



# POLICY BRIEF

## Stifling democracy in Tanzania Scenarios for the 2025 elections

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As Tanzania approaches its general elections on 29 October 2025, there is a significant risk that the polls will reinforce authoritarian practices rather than promote democratic governance. The ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, has consolidated power around President Samia Suluhu Hassan and disqualified the main opposition parties from the presidential race. Despite reforms that established the Independent National Electoral Commission, executive influence continues to undermine its credibility.

## Key findings

- ▶ President Samia's early nomination as Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)'s candidate – widely viewed as contravening party traditions – reflects declining internal democracy, which undermines Tanzania's democracy as a whole.
- ▶ The disqualification of the Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo party and the Alliance for Change and Transparency–Wazalendo (ACT–Wazalendo) makes the presidential polls a one-sided race.
- ▶ The early voting procedure in Zanzibar could trigger violence. While grounded in law, the opposition views it as a strategy to manipulate elections. The absence of Seif Shariff Hamad, Zanzibar's reconciliatory figure, increases the potential for violence. ACT–Wazalendo's candidate, Othman Masoud, is more resolute, which reduces the potential for a post-election compromise with CCM.
- ▶ The electoral framework and management bodies, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC), are seen as partisan, which undermines free and fair elections.
- ▶ Independent media are increasingly self-censoring, while harassment of opposition and dissenters continues.
- ▶ Increased security presence, intimidation and vigilante groups, especially in Zanzibar, threaten security on and after election day.
- ▶ While the INEC has announced increased voter registration, credibility concerns remain, with allegations of possible manipulation of voter data.

## Recommendations

Electoral management bodies (INEC and ZEC):

- ▶ Uphold the provisions of the law that guarantee impartiality to counter state interference
- ▶ Abide by regional and international best practices, rules and regulations governing the conduct of democratic elections and commit to their consistent application
- ▶ Ensure the meaningful involvement of all relevant stakeholders in key electoral decisions

Political parties:

- ▶ Refrain from any actions that may violate the country's Constitution or international laws and standards
- ▶ Commit to promoting peace and fair treatment throughout the election period

Government and security agencies:

- ▶ Respect and uphold the Constitution and international law, providing for free and fair elections

- ▶ Ensure equal application of the rule of law before, during and after the elections

Media:

- ▶ Ensure fair and balanced reporting in line with best journalistic practices
- ▶ Provide fact-based coverage during politically tense periods to ensure voters have accurate information about the electoral process

Regional and international community and observers:

- ▶ Participate actively as monitors and observers to witness firsthand key events
- ▶ Document and expose irregularities throughout the process to enhance transparency
- ▶ Support efforts to build an early warning system for Tanzania during the elections, given the threats of widespread violence due to the lack of judicial remedies



## Introduction

Tanzania will hold its general elections on 29 October 2025. This will be the seventh general elections since the return of multiparty politics in 1992. The first multiparty elections were held in 1995. Since then, the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), has won all the elections, making it one of Africa's longest-serving independence parties.<sup>1</sup> The general elections will include presidential, parliamentary and ward-level elections in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, Tanzania's semi-autonomous region.

These elections will be the first under President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who assumed office following the death of former president John Magufuli in March 2021.<sup>2</sup> During Magufuli's administration, Tanzania experienced a decline in democracy, marked by heightened political repression and restrictions on civil and political rights. As a result, the country's status in the Freedom House Democracy Index dropped from 'Partly Free' in 2020 to 'Not Free' in 2024.<sup>3</sup> In the early years of her administration, President Samia initiated reforms that represented a radical departure from her predecessor's policies.<sup>4</sup>

CCM has ruled since independence in 1961 and is one of Africa's longest-serving ruling parties

However, she has backtracked on the reform agenda going into the elections.<sup>5</sup> The political landscape remains sharply polarised, with opposition leaders facing legal harassment and civic space constrained. In Zanzibar, the Government of National Unity, composed of the ruling party, CCM, and the opposition Alliance for Change and Transparency–Wazalendo (ACT–Wazalendo), has been weakened by disagreements between the parties. This threatens peace and stability during the electoral process. Early voting in Zanzibar, though provided for by law, remains a point of contention.

This report relied on a combination of primary and secondary data. A field study was conducted in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar in July and August 2025, and interviews with key election stakeholders were conducted. For analysis, the report used data from various electoral frameworks, laws and policy documents.

### Chart 1: Map of Tanzania's regions



Source: Author

## Background and electoral political system

Tanzania is one of the more stable countries in the region and has conducted regular multiparty elections. Its political system comprises a dual-government structure – with a Union Parliament and presidency for both the mainland (formerly Tanganyika) and the islands, and a separate House of Representatives and presidency for Zanzibar. In the case of the Union, presidential and vice-presidential candidates run on the same political party ticket and are directly elected by universal suffrage for five years (incumbents may serve for a maximum of two terms).<sup>6</sup>

Tanzania's National Assembly, or Bunge, is based in the capital, Dodoma, and has 393 seats, including 264 elected through constituencies and 113 Special Seats for women allocated by party proportionality, five members elected by Zanzibar's House of Representatives, 10 appointed by the President, and the Attorney-General as an ex officio member. In 2025, eight new constituencies were added, bringing the total to 272 (222 in mainland Tanzania and 50 in Zanzibar). Zanzibar's House of Representatives has 76 seats, counting the Speaker: 50 elected, 18 Special Seats for women, and seven nominated by the President and Speaker.

## Tanzania's political context

Tanzania's political landscape is marked by CCM's deep-rooted dominance. The party has ruled since independence in 1961<sup>7</sup> and is one of Africa's longest-serving ruling parties. It is also considered to be one of the independence liberation parties of Southern Africa whose political strength is declining. Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF, Mozambique's FRELIMO, South Africa's ANC and Namibia's SWAPO have all seen declining vote shares in recent elections.

In the 2015 elections, CCM's vote share plummeted to 58% – the lowest since the return of multiparty elections. Growing opposition and perceived vulnerabilities prompted the party to use repressive tactics to clamp down on dissent.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in the 2020 elections, Magufuli won by a landslide with 84.4% of the vote, an outcome widely criticised for irregularities, including restrictions on the media, political parties and civil society.<sup>9</sup>

Internal party democracy within the ruling CCM has been stifled through an orchestrated move to make President Samia the sole candidate

Following Magufuli's death, Samia, as vice-president, was sworn in. Despite the constitutional provisions, her rise to the presidency was not straightforward, with factions loyal to Magufuli reportedly trying to obstruct her. Nevertheless, after assuming office, she began consolidating her position within the CCM party, initially sidelining Magufuli loyalists and bringing in new faces through periodic cabinet reshuffles.

President Samia initiated several reforms between 2021 and 2023. She lifted bans on rallies, released opposition figures and relicensed media outlets, which created optimism.<sup>10</sup> Between 2023 and 2024, the government established an ostensibly independent electoral commission and made superficial amendments to electoral laws, while actual control over appointments, budgets and decisions remained with the presidency. This allowed CCM to maintain its authoritarian framework while projecting an image of liberalisation.<sup>11</sup>

Going into the general elections, CCM has centralised power around the President with the help of a deep state colloquially known as *Mtandao* (network).<sup>12</sup> Internal party democracy has been stifled through an orchestrated move to make President Samia the sole candidate.<sup>13</sup> While this has deepened divisions within the party, a facade of unity is being presented to the public.

CCM faces little opposition in this year's elections after the disqualification of the two leading opposition parties. Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), the main opposition party, was barred after refusing to sign the electoral code of conduct in April 2025. Its chairperson, Tundu Lissu, also

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faces treason charges linked to his calls for electoral reforms, which authorities interpreted as an attempt to disrupt the elections. Similarly, ACT–Wazalendo’s presidential candidate, Luhaga Mpina, was also disqualified from the presidential race.<sup>14</sup>

Zanzibar will also hold elections on 28 and 29 October. Unlike the mainland, it allows early voting (*kura ya mapema*) under its Electoral Act No. 4 of 2018, Section 82.<sup>15</sup> This enables election officials and security personnel on duty to vote a day in advance. While proponents argue it ensures everyone can vote,<sup>16</sup> the opposition contends that it is a rigging scheme for the ruling party.<sup>17</sup>

Legal and institutional framework

In February 2024, Tanzania’s Parliament passed three bills: the National Electoral Commission Act (2023), the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Bill (2023) and the Political Parties Affairs Laws (Amendment) Bill 2023. Following these laws, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) was renamed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in what was seen as an attempt to reform the country’s electoral architecture.

One critical reform required that previously ‘unopposed’ candidates now undergo an actual election instead of being declared winners without votes being cast.<sup>18</sup> Another reform introduced competitive appointments of electoral officials through an independent panel chaired by the Chief Justice. Previously, Regional Administration and Local Government supervised elections, but this responsibility was transferred to the INEC under the reforms.

Criticism remains over the executive’s continued influence in appointing top officials to the electoral body

Despite these changes, criticism remains over the executive’s continued influence in appointing top officials to the electoral body.<sup>19</sup> The High Court retained Regional Administration and Local Government oversight of the 2024 local government elections signalling weak implementation of the reforms.<sup>20</sup> Presidential results also remain non-justiciable, despite a 2018 African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights ruling that the Tanzanian Constitution violated fundamental human rights.<sup>21</sup>

Chart 2: Tanzania’s electoral laws

Law or Act	Main provisions
Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, as amended	Sets the foundation for elections; defines presidential and parliamentary systems; establishes electoral bodies; sets term limits; Article 41(7) bars court challenges to presidential election results
Independent National Electoral Commission Act, 2024	Establishes the INEC as the electoral body; outlines composition, appointment of commissioners, powers and functions (voter registration, election management, constituency delimitation)
Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors’ Elections Act, 2024	Regulates procedures for conducting presidential, parliamentary and local elections, candidate nomination, campaigning, voting, counting and announcing results
Political Parties Affairs (Amendment) Act, 2024	Governs registration, regulation, funding and conduct of political parties; enforces party accountability and adherence to democratic principles
Electoral Expenses Act, 2010, still in force with amendments	Sets rules on campaign financing, expenditure ceilings, disclosure requirements and penalties for overspending or misuse of funds
Zanzibar Constitution, 1984, as amended (2010), and Zanzibar Election Act	Establishes Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC); regulates elections for Zanzibar President, House of Representatives and local government

Source: Author’s compilation

**Chart 3: Tanzania's electoral institutions**

Institution	Legal basis or provision	Main functions
INEC	Constitution of Tanzania, Article 74; Independent National Electoral Commission Act, 2024	Organises and supervises presidential, parliamentary and local government elections; manages voter registration; reviews constituency boundaries; declares election results
ZEC	Constitution of Zanzibar, 1984 as amended (2010), Articles 119–123; Zanzibar Election Act	Manages elections for Zanzibar President, House of Representatives, and local councils; oversees voter registration in Zanzibar
Office of the Registrar of Political Parties	Political Parties Act, 1992, amended 2024	Registers political parties; monitors compliance with law; enforces party codes of conduct; can suspend or deregister parties

Source: Author's compilation

## Key actors and messaging

CCM aims to secure a seventh consecutive election and maintain its dominance in Tanzanian politics. The incumbent, President Samia, was nominated in January 2025 – earlier than the party tradition – in a move aimed at dealing with internal party schisms.<sup>22</sup> She selected Emmanuel Nchimbi as her running mate, leveraging his grassroots support and influence. Vice-President Phillip Mpango reportedly declined the position, while former president Jakaya Kikwete, continues to wield political influence in the party.<sup>23</sup>

The party focuses on stability and continuity, with a manifesto outlining economic, social, governance and constitutional reforms aligned with Tanzania's new long-term Vision 2050. This approach allows CCM to build on existing policies while presenting an ambitious reform agenda to the electorate.

The main opposition party, CHADEMA, is not participating in the elections after the INEC disqualified it in April. Earlier, the party had resolved not to contest the elections without significant reforms, adopting a 'No Reforms, No Election,' stance during a December 2024 convention.<sup>24</sup>

In January 2025, internal elections saw Vice-Chairperson Tundu Lissu defeat longtime Chairperson Freeman Mbowe, creating frictions over the party's position on elections.<sup>25</sup> Mbowe's faction viewed the stance as a pressure tactic for reforms rather than a boycott, while Lissu took a more radical approach. On 9 April 2025,

while attending a campaign meeting in Mbinga, southern Tanzania, Lissu was arrested and charged with treason; his case is currently before the High Court.

ACT–Wazalendo's presidential candidate, Mpina, was disqualified from the race following a petition from the Registrar of Political Parties, which claimed his nomination was unprocedural.<sup>26</sup> Although the High Court overturned the decision, the Attorney-General's objection led the INEC to uphold the disqualification.<sup>27</sup> With both CHADEMA and ACT–Wazalendo excluded, smaller parties such as Chama Cha Ukombozi wa Umma (CHAUMMA) and the Civic United Front (CUF) now serve mainly to lend an appearance of inclusivity to the elections.<sup>28</sup>

## The opposition landscape is fragmented and reactive, and struggles to articulate a unified alternative

Despite their concerns about electoral integrity, ACT–Wazalendo is rallying around the *Linda Kura* (Protect the Vote) slogan as a citizen-led mobilisation and oversight effort. The party considers this strategy one that will energise the grassroots, especially in areas with strong support, such as Pemba Island.<sup>29</sup>

This notwithstanding, the opposition landscape is fragmented, reactive and has struggled to articulate a unified alternative.

**Chart 4: Presidential candidates cleared by the INEC, 2025**

	Candidate	Gender	Party	Running mate	Gender
1	Samia Suluhu Hassan	Female	CCM	Emmanuel Nchimbi	Male
2	Salim Mwalimu	Male	CHAUMMA	Devotha Minja	Female
3	Haji Ambar Khamis	Male	National Convention for Construction and Reform–Mageuzi (NCCR-Mageuzi)	Dr Evaline Munisi	Female
4	Saum Rashid	Female	United Democratic Party (UDP)	Juma Khamisi Faki	Male
5	Kunje Ngombale	Male	Alliance for African Federation Party (AAFP)	Chumu Abdallah Juma	Male
6	Wilson Mulumbe	Male	Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC)	Shoka Khamis Juma	Male
7	David Mwaijolele	Male	Chama Cha Kitaifa (CCK)	Masoud Ali Abdala	Male
8	Yustas Rwamugira	Male	Tanzania Labour Party (TLP)	Amana Suleiman Mzee	Male
9	Doyo Hassan Doyo	Male	National League for Democracy (NLD)	Chausiku Khatibu Mohamed	Female
10	Coaster Kibonde	Male	Chama Cha Makini	Azza Haji Suleiman	Female
11	Hassan Almas	Male	National Reform Alliance (NRA)	Hamis Hassan Majukumu	Male
12	Abdul Mluya	Male	Democratic Party (DP)	Sadoun Abrahman Khatib	Male
13	Georges Busungu	Male	Tanzania Democratic Alliance (TADEA)	Ali Makame Issa	Male
14	Mwajuma Mirambo	Female	United Movement for Democracy (UDM)	Mashabi Alawi Haji	Male
15	Twalib Kadege	Male	United Progressive Democratic Party (UPDP)	Abdallah Mohamed Hassan	Male
16	Majalio Kyara	Male	Social Action Union (SAU)	Satia Mussa Bebwa	Male
17	Samandito Gombo	Male	CUF	Husna Mohamed Abdalla	Female

Source: Author's compilation

## Voter registration and INEC preparedness

Voter registration ended in July 2025, with 37.65 million registered voters, a 26.55% increase from 2020.<sup>30</sup> Critics have questioned these figures, claiming they are manipulated to justify electoral fraud.<sup>31</sup> Urban areas, mainly Dar es Salaam, saw high voter registration, but disruptions in rural areas, such as among Maasai communities in Ngorongoro, raise concerns about disenfranchisement and manipulation.<sup>32</sup>

The INEC upgraded its Biometric Voter Registration kits, securing over 6 000 devices to update the Permanent Voters' Register. For the first time, voters can update their details online.<sup>33</sup> The new system runs on Android software, replacing the old Windows-based version. However, stakeholders have raised concerns about possible integration with the National Identification Authority database and the ruling party systems, which could enable manipulation – allegations the INEC has publicly denied.<sup>34</sup>



Despite the INEC figures showing high voter registration, turnout is predicted to be low. In the 2020 elections, the turnout was 50.72%; in 2015, it was 65%. Voter apathy could be high due to the impact of the disqualification of the two main opposition parties. CHADEMA's 'No Reforms, No Elections' clarion call could also affect voter turnout.

## Civic space and information environment

Civic space is severely restricted ahead of the elections. Opposition leaders experience harassment and abductions, while restrictive laws push journalists to self-censor. Underfunded and closely monitored, civil society struggles to engage citizens<sup>35</sup> and public discourse is muted by fear. Youth and women remain sidelined<sup>36</sup> and political competition unfolds in a shrinking democratic space, raising serious doubts about the elections' legitimacy and inclusiveness.

## Peace and security outlook

As Tanzania approaches the elections, repression on the mainland will likely keep dissent subdued. Fear, widespread apathy and the ongoing treason case against Lissu reduce the likelihood of CHADEMA-led mass protests, even amid growing citizen frustration.<sup>37</sup>

Opposition leaders experience harassment and abductions, while restrictive laws push journalists to self-censor

In contrast, Zanzibar stands out as a potential flashpoint. With its history of election-related tensions and an anticipated heavy security presence from the mainland, the use of vigilante groups known as *mazombi* increases the risk of post-election violence, especially around disputed early voting.<sup>38</sup> These will be the first general elections in Zanzibar without Seif Shariff Hamad, a key opposition figure who died in 2021. He was a reconciliatory figure and could often calm his base after elections.<sup>39</sup> His successor, Othman Masoud, is viewed as more uncompromising, which could deepen divisions and tensions.

Threats will likely focus on areas with a history of conflict, such as Pemba Island. The most dangerous times will occur during vote counting and announcements, especially if there are Internet or social media shutdowns and mass content removals.<sup>40</sup> Patterns of global shutdowns highlight the need for clear commitments from authorities to avoid disrupting communication. International and regional observer groups such as the African Union, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community should monitor this and pressure the government.

A strong security presence may deter violence, but perceptions of fairness will hinge on political restraint, proportionality and clear communication to counter misinformation.<sup>41</sup> The involvement of observer missions from the



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African Union, EAC and Southern African Development Community could reassure the public, while their exclusion would heighten tensions. Warning signs include accreditation withdrawals, Internet disruptions, mass arrests of opposition figures, restricted access to tallying centres, abductions of critics and online calls for election-day protests, all of which would increase tensions and suppress voter turnout.

## Scenarios

1. Managed stability: International and regional observers record electoral anomalies but refrain from categorical condemnation as CCM wins by a landslide with little opposition participation. There are pockets of violence and questions over CCM's legitimacy, but the status quo prevails.
2. Zanzibar flashpoint: Security crackdowns heighten tensions as early voting causes unrest, especially in Pemba. A high security presence in both Zanzibar and on the mainland makes protests highly unlikely.
3. Suppressed contestation: Disqualified opposition parties and fear-induced apathy lead to low voter turnout. Protests are pre-emptively stifled, consolidating authoritarian control.

4. External intervention pressure: The European Union, the United States, EAC and African Union denounce serious irregularities. Although CCM retains power, regional mediation efforts push for post-election reforms and dialogue.

## Conclusion

Tanzania's 2025 elections pose a significant risk of strengthening authoritarian practices rather than advancing democratic governance. The ruling party's control, exclusion of the opposition and institutional bias undermine electoral credibility. Limited civic space and low voter engagement further weaken inclusiveness. In Zanzibar, instability surrounding early voting heightens the risk of violence, underscoring the need for preventive action.

For policymakers, key steps include advocating for transparent electoral processes, ensuring the early deployment of reliable observers and supporting civic groups to counter misinformation and intimidation. Sustained diplomatic pressure, quiet but firm, will be vital to deter manipulation, preserve regional stability and encourage reforms that can restore Tanzanians' trust in the democratic process.

## Notes

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- 41 Interview with a Policy and Governance Expert, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 3 August 2025.

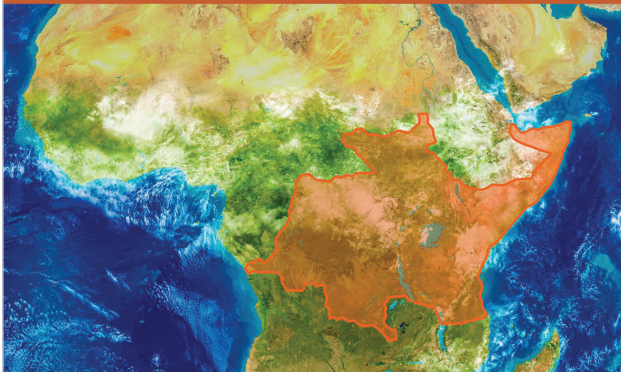


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## Too far, too wide? Assessing the expansion of the East African Community

Nicodemus Minde



The expansion of the East African Community (EAC) presents opportunities and challenges for the bloc and its member states. Countries are motivated to join by geopolitical, economic and security considerations, as well as foreign policy factors. These reflect both the strategic interests of applying countries and the EAC's regional integration goals. To maximise benefits and reduce risks, expansion must be navigated strategically.

EAST AFRICA REPORT 52 | MAY 2023



## Is Zimbabwe in a slow-motion race to the bottom?

Ringisai Chikohomero



Zimbabwe faces a deep crisis of confidence stemming from economic instability, currency problems and ineffective governance under ZANU-PF. Despite international re-engagement efforts, the government prioritises short-term survival over structural reforms. With weakened state institutions, a fragmented opposition and constrained civil society organisations, Zimbabwe remains trapped in cycles of dysfunction, making democratic transformation increasingly difficult.

SOUTHERN AFRICA REPORT 62 | AUGUST 2023



## Under the influence? Online mis/disinformation in South Africa's May 2024 election

Karen Allen and Jean le Roux



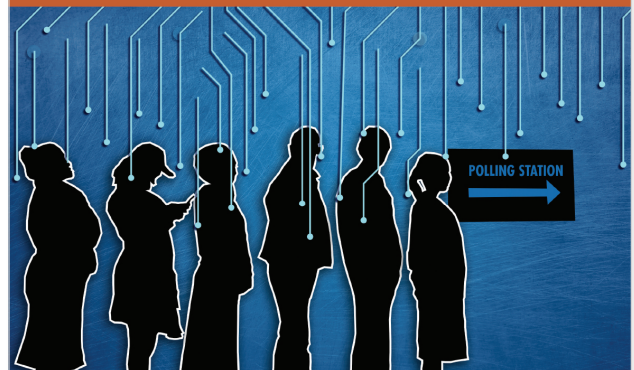
Online mis/disinformation campaigns have the potential to skew the information landscape and undermine key pillars of democracy especially during the election season. These information operations have become a tool of influence across Africa – at times undermining traditional professional media. With a focus on South Africa's 2024 election, this study spotlights the tactics, narratives and actors who drive such campaigns and offers lessons for other African countries.

SOUTHERN AFRICA REPORT 61 | DECEMBER 2024



## A question of influence? Case study of Kenyan elections in a digital age

Karen Allen, Jean le Roux and Bonface Beti



Online influence and coordinated disinformation campaigns during Kenya's August 2022 elections highlight the threat posed to democratic institutions by weaponising digital communications. This study examines the use of social media and messaging platforms in the polls. It reveals an emerging marketplace for influence operations where hashtags and tweets carry a price tag and a vast supply of digital entrepreneurs stand ready to monetise their social networks.

EAST AFRICA REPORT 49 | JUNE 2023

## About the author

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