2 already need efficient arithmetic in \mathbb{F}_p and \mathbb{F}_{p^2} , and further processing (e.g. explicit or implicit exponentiation) of pairing values need efficient algorithms for $\mathbb{F}_{p^{12}}$ itself, or in some cases for the subfield \mathbb{F}_{p^6} or \mathbb{F}_{p^4} , if pairing compression techniques are adopted (by factors of 2 and 3, respectively). Also, potential support for efficient conversions between different representations have to be planned for the sake of interoperability.

Generator simplicity

Obvious generators that do not involve any extra processing or storage are clearly desirable. A curve equation of form $E : y^2 = x^3 + (c^4 + d^6)$ admits the obvious solution $(-d^2, c^2)$. Besides, by Theorem 2 the sextic twist of form $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + (c^2 + id^3)$ always contains a subgroup of the same order n as E , and the curve equation for E' admits the obvious solution (id, c) , so that $h \cdot (id, c)$, where $h = p - 1 + t$, only fails to be a generator of $E'[n]$ with negligibly low probability $O(1/h)$. A particularly sensible choice is to set $d = 1$ and look for the smallest c such that E has order n . The cofactor multiplication can be carried out very efficiently [28, Section 6].

Suitable field sizes

An obvious bottleneck is \mathbb{F}_{p^2} arithmetic, since it is at the bottom of all operations in \mathbb{G}_2 , \mathbb{G}_T , and pairing computation. Choosing p slightly smaller than a multiple of the platform word size (say, more than two bits but less than three bits). This enables not only postponing modular reductions in critical operations like \mathbb{F}_{p^2} multiplication or squaring, but also simplifying the actual reduction when it is finally applied, as pointed out in [5, Section 5.2].

4 Sample curves

We provide on Table 1 practical curves of the proposed family for fields of bit length $\ell := 32m - 2$ where $5 \leq m \leq 20$, thus ranging between 80-bit and 192-bit security levels. All of them have the form $E_\ell : y^2 = x^3 + (c^4 + 1)$ over $\mathbb{F}_{p(u)}$, prime order $n(u)$, and admit a twist of correct order given by $E' : y'^2 = x'^3 + (c^2 + i)$ over \mathbb{F}_{p^2} . Also, c is always a power of 2.

Field extensions $\mathbb{F}_{p^{2d}}$ can be represented, if desired, directly as $\mathbb{F}_{p^2}[z]/(z^d - c^2 - i)$ for $d = 2, 3, 6$, or via towers as indicated in Example 1.

The pairing groups are $\mathbb{G}_1 = \langle G \rangle$ for $G = (-1, c^2)$, and $\mathbb{G}_2 = \langle G' \rangle$ for $G' = h \cdot (i, c)$ with $h = p - 1 + t$, respectively. The low weight of u enables very efficient multiplication by the cofactor h [28, Section 6].

The peculiar choice $\ell := 32m - 2$ deserves some attention, since it is smaller (albeit not by much) than a multiple of typical word sizes (more precisely, a multiple of 8 bits) and hence leads to security levels that are very slightly lower than usual. This was done so that, adopting Montgomery arithmetic in the base field, all values listed here enable all modular reductions involved in an \mathbb{F}_{p^2} multiplication or squaring to be postponed and carried out only once at the very end of that operation, in a very simple and efficient manner as suggested by [5, Section 5.2]. The value $\lfloor 2^{32m}/p \rfloor$ indicates how many modular reductions can be postponed if \mathbb{F}_p elements are held in $32m$ -bit variables. With the suggested choice of $\ell = 32m - 2$, $\lfloor 2^{32m}/p \rfloor = 7$ for all examples on Table 1 except for the entry at $\ell = 254$, where it is 6 (\mathbb{F}_{p^2} multiplication or squaring does not need this value to be larger than 5).

Square roots in \mathbb{F}_{p^2} can be efficiently computed with the suggested method, either KCYL [18] or Müller [22].

Example 2. The parameters for the 254-bit curve defined by $u = -(2^{62} + 2^{55} + 1)$ are $E_{254} : y^2 = x^3 + 2$, $G = (-1, 1)$, $E'_u : y'^2 = x'^3 + (1 + i)$, $G' = h \cdot (i, 1)$.

The parameter of for this particular curve has been apparently first suggested in [26, Section 4.2], albeit without the benefit of a simple model for the curve equation, its twist, and the finite fields involved as per our proposal. Notice that E_{254} and all other curves

with $c = 1$ (and hence $b = 2$) have $u \equiv 11 \pmod{12}$. Therefore, as first pointed out in [30], they could have been found even without the test for order n . \square

Table 1. Sample curves

m	ℓ	u	c	$\text{wt}(6u + 2)$	$\sqrt{\mathbb{F}_p^2}$
5	158	$-(2^{38} + 2^{28} + 1)$	2	5	KCYL
6	190	$-(2^{46} + 2^{23} + 2^{22} + 1)$	8	5	KCYL
7	222	$2^{54} - 2^{44} + 1$	4	5	Müller
8	254	$-(2^{62} + 2^{55} + 1)$	1	5	KCYL
9	286	$-(2^{70} + 2^9 + 2^8 + 1)$	4	5	KCYL
10	318	$2^{78} + 2^{62} + 2^1 + 1$	1	6	KCYL
11	350	$-(2^{86} - 2^{69} + 2^{28} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
12	382	$-(2^{94} + 2^{76} + 2^{72} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
13	414	$-(2^{102} - 2^{84} + 2^{55} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
14	446	$2^{110} + 2^{36} + 1$	4	5	Müller
15	478	$-(2^{118} - 2^{55} - 2^{19} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
16	510	$-(2^{126} + 2^{53} - 2^{50} + 1)$	4	6	KCYL
17	542	$-(2^{134} + 2^{114} + 2^{30} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
18	574	$-(2^{142} + 2^{120} - 2^{99} + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
19	606	$-(2^{150} - 2^{95} + 2^8 + 1)$	1	7	KCYL
20	638	$2^{158} - 2^{128} - 2^{68} + 1$	4	7	Müller

5 Conclusion

We have presented a subclass of Barreto-Naehrig curves that generically favors efficient implementation while retaining a very simple description. Our proposal targets the efficiency of all typical arithmetic operations needed to instantiate cryptographic protocols, and focuses on offering optimization opportunities on the broadest possible landscape of platforms rather than restricting them to the idiosyncrasies of any particular one.

One problem still open is that of highly efficient hashing onto the \mathbb{G}_1 and \mathbb{G}_2 groups. Although our proposal addresses this problem by enabling the fastest known arithmetic algorithms for these groups (particularly square root extraction), more advanced hashing techniques like that of Icart [17] are currently not applicable to any BN curve. Finding a fast and secure hashing method for those groups is of great importance for many protocols.

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