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Constructing a Political Risk Framework through Vulnerability Assessment of Malaysia Madani Policy among University Students

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ABSTRACT

Political risk refers to the possibility of changes in the political landscape that can affect a country's stability. Recent policies such as Malaysia Madani have raised questions regarding their impact on the nation's political vulnerability, especially among university students, who represent a significant portion of the new electorate due to the 'Undi 18' policy. This study aims to construct a new political risk framework by assessing the vulnerability of the Malaysia Madani policy among students, focusing on their perceptions and influencing factors. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, is employed to investigate the direct and indirect effects of students' perceptions of political risk and the factors contributing to their vulnerability. The objectives are to identify the level of students' perception of political risk, explore how the Malaysia Madani policy shapes these perceptions, and develop a political risk framework through vulnerability assessment specific to this policy among Malaysian students. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers to enhance students' awareness of political issues and create more effective policies to reduce vulnerability to political risks. This research contributes to a detailed and novel understanding with an output of a political risk framework that examines the vulnerability assessment of the Malaysia Madani policy among students.

1. Introduction

Leadership is widely recognized as a crucial function in governance, shaping the stability and effectiveness of political institutions. However, its definition varies across cultural contexts, reflecting differences in power distance, individual characteristics, and leadership styles. Leadership plays a pivotal role in determining the extent to which a nation successfully achieves its objectives. It is commonly understood as the ability of an individual to influence others and guide them toward shared goals. Thus, leadership is fundamentally a process in which a leader motivates and directs individuals to act in alignment with a desired vision.

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Political leadership, in particular, refers to individuals who hold legislative and executive authority to govern and guide society toward collective well-being. It encompasses governance responsibilities within public administration as well as legislative functions within parliamentary institutions. Political leadership is closely intertwined with administrative leadership, encompassing executive roles that involve policy formulation and implementation. Scholars across various disciplines have conceptualized leadership differently, leading to diverse interpretations of its nature and impact

Empirical studies have identified multiple variables that contribute to leadership effectiveness. Winston and Patterson *et al.*, [1] outlined over 90 contributing factors, including the ability to provide support, take risks, foster unity, and prioritize ethical behavior. Similarly, Northouse *et al.*, [2] classified leadership into five key dimensions: (i) inherent personal traits, (ii) learned leadership skills, (iii) leadership as a competency for achieving organizational goals, (iv) leadership behavior focusing on task orientation and human relations, and (v) leadership as a relational process emphasizing two-way communication between leaders and followers. Lussier and Achua *et al.*, [3] further categorized leadership into five components: influence, organizational objectives, leader-follower relationships, change management, and public engagement

Political leadership involves figures such as members of parliament, ministers, and prime ministers who bear the responsibility of governing a country and ensuring effective policy implementation. Knies *et al.*, [4] identified five domains of leadership at the national level: accountability leadership, which ensures justification of actions; lawfulness leadership, which aligns actions with legal frameworks; ethical leadership, which promotes moral behavior; political loyalty leadership, which prioritizes alignment with political directives; and network governance leadership, which fosters collaboration with government entities.

At the international level, leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping national security, economic prosperity, and public trust in governance. Leadership challenges are evident across Western, Eastern, and Asian nations, with issues ranging from governance inefficiencies within the European Union (EU) to prolonged political and religious conflicts in the Middle East. These geopolitical tensions often arise due to ideological, economic, and sociopolitical disparities among leaders, leading to diplomatic rifts such as the recent France-United States dispute at the United Nations Security Council.

In Malaysia, political leadership underwent a significant transformation following the dismissal of Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister in 1998. This event catalyzed the Reformasi movement, fundamentally altering Malaysia's political landscape. The 14th General Election (GE14) in 2018 marked another pivotal shift, resulting in the first change in government after 61 years. However, between 2018 and 2022, Malaysia faced prolonged political turmoil exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Governance instability was primarily driven by party defections and multiple changes in government without electoral mandates. The 15th General Election (GE15) in November 2022 resulted in a hung parliament, ultimately leading to the formation of a unity government under the Pakatan Harapan coalition. These events underscored the vulnerability of Malaysia's political landscape, particularly in terms of policy continuity, leadership integrity, and corruption risks.

To address ongoing governance challenges, the 7th Prime Minister of Malaysia introduced the Malaysia Madani concept as the foundation of his administration. This governance framework represents a holistic and integrated approach aimed at fostering human-centered policies through continuous public engagement and institutional reforms. The framework is built upon six core values—Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust, and Compassion—that collectively drive national development. The essence of Malaysia Madani lies in its adaptability to evolving political dynamics, striving for substantive reforms that promote an advanced and prosperous nation.

Despite these efforts, Malaysia continues to experience significant political risks, particularly concerning governance stability. The political turbulence that followed GE14, including party defections, coalition realignments, and the Sheraton Move in 2020, has led to governance uncertainty. The absence of a clear political trajectory has contributed to declining public trust and heightened concerns regarding corruption. Malaysia’s ranking in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) deteriorated from 51st in 2019 to 62nd in 2021, as reported by Transparency International Malaysia. This decline underscores the urgent need to reassess the factors contributing to governance instability and political risk.

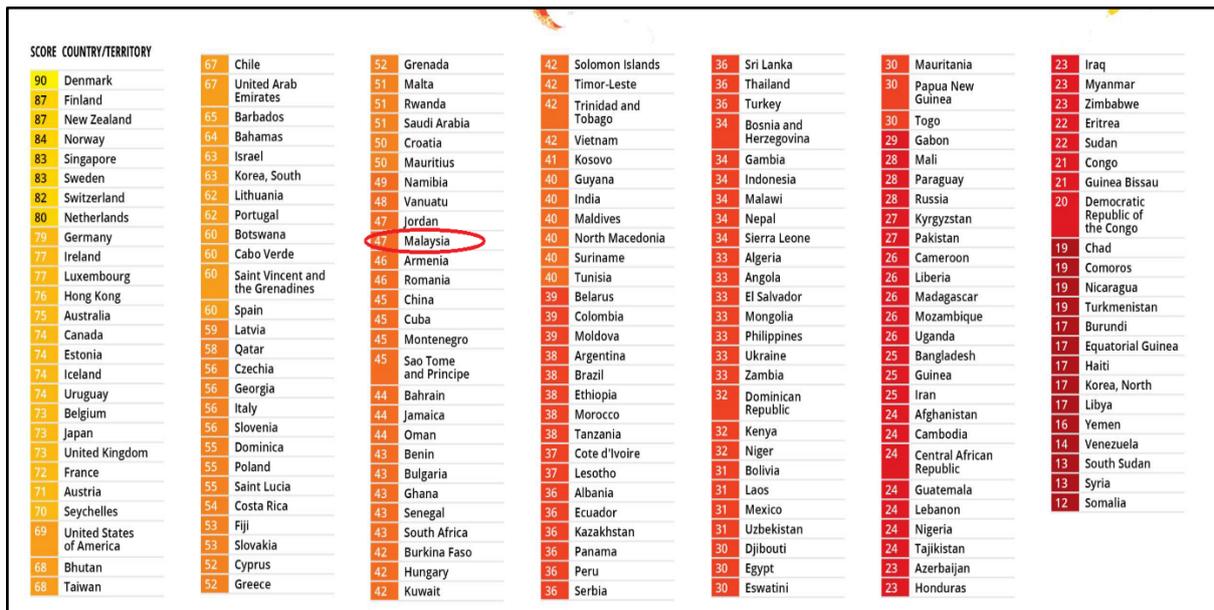


Fig. 1. Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International Malaysia (2023)

Given these challenges, understanding the impact of political leadership on governance stability is crucial. This study focuses on assessing students' perceptions of political risk within the Malaysia Madani framework, recognizing them as a key demographic in shaping Malaysia’s political future. By examining students' vulnerability to political uncertainty, this research seeks to construct a Political Risk Framework that identifies the factors influencing their perceptions and evaluates the broader implications of governance instability.

Political leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping governance stability, influencing policies, and addressing national vulnerabilities. Recent electoral shifts in Malaysia, exacerbated by governance instability and leadership transitions, have heightened political risks. The Malaysia Madani policy, introduced as a reformative governance approach, presents an opportunity to examine political risks among university students, particularly in the context of ‘Undi 18’ and their evolving political engagement. However, existing literature does not explicitly address how youth perceive political risk within the Malaysia Madani framework. While studies have examined political engagement and youth voting behaviors, there is limited discussion on their vulnerability to governance instability. This study seeks to fill that gap by developing a comprehensive framework that evaluates the extent to which Malaysia Madani policy contributes to students' perceptions of political risks and governance stability.

1.1 Political Risk Framework

Given this evolving political landscape, concerns have emerged regarding political risk and its impact on governance stability. Political risk refers to uncertainties in the political environment that can influence national stability and policymaking. Political risk is typically categorized into three dimensions: (i) macro-political risk, which involves broad national or international instability, (ii) micro-political risk, which affects specific sectors or industries, and (iii) internal political risk, which arises from internal governmental conflicts and policy shifts [5].

Studies on political risk emphasize its role in shaping governance and electoral stability. For instance, Tummers and Knies *et al.*, [6] argued that political risk is closely linked to governance trust, with fluctuations in leadership direction influencing public confidence. In Malaysia, the introduction of Malaysia Madani has raised questions about its impact on political risk, particularly among youth voters under the 'Undi 18' policy. Political risk assessment frameworks typically involve qualitative and quantitative measures, such as expert analysis, economic indicators, and public perception surveys [7].

This study is significant as it seeks to bridge this gap by developing a Political Risk Framework within the context of Malaysia Madani. Understanding the extent to which governance instability influences public perceptions, particularly among university students, is essential for strengthening leadership integrity and ensuring sustainable governance. Given the increasing political participation of young voters following the implementation of the Undi 18 policy, analyzing their views on leadership risks, policy consistency, and corruption will provide critical insights into the resilience of Malaysia's democratic system.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess students' perceptions of Malaysia Madani in relation to political leadership and governance stability.
2. To identify key factors influencing students' views on political risks, including leadership integrity, policy consistency, and corruption perceptions.
3. To develop a Political Risk Framework that evaluates the implications of leadership

2. Literature Review

Political risk has been extensively examined in global contexts, with studies highlighting its implications for governance, economic stability, and public trust. Howell [5] categorizes political risk into macro, micro, and internal dimensions, emphasizing that policy inconsistencies often result in governance instability. In Malaysia, the introduction of Malaysia Madani has raised questions about its impact on political risk, particularly among young voters. Existing literature, including works by Jensen and Malesky [7], underscores the importance of leadership integrity in mitigating governance-related risks. However, studies specifically addressing the intersection of Malaysia Madani and youth political perceptions remain scarce.

Further exploration of youth electoral engagement, as discussed in studies by Dalton and Norris , highlights the role of political awareness in mitigating perceived risks. Research on Southeast Asian political behavior [23,24] has emphasized that policies like Malaysia Madani require deeper scrutiny to understand their effects on voter confidence and democratic stability. By incorporating these perspectives, this study builds a stronger theoretical foundation for evaluating students' vulnerability to political instability and the role of governance transparency in mitigating risks.

Political leadership is an essential element in governance, shaping the political landscape and administrative structure of a nation. Leadership, irrespective of its scale, category, or style, is closely linked to efforts aimed at achieving broader societal and developmental goals. Ibn Khaldun, as cited by Mohamad Kamil [1], emphasized that leadership (*khilafah*) is fundamentally about guiding society in accordance with religious principles for both worldly and afterlife benefits. According to Saifulazry [2], effective leadership is often characterized by leading by example, where a leader's character and behavior serve as a model for others.

This literature review explores the dynamics of political leadership, particularly in Malaysia, in alignment with the objective of understanding governance frameworks, leadership effectiveness, and their impact on political institutions.

Ahmad Atory [3] defines political leadership as the legitimate authority of a leader in the political domain, encompassing both political power and administrative functions. Burns [4] conceptualized leadership as a process of mobilizing people and resources to achieve shared goals within competitive and conflicting contexts. Similarly, Bennis and Nanus [5] distinguished between managers and leaders, asserting that "managers are people who do things right, and leaders are people who do the right thing." Yukl [6] further emphasized that true leadership is measured by a leader's ability to influence followers toward desired behaviors.

Leadership encompasses directive roles such as planning, policymaking, governance, enforcement, education, and influence, as outlined by Dzulfida [7]. Sharifah Sofiah 'Atiqah *et al.*, [8] described leadership as a two-way communication process, where leaders guide subordinates toward achieving organizational or institutional goals. Moreover, McShane *et al.*, [9] argued that leadership is ineffective without voluntary compliance from subordinates.

Political leadership in Malaysia is primarily shaped by elected representatives, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and State Assembly Members (ADUNs). MPs play a crucial role in federal legislative and executive affairs, while ADUNs oversee state governance. As noted by Paridah [10], the leader of the majority party at the state level assumes the position of Chief Minister (Menteri Besar), while at the federal level, the leader becomes the Prime Minister.

Jamaie [11] stressed that elected representatives should be well-educated, religiously committed, and experienced in administration, corporate affairs, or business. Effective political leadership, according to Ahmad Atory [12], significantly impacts societal development, resolves public issues, and advances collective aspirations.

Several scholars have identified key attributes of successful political leaders. Gordon [13] suggested that leadership effectiveness depends on the positive interactions between leaders and group members. Stogdill [14] further argued that successful leaders fulfill the expectations and demands of their followers. In support of this perspective, DuBrin [15] emphasized that an effective leader influences organizational activities through persuasion and personal appeal.

Daft [16] reinforced the idea that leadership involves mobilizing people toward a vision without coercion. Similarly, Funston [17] highlighted the importance of strong public backing for policy implementation and national progress. The significance of ethical leadership in combating corruption and fostering integrity within civil service was underscored by Greenleaf [18]. Meanwhile, Ahmad Atory and Malike Ibrahim [19] emphasized that effective political leadership reassures citizens and strengthens national unity.

Malaysia's political landscape is shaped by governance structures, electoral trends, and political competition. Mior Kamarul [20] noted that electoral history in Malaysia reflects a preference for coalition politics, as evident in Barisan Nasional, Pakatan Harapan, and Perikatan Nasional. The increasing complexity of political discourse, driven by ideological differences and multiparty competition, has influenced governance stability.

Political conflicts often stem from party rivalries and electoral competition. Awang Azman [21] highlighted the risks of “politics of hate,” which can undermine national unity. Electoral behavior, as explained by Awang Besar [22], is shaped by factors such as family background, social environment, and organizational involvement. The 14th General Election (GE-14) in 2018 marked a major shift in voter sentiment, largely due to governance issues, economic policies, and corruption scandals.

The emergence of "New Politics" in Malaysia has been widely discussed. Sani *et al.*, [23] and Kia *et al.*, [24] noted that voters increasingly demand greater political participation and reject racialized politics. Mohamed Noor *et al.*, [25] observed that urban voters in GE-14 prioritized governance reforms over ethnic-based political considerations. Further research by Vellymalay *et al.*, [26] examined electoral shifts among Indian voters, showing widespread disenchantment with the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) due to unresolved socio-economic issues.

The 15th General Election (GE-15) in 2022 exposed deep electoral polarization along ethnic lines. The Malay electorate strongly supported Perikatan Nasional (PN), while non-Malay voters consolidated behind Pakatan Harapan (PH). As reported by Kia *et al.* [27], PN secured approximately 74% of the Malay vote in Alor Setar, whereas PH garnered over 90% of the Chinese vote. This electoral divide signals a growing trend of ethnic-based political alignment. Additionally, Sabah and Sarawak have developed strong regional political identities, with local parties such as Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) and Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) playing pivotal roles in national politics.

3. Methodology

A mixed-methods research design integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively assess students' perceptions of political risk. A survey was conducted among 311 students enrolled in the Constitution of Malaysia course at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The survey measured students' understanding of governance, political awareness, and vulnerability to political risks. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across faculties, academic backgrounds, and demographic factors, minimizing bias in the findings. The survey included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to quantify students' perceptions of governance, leadership trust, and political engagement. The quantitative phase involved a survey distributed to 311 university students enrolled in the Constitution of Malaysia course at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This survey was designed to assess students' understanding of elections, the Undi 18 policy, and their level of political awareness. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for statistical measurement of students' knowledge, attitudes, and concerns regarding Malaysia's political landscape. Data collected from the survey was analyzed using SPSS software, applying descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, and correlation analysis, to identify significant patterns and relationships.

Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software, ensuring a rigorous interpretation of qualitative data. The analysis process involved multiple coding cycles, categorizing responses into primary themes such as trust in governance, policy stability, and media influence. To enhance methodological rigor, inter-coder reliability was established by having two independent researchers validate the coding process. Data triangulation was employed by comparing survey findings with interview responses to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study.

The qualitative phase aimed to provide a deeper contextual understanding of students' political views and engagement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three student leaders, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation of leadership roles within

student organizations. The interviews explored students' personal experiences with political participation, their perspectives on leadership integrity, and the broader implications of electoral policies like Undi 18. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, using Braun and Clarke's framework to identify recurring themes and key insights. Data coding and categorization were facilitated using NVivo software, allowing for systematic identification of dominant narratives regarding political risks, governance trust, and student electoral behavior.

4. Result and Discussion

Objective 1: Exploring Student Perceptions of General Elections in Malaysia

The survey results indicate that 73% of students fully understand the democratic system, while 26.4% have partial understanding. This suggests a high level of political awareness among students, aligning with Dewey's (12) argument that education serves as a foundation for active participation in democracy. Furthermore, 64.3% of respondents fully understand Malaysia's political and administrative systems, with 34.1% having partial knowledge and 1.6% expressing no understanding. These findings highlight the effectiveness of civic education in fostering political literacy, consistent with Norris' (13) research on how education strengthens democratic engagement.

Additionally, students demonstrated a strong grasp of the electoral system, with 77.2% reporting full understanding, 22.2% partial knowledge, and only 0.6% lacking comprehension. This aligns with Print and Milner's (14) findings, emphasizing the role of civic education in enhancing electoral awareness among youth.

Objective 2: Identifying Student Perceptions on Voting at 18 (Undi 18)

The survey reveals that 95.5% of students are aware of the Undi 18 policy and automatic voter registration, while only 3.9% remain unaware. This high level of awareness reflects effective dissemination of information and growing civic responsibility among young Malaysians, as highlighted by Dalton (15) in his study on the impact of youth electoral engagement.

Moreover, 90.7% of students agree on the necessity of integrating democracy education in schools, while 9.0% disagree. This finding supports global trends advocating for early civic education, as emphasized by Hahn (16), who argues that fostering political literacy at the secondary education level strengthens democratic participation.

Objective 3: Analyzing Youth Awareness of Political Issues Ahead of PRU-15

Regarding decision-making on candidates, 72.3% of students have already decided on whom to vote for, indicating strong political engagement. This supports Hooghe and Stolle's (17) argument that informed decision-making is crucial for active youth participation in governance. Additionally, 86.5% of respondents are prepared to gather election-related information, reflecting a proactive approach toward political literacy, as discussed by Delli Carpini and Keeter (18), who emphasize the significance of knowledge-seeking behavior in sustaining democratic health.

Students' primary sources of election information are social media platforms, with TikTok (19%) and Facebook (13%) being the most frequently used. This highlights a shift toward digital platforms for political awareness, supporting Loader and Mercea's (19) findings on the role of social media in participatory politics.

Regarding political party preferences, 55% of students support Perikatan Nasional (PN), 31.2% favor Pakatan Harapan (PH), and 13% align with Barisan Nasional (BN). These preferences indicate a

generational shift in political allegiance, as discussed by Levitsky and Ziblatt (20), who argue that party alliances significantly shape young voters' political identities.

When considering key factors influencing voting decisions, 36% of students prioritize candidates' personal integrity, while 31% focus on the party manifesto. This highlights a growing demand for ethical leadership and transparent policies, aligning with Campbell *et al.*'s (21) argument that both candidate qualities and political promises significantly impact voter behavior.

Regarding preferred prime ministerial candidates, 46% of respondents favor Muhyiddin Yasin, while 29% support Anwar Ibrahim. This indicates distinct leadership preferences among youth, as Norris (22) suggests in her study on global democratic support, where leader credibility directly affects political stability.

When asked about key criteria for assessing political candidates, students emphasized integrity (23%), education (18%), and experience (17%) as the most critical attributes. These findings reinforce Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (23) research, which identifies transparency and ethical governance as top concerns for modern voters.

Similarly, when evaluating political parties, students prioritize manifestos (21%), party ideology (20%), and candidate selection (16%). These preferences underscore the importance of ideological alignment in shaping political loyalty, aligning with Dalton's (24) research on the expansion of youth political participation.

Qualitative Insights from Student Leaders

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the UUM Student Representative Council revealed a strong emphasis on integrity and leadership accountability. Participants expressed concerns that corruption undermines public trust and weakens political institutions. One student stated:

"If a leader goes astray, it will have a significant impact not only on the individual but also on the party and the country. For instance, cases of corruption, breach of trust, and abuse of power involving UMNO leaders have damaged the reputation of Barisan Nasional (BN). Due to this issue, BN lost the elections for the first time in 2018."

Another student described corruption as a "virus" that spreads across multiple sectors, emphasizing that leaders must be held accountable:

"When a figure is convicted of corruption, if found guilty, they must be properly punished. Otherwise, it will lead to division in society. Integrity is essential—without it, students are left questioning whom to trust. If a leader is involved in corruption or breach of trust, their words in Parliament become difficult to believe."

Despite concerns about corruption, students acknowledged the importance of strong leadership in maintaining national stability. They noted that challenges such as party-hopping and governance scandals complicate political trust but do not diminish the essential role of political leaders. As one participant highlighted:

"It is not easy to be a successful leader who is respected by both opponents and allies. Leadership comes with immense responsibility, and within political parties, various challenges exist that can undermine governance."

5. Summary

Findings reveal that 73% of students have a comprehensive understanding of Malaysia's political system, yet concerns about leadership integrity and policy consistency remain prevalent. Social media platforms, particularly TikTok (19%) and Facebook (13%), are the primary sources of political information. The study identifies three key factors influencing students' perceptions of political risk: (1) leadership integrity, (2) policy stability, and (3) corruption concerns. Political party preferences among students indicate a generational shift, reflecting increased scrutiny of governance practices.

The proposed Political Risk Framework addresses these concerns by integrating elements of risk mitigation, policy transparency, and leadership accountability. A critical finding is that students with higher political awareness exhibit lower vulnerability to political uncertainties, reinforcing the need for structured civic education. Additionally, findings suggest that policymakers must actively engage with youth through digital platforms to enhance trust and mitigate misinformation.

Furthermore, this study highlights the need for improved communication between policymakers and youth to enhance trust in governance structures. The findings also underscore the importance of embedding electoral education in university curriculums to foster informed civic participation. By fostering greater engagement and transparency, Malaysia Madani can enhance democratic resilience among young voters.

5. Conclusions

This study contributes to the field of political risk assessment by developing a tailored framework applicable to Malaysia Madani policy. The findings emphasize the need for transparent governance practices to enhance public trust and political stability. Given the increasing political engagement among youth voters, integrating electoral education within academic institutions is crucial.

Additionally, this study acknowledges limitations related to its sample size and demographic focus on university students, suggesting that future research should include a broader, more diverse population. The reliance on self-reported data also presents potential biases, warranting further experimental research to assess behavioral responses to political risk. Future research should explore cross-country comparisons to contextualize political risk within diverse governance models, thereby strengthening the proposed framework's applicability beyond Malaysia.

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