

Political and Professional Participation of Women in Nigeria: Its Challenges and Prospects **Gbadebo, Fatai Adeleke**

ABSTRACT

Women's participation is insignificant in various professional and political activities in Nigeria. Studies identified several hindrances to women's participation, little empirical study on women's roles in professions and parties' structures. This paper examines women's activities in professional and political parties in Nigeria. The paper argues little positions are vied and applied in parties and professions by women. Strict requirements by professionals, strong competitive and traditions from men were identified. Lack of time for public life, finances and poor electoral process hindered their participation. There is a need to reduce on requirements of professionals, party systems and increase public awareness.

Keywords: Political Participation, Professional participation, Women, Challenges, Prospects

INTRODUCTION

The position of Nigeria as the most populous African country has prompted many professionals' interest and concern to improve on the equality of gender toward her development. There is unequal treatment by male counterparts to women despite equal proportional population ratio 49 to 51 as enumerated in 2006 Nigeria Population Census (NPC, 2006). Historically, the participatory role of women in pre-colonial era was subordinate to men, where women were left behind in both political structure and administrative hierarchy in Nigeria's ethnic groups. A few roles were performed by women in the past in areas of spiritual but played significant duties in the selection of kings in some of the ethnic groups. In all traditional systems in Nigeria, especially before the advent of colonial masters, women's position was normative and highly subordinated to men. The contact with the colonial administrators reduced the little recognition accorded to women. Men were in the forefront of all sectors including the political structures and civil service, professionals and economic aspects. The type of system adopted in all the segments led to women's indoctrination and little or no policy nor effort used in the past to break the chains of subordination. It is widely believed in mostly ethnic groups that

women's responsibilities start and end in the kitchen. Men were more empowered than women, and the pattern of administration in colonial era favoured the men. Right from Nigeria Independence in 1960 to Fourth Republic (1999-2015), both national and indigenous issues such as traditional institutions, political and professionals in particular remains male-dominated.

Despite numerous constitutional laws or conventions both international and national, addressing the critical issue of political rights of women (Nigeria is a signatory), women were still in subordinate position. Two memorable laws were 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women and the 1989 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW). However, these two conventions produced some positive steps in the right direction by eliminating all forms of political discrimination against women in Nigeria's Constitution. For instance, it was in 1979 Second Republic's general elections that women in Northern Nigeria had the franchise to exercise their voting rights. This implied that women could not contest for political positions nor participate in choosing their political leaders until 1979 Second Republic's general elections.

In Marilyn's (1992) argument, she opined that politics is everyone's business and it affects the lives of each of us and the political space therefore belongs to all citizens irrespective of sex. She made her position clearer in the inter-Parliamentary Union in 1992 on equal status of women with their male counterpart in the political activities of their country. Also, recent debate in 2012 Inter-Generational dialogue on women in Nigeria organised by the Centre for Human Development titled 'Promoting Women's Political Participation' brought together women including party leaders, female politicians, market women, civil society organisation and gender to debate on finding lasting solutions to male's domination in politics.

Despite all these efforts, few women have been able to raise their head above male domination in both professionals and political participations in Nigeria. However, women in almost all countries of the world had the rights to vote but insignificant numbers were allowed to be voted for especially in Nigeria's nascent democracy. Women are barred from applying for certain appointments in some professionals, irrespective of equal academic and physical qualifications of both

sexes. The study, therefore examined the political and professional participations of women in Nigeria's democratic process in Southwestern states, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite the fact that women constituted 49.2% of Nigeria's population as reported in Nigeria Population Census of 2006, women still have little political appointment either elective or nominative in Nigeria (Jegele, 1994). The 1998 Nigerian Human Development Report (HDR) observed various broad-based discriminations against women particularly in African countries in terms of employment, education, health care and nutrition. However, there has been little focus on the political participation of women especially in the areas of elective position or contest as party executives, professional and public administration. Little studies in the past on the participation of women in various professional bodies and associations in Nigeria.

However, many researchers such as Califano (1989) and Oyewole (2000) conducted studies that centered on the political, labour force participation, and policy-making, unequal participation in the authoritative allocation of values and resources between both sexes. The participation of Africa's women in general political processes in respective societies is a new area that has attracted scholarly attention. Some works have focused on women's roles in indigenous African's political organization. Others have traced the history of their engagement in politics from the colonial period to decolonisation and the achievement of independence. Although, many citizens including both local and international organisations have provided different approaches and suggestions in putting an end to male dominance but little results have been achieved. Scholars like Ekeanyanwu (2013) believe that the legal rules have a consequent effect on the women while Califano (1989) emphasised a serious hindrance to women on conventions, habits, customs, and unequal biases planted in both sexes rights from birth. Previous studies focused on the customs and less on western capitalism that relegated women's traditional role to social and domestic categories, and outright dependence on their husband's survival. Scholars like Oyewole (2000) put the equality of men and women on the same par and believed that women in Nigeria do not reflect the equal status conferred on them by the Constitution. Yet, the fact remains that women in gender spheres remain a central

phenomenon for development in Nigeria since they constituted nearly an equal numerical strength and therefore their political participation and professional contributions should remain relics to the development of all sectors in Nigeria as a whole.

Different approaches have been adopted in the past to break the chains of women's subordination and perpetual slavery to men. But this has been little achieved in gender-political and professional association. The Marxist feminist employed the variables of race, class and gender to face the women's subjugation but Winifred (1992) indicated that some ineffective levels of women can be related to nonperformance in economic structures. The study is highly important because of various diluted methods adopted in the past especially in eradication of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, inequality of sex and different gender roles in the constitution. There is no known empirical study on the level of women involvement and empirical investigation on political appointment and various professionals in Nigeria. It must be noted that the true emancipation goes beyond mere agitating but the effective and operational laws for equality are needed. This study fills the gap in knowledge by examining the political and professional participations of women in Nigeria's democratic process.

WOMEN IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, although women constitute 50 percent of the population and 51 percent of voters in elections, yet, they do not enjoy their full political rights like their male counterparts (Ofong, 2002). Available statistics revealed that women's overall political representation in government is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010). The military regimes in Nigeria from 1966 to 1979 witnessed male domination in all the Federal, State and Local governments' appointments. No female was appointed into the highest political machinery of the government, either the Supreme Military Council or Armed Forces Ruling Council. Despite long military rule in Nigeria since 1960 Independence, the military administrators in all the states of the federation were men and the situation was not too different during Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2015). In the 1979 general elections, the excuse that long rule of military as a major excuse had hindered women's performance in political and elections' processes remain challenging (Oriavwote, 2000). Out of five political parties that contested elections in the Second Republic (1979- 1983) all the Presidents and Vice-President Candidates were men. Out of contested Governors and Deputy

Governors in the 19 states then, only two female Deputy Governors were presented by the National Party of Nigeria out of five parties. This indicated that the executive arms of government in both the state and federal levels comprised of only 2 (1.0%) women while men had (99.0%). Besides, no woman won a seat out of 95 Senate seats and only two women won membership seats into the 449 House of Representative in the 1979 general elections. The Shagari-led government appointed one woman out of 45 cabinet ministers and 3 women as junior ministers. The same poor situation was repeated in the 1983 general elections when less than 100 women (which is less than 0.8% of all the positions contested for by women) ran for political offices out of 12,000 political offices in all the tiers of governments. From these 100 women, only 2 women ran for vice gubernatorial positions, 4 women for the Senatorial seats where only one seat was won; 19 women ran for House of Representatives while 71 seats in State House of Assemblies were vied for by women. Also, in 1997/98 transitional programmes, only 8 women members were elected into the Senate out of 109 seats and 16 women out of 369 House of Representative seats. In this 1997/98 data, it indicated that out of contested position in the National Assembly, only 5.0% of the elected positions were female, which is insignificant when compared to their male counterpart.

Between 1998 and 2015, women were encouraged to contest elections in Local, States, and National levels unlike the previous elections. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations were in the crusade of awareness to motivate women to maximum participation. Not only this, political party like Peoples Democratic Party waived interests' form and party nomination fees for women who were interested in contesting elections, the decision of the party was to give women easier ways to contest effectively with their male counterparts by eradicating the financial weakness of women. Despite these encouragement in the 1999 general elections, out of the 978 contestable seats in all the States' Houses of Assembly, men won 966 (98.8%) while women won only 12 (1.2%) positions. At the National Assembly, women occupied 13 (3.6%) out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives, while men occupied 347 (96.4%) seats. Also, in the upper chamber, women won 3 (2.8%) seats out of the 109 seats in Senate, while their male counterparts won 106 (97.2%) seats. In the 2003 general elections, out of the 951 available seats in all the states' houses of assembly, women won 39 (4.0%) seats and men occupied 912 (96.0%) seats. There was no significant improvement in the House of Representatives since women occupied 21 (6.0%) seats and men occupied 105 (94.0%) sea while only 3.7% of the women won seat in the Senate. There was

no significant improvement in the House of Representatives since women occupied 21 (6.0%) seats and men occupied 105 (94.0%) seats while only 3.7% of the women won seat in the Senate. There was low level of increase in the 2007 general elections, out of 990 seats, women won 54 (5.5%) seats in all the States' Houses of Assembly and men occupied 94.5% (936) seats. In the lower chamber of House of Representatives, women occupied 25 (7.0%) seats and men 100 (93.0%) seats. In the Senate, women occupied only 9 (8.3%) seats while men won the remaining seats.

Lastly, in the 2011 general elections, only 8.0% of all the political positions occupied by women and men cleared the remaining 92.0% of the public elected offices. Also, only 32 women were elected into both Senate and House of Representatives (Independence National Electoral Commission, 2011). Agbalajobi (2010) further confirmed that women occupied 26 out of the 145 positions in the presidency between 2007 and 2010 and this indicated that many appointments were male dominated. Even on a mere committee level set-up by Federal, State and Local governments, men always dominated all the political structures of government. For instance, out of the popular Vision 2010 Committee set-up in Nigeria, only 11 were women out of 179 members of the committee, this represented only 6.1% of the entire committee members. Though, efforts of some promoted associations such as Abacha's Family Support Programme, Babangida's Better Life for Rural Women, 40 years operation of National Council of Women Societies, National Association of University Women, Women in Nigeria, Nigerian Market Women Association and The Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria created little achievements in the area of political participation of women. In the 1957 general elections, before Nigeria's independence, three women were elected into the Eastern House of Assembly, some women were also in the forefront of political and cultural emancipation of women in the North and Western regions, which many people saw as a sign of positive developments toward future participation.

Women were relegated to the background and this arose from the unnecessary attachment to feminine gender (Gonyok, 2013), whereas, women constituted nearly the same proportion to male. Prior to any general elections, people always chorused and agitated that a greater number of women must vie for elective positions in the country but after

the elections, few positions were contested and won. The women were playing both subordinate roles and positions in home and family life, which had a negative influence on their participation in professional and political life.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SELECTED PROFESSIONS IN NIGERIA

A number of issues received little scholarly attention in gender imbalance and these include the employment, political and professional participations in Nigeria. There is a need to examine empirically the rate of participation of women in such bodies and redirect the attention toward reducing the high rate of discrimination against women.

Right from the colonial era to 1960 Independence, from the independence to the present Fourth Republic (1999-2015), women had a handful of appointments into civil service especially in policy-making bodies (Komolafe and Henry, 2010). Despite the 1963 census and the demographic data that showed Nigerian women in 1985 constituted about 50% of the nation's population and in spite of their numerical parity with males, all indices of nation's development indicated a consistent bias against women. In 1985, a woman was first appointed as the Vice-Chancellor in the history of Nigeria's educational system; and, between 1987 and 1990, 63 women served as commissioners in all the States, 68 women rose to the position of Director-General, which remained a token to their men counterparts (Ikeanyibe, 2009). Although, there was a great discrepancy even in school enrolment, for instance, in 1980, 42.0% of total enrolment in the primary's schools 38.0%, in secondary schools and 20.0% in the tertiary schools which literarily indicates that there were little opportunities for women compared with men in civil service positions (Federal Ministry of Education Comparative Statistics Handbook, 2003).

The United Nations (2009) statistics showed that about 60% of women were in agricultural labour in Nigeria compared to men in agriculture sector. The statistics further showed that 50.0% in husbandry, 95.0% in food processing while 10.0% enjoyed benefit of literacy as against 40.0% of men. Another United Nations Global compact Annual Review further showed in 2009 that in labour force survey of 1966, 94.0% of eligible males were economically active while 64.0%

females were redundant. Also, United Nations Development Programs (2010) manpower survey revealed that 18.0% of women were in major employments and less than 7.0% in technical, professional and scientific manpower categories while in 1982, about 14.0% women were in the Federal Civil Service compared with nothing less than 85.0% men. Appointments were given to women in the least materially rewarding level in civil service and other related professional (Federal Civil Service Handbook, 1999). Most women engaged in the informal, semi-skilled, pre-modern, and poorly paid sectors of a rapidly changing and fast-moving economy. Women were still excluded from the mainstream of national affairs.

In 1989, a National Commission for Women was established in line with the United Nations General Assembly resolution 3320 and 3523 of December 1975, which called on all member states to establish a national commission aimed at fully integrating women into the mainstream of development. Equal participation of sexes without any hindrance remains only avenue for greater development of any nation irrespective of the natural resources. Therefore, hope of any nation centres around the evolution and development of entire people through equal participation of both sexes. According to reports from the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) that if the collective social existence is paramount and relevant to the need of society, there is a need to involve both sexes maximally to have a meaningful change. The report went further that there is a need for any law to be situated within a social framework and respond to the need of that society to reflect social order. The paper further examines the appointments of women in the administrative positions of selected professional bodies in Nigeria.

(a) Nigerian Bar Association

This professional body is non-profit and admits all lawyers after call to the Bar in Nigeria. Their main responsibility includes promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law and good governance in Nigeria. It has a great working partnership with many national and international non-governmental organisations concerned with human rights, the rule of law and good governance in Nigeria and in Africa. The body is made up of 109 branches, 3 professional sections, 2 specialised institutes, 6 practice-cadre forums, and high level of leverage in the political society in Nigeria. Only 4.2% of the executives were women since 1900 to 2015 in all the state and national executives. Out of 30 past chairs, only one (3.3%) woman chaired the association in almost 115 years of its existence (Nigeria Bar Association Statistics Handbook, 2015).

(b) Nigerian Medical Association

Nigerian Medical Association is a professional association that only registers the Nigerian doctors and physicians with almost 35,000 members. The body was established in 1951 with four affiliated associations: Nigerian Dental Association, Nigerian Medical Women Association, National Association of Resident Doctors, Medical, and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria. With the exception of Nigerian Medical Women Association, which is predominantly women, no woman has been the chairperson of these associations since their inception. Besides, only 1.7% of all the executives were women since its inception while less than 0.2% chaired by women out of the 3 affiliated associations (Nigerian Medical Association Comparative Data, 2015).

(c) Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria

This body is one of the well-known professional associations that regulate the activities of accountants in Nigeria. It was established in 1965 and by 2014, over 14,000 members have registered. Presently 2 women had chaired the association out of the 47 chairs in the past and 2.3% of all the executives since its inception were women. Beside this, only 1.7% of all the executives in all other related associations had women in their executives in these four associations: Chartered Institute of Bankers, Association of Nationals Accountants of Nigeria, Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria, and Nigerian Accounting Association (Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria Statistics Handbook, 2014).

(d) Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria

This body regulates and controls the training and practice of engineering in Nigeria. It is to ensure and enforce the registration of all engineering personnel such as Engineers, Engineering Technologists, Engineering Technicians, and Engineering Craftsmen. It is a distinct body in the sense that majority believe that only men are fit for engineering works. No woman has become the president of the association since its inception in 1992 and the number of women has not exceeded three in the total executives in every administration.

(e) Academic Staff Union of Universities

The body was formed in 1978 as a successor to the Nigerian Association of University Teachers, formed in 1965. The Body

comprises all the academic teaching staff of all the Nigerian universities both state and federal. This association was one of the formidable militant groups that fought against military rule in Nigeria. Since the inception to 2014, there is only insignificant (1.1%) number of women in the executive bodies in various universities and national as a whole (Academic Staff Union of Universities Administrative Book, 2014). No woman has been a president of the union since 1978 up to 2015.

Its Challenges

Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems in political involvement ranging from large scale marginalisation in voting exercises and in allocation of political offices. Political violence and the social stigma that politics is a dirty game remain major causes for the low representation of women. There are identified factors that hinder equal participation of women with men but the paper identified these distinct social factors as hinderance. This can be briefly summarised as following:

POLITICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AS MALE AFFAIRS

Low levels of political and professional participation by women are explained partly by societal norms and culture that reserved these exclusively for males. Many scholars like Zenger and Folkman (2012) argued that norms and legal enactments and requirements created a significant gap in the participation rate of women when compared with their male counterparts. The Independent Electoral Commission in Nigeria, a body charged with the responsibility of conducting elections in the Fourth Republic (1999 to 2015) lamented that only 6 women emerged as deputy governors in a zone in 2007 while the remaining were males out of the 36 states in Nigeria. Rate of women is still far behind competing effectively with their male counterparts. Vissandjes, Abdool and Dupere (2008) argues that equality or artificial involvement of women in politics and other professionals could not be ascertained due to the culture of inequality, which seems to be firmly established. This indicated that society has been customarily gender-role, having been accepted by women themselves. During the Political conference held at Founder of Women in Technology, Lagos State, Southwestern, Nigeria by Somolu-Lesi (2016:3) lamented that:

I contested the position of chairman of my local government in the 1999, 2003 elections and failed. Even the village women saw me as an arrogant and disobedient woman that disobeys the traditions of our people

In order to corroborate this assertion, an address by one of the founding members of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Nigeria held at the Convention Hall, Barcelona Hotel, Wuse 2, Abuja, Shekarau (2014) said that:

I was the only female law student in the department during my university, the males treated me like a pet. Despite my brilliant academic performance, men still find it difficult to change their belief.

Anker (1997) argues that equal political participation is practical problems owing to the weight of culture and tradition. Politics has traditionally been a male domain and in Nigeria's societies especially, traditional or patriarchal values remain strong. In such circumstance, women are often face practical barriers to entering politics since society look at them as rebel to the norms of the society.

Poor Electoral Process

Poor female participation in politics is highly connected with the fact that more males constitute the membership of most political parties and mostly available to be voted for. Scholars Anifowose (2004) and Agbalajobi (2010) described Nigeria's politics as a dirty game and indecent profession since women were exposed to many irritating behaviour and interaction with men. Harsh and unclean electoral process are regarded as sacrilege and ungodly practices and literally termed as cultural bastardisation (Akiyode-Afolabi and Arogundade (2003). Many Nigeria's politicians were not credible and the foundation of politics and practice is generally considered a rough one Adeleke (2015) argues that the perception of professional or academics on the general electoral process resulted into high rate of voters' apathy in the society. This indicated that fair and free electoral process encourages many voters to vote and encourage positive behavioural pattern. Voting participation is just an integral part of effective and fair electoral processes, which determine the level of women's participation while poor procss discourage participation. Therefore, electoral violence is one of the factors highly affected the free and fair electoral process in Nigeria.

Electoral violence is an inhuman usage of force by political parties or

their supporters to intimidate opponents and threaten a democratic regime. This has often accounted for seizure of political power by the use of undemocratic means such as force. Violence aimed at intimidating opponents (women regarded as the weak sex) to deny them the freedom of expression and choice. According to Adejumbi (1998), electoral violence is any form of physical force applied at disorganising the general electoral processes and destructions of electoral materials where voters are intimidated to cast their votes through intervention of political thugs. Gutierrez-Romero (2012) argued on Nigeria previous elections that the process was deeply flawed with names and photographs of many contenders were omitted from the ballots. The elections had disastrous rigging and violence with an estimated of 700 violent elections ranging from killing to assassinations. Jega (2013), the Independence National Electoral Commission's (INEC) chairman lamented the culture of thuggery, intolerance and unruly conduct by partisans in the electoral process and how mobs of armed youths disrupted the electoral process in some areas, harassing and intimidating innocent voters. He expressed further that electoral officials were also intimidated, harassed and threatened while some INEC supervisory officials were assaulted and killed.

LEGAL ENACTMENT AND STRIFE COMPETITION FROM MEN

A gender balance in both political and professional leaderships is very crucial to the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy and development. Though, there were serious struggle and agitations by the civil organisations, Agbalajobi (2010) argues that women's antecedents showed that they are incompetent to lead by traditions and religions, and not physically fit in many male professions like security, police and armed forces. Despite women's participation being hampered with traditions in political administration, some professional legislations and laws put insignificant number of women to employment in some Professionals or groups because of the patriarchal nature of the jobs. In Ofong's (2002) word, the hostile climate and strong competition from men, hard political environment and some women's lack of interest weaken the women participation in political activities. In a related development, Ryan-Okpu (2007) lamented on the rules and regulation in the military professions that insignificant intake were allocated to women during the recruitment exercises. She said that 'I passed the entrance examination and physical competency into Nigeria Army, the Commandant remarked that the Army has no provision for women and

they had a standing order that one out of every 28 men should be taken.

LACK OF TIME FOR PUBLIC LIFE, FINANCE AND GREATER FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a general view that woman's role start and end in the kitchen. In the traditional society, the role of women from early days shows that women belong to the kitchen. With economic meltdown and high rate of inflation in the country, women's everyday life is sometimes so harsh and mere survival in a precarious economic situation is a challenge. Vissandjes, Abdool and Dupere (2008) argues that women find it difficult to provide house needs will surely find it difficult to vie for any position in political parties. This indicated that the question of women's participation in politics hardly arises where state's economy is bad. Also, women's participation in political activities declines and centered on mere vote, electoral campaigns, promoting and organising political events. As a result of this economic hardship, inferiority complex and persistent inadequate of financial bouyant make women reluctant to become involve in public life. In a related argument, Akinyode-Afolabi and Arogundade (2003) said that difficult social conditions and concerns relating to family needs and deteriorating social conditions make women lose interest in political life.

However, the bigwigs are involving in Nigeria's politics and the foundation of the politics centered much on moneybags. Political shareholders always set aside the rules of the game and the entire politics in Nigeria is characterised with fraud right from the primaries level (candidates of the party to party executive) to general election processes (Ofong, 2002). The voters were enticed with cash and goods everywhere, and cajoled into voting, mercenaries were paid to disturb electoral process. The exercise from 2003 to 2007 general elections was more of a show of financial strength than the capturing of the wishes of the people. Nigeria's politics were operated moneybag and women found it difficult competing with men due to their financial weakness. Since males dominate all sectors including economy, therefore, women participation in politics are minimal since huge financial demanded in effective participation.

CONCLUSION

The findings showed that women registration and participation in major professional bodies and political parties were insignificant in Nigeria. Little number of women were in various political appointments and

elected positions in both the local and state government while insignificant numbers were members of professional executives. It further showed that men dominated the party executives and few women were elected as party officials. The findings established that three hindrances for equal opportunity of sexes established such as various enactments and restricted laws in term of job contract in professional bodies, perception and cultural beliefs that women are incapable to perform some professional responsibilities and socio-cultural believed that it is a taboo for women to lead men.

There is a need for a special mobilisation fund for women in active politics. This will assist in no small measure mitigate some of the challenges facing women such as lack of enough funds for political mobilisation. Also, female politicians in the local, state and national levels must see political rights as an integral part of their Fundamental human Rights. Women must be ready at any point of their political activities to challenge any violation of such rights and other forms of inequalities in Courts. There is a need to improve on legal enactment of all the professionals and parties' laws and regulations in favour of equal status of men and women. Women need to seek new ways of networking, carry out sustained awareness campaigns to win elections, register enmasse, infuse and permeate the political parties' structures in manner to encourage representative in the political space. Both the government and non-government organisations should enlighten the public on the equal participation of men and women. There is a need for total eradication of culture that is detriment to equal political participation of both sexes and regarded as repugnant to social justice and equity. Lastly, the affirmative laws should entrench equal percentage of both males and females in the constitution.

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