

Uncovering the Pervasive Grip of Corruption on Local Government System in Nigeria: An Analysis of the Infrastructural Implications

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Abstract: *This study investigated the pervasive grip of corruption on the local government system in Nigeria and analyzes its implications for infrastructure development. The local government system in Nigeria is aimed at bringing governance closer to the people, encouraging citizen participation, accountability, and community-level advancement. However, corruption has plagued the system, resulting in mismanagement of resources and abuse of power by local government officials. Factors contributing to corruption include weak institutional frameworks, political interference, and a lack of accountability. This corruption has led to the embezzlement of funds earmarked for infrastructure development, causing a lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and good roads in rural areas. The poor state of infrastructure negatively impacts living conditions, productivity, and economic growth. It was recommended that the government strengthen institutions like the EFCC to fight corruption, improve civil service recruitment, training, and performance management, as well as raise awareness and educate citizens about their rights and the harm of corruption.*

Keywords: Corruption, Local Government, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Rural Development, Economic and Financial Crime Commission

Introduction

The establishment of local government in Nigeria serves a crucial purpose in ensuring effective governance at the grassroots level (Odo, 2014). The fundamental objective of this initiative is to make governance more accessible to the masses, particularly those residing in rural areas and communities who might not have easy access to the centralized government system. By bringing governance closer to the people, the local government system seeks to promote greater participation of citizens in governance, encourage accountability and transparency, and foster community-level advancement (Monday & Wijaya, 2022). Through the local government system, people can participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their communities. This enables them to contribute their ideas, opinions, and suggestions towards the development of their localities. By promoting community involvement, the local government system helps to build a sense of ownership, responsibility, and pride among citizens, leading to the development of a strong and cohesive society. This approach ensures that policies and programs are tailored to suit the needs of each community, resulting in more effective implementation and better outcomes.

However, Adeyemi (2012) maintained that, over the years, the local government system in Nigeria has been plagued by allegations of corruption, mismanagement of resources, and abuse of power by local government officials. The aforementioned circumstance has caused a dearth of progress in rural regions and contributed to the degradation of the nation's infrastructure. Nevertheless, the local governance structure in Nigeria has been hampered by corruption, which has had significant repercussions on the progress of essential infrastructure. According to Edeh and Nwakamma (2017), corruption in the Nigerian local government system is pervasive and has been fueled by factors such as weak institutional frameworks, political interference, and a lack of accountability. As a result, local government officials often embezzle funds meant for infrastructural development, leading to a lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and good roads. In recent years, there has been a growing concern about the impact of corruption on the local government system in Nigeria, particularly regarding its implications for infrastructure development (Shinge, 2019).

It is widely believed that corruption has led to the diversion of funds earmarked for infrastructure development, resulting in the poor state of roads, schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure in rural areas (Ezeifekwuaba, 2022). Similarly, Adeyemi (2012) noted that corruption has resulted in the misallocation of resources, leading to the poor state of infrastructure and service delivery in the country. He further argued that in Nigeria, this has been a prevalent issue in local government councils, where officials often misuse funds meant for providing basic amenities like water, roads, and electricity. This has resulted in the severe deprivation of

these essential services, leaving many communities without access to them. As a result, the people in these communities suffer and are left disconnected and disenchanted with the three tiers of government: federal, state, and local.

The implications of this corruption on infrastructural development in Nigeria are far-reaching. According to Shinge (2019), the lack of infrastructural development at the local government level has led to poor living conditions for Nigerians, low productivity, and a decline in economic growth. He argued that corruption in the local government system has created a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment that needs to be addressed urgently. Corruption has been a persistent problem in Nigeria and has negatively affected various aspects of the country, including its economy, social services, and governance. Therefore, there is a need to examine the pervasive grip of corruption on the local government system in Nigeria and its implications for infrastructure development. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the infrastructural implications of corruption in the local government system in Nigeria. It seeks to identify the factors that have contributed to corruption in the local government system and its impact on infrastructure development, with a view to proposing solutions to address the problem.

Conceptual Clarifications and theoretical Framework

Corruption

According to Okereka (2015), corruption is characterized as the exploitation of power and public confidence for personal gain. In Nigeria, this issue has been identified as a pervasive and intricate problem that has infiltrated all aspects of society. Corruption is often likened to a complex, multi-faceted challenge, making it difficult to tackle. Its detrimental effects have been observed in various sectors of Nigerian society, including politics, economics, social structures, and culture. Corruption has proven to be a significant obstacle to development, economic growth, and the establishment of good governance in Nigeria. Its consequences extend far and wide, resulting in poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. The World Bank (1997) has stated that corruption can manifest in politics, business, law enforcement, and public service, undermining the rule of law, distorting resource allocation, and eroding public trust in institutions. Consequently, corruption is a grave issue with severe implications for individuals, societies, and nations at large.

Nkom (1982) defines corruption as the manipulation and misappropriation of public resources and affairs for personal interests and private advantages. It encompasses various unethical and illicit practices that undermine the integrity of public institutions and impede societal progress. Corrupt acts involve the abuse of entrusted power, often exhibited by public officials or individuals in positions of authority who exploit their influence for personal gain. Examples include bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, and favoritism, among others. By engaging in corrupt activities, individuals prioritize their own interests over the well-being and common good of society. Resources that should be allocated to public services, infrastructure, and social welfare are diverted to benefit a select few, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, inequality, and social injustice.

According to Onigu (1986), corruption can be defined as the deliberate distortion of integrity or affairs through practices such as bribery, favoritism, or moral decay, leading to a state of impurity within society (Otite, 1986). Corruption represents a deviation from ethical norms and undermines the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability in various domains, including politics, business, and public administration. Otite's definition emphasizes the multifaceted nature of corruption, encompassing both financial misconduct, such as bribery and embezzlement, and the erosion of moral values within society. This broad perspective acknowledges that corruption extends beyond the realm of financial transactions and encompasses the compromise of principles, ideals, and the overall fabric of society. Nwabueze (2002) argued that in certain instances, social deviance emerges, manifesting as acts of criminal behavior that arise from a failure or a deliberate unwillingness to adhere to established social norms governing interpersonal interactions. Such behaviour falls outside the boundaries of legality and societal expectations, representing an alternative avenue for achieving desired objectives. It signifies a form of maladaptive response involving the embracement of cultural goals while simultaneously rejecting the socially sanctioned means of attaining those goals. This phenomenon serves as a condemnation of society's shortcomings in its ability to effectively socialize individuals, suggesting deficiencies in the development of citizens' personality systems. Moreover, it serves as an indication of weaknesses within the mechanisms of social control, which ought to punish rather than reward those who engage in corrupt practices.

Umaru (2020). Corruption refers to criminal misconduct by public servants in carrying out their official duties. This may involve accepting illegal gratification, misappropriating or converting entrusted property, or obtaining financial benefits for themselves or others. He further argued that the main cause of poverty in Nigeria is mismanagement and corruption, leading to a large wealth gap between a small group of elites and the impoverished majority. Corruption creates a cycle that further concentrates wealth among the elites and causes deterioration of public infrastructure, social unrest, and high levels of unemployment, among other issues. Effectively controlling corruption is necessary to reduce poverty in Nigeria.

Local Government

Local government plays a vital role in ensuring effective governance and addressing the unique needs of communities at the local level. By actively engaging with residents and understanding their individual circumstances, local governments contribute to the development of vibrant and sustainable communities. Local government refers to a governing body that administers a specific geographical area or locality. It is typically established at the sub-national level, such as a city, town, or county, and is entrusted with the provision of public services and the management of local affairs within its jurisdiction. As Majekodunmi (2012) states, local government is a form of governance that operates at the grassroots level, overseeing the administration of a particular locality, such as a town, city, or county. It serves as the closest and most accessible level of government for the citizens, shouldering the responsibility of delivering public services and implementing policies that directly impact the everyday lives of individuals within its jurisdiction. Local government can be defined as per the provisions stated in the 1976 Local Government Reforms:

“Government at local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal government in their areas and to ensure, through devolution of functions to their councils and through the active participation of the people and traditional institutions, but that local initiative and response to local needs and condition are maximized”, (FRN, 1976).

Local governments are established to address the unique needs and concerns of a particular community and to ensure that its residents have access to basic services such as education, healthcare, public safety, and sanitation. The powers and responsibilities of local governments vary from country to country, but they generally have the authority to collect taxes, create and enforce local laws, and regulate land use and development. Thapa (2020) says that local government is a unique and complex system of governance that is rooted in the principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are made at the most local level possible. It is composed of elected officials who are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of a specific geographical area and who possess a broad range of administrative, legislative, and executive powers. Through the exercise of these powers, local government is able to determine the needs and priorities of its constituents and take action accordingly. Whether it is providing essential services, enacting laws and regulations, or promoting economic development, local government plays a vital role in shaping the lives of individuals and communities across the globe.

In many countries, local governments are composed of elected officials who represent their constituents and make decisions on their behalf. These officials may be organized into councils, boards, or committees, and they work with local government employees to manage public services and facilities. Local governments also often collaborate with other levels of government, such as state or national governments, to address larger issues or access additional resources. According to Ndreul (2016), local government refers to elected governing bodies responsible for administrative, legislative, and executive functions within their respective jurisdictions. They are recognized as the governing authority that establishes and implements specific measures within a defined territory. According to Bello-Imam (1996), when considering local government from an administrative perspective, it can be understood as a distinct administrative unit with specific geographical boundaries, powers, and administrative authority that operates with a certain level of autonomy. Local government entities are responsible for managing and governing a defined territory within a larger political framework. They possess the authority to make decisions and implement policies that directly impact the local community they serve. The concept of relative autonomy highlights that local governments have a certain degree of independence in carrying out their administrative functions. While they operate within the overall framework of national or regional governance, local governments are granted a level of discretion to tailor their policies and services to meet the specific needs and characteristics of their locality. This autonomy allows local governments to address local concerns more effectively and efficiently, as they possess a better understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities within their jurisdiction.

Empirical Review

In a study conducted by Shinge (2019), the focus was on the impact of inadequate infrastructural facilities on the socio-economic development of Ussa Local Government Area in Taraba State, Nigeria. The research revealed significant deficiencies in infrastructure, including poor maintenance, a lack of consistent services, and insufficient institutional support. Notably, electric poles were found to be frequently malfunctioning, resulting in long queues and an unreliable power supply, leading to high electricity bills. The respondents, primarily active farmers, heavily relied on rural infrastructure like roads, storage facilities, and clean water sources, particularly boreholes, which were found to be in a dismal state. The study recommended the implementation of solar power as an effective solution for rural development, suggesting the use of solar cells to provide reliable water sources and alleviate the hardships faced by rural communities, especially farmers.

In their 2017 study titled "Corruption in the Nigerian Local Government System: A Path to Progress," Edeh and Nwakamma highlight the pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria. They emphasize that corruption has deeply penetrated all sectors of the economy, resulting in widespread poverty despite the country's abundance of resources. Nigeria ranked 136 out of 168 countries in terms of corruption, indicating its position as the 32nd most corrupt nation in the world. The study focuses on corrupt practices within the local government system and utilizes prebendalism theory. Employing content analysis, the researchers identify key factors contributing to corruption, such as an unstable value system, a lack of public commitment, poverty, greed, and the practice of paying for official positions. The study concludes that corruption hinders Nigeria's progress, particularly in local government administration, and must be eradicated. Recommendations include strengthening anti-corruption institutions like the EFCC and ICPC, ensuring no one is exempt from investigation, and promoting enhanced financial monitoring in the local government system.

In Okereka's (2015) research titled "Corruption and Development in Nigeria: A Critical Re-Examination," the focus was on investigating the impact of corruption on Nigeria's overall progress. The study highlighted Nigeria's abundance of human and natural resources yet attributed the country's severe poverty and underdevelopment to corruption, specifically public corruption, where public office is exploited for personal gain. By employing historical analysis and content examination, the study draws relevant data from existing literature. Utilizing a political economy approach, the paper traced the roots of corruption back to colonialism, a problem that persisted even after independence. Notably, the research revealed prevalent issues in Nigerian society, including the embezzlement and misappropriation of public assets, as well as a lack of transparency and accountability among the ruling elite. One of the key suggestions made in the paper is to shift societal values away from wealth and condemn individuals who have amassed fortunes through illicit means instead of idolizing them.

In a comprehensive study conducted by Ezeifekwuaba (2022), the focus was on examining the impact of corruption on sustainable development in Africa, with Nigeria serving as a specific case study. The prevalence of corruption in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, presents a significant challenge that affects various sectors, including private industries and government entities. To conduct this research, the author collected secondary data from a wide range of sources, such as library materials, government publications, journals, the internet, and daily newspapers. The research paper primarily highlights how corrupt practices among political leaders have significantly hindered the stability and growth of Nigeria's economy. Moreover, the study reveals that corruption exacerbates poverty levels, leading to increased criminal activity within the nation. To address these issues, the paper proposed the investigation of corrupt leaders and the recovery of embezzled funds. Additionally, it suggested that anti-corruption organizations should operate independently, free from the influence of the executive branch, and be under the authority of the judiciary.

Methodology

This study aims to carefully analyze and study recent literature to better understand how corruption affects the way local governments operate. The focus is on exploring how corruption has negatively impacted the infrastructure of local government entities. To achieve this, the study will thoroughly examine current literature, paying close attention to the details and context. This approach will help uncover the various aspects involved in local government administration, especially when corruption is involved. By using this method, the study can gain a deeper understanding of the topic and conduct a more detailed analysis of the complex dynamics at work.

Theoretical Underpinning

This work is firmly rooted in the principles of System Theory, which draws inspiration from the groundbreaking research conducted by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Systems Theory presents a unique perspective, considering organizations or systems as intricately interconnected entities. It recognizes that any modifications or actions taken within one component of the system can trigger a ripple effect, impacting other interconnected components. Within the realm of Systems Theory, the interdependence of organizations or systems becomes apparent, as alterations in one component can reverberate throughout the entire system. Within this framework, the detrimental effects of corruption within the local government system on infrastructure development are highlighted. These effects manifest as substandard living conditions, reduced productivity, and an overall decline in economic well-being. The present essay sheds light on the indispensable role of effective governance in infrastructure development and emphasizes the disruptive nature of corruption within this system. Corruption within the local government system establishes a vicious cycle of poverty and hindered progress. By diverting funds originally designated for infrastructure projects, corruption perpetuates the dismal state of vital components such as roads, schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure. Consequently, the general population is deprived of essential resources, nurturing dissatisfaction and discontent. This feedback loop intensifies the adverse impact of corruption on infrastructure, thus perpetuating the cycle of underdevelopment.

Moreover, corruption's influence extends beyond infrastructure development, adversely affecting the economy, social services, and governance in Nigeria. It erodes the foundations of the rule of law, distorts the allocation of resources, erodes public trust, and

exacerbates both poverty and inequality. These complex interdependencies illustrate how corruption permeates various sectors, obstructing comprehensive development. In the context of Nigeria's local government system, pervasive corruption leads to the misallocation of resources and the degradation of infrastructure. These emergent characteristics underscore the systemic nature of corruption and its far-reaching implications for infrastructure development.

The impact of corruption in local government system in Nigeria on infrastructural development

Corruption has plagued Nigeria for a considerable period of time, permeating various sectors of society, including the intricate fabric of the local government system. This deeply ingrained problem has had profound and detrimental effects on the country's governance, economy, and the overall well-being of its citizens. Throughout Nigeria's history, corruption has become a persistent and pervasive challenge, hindering progress, development, and the fair distribution of resources. The local government system, which plays a crucial role in delivering essential services to the grassroots level, has not been immune to this corrosive influence. Instead, it has suffered from a range of corrupt practices that undermine its effectiveness and erode public trust.

1. One of the key manifestations of corruption within the local government system in Nigeria is the embezzlement of public funds. Officials entrusted with the responsibility of managing public resources often exploit their positions for personal gain, diverting funds meant for infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and other vital services. This misappropriation of funds has dire consequences, leaving communities deprived of the necessary facilities and exacerbating poverty and inequality. This observation was supported by research by Okereka (2015), who blamed official corruption, more specifically, the abuse of public office, for the country's extreme poverty and underdevelopment. There have been numerous cases of local government officials misappropriating funds meant for development projects or public services. For example, in 2019, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested 16 local government chairmen in Kwara state for allegedly diverting funds amounting to millions of naira. Olafusi (2019) had reported that the Kwara zonal office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested 16 local government chairmen for their alleged involvement in misappropriating a N4 billion loan. The chairmen were accused of diverting 10% of the monthly internally generated revenue for personal use and sharing N100 million among themselves after securing the loan. The individuals under investigation were identified as Risikat Opakunle, Saidu Yaru Musa, Umar Belle, Ayeni Dallas, Fatai Adeniyi Garba, Lah Abdulmumeen, Raliat Funmi Salau, Aminat Omodara, Muyiwa Oladipo, Oladipo Omole, Abdullahi Abubakar Bata, Saka Eleyele, Lateef Gbadamosi, Oni Adebayo Joseph, Omokanye Joshua Olatunji, and Jibril Salihu. They had requested the loan to pay salary arrears to teachers, local government staff, and pensioners. During interrogation, the suspects admitted to sharing the loan and receiving 10% of the internally generated revenue. The council chairmen are currently in EFCC custody and may be charged to court after the investigations are completed.

Furthermore, legal proceedings were initiated by the Makurdi Zonal office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) against Otsapa Ubani Otsapa, who holds the position of chairman for the Benue State Chapter of the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Ado Local Government. On a specific date, October 9, 2020, Otsapa appeared before Justice Moris Ikpambese at the Benue State High Court located in Makurdi. The charges leveled against him consist of two counts, namely engaging in criminal conspiracy, abusing his authority, and diverting public funds totaling an amount of N17,552,400.00. During 2019, the EFCC apprehended Tukur Yabo, the Director of Works and Housing in Tureta Local Government Area, Kano State, Nigeria. Also apprehended were Hon. Abubakar Maigishiri, a Councilor in charge of Social Welfare, Tureta LGA, and two others involved in the misappropriation of N980,000 in public funds. In addition, two individuals named Danjuma Ibrahim and Sambo Abdullahi, who work for the Ministry of Social Welfare and Community Development, were apprehended by authorities. These arrests followed an investigation prompted by a petition regarding the unpaid salaries of Sokoto Marshal Corps/Neighborhood Watch Operatives in Tureta LGA. The suspects were accused of utilizing the diverted salaries for personal gain instead of fulfilling their obligation to the workers (PM News, 2019). In a separate incident, Alhaji Kabiru Ado Panshekara, the Chairman of Kumbotso Local Government Council situated in Kano State, faced a 14-month suspension due to allegations of misappropriating a significant sum of N177 million from the council's financial resources. The suspension was implemented by seven out of the eight council members and remained in effect until the completion of his term. It commenced on October 31, 2020, serving as a response to the alleged embezzlement.

2. Another aspect of corruption within the local government system is the deeply rooted problem of bribery and extortion. This form of corruption involves public officials who hold positions of power exploiting their authority to demand illicit payments or engage in nepotistic practices. These officials use their influence to grant contracts, permits, or licenses to individuals or organizations in exchange for personal gains, thus establishing a system that prioritizes the interests of a select few while disregarding the welfare of the majority. The pervasive nature of bribery and extortion creates a culture of patronage within the local government, wherein those who are willing and able to offer bribes or engage in corrupt dealings are more likely to receive preferential treatment. This undermines the fundamental principles that should guide public service, including fairness, transparency, and equal opportunity. Instead of serving the best interests of the community, public officials exploit their positions to accumulate wealth and power at the

expense of the public they are meant to serve. One common manifestation of this corrupt behavior is the solicitation and acceptance of bribes by local government officials in exchange for providing services or granting favors. Citizens frequently find themselves in situations where they are compelled to pay bribes in order to obtain basic services, such as securing business permits or gaining employment within the local government. This practice creates an environment of exploitation, where individuals are forced to part with their hard-earned money simply to access opportunities and resources that should be available to all on equal grounds. The consequences of bribery and extortion in the local government system are far-reaching. It perpetuates inequality and undermines social cohesion by widening the gap between the privileged few who can afford to pay bribes and the disadvantaged majority who suffer from limited access to essential services. Moreover, it erodes trust in public institutions and contributes to a sense of disillusionment and apathy among the citizenry. When corruption becomes pervasive within the local government, it hampers development, stifles economic growth, and perpetuates a cycle of poverty and injustice.

3. Contract inflation and kickbacks refer to unethical practices involving local government officials who engage in inflating the costs of contracts and demanding kickbacks from contractors. These illicit activities have far-reaching negative consequences as they undermine both the quality and efficiency of public projects. The act of contract inflation involves artificially increasing the financial value of projects beyond their fair market prices. This deceptive practice serves as a means for corrupt officials to siphon public funds into their own pockets or those of their associates. By artificially inflating contract costs, these officials create an avenue to embezzle a portion of the allocated budget, diverting funds from their intended purposes. As a result, the actual resources available for executing public projects are significantly diminished, impairing the government's ability to deliver essential services to its citizens. Furthermore, kickbacks further exacerbate the detrimental effects of contract inflation. Local government officials who engage in these practices demand illegal payments or bribes from contractors in exchange for awarding them contracts or facilitating their smooth execution. This corrupt transaction unfairly tilts the playing field, favoring those contractors who are willing to participate in such illicit exchanges. Consequently, qualified and competent contractors who refuse to engage in bribery may be overlooked, compromising the overall quality and efficiency of public projects. This not only undermines healthy competition but also impedes socioeconomic development, as projects may be awarded to less competent or unscrupulous individuals or entities. The consequences of contract inflation and kickbacks are wide-ranging. The diversion of public funds and the subsequent diminishment of available resources severely impact the government's capacity to meet the needs of its citizens. Public infrastructure projects suffer from inadequate funding, resulting in delays, poor construction quality, and incomplete execution. Vital sectors such as education, healthcare, and transportation bear the brunt of these corrupt practices, leading to substandard facilities and limited access to essential services. The overall development and progress of communities and regions are significantly hindered as a result.

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of corruption within Nigeria's local government system has had severe implications for infrastructure development in the country. Despite the fundamental objective of the local government system to bring governance closer to the people and promote community-level advancement, corruption, mismanagement of resources, and abuse of power by local government officials have hindered its effectiveness. Corruption within the local government system in Nigeria is fueled by factors such as weak institutional frameworks, political interference, and lack of accountability. This has led to the embezzlement of funds earmarked for infrastructural development, resulting in a lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and good roads in rural areas. The misallocation of resources and diversion of funds meant for infrastructure development have contributed to the poor state of roads, schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure in Nigeria. The implications of corruption on infrastructure development in Nigeria are far-reaching. The lack of infrastructural development at the local government level has led to poor living conditions, low productivity, and a decline in economic growth. Corruption within the local government system has created a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, exacerbating the wealth gap between a small group of elites and the impoverished majority.

Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed above regarding corruption within the local government system in Nigeria, here are some recommendations:

1. The Nigerian government should focus on strengthening institutions responsible for combating corruption, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Provide these institutions with adequate resources, training, and autonomy to effectively investigate and prosecute corruption cases. Additionally, ensure the protection of whistleblowers who expose corruption within the local government system.
2. Strengthen the recruitment, training, and performance management systems within the civil service to ensure the employment of competent and ethical personnel. Implement merit-based recruitment processes and establish mechanisms to detect and sanction officials engaged in corrupt practices.

3. Conduct widespread awareness campaigns and civic education programs to educate citizens about their rights, the negative impacts of corruption, and the importance of demanding accountability from local government officials. Foster a culture of integrity and citizen activism against corruption

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