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## CHAPTER 10

### Diversity, trust and social cohesion

*Bram Lancee*

#### 1. Introduction

An often-mentioned explanation for changes in trust and social cohesion is the increasing diversity that societies are faced with. Central to this argument is that, besides characteristics of individuals, the specific context, or social environment that people live in affects how individuals trust one another. The scholarly literature has primarily addressed two types of diversity: ethnic and economic diversity.

The first argument is that trust varies with ethnic diversity. Concerns about immigration and the rising visibility of ethnic and racial minorities have triggered a lively scholarly debate on the consequences of ethnic diversity for trust and social cohesion (see for an overview Morales 2013; Schaeffer 2014; Van der Meer/Tolsma, 2014; Koopmans et al. 2015). For example, in political science and sociology, Putnam's (2007) 'hunkering down' thesis is a central focus of debate: In neighbourhoods or areas that are more ethnically diverse, citizens withdraw from public social life and reciprocity and trust go down. If trust is indeed negatively affected by migration-related diversity, this poses a major policy challenge for Western societies. On the other hand, contact theory suggests that in more ethnically diverse contexts levels of (inter-ethnic) trust are higher due to increased opportunities for inter-ethnic contact. There are also studies that do not find any evidence for a relation between ethnic diversity and trust.

Second, besides ethnic diversity, economic diversity and economic inequality are often-mentioned as drivers of trust (Uslaner/Brown, 2005; Wilkinson/Pickett 2009; Lancee/Van de Werfhorst 2012). Solt (2008; 2010), for example, concludes that higher levels of inequality are associated with lower political engagement (political interest, political discussion, and electoral participation). High levels of economic inequality imply large differences between people, resulting in the poor feeling powerless and thus less trusting. Furthermore, when resources are distributed unequally, people at the top and the bottom will not see each other as facing a shared fate (Uslaner/Brown 2005). It has also been argued that larger differences in income results in status competition (Wilkinson/Pickett 2009), which emphasizes differences between people. As a consequence, trust is lower. Because inequality has been reported to increase substantially in Europe (Nolan et al. 2014), trust might be at risk.

This chapter focuses on the potential consequences of rising ethnic diversity and economic diversity for trust being at risk. The chapter starts with a brief description of the concept of trust and social cohesion. The section on diversity as a driver for eroding trust discusses the mechanisms that explain why changing diversity can be expected to affect trust and social cohesion. Subsequently, I will discuss how responses in the research agenda might look like.

#### 2. Trust and social cohesion

Trust is a fundamental element of socially cohesive societies. It is therefore of utmost importance to understand and explain variation in trust and social cohesion. Eroding trust could harm social cohesion in neighbourhoods and societies in general. On the other hand, high levels of trust can be a good thing for a cohesive society.

In this chapter I take a broad perspective on trust and social cohesion. Following Koopmans et al. (2015, p. 2) I refer to it as 'a community's capacity for collective action in the pursuit of public goods, and the attitudes and expectations that undergird this capacity'. Social cohesion thus refers to the collection of attitudes that express some degree of confidence in other people or institutions and shared values and norms, but also to the set of (behavioural) indicators that reflect social networks, civic participation, intergroup contacts and the like.

If diversity affects trust, this has potential consequences for a range of indicators that are often considered desirable. For example, (perceived) neighbourhood safety, social and civic participation, trust in one's neighbours, contact with neighbours, or helping behaviour. Eroding trust might have consequences on the national level. An often-mentioned risk of negative consequences of ethnic

diversity is the rising of anti-immigrants attitudes (Hopkins 2010). Some scholars refer to the rise of populism, the more general political processes of looking inward, rather than outward (for example, Euroscepticism), the willingness to pay taxes (Hopkins 2009), or more general coordination problems (Habyarimana et al. 2007). Better understanding if and, more importantly how diversity affects trust can help designing policies that contribute to a more cohesive society.

### 3. Ethnic diversity

In almost all Western societies, the consequences of immigration represent a key topic on both the public and political agenda. For good reasons: if people retreat from society and develop 'parallel' societies, this is of utmost importance to the on-going debate on social cohesion (Portes et al. 2005). On the other hand, increasing diverse societies trigger inter-ethnic contacts which contributes to higher levels of tolerance. The question, however, is why we can expect an association between diversity and social cohesion. Several mechanisms have been suggested to explain a relation between ethnic diversity and social cohesion (see Koopmans et al. 2015).

A first mechanism that has been put forward to explain the relation between diversity and trust is 'out-group' bias and 'in-group' favouritism. The main argument of 'in-group' favouritism is that people favour others who are alike (McPherson et al. 2001). According to the homophily principle, people build relations with others that are similar to them. Consequently, people tend to see 'in-group' members as more trustworthy, and out-group members as less trustworthy (Hewstone et al. 2002). Thus, people tend to trust people similar to them more ('in-group' favouritism), resulting in ethnic boundaries. In areas or contexts that are more diverse, people are, on average more frequently confronted with others that are 'unlike them', resulting in lower levels of trust.

'Out-group' bias is based on group threat theory and provides a more substantial explanation as to why ethnic cleavages occur. Group threat theory explains 'out-group' bias with the argument that people compete with other ethnic groups for scarce resources such as jobs and housing. As a result of this (perceived) competition, people experience threat or conflict situations with other ethnic groups. Thus, because other ethnic groups compete for the same resources, people feel threatened by people unlike them, resulting in lower levels of trust. A second reason for outgroup bias to occur is social identity theory. Besides threat based on competition over resources, social identity theory assumes that 'out-group' bias is a consequence of more permanent and psychological distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Blumer (1958) originally identified group identity, out-group stereotyping, preferred group status, and perceived threat as being intrinsic to prejudice. The theory 'assumes that individuals identify with one or more groups and that the diverse interests of different groups generate conflicts that in turn generate negative attitudes' (Hjerm 2007, p. 1254). 'In-group' favouritism and 'out-group' bias are often regarded as a key mechanism to explain why contextual diversity drives down social cohesion.

However, there are also reasons to expect a positive relation between diversity and social cohesion. The opposite, or alternative mechanism to 'out-group' bias and 'in-group' favouritism is the positive effect of inter-group contact (Allport 1979). Contact theory postulates that one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice is when people of different backgrounds have interpersonal contact. Along this line of reasoning, people who live in a diverse area have more contact with others 'unlike' them, and will therefore trust them more. A meta-analysis indeed supports the assumptions of contact theory (Pettigrew/Tropp 2006). Thus, in neighbourhoods that are ethnically diverse, opportunities for contact with people that have other backgrounds are larger. As a consequence, levels of trust are higher. For example, Lancee and Dronkers (2011) show that in more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, interethnic trust is higher among native residents (while, on the other hand, general trust is lower). However, as Allport (1979) outlined, whether interethnic contact promotes or reduces ethnic biases is likely to depend on the quality of contact.

The relation between ethnic diversity and trust is also explained by coordination problems. It has been suggested that in contexts with higher levels of diversity, coordination problems arise. In this view, a shared language or commonly understood practices are necessary to successfully coordinate the production of common goods (Habyarimana et al. 2007). In ethnically diverse areas, it is more likely that people do not speak a common language, or perceive higher cultural barriers. As a consequence, it may be harder 'to get things done'. There is some empirical evidence that trust is lower in neighbourhoods in Australia that are linguistically more heterogeneous (Leigh 2006), although no effect of linguistic diversity on trust was found in the Netherlands (Lancee/Dronkers 2011). A related mechanism to coordination problems is that of shared

preferences. A condition for collective action is that there is a shared goal. In more diverse areas, such shared goals might be insufficiently present. Page (2008) has argued that asymmetrically distributed preferences may erode trust because they are a potential for disagreement.

Another mechanism that is put forward by Koopmans et al. (2014) is network effects of diversity on trust and social cohesion. Network theory generally assumes that with social closure (i.e. a high degree of interconnectedness between people), there are better opportunities for social control. That is, with high levels of network closure, everybody knows everybody, which improves the sanctioning capacity in the network (Buskens 1998, 2002). As a consequence, levels of trust, social capital and social cohesion are higher in networks with social closure (Coleman 1990). Social closure is less likely in more diverse contexts. For example, there is evidence that friendship in school classes cluster along ethnic lines. Also, because of 'out-group' bias and 'in-group' favouritism, ethnic cleavages imply that social closure is lower. The network mechanism thus refers to the network effects of ethnic cleavages and its detrimental effects on trust.

#### **4. Economic diversity**

Similar to explanations for the consequences of ethnic diversity, also economic diversity has been argued to affect trust. Many scholars report a negative association between income inequality and trust and social cohesion (Rothstein/Uslaner 2005; Uslaner/Brown 2005; Wilkinson/Pickett 2009; Solt 2010; Lancee/Van de Werfhorst 2012; Burgoon 2013). As income inequality in Europe is rising (Nolan et al. 2014), a negative effect on economic diversity on trust is of great interest to policy makers concerned with social cohesion in Europe. This section discusses the arguments that explain why we can expect a relationship between economic diversity and social cohesion.

A first reason why there is a negative relation between inequality and trust is the unequal distribution of resources. Resource theory argues that it is the availability of resources that affects social cohesion and trust. Lynch et al. (2000) claim that 'under a neo-material interpretation, the effect of income inequality [...] reflects a combination of negative exposures and lack of resources held by individuals, along with systematic underinvestment across a wide range of human, physical, health, and social infrastructure'. The central idea in the resources argument is thus that if there are people who have little resources, they can or do not want to participate. As Uslaner and Brown (2005) put it: 'The direct effect of inequality on participation arises when inequality of resources leads people in lower economic brackets to refrain from participating, either because they have fewer resources or because they believe that getting involved will be fruitless because the system is stacked against them'. For example, income inequality restricts access to housing for low-income households (Dewilde/Lancee 2013). In other words, in neighbourhoods or other contexts with high levels of inequality, there is a substantial amount of people with little resources, who do not have the means to participate, be it socially, civic or otherwise. Along that line of argumentation, reduced social cohesion in more unequal contexts results in lower trust too. Neckermann and Torche (2007) label the resource explanation a 'mechanical effect' of inequality: because economic status is related to social participation, rising inequality will result in a corresponding increase in disparities in social participation.

A second reason why inequality depresses trust can be labelled the psychosocial explanation. Whereas the first explanation refers to the consequences of the unequal distribution of tangible resources, the second explanation stipulates that economic diversity has psychosocial consequences, because it affects the way that people relate to each other.

A first psychosocial mechanism that has been suggested in the literature is that if increasing status differences and resulting status competition. The central argument why inequality reduces trust is that as economic differences between people are larger, uncertainty increases and trust in other people subsequently goes down. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), greater differences between status group members exist with higher levels of inequality, resulting in status gaps. These gaps trigger status competition to the detriment of a range of desirable outcomes, including trust. Wilkinson and Pickett argue that 'the scale of income differences has a powerful effect on how we relate to each other'.

Besides the negative effects of status competition, there may also be status anxiety, rooted in feelings of relative deprivation. Neckerman and Torche (2007) label this an 'externality' effect where 'living in a context of high inequality might intensify feelings of relative deprivation among low-income individuals'. As Oxendine (2009) puts it: '[i]n an atmosphere of economic stratification, the poor will feel degraded, will be envious and will continually covet the riches they lack'. Lancee

and van de Werfhorst (2012) conclude indeed that both resources and psychosocial processes explain the negative relation between income inequality and social participation. They find that even when taking into account resources on the individual and societal level, there still is a negative effect of income inequality on social participation. Furthermore, differences in individual income matter more under conditions of high inequality: whereas lower income individuals participate less than higher income individuals, this gap is even larger in highly unequal societies.

However, similar to ethnic diversity, contact theory predicts a positive relation between economic diversity and social cohesion. In contexts that are economically diverse, there are more opportunities for people of other income groups to meet. Contact between different economic groups contributes to better mutual understanding and tolerance. Along this line of reasoning, economic diversity contributes to a socially cohesive society by increasingly 'open' attitudes.

A last mechanism, in line with contact theory, is that economic diversity and the resulting heterogeneity in society may breed creativity. According to Burt (2004), good ideas are disproportionately in the hand of people who have connections between groups. Burt argues that 'opinion and behaviour are more homogeneous within than between groups, so people connected across groups are more familiar with alternative ways of thinking and behaving'. As a consequence, this creates 'good ideas', resulting in social capital. It can be expected that in more economically diverse contexts, more between-group connections. Indeed, Lancee and Dronkers (2011) find a positive effect of economic diversity in neighbourhoods on trust in the neighbourhood.

## 5. General mechanisms

Several arguments have been discussed that explain why we can expect a relation between ethnic and economic diversity. There are mechanisms that imply a negative relation between diversity and social cohesion, but there also mechanisms that stipulate a positive relation. The most researched mechanism that theorizes a negative relationship is likely that of 'out-group' bias and 'in-group' favouritism. On the other hand, contact theory is a prominent explanation for a positive relationship between diversity and trust.

Figure 1 summarises the mechanisms that are discussed above. This list is not exhaustive; one can most likely identify additional mechanisms. However, the list shows that there are different and even competing explanations for a relation between diversity and social cohesion. The central question is to better understand when, how and under which conditions these mechanisms operate. Answering these questions will advance our understanding of trust and social cohesion.

Figure 1: Mechanisms that may explain a relation between diversity and social cohesion

Mechanism	Ethnic diversity	Economic diversity
Out-group bias and in-group favouritism	Ethnic threat due to competition over resources and ethnic identity.	Status competition exacerbates group differences and feelings of 'us' versus 'them'.
Intergroup contact	Inter-ethnic contacts result in mutual understanding and tolerance.	Contact between income groups increases mutual understanding and tolerance.
Creativity	Between-group connections induce different ways of thinking and result in good ideas.	Between-group connections induce different ways of thinking and result in good ideas.
Coordination problems	Language and cultural barriers result in reduced coordination and thus cooperation.	
Shared preferences	Asymmetric preferences due to cultural differences	Status anxiety, feelings of relative deprivation implies that common goals are difficult to define and achieve.
Network effects	Reduced sanctioning capacity and social control due to ethnic cleavages in networks	
Resources		Resources that are required for social and civic participation are unevenly distributed.

## 6. Knowledge gaps

While there are many studies on the topic that look at associations between indicators of diversity, we know relatively little about which mechanism explains the (absence of) associations. Several knowledge gaps can be identified that would benefit from future research in order to better understand how and if diversity affects social cohesion.

First, more research is needed to find out which mechanisms operate in the relation between diversity and social cohesion. The set of mechanisms listed in figure 1 suggests that there are multiple mechanisms that explain if and how diversity and social cohesion are related to one another. To better understand how societies can deal with changing diversity, we first need to understand how its effects on social cohesion come about.

Second, the mixed results of previous empirical studies suggest that the relation between diversity and trust is conditional on other factors. Future research will have to be carried out about the conditions under which there is a relation between diversity and trust. Which processes moderate the relation between diversity and social cohesion? Are these processes the same in different countries, or for different social groups? Central in this conditional analysis is, again, the mechanism that link diversity to social cohesion.

Furthermore, findings may depend on the level of analysis (countries, regions, neighbourhoods, the workplace). It is an unanswered question whether the mechanisms described above function similarly at different contextual levels. Can we expect the same processes in societies, neighbourhoods, school classes, or work environments? Future research could be directed at studying the role of the level of analysis.

This chapter discusses ethnic and economic diversity, but there are other forms of diversity that may equally matter for social cohesion, for example, in terms of religion, education, or age. While the literature on the effect of ethnic and economic diversity is relatively abundant, we know much less about potential effects of other forms of diversity on trust. To better understand the relation between diversity and cohesion, it is desirable to study other forms of diversity too. A likely candidate to study is religious diversity (Wuthnow 2011). For example, does religious diversity have similar effects as ethnic diversity? Are effects of income inequality different from wealth inequality? Can we expect similar effects of diversity in terms of educational attainment? Furthermore, studies on the consequences of ethnic diversity almost exclusively focus on non-western ethnic minorities. Yet, in Europe there is a high amount of intra-European migration and mobility, which is often high skilled. It can be expected that effects of migration related diversity are different when other social groups are considered. Especially in light of the European internal labour market, we need to better understand the consequences of ethnic diversity that is spurred by intra-European migration.

Last, while much empirical research analyses the relation between diversity and trust, the majority of studies use cross-sectional data and consequently studies associations. Most research available is correlational, and often tests the same hypothesis with cross-sectional data in different settings. Such associational research is less likely to make an innovative contribution to scholarly literature. To formulate policy responses, it is desirable to know more about the causal mechanism that drives this relationship. Empirical research would be desirable that analyses the underlying causal mechanism that links diversity to trust. This requires the collection of new data and the use of different methods (longitudinal analysis, experimental methods, qualitative fieldwork).

## 7. Scenarios of changing diversity, trust and social cohesion

How can we expect diversity and trust to develop in the future? While the evidence for an association between diversity and social cohesion is growing, we know very little as to how to effectively build trust in diverse contexts. Given these largely unanswered research questions, it is very difficult to identify likely scenarios. In this section, I provide some tentative thoughts about how diversity and social cohesion might develop in Europe. It has to be emphasized that these scenarios are, by definition, both speculative and extreme cases. However, the scenarios illustrate the possible consequences of diversity for social cohesion and provide a tool for 'forward thinking' in how to deal with diversity, both in terms of future research and designing policy.

The starting situation for the scenarios is to specify a trend in diversity. We assume a trend of increasing economic inequality, stagnating non-western immigration, and rapidly increasing intra-European mobility. As several scholars have pointed out, inequality is rising; economic differences between individuals are thus growing, both in terms of income (Nolan et al. 2014) and wealth (Piketty 2014). Furthermore, immigration from non-European countries is unpopular and immigration is politically highly opposed (Lubbers et al. 2002), threatening the nation state (Joppke 1998) and thus largely banned. At the same time, because of the freedom to move within the EU, the accession of new member states, and the economic crisis, intra-European mobility surges (Fligstein 2008; Kuhn 2015). Thus, in this scenario, we have a situation with stagnating, non-Western immigration, extremely high intra-European mobility and expanding socio-economic cleavages due to rising economic inequality.

In the first scenario, the dominant mechanism in the relation between diversity and social cohesion is one of threat due to 'out-group' bias and 'in-group' favouritism. Under this scenario, we can expect a more fragmented society, and lower levels of trust, especially in groups 'unlike you'. Some citizens reap the benefits of high mobility, and economic opportunities, while others, mostly lower educated are left with lower paying jobs in less attractive places. As a consequence, there will be a clear demarcation of winners and losers of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2006; Burgoon 2013), and this cleavage is likely to be economic, as well as cultural. Besides a bifurcation of attitudes, physical segregation is likely to increase as well (Massey 1993). Thus, in a scenario of increasing diversity and a dominant mechanism of 'in-group' favouritism it might be speculated that a more fragmented society creates 'islands of trust'; separated sub-groups or regions that show high internal cohesion, which are less open for between-group connections. As a consequence, societies are less cohesive. 'Out-group' bias breeds misunderstanding between social groups, resulting in lower levels of trust, social and civic participation, as well as more extreme political attitudes, such as xenophobia.

In a second scenario, intergroup-contact is the dominant operating mechanism. Under the 'contact scenario', the consequences for trust and social cohesion are very different. In this scenario, individuals of different economic and cultural background are able to build cross-cutting networks, that increase creativity, resulting in 'better ideas' (Burt 2004). Thus, in this scenario, increasing diversity goes hand in hand with increased mutual understanding, because different groups have contact with one another (Pettigrew/Tropp 2006). As a consequence, solidarity increases, as well as social and civic participation; attitudes are generally more 'open'. This scenario may be likely because change in ethnic diversity refers to intra-European mobility, which is less threatening than an increase of non-western immigration, to whom cultural distance is substantially larger (Schneider 2008). In the contact scenario, the increasing economic differences between people might even increase solidarity. For example, Kenworthy and Pontusson (2005) find that increasing inequality has resulted in more redistribution, as 'existing social-welfare programs compensated for the rise in market inequality'. Thus, in the 'contact scenario', diversity breeds socially cohesive societies with high levels of trust, also between groups.

Another possible and likely development is that, besides the increase in diversity sketched above, also immigration from non-western countries to Europe continues to grow rapidly. In this scenario, European countries are faced with an ever-increasing diversity of cultures that are vastly different from their own (Koopmans et al. 2005). Important in this vein is immigration from Muslim countries, as this implies the arrival of individuals who are very different culturally, religiously, and in terms of language. Moreover, immigration from low-income countries also exacerbates economic differences over and above the developments in inequality that have been mentioned already. Such rapid immigration is likely to increase changes described under both the conflict and the contact scenario.

## 8. Policy responses

Which kind of policies can be suggested to prevent a threat scenario to occur? What policies could foster a scenario that results in socially cohesive societies? While there are many open questions on the relation between diversity and social cohesion, there are also many questions on the policy implications and, more importantly, the effectiveness of policies. Many existing studies focus on the analysis of the relation itself, while the policy implications are largely under studied. It is therefore a relatively open question how a policy response could look like. Moreover, we know little about the effectiveness of policies that are suggested. Future research could thus explicitly support the impact analyses of existing policies. Such research would yield much needed evidence on the effectiveness of existing policies.

However, assuming a 'threat' scenario, some very general policy suggestions can be made. In order to avoid the development of islands of trust, and fragmentation across social groups several forms of mixing have been suggested, to create opportunities for (positive) contact (Allport 1979; Pettigrew/Tropp 2006). One could think of mixed school classes and neighbourhoods, but also of companies with explicit diversity policies. When people are more used to the (ethnic) differences around them, and when in a context that facilitates positive contact is the thought, a threat scenario can perhaps become a contact scenario.

Another condition for intergroup contact to result in positive (interethnic) attitudes, as opposed to threat is the presence of common goals (Allport 1979). Policies could thus aim for defining a common goal; in the neighbourhood, but also on the level of nation states, and Europe. For example, when people feel that the European project is one of their own, they are more likely to accept the consequences of increasing ethnic diversity as a consequence of intra-European migration. If people have a shared goal, they are more likely to work together and cooperate. For example, transnational experiences foster a more positive European identity (Kuhn 2015). Similarly, if a neighbourhood strives for a common goal like clean streets, cooperation is more likely and differences between people may be less of an obstacle.

In defining the conditions for contact to contribute to more positive inter-group attitudes, Allport also emphasised the necessity for authorities to support the contact and equal working of different groups. This seems a logical task for (new) policies. For example, a goal in the neighbourhood of cleaner streets could be supported by the authorities in terms of a budget and an infrastructure that facilitates meetings of the residents. It has also been suggested that all is a matter of time. Putnam (2007), for example, suggests that the negative consequences of ethnic diversity largely disappear when time passes. Over time and generations, people get more used to diversity and it therefore becomes less problematic in terms of people's perception of differences.

In sum, however, it should be emphasized that given the complexity of the topic at hand (different mechanisms, levels of analysis, and moderating conditions), it is difficult to provide general policy recommendations. Given the vivid scholarly debate about the nature of the relationship between diversity and cohesion, it is difficult to recommend and design policy. This is all the more complex since there are few studies that explicitly evaluate policies that already exist. For example, randomised controlled trials that evaluate neighbourhood policies on diversity are rare.

## 9. How could European R&I policy and Horizon 2020 react?

This chapter has discussed several arguments and empirical work why diversity and social cohesion may be related. Subsequently, knowledge gaps have been identified. The Horizon 2020 program could respond to these research challenges in the following ways.

First and foremost, a future research program could and should be explicitly targeting the knowledge gaps that are identified in the section 'knowledge gaps'. In short, these are: 1) identifying the different mechanisms that explain the relation between diversity and social cohesion; 2) studying the conditions under which diversity affects social cohesion; 3) the empirical analysis of the causal mechanisms that link diversity to social cohesion; 4) studying potential other forms of diversity and its effect on social cohesion.

Second, and related to the first point, much existing empirical work is limited because of available data. Especially when studying the consequences of diversity, comparative studies are essential. Comparative work, however, requires good comparable data. Future projects could include the collection of new data that allows for comparative research. Similarly, experimental data can help



to study specific mechanisms and causal relations. Furthermore, especially contextual data that measures diversity in different contexts comparably is hard to come by. For example, research effort could be aimed at creating a European data archive on country, neighbourhood, and regional contextual data. This could help researchers to access data, facilitate comparative work and improve possibilities for replication studies.

Third, general policies could be developed that explicitly take into account the conditions for positive inter-group contact, as discussed in the policy response section. While more research is needed to find out which policies are most likely to be successful, examples are mixing in neighbourhoods and classrooms, diversity and anti-discrimination policies in companies, and exchange programmes to foster a collective (European) identity.

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