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Citizenship Rights and National Unity: An Analysis of the Role of the State in the Transition from Crisis-Induced Solidarity to Sustainable Social Capital

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Iranian society has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for solidarity and national unity during periods of crisis, such as the Twelve-Day Sacred Defense. The fundamental question, however, is how this reactive and emotionally driven solidarity can be transformed into institutionalized and sustainable social capital. Addressing this question constitutes the central concern of the present study. The findings indicate that sustainable national unity rests on three key components: "social capital and institutional trust," "procedural justice and governance legitimacy," and "commitment to citizenship rights and the institutional framework." Through their dialectical relationship, these three components generate a cycle of mutual reinforcement. The analysis of "illegitimate filtering" as a governance paradox demonstrates that measures undertaken in the name of preserving national unity, when they violate citizenship rights and lack legal justification, not only fail to consolidate national unity but also become a source of erosion of public trust and weakening of social capital. The findings and theoretical proposition of this article emphasize that only through respect for citizenship rights and the institutionalization of procedural justice can national unity advance from episodic forms of solidarity to sustainable social capital. In this process, the state plays a pivotal role at three levels: "strategic–policy," "institutional–legal," and "executive–managerial." Practical measures include the adoption of comprehensive legislation, a paradigm shift in policymaking toward participatory approaches, and the establishment of executive mechanisms such as an integrated complaints management system and a performance management system based on citizenship-rights indicators.

Keywords: *national unity, citizenship rights, social capital, procedural justice, institutional trust, governance, illegitimate filtering*

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1. Introduction

National unity, as the backbone of the political and social life of every country, plays a decisive role in sustaining its independence, security, and comprehensive development. This concept, which is described in the political literature as "institutionalized social capital," extends beyond temporary and emotional solidarity and depends on the existence of structural trust between citizens and governance institutions. Throughout its turbulent history, Iranian society, particularly at critical junctures such as the Sacred Defense and, more recently, the Twelve-Day Sacred

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Defense, has demonstrated its remarkable capacity for solidarity and collective self-sacrifice. These experiences provide clear evidence of the existence of a rich reservoir of social capital within Iranian society.

Nevertheless, it can be observed that such unity and solidarity emerge predominantly during periods of crisis and in response to external threats. Although this phenomenon is valuable and vital in its own right, it does not, by itself, guarantee sustainable unity under ordinary conditions of social life. Indeed, the principal challenge confronting Iran's political system is the transition from crisis-induced cohesion to continuous cohesion. In other words, the fundamental issue is the transformation of fluid social capital into institutionalized and sustainable social capital.

In this context, the role of the state, as both an executive authority and a policymaking institution, is pivotal and decisive. Through prudent and well-considered governance, the state can create the conditions necessary for this transition. The central hypothesis of this article is that respect for citizenship rights and the strengthening of procedural justice constitute the key to this fundamental transformation. When citizens observe and experience fairness, transparency, and accountability on the part of governance institutions in their everyday lives, their trust in the political system is consolidated, and national unity is transformed into a sustainable phenomenon grounded in public satisfaction.

At the same time, it must be recognized that, in today's world, cyberspace has become a vital arena for the realization of many citizenship rights. In this regard, arbitrary restrictions on rights such as access to information and cyberspace—a phenomenon commonly referred to as filtering—may not only result in violations of citizens' fundamental rights but may also, in the long term, erode public trust and consequently weaken national unity.

Ultimately, this study seeks to examine the reciprocal relationship between citizenship rights and national unity and, with particular emphasis on the central role of the state, to propose practical strategies for institutionalizing national unity in the country. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and drawing upon authoritative documents, the study argues that the full realization of citizenship rights is a necessary condition for consolidating national unity, not as an emotional and situational phenomenon, but as a deeply rooted and enduring norm embedded within society.

With regard to the subject of the present article, several studies have addressed national unity. Among them, Azari and Habibollahi, in their article on the legal manifestations of national unity and Islamic cohesion in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the role of the national media in realizing them, examined this issue; Sobhi, in an article entitled "National Unity and Islamic Cohesion at a Glance," and studies addressing strategies for unity and cohesion have likewise examined the concept of national unity. Afshari et al., in their study on a strong state and the issue of national unity, also addressed this subject. Similarly, Saffar, in an article on national unity and Islamic solidarity from the perspective of the Qur'an and Sunnah, examined the issue from the viewpoint of Islamic sources, while Dehghani addressed it in a book on national unity and Islamic cohesion. However, no study was found specifically addressing "Citizenship Rights and National Unity: An Analysis of the Role of the State in the Transition from Crisis-Induced Solidarity to Sustainable Social Capital," and this constitutes the innovative dimension of the present research.

2. National Unity During the Twelve-Day Sacred Defense: Arising from Satisfaction or Political Insight?

The Twelve-Day Sacred Defense presented an unparalleled manifestation of national solidarity and unity in response to enemy aggression. This remarkable unity raises a fundamental question for analysts: Was this solidarity rooted in general satisfaction with political governance and the state of citizenship rights, or was it the product of the Iranian nation's political maturity and historical insight?

In democratic systems such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, assessing the extent of public satisfaction with governance is not particularly difficult, because objective and quantitative indicators can clearly reflect citizens' levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Among these indicators, public participation in elections, as the most important manifestation of popular presence in the political arena, reveals deeper realities concerning the relationship between the people and governance. When participation in the country's most important election reaches approximately 40%, it clearly indicates that one

cannot insist upon the existence of complete public satisfaction with political governance.

This dissatisfaction, however, by no means signifies opposition to the fundamental structure of the Islamic Republic. In analyzing social and political phenomena, it is necessary to recognize the fundamental distinction between "dissatisfaction with performance" and "opposition to structures." Across the spectrum of political attitudes and orientations within Iranian society, varying degrees of dissatisfaction can be observed, but these do not necessarily imply a desire to alter the structure of the political system. Much of this dissatisfaction is directed toward functional, managerial, and executive issues rather than toward the principles and foundations of the political system. This reality itself supports the proposition that the Iranian people have attained a degree of political maturity that enables them to distinguish between "loyalty to national ideals" and "criticism of governance performance."

Accordingly, a thorough analysis of the available evidence clearly demonstrates that this profound unity did not arise from satisfaction with existing conditions but rather from the depth of the Iranian people's political insight and historical understanding of existential threats. This profound insight is rooted in three historical-cultural layers. The first is the Iranian nation's historical collective wisdom, through which it has learned, over the course of its turbulent history, to prioritize unity over internal differences when confronting external threats. This collective wisdom, inherited from the experience of previous imposed wars, teaches the Iranian people that the preservation of territorial integrity and national independence takes precedence over domestic disagreements. The second layer is religious insight and Islamic culture, which have institutionalized self-sacrifice and devotion in defense of the Islamic polity and the homeland as elevated values. This cultural-religious outlook teaches citizens that defending Islam and Iran constitutes both a religious and national duty. The third layer is the lived experience of resistance. The present generation has inherited the experience of resistance to external pressures, and this lived experience has taught the Iranian people that, when confronted with coercion, they must act on the basis of unity and cohesion.

The unity demonstrated by the Iranian people during the Twelve-Day Sacred Defense generated substantial political legitimacy for the political system; however, it must be remembered that such legitimacy does not constitute permanent capital and is inherently fragile.

3. Theoretical Foundations: Components of Sustainable Unity

Sustainable national unity, conceived as institutionalized social capital, requires the simultaneous realization of three fundamental components that, through an organic and close interrelationship, form a coherent and inseparable structure. A profound understanding of these components and of their systematic interaction is essential for accurately analyzing the phenomenon of national unity and developing practical strategies for its realization in Iranian society.

3.1. Social Capital and Institutional Trust

Within theories of political and social development, social capital is defined as stable networks of trust and institutionalized norms of voluntary cooperation that make constructive collective action possible. In the context of Iranian society, this substantial capital is rooted in three historical-cultural layers: deeply embedded Islamic beliefs that promote values such as self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and enjoining what is right; formative collective experiences such as the Islamic Revolution and the Sacred Defense, which have embedded a shared memory of solidarity and resistance in the historical consciousness of the Iranian nation; and shared religious and national rituals and ceremonies that periodically reinforce collective belonging and social empathy. Nevertheless, the decisive issue in the transition toward sustainable unity is the qualitative transformation of this traditional and affective social capital into modern and rational "institutional trust." Institutional trust refers to citizens' profound confidence in the effectiveness, integrity, fairness, and accountability of governance institutions in everyday processes and structural interactions. This form of trust develops when citizens consistently experience predictable, fair, transparent, and law-based patterns of conduct in their objective and daily interactions with governmental and public institutions. The absence of institutional trust, even in the presence of strong traditional social capital, can gradually erode the foundations of national unity.

3.2. Procedural Justice and Governance Legitimacy

The theory of procedural justice, as a central paradigm in political science and public law, emphasizes the fundamental principle that the legitimacy of a political system does not depend solely on equality in "distributive outcomes," such as the equitable distribution of wealth and services, but also on the fairness of "processes, procedures, and decision-making mechanisms." Extensive empirical evidence in the sociology of law, political psychology, and governance demonstrates that even when citizens do not obtain personally desirable outcomes, they exhibit higher levels of trust, participation, and cooperation with governance institutions when they perceive the relevant procedures and processes as fair, transparent, and law-based. The key components of procedural justice include complete transparency in decision-making, the right to express views and participate in policymaking processes, structural impartiality in the enforcement of laws, predictability of procedures and decisions, and the availability of effective mechanisms for objection and appeal. The realization of these components is of heightened importance in cyberspace, where citizens are entitled to expect that restrictions will not be imposed on the basis of arbitrary decisions, but rather pursuant to transparent laws, demonstrated necessity, and procedures subject to challenge and review.

3.3. Citizenship Rights and the Institutional Framework

Citizenship rights refer to the body of rights and freedoms whose implementation the state secures and guarantees for its citizens (Yazdani & Tavassoli Naeini, 2018). In fact, citizenship rights constitute that dimension of human rights that has acquired a national and territorial character and has consequently developed a direct relationship with the programs and activities of governmental institutions (Hamidi & Alkajbaf, 2021). Such rights are regarded as legal rights by virtue of their recognition by the legislature (Javid, 2013). Within the constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran, citizenship rights have, in Islamic thought and belief, an inherently divine origin and purpose (Parvin & Tajalli, 2016). Since, within the legal construction of the Islamic Republic of Iran, citizenship rights derive their existence from Islamic teachings, Sharia, as the supreme divine law, determines the scope of and limitations imposed upon citizenship rights. Accordingly, the exercise and enjoyment of these rights extend only insofar as they do not conflict with public order, the rights of others, or Islamic principles (Ghahremani Afshar et al., 2021). Given the religious nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the interaction and mutual reinforcement between the two components of "citizenship rights" and "state action" should, in principle, be particularly strong. The state should provide the fullest possible protection of citizens' rights, while the people, in turn, should support the programs of the state (Yazdani & Tavassoli Naeini, 2018).

Within the context of the present study, citizenship rights, as a modern legal and institutional framework, provide the necessary foundation for the concrete realization and institutionalization of the preceding two components. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, this framework has been designed at two broad levels. At the constitutional level, fundamental principles such as freedom of expression, the inviolability of correspondence and communications, the right of assembly, judicial security, and Article 9, which prohibits deprivation of legitimate freedoms, provide a robust legal foundation for the realization of citizenship rights. At the level of ordinary legislation, the "Citizenship Rights Charter," as a progressive and comprehensive instrument, specifically addresses the protection of rights in the digital age. For example, Articles 33 to 35 of the Charter, reflecting contemporary developments, expressly recognize the right to free, non-discriminatory, and secure access to cyberspace, access to electronic government services, and the protection of personal data, while prohibiting restrictions imposed without an explicit legal basis (Hashemi et al., 2022). These three components operate through a dialectical and mutually reinforcing relationship to constitute sustainable national unity: citizenship rights provide the institutional foundation necessary for procedural justice; procedural justice within institutional structures produces and strengthens social capital and institutional trust; and the existence of social capital enhances the legitimacy and capacity of institutions to fully implement citizenship rights. Any disruption of this cycle, such as the violation of citizenship rights in cyberspace without transparent legal justification, can gradually erode institutional trust and consequently weaken the foundations of sustainable national unity.

4. Illegitimate Filtering as an Instance of Conflict Between Citizenship Rights and National Unity

As a concrete manifestation of conflict between governance and citizenship rights, the phenomenon of illegitimate filtering may be analyzed as a prominent example of the paradox encountered in the pursuit of sustainable national unity. In Iran, illegitimate filtering operates as a symbol of a governance paradox whereby a measure purportedly intended to consolidate national unity instead becomes a factor contributing to its weakening. This paradox becomes apparent when the state adopts measures in the name of ensuring security and consolidating national unity that ultimately undermine those very fundamental objectives.

In Iran, widespread filtering, by obstructing free access to information, violates this fundamental right of citizens and, in practice, operates as an instrument of censorship. The dimensions of this paradox become even more pronounced when the impact of filtering on citizens' right to security is considered. By blocking broad areas of cyberspace rather than selectively filtering specific content, filtering may result in the loss or inaccessibility of non-criminal data. Such measures also impede access to useful and educational information (Hashemi et al., 2022). For example, the blocking of platforms such as Telegram has impeded access to valuable information uploaded to them. This is despite the fact that, under Article 22 of the Constitution, the dignity, life, property, rights, residence, and occupation of individuals are protected from infringement. Illegitimate filtering, by creating multiple barriers to access to information and restricting the digital business environment, contravenes this constitutional principle (Hashemi et al., 2022).

Another important issue is the violation of the right to equality through selective filtering. The unequal implementation of filtering, whereby certain social networks are blocked while comparable networks carrying similar content remain accessible, violates the principle of equality before the law. This inequality becomes even more evident when public officials themselves adopt a dual approach by continuing to use filtered social networks. Such circumstances not only conflict with Article 20 of the Constitution, which emphasizes the equality of all individuals before the law, but also contribute to growing public distrust of governance institutions.

Illegitimate filtering, in addition to violating natural rights, also conflicts with citizenship rights. Articles 30 and 33 of the Citizenship Rights Charter recognize the right of access to information and the right to benefit from cyberspace. Nevertheless, widespread filtering infringes these rights. Furthermore, blocking educational platforms such as YouTube and Wikipedia restricts citizens' right to education. In the contemporary world, access to digital educational resources constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of individual and social development. Moreover, filtering social networks reduces citizens' opportunities for cultural participation and excludes them from the digital public sphere.

From a legal perspective, illegitimate filtering is also inconsistent with fundamental legal principles. The principle of legality, as one of the basic principles of law, requires that any restriction on freedom have an explicit legal basis. Nevertheless, filtering in Iran is characterized by the absence of an explicit statutory provision authorizing the complete blocking of social networks. Moreover, legislative silence regarding the use of circumvention tools, ambiguity in statutory language, and the absence of clear time limits for restrictions represent additional weaknesses of this policy. The principle of judicial determination is likewise undermined by delegating judicial powers to a non-judicial committee, failing to guarantee the right of defense for affected individuals, and disregarding the right to appeal.

The consequences of this governance paradox are extensive. On the one hand, illegitimate filtering intensifies public distrust of governance institutions. On the other hand, by restricting access to information and educational resources, it impedes individual and social development. It also damages economic growth by creating obstacles to economic activity in cyberspace. At the same time, experience has shown that citizens may resort to unlawful methods to circumvent such restrictions, which can itself generate additional security risks (Naemeh, 2011).

Resolving this paradox requires a fundamental reconsideration of filtering policies. Replacing broad and unlawful restrictions with intelligent regulatory approaches, clarifying the criteria governing restrictions, respecting citizenship rights, and adhering to principles of legality are among the principal strategies for overcoming this impasse. Only through such measures

can fundamental values be protected while simultaneously strengthening public trust and national unity.

5. The Role of the State in the Transition Toward Sustainable Unity

As the principal agent responsible for structural transformation, the state must adopt a systematic, scientific, and multilevel approach in order to transform national unity from a reactive, crisis-centered phenomenon into a sustainable and satisfactory social norm. This historical transition can be achieved only through the simultaneous and coordinated implementation of fundamental strategies in the institutional-legal, policy, and executive domains.

5.1. Strategic-Policy Level

At the policymaking level, a paradigm shift is required from restrictive and command-based approaches toward affirmative and participatory approaches. The state should intelligently prioritize policies that produce rapid and tangible effects on citizens' "perception of fairness." For example, the public, impartial, and transparent implementation of anti-corruption measures, in such a manner that the public can clearly observe fair and non-discriminatory adjudicative processes, may rapidly restore lost trust. Such measures include public disclosure of corruption cases, explanation of adjudicative procedures, and transparent communication regarding the outcomes of proceedings.

In parallel, replacing "smart regulation" with "general and ad hoc prohibitions" in sensitive areas such as cyberspace constitutes an undeniable necessity. This requires genuine participation by stakeholders, including professional associations, the academic community, civil society actors, and information technology specialists, in policymaking processes so that realistic, effective, and enforceable laws and regulations can be designed. Smart regulation is based on an understanding of the realities of cyberspace, recognition of users' needs, and the development of innovative solutions for managing challenges, rather than recourse to simplistic measures such as widespread filtering. This approach includes the preparation of social-impact annexes for all major policies, consultation with stakeholders prior to implementation, and periodic evaluation of the effects of implemented policies.

In addition, "evidence-based policymaking" grounded in accurate data and valid scientific research, the "development of a strategic document for national cyberspace development" emphasizing empowerment and digital literacy, and the "design of a participatory oversight system" involving users and the private sector in monitoring cyberspace constitute other necessary measures at this level. Furthermore, "revising cultural policies" with an emphasis on producing attractive and diverse digital content and promoting "rapprochement among religious denominations and ethnic groups" through intelligent cultural policies can contribute to strengthening national solidarity.

5.2. Institutional-Legal Level

At this level, the state should firmly undertake the redesign of legal frameworks and the strengthening of supervisory institutions. Drafting and adopting a "Comprehensive Digital Governance Law" should constitute a priority. Such legislation should clearly specify the precise scope of permissible restrictions and the circumstances under which they may be imposed, explicitly identify the competent authority responsible for deciding upon restrictions, provide clear procedures for challenging restrictive decisions, and establish mechanisms for supervising implementation and addressing violations. The law should be founded upon four principles: legality, necessity and proportionality, transparency and accountability, and compensation for harm. Accordingly, any restriction in cyberspace should have an explicit legal basis, be proportionate to the relevant threat, be limited to a specified period, and be accompanied by transparent mechanisms for objection, review, and compensation for persons adversely affected.

Strengthening the implementation of the "Law on Dissemination of and Free Access to Information" through the establishment of robust supervisory mechanisms and sanctions against non-compliant public bodies is likewise necessary. This requires the establishment of an independent supervisory institution vested with sufficient authority to oversee proper implementation of the law and address violations by public agencies (Nabavi & Mortazavian, 2019). Moreover, adoption of a "Conflict of Interest

Management Law" and strengthening independent supervisory institutions such as the Administrative Justice Court can, by enhancing transparency in the relationship between power and wealth, prevent the emergence of centers of corruption that severely damage social capital and public trust. Such legislation should clearly regulate relations between government officials and the private sector, require disclosure of officials' assets, and establish effective monitoring mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, establishing a "comprehensive system of public oversight" over the performance of government agencies through the formation of public supervisory councils at provincial and county levels, with the participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations, professional associations, and specialized organizations, can make a substantial contribution to enhancing transparency and accountability.

Similarly, "reforming electoral law" with the aim of increasing competitiveness, transparency, and public trust in the electoral system constitutes another necessary measure at this level.

5.3. Executive-Managerial Level

Ultimately, all institutional and policy measures will remain rhetorical unless they are translated into practice at the executive level. Establishing an "integrated complaints-handling system" with features such as electronic registration of all complaints, online tracking of the complaint-review process, automatic notification of complainants regarding case progress, and clearly specified deadlines for each stage of review can reduce citizens' sense of helplessness in their interactions with government institutions. This system should be designed so that citizens can easily register their complaints, remain informed about the progress of their cases, and receive responses within predetermined timeframes.

The establishment of a "transparency dashboard" for the online publication of information should include performance reports of executive agencies, financial statements of public institutions, major national decision-making processes, and impact assessments. This dashboard should be designed to provide the public with information in a user-friendly, up-to-date, and comprehensible format. In addition, mandatory and continuous training for all government employees on "citizenship rights" and "procedural justice," accompanied by performance evaluation based on these principles, can gradually reorient the organizational culture of government institutions toward prioritizing respect for citizens and adherence to fairness. Such training should include the development of uniform educational standards for all public agencies, periodic assessment of employees' knowledge, linking career advancement to demonstrated awareness of citizenship rights, and establishing reward systems for employees committed to protecting those rights.

Other necessary executive measures include the "establishment of a performance management system based on citizenship-rights indicators" across all executive agencies, "pilot implementation of policies on a limited scale" before nationwide expansion, the "creation of a permanent secretariat for monitoring the implementation of citizenship-rights resolutions" within the Office of the President, and the "development of electronic service-delivery standards" for all public agencies. Furthermore, organizing "media literacy training programs" for the general public, establishing "free legal counseling centers" at the neighborhood level, and creating a "transparent ranking system for government agencies" based on their compliance with citizenship rights can contribute to the practical realization of national unity.

This cultural transformation within the state bureaucracy constitutes a necessary condition for the institutionalization of sustainable unity in society and requires long-term planning, adequate resource allocation, and firm political commitment.

6. Conclusion

The present article, through an examination of the reciprocal relationship between citizenship rights and national unity, reached the key conclusion that sustainable and institutionalized unity in society, beyond emotional and situational solidarity during moments of crisis, requires robust structural, institutional, and legal foundations. The experience of the Twelve-Day Sacred Defense clearly demonstrated that Iranian society possesses profound social capital and a strong capacity for solidarity in confronting existential threats. However, as "fluid capital," this social capital becomes activated primarily under critical conditions, and its transformation into "institutionalized capital" requires a

transition from crisis-induced cohesion to everyday cohesion.

This transition depends on the realization of three interconnected components:

- Strengthening institutional trust through good, accountable, and predictable governance.
- Full implementation of procedural justice, with particular emphasis on transparency, the right to participation, and impartiality in institutional processes.
- Full realization of citizenship rights as the institutional framework providing the foundation for the practical realization of the two preceding components.

By examining the concrete example of "illegitimate filtering" as a manifestation of the governance paradox, the article demonstrated how measures undertaken under the claim of protecting security and national unity may, when they violate citizenship rights and legal principles, become factors contributing to the erosion of public trust and the weakening of the very unity they ostensibly seek to preserve.

Finally, the role of the state as the principal agent of this transformation was explained at three levels: "institutional-legal," "strategic-policy," and "executive-managerial." Measures ranging from the adoption of comprehensive legislation such as a Digital Governance Law and the strengthening of independent supervisory institutions, to a paradigm shift in policymaking from restrictive approaches toward affirmative and participatory models, and ultimately to the practical implementation of mechanisms such as an integrated complaints system and a performance management framework based on citizenship-rights indicators, constitute essential steps toward institutionalizing national unity.

In conclusion, it is emphasized that sustainable national unity constitutes a divine and historical asset for Iran, whose recurring manifestation at critical junctures demonstrates the exceptional capacity of the Iranian nation. The sustainability of this national asset depends upon the prudence of those who govern and upon transforming this potential capital into enduring capital through practical respect for citizenship rights, the guarantee of justice, and unconditional accountability to the people. Only under such circumstances can national unity be transformed from a situational reaction into a deeply rooted and sustainable norm embedded within society.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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