

Rideau Hall ruckus: Canadians divided along political lines over Governor General's performance in first year

One-in-four believe Julie Payette is "adjusting" and will eventually settle into her role

October 12, 2018 – After weeks of [critical news stories](#) that prompted Governor General Julie Payette to apologize for how her office's work has been perceived in its first year and [reiterate her commitment](#) to the job, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians with an opinion about the matter are more polarized about a traditionally apolitical figurehead and institution than might be expected.

Relatively few are following the news about Payette's performance closely, but those who are tend to hold more negative views of the Governor General

While most are unsure how to rate Payette's performance as the Queen's representative in Canada after 12 months in the role, the Governor General today enjoys little of the implicit goodwill [the institute recorded](#) for her initial nomination to the post last year (at the time, 55% approved of her appointment).

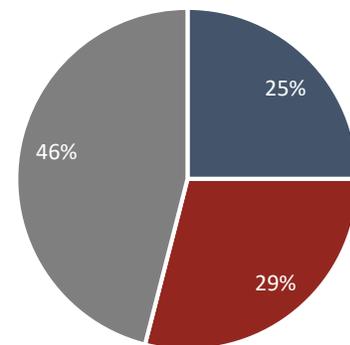
Instead, those who have an opinion on the former astronaut are divided along political lines, with past supporters of the Conservative Party of Canada especially inclined to say she is doing a bad job (41% do) and that she is poorly suited to her current position (47%). Past Liberal and New Democratic Party supporters are less likely to have an opinion on Payette, and those who do have an opinion are more evenly divided.

More Key Findings:

- Overall, one-in-four Canadians (25%) say Payette "is adjusting and will eventually settle into the role of Governor General." Most are either uncertain (46%) or skeptical that she is a good fit for her position (29%)
- Asked whether they believe the Governor General is doing a good job or a bad one, most Canadians (57%) are not sure, with the rest divided evenly between good (22%) and bad (21%)

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own - even if neither is exactly correct?

- Julie Payette is adjusting, and will eventually settle into the role of Governor General
- Julie Payette is poorly suited to the role of Governor General
- Not sure/Can't say



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from October 3 – 7, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,500 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Payette enjoys more favourable views in her native Quebec, where one-in-three (33%) say she is doing a good job, compared to 18 per cent who say she is doing a bad one. In every other region, those saying “bad job” outnumber those saying “good job” at least slightly

INDEX:

- **Good job or bad? Most Canadians can’t say**
- **Relatively few confident Payette will settle into role**
- **Low awareness helps drive uncertainty**
- **Significant issue or overblown?**

Good job or bad? Most Canadians can’t say

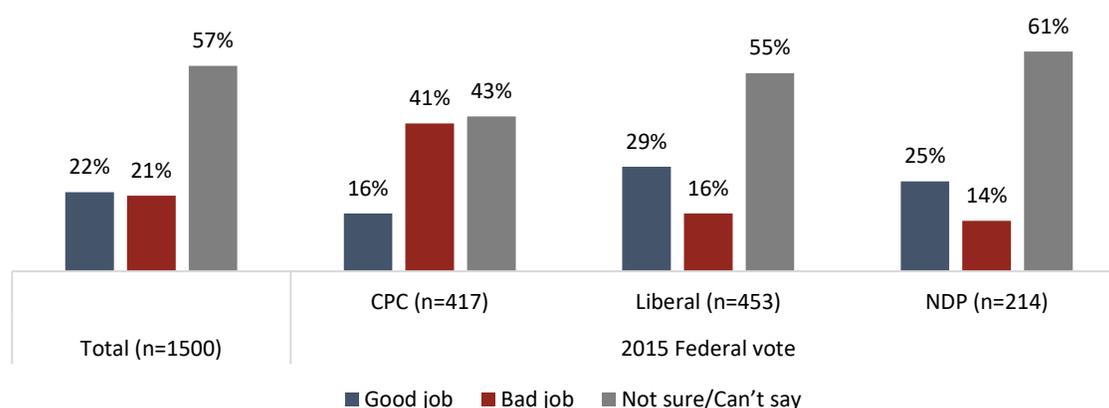
Julie Payette’s term as Governor General began with controversy. In a November 2017 speech, she [took a mocking tone](#) when describing debate about creationism and climate change. Critics pointed out that – regardless of the merits of her arguments – they served to [undermine the role](#) of the Governor General as an impartial embodiment of the state, politicizing what is supposed to be a non-political role.

More recently, criticism of Payette has centred on her [lighter-than-average schedule](#) and reports that she [dislikes the spotlight](#) that comes with the job.

The findings of this poll suggest some justification for fears about the role of Governor General becoming politicized.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed Payette, and those who voted for his Liberal party in 2015 are more likely to say she is performing well than poorly, though not by a huge margin. Those who voted for the opposition Conservatives, meanwhile, are more than two times as likely to perceive Payette’s performance in a negative light as they are to view it in a positive one:

Based on whatever you have seen or heard, would you say Payette has been doing a good job or a bad job as Governor General?

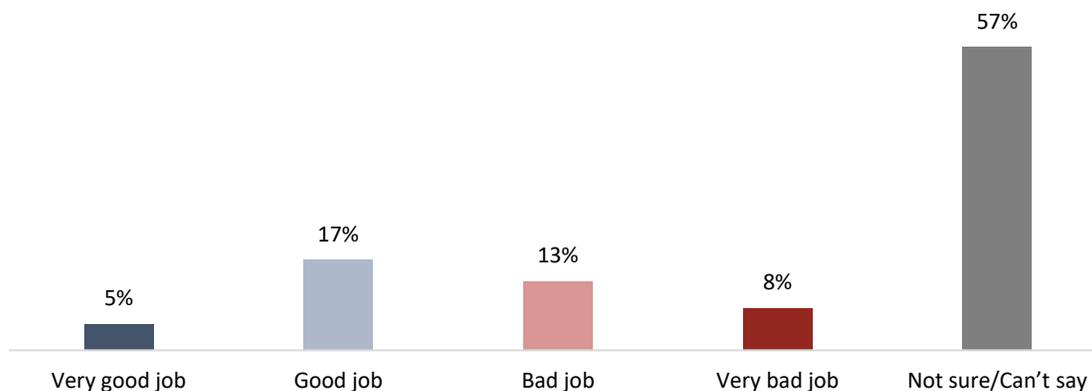


Overall, despite the recent spate of bad publicity, most Canadians (57%) are uncertain about Payette’s performance as Governor General. Those who have an opinion are split fairly evenly:

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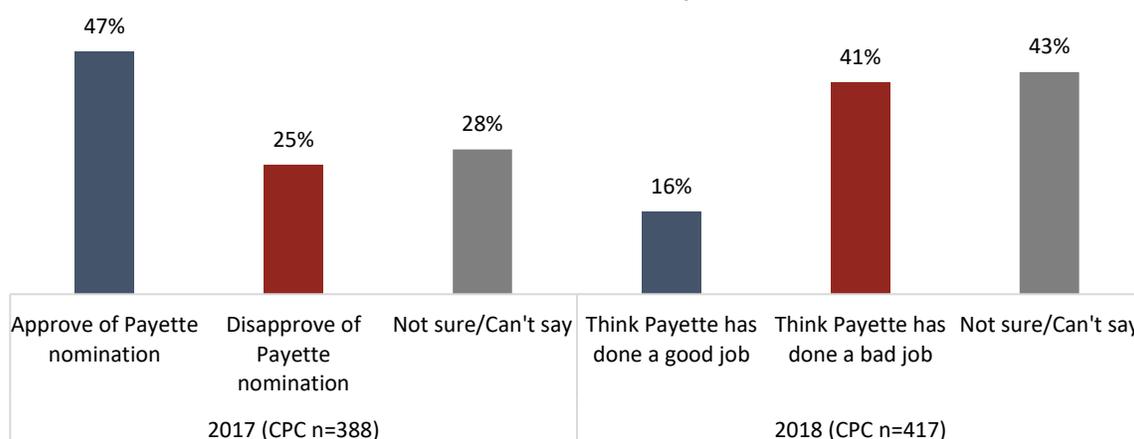
It's possible that right-of-centre voters would be more inclined than most to be displeased with any Trudeau-appointed Governor General, but the depth of their displeasure with Payette is both new and notable.

When the Angus Reid Institute asked about Payette's nomination to the post in August 2017, past Conservative voters were among those most likely to disapprove of her nomination, but it was only one-in-four (25%) who did so. Nearly half (47%) of past Conservatives approved of her nomination.

Related – Most Canadians approve of nomination of Julie Payette to be Governor General

While the two questions are different, the results suggest an erosion of trust in Trudeau's chosen Governor General over time.

Conservative voters' views of Julie Payette in ARI studies:

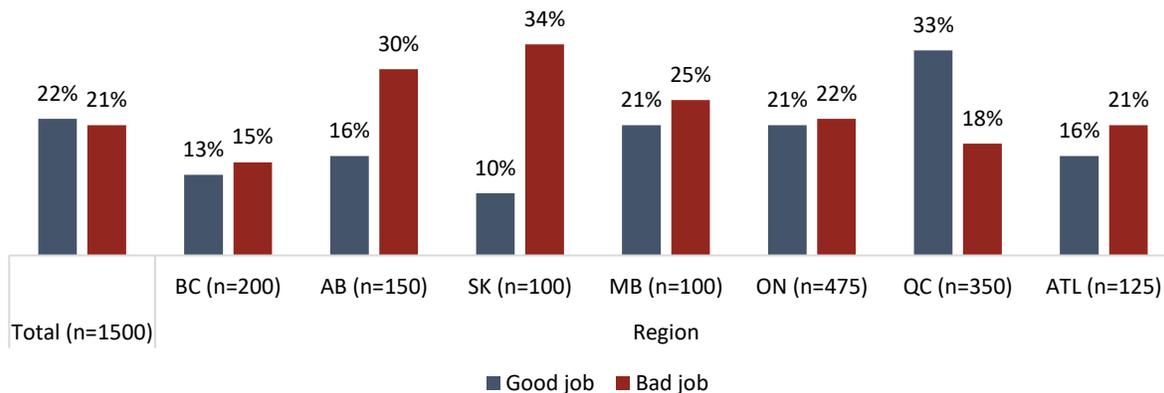


Regionally, Payette is better received in her home province of Quebec, where those who feel she's doing a good job outnumber those who feel she's doing a bad one by almost two-to-one. In every other region, this pattern is reversed, with more rating her performance as poor than good:

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**Based on whatever you have seen or heard, would you say Payette has been doing a good job or a bad job as Governor General?
(Not sure responses hidden)**

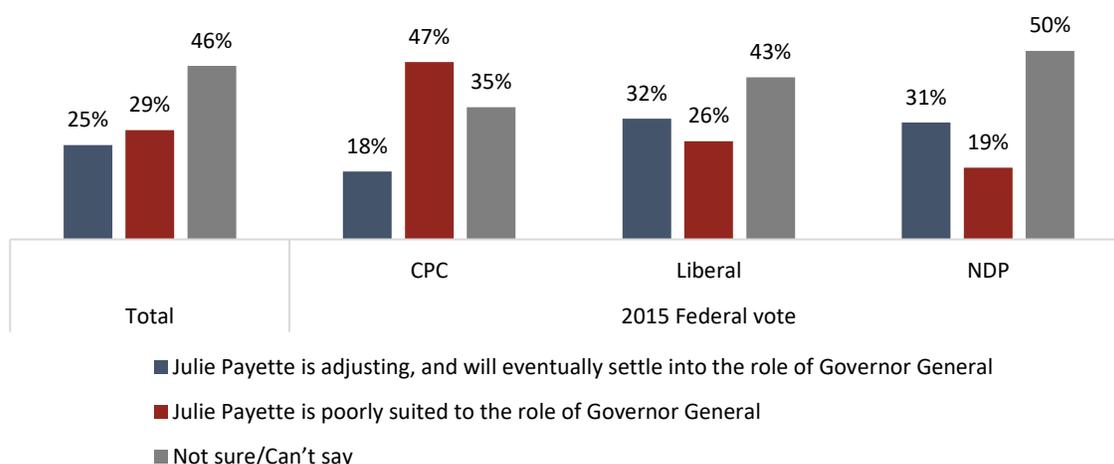


Relatively few confident Payette will settle into role

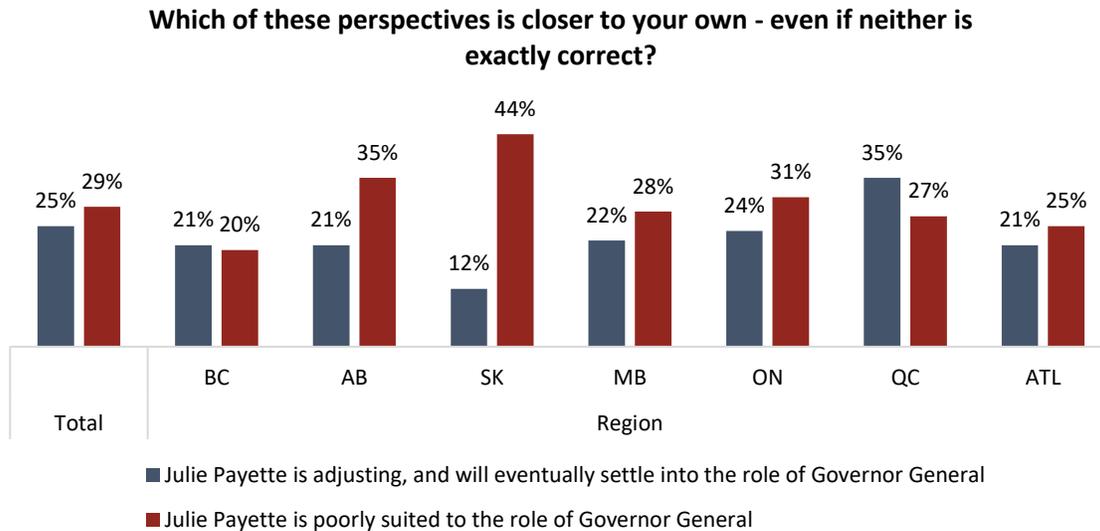
A question raised – either explicitly or implicitly – by much of the reporting about Payette’s first year in her vice-regal appointment is whether her struggles in the role are part of the adjustment period experienced by many governors-general in the past, or an indication of some deeper misalignment between the post and the person who fills it.

Asked to weigh in on this question, a plurality of Canadians (46%) are unsure, and those with an opinion are again split along political lines. Nearly half (47%) of past CPC supporters say Payette is “poorly suited to the role of Governor General,” while fewer than one-in-five (18%) say she will settle into the position:

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own - even if neither is exactly correct?



Again, Payette enjoys the most support in Quebec. More than one-in-three there say she is adjusting to her role, while fewer than one-in-four say the same in every other region of the country:



Low awareness drives uncertainty

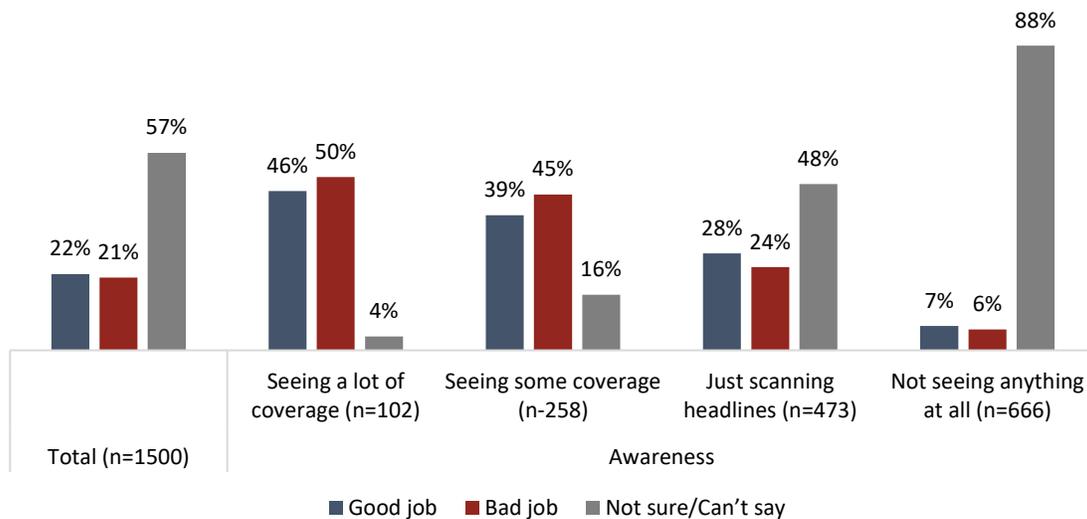
The large number of Canadians who express uncertainty about Payette’s performance corresponds with the relatively small number of Canadians who are engaging with news stories about the Governor General.

This subject scores a 26 on the ARI Engagement Index, which measures how strongly the topics of ARI polls are registering with the public. This topic is tied with the issue of [changes to net neutrality laws](#) south of the border for the lowest score recorded on the index in 2018. For comparison purposes, an “average” news story would score a 50 on the index (see notes on methodology at the end of this report).

As might be expected, those who haven’t been paying attention to news stories about Payette’s performance are more likely to be uncertain about it. Those who are paying the most attention, on the other hand, are the most likely to have an opinion, either positive or negative.

On whether Payette is doing a good job or a bad one, those who are seeing a lot of media coverage are divided:

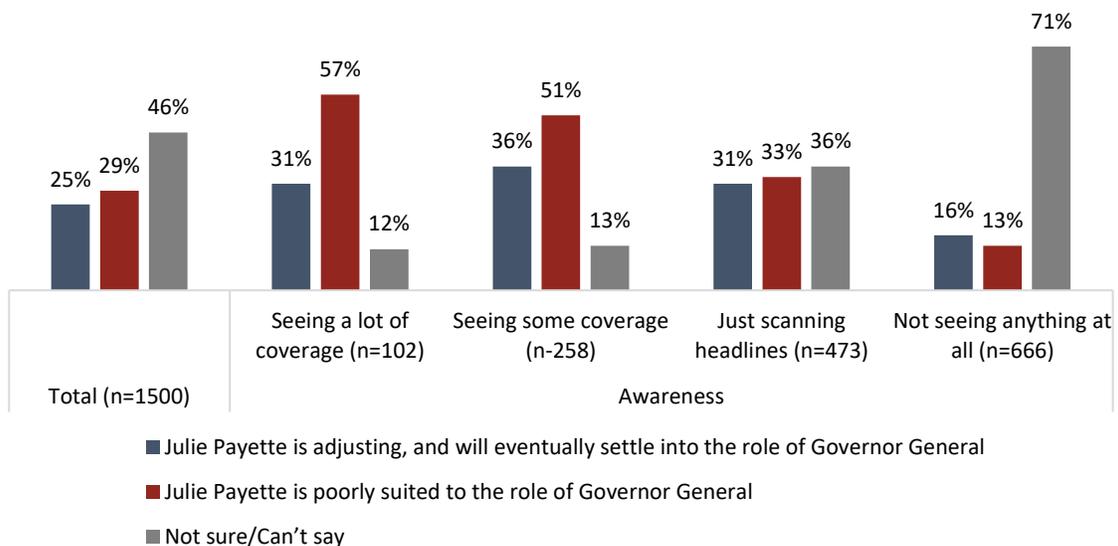
Based on whatever you have seen or heard, would you say Payette has been doing a good job or a bad job as Governor General?



On whether she is likely to adjust to the role, however, these most-engaged Canadians are more skeptical. Almost six-in-ten (57%) say Payette is poorly suited to the position of Governor General, compared to just 31 per cent who say she is going through an adjustment period.

Those who are disengaged from the story, again, are overwhelmingly unsure:

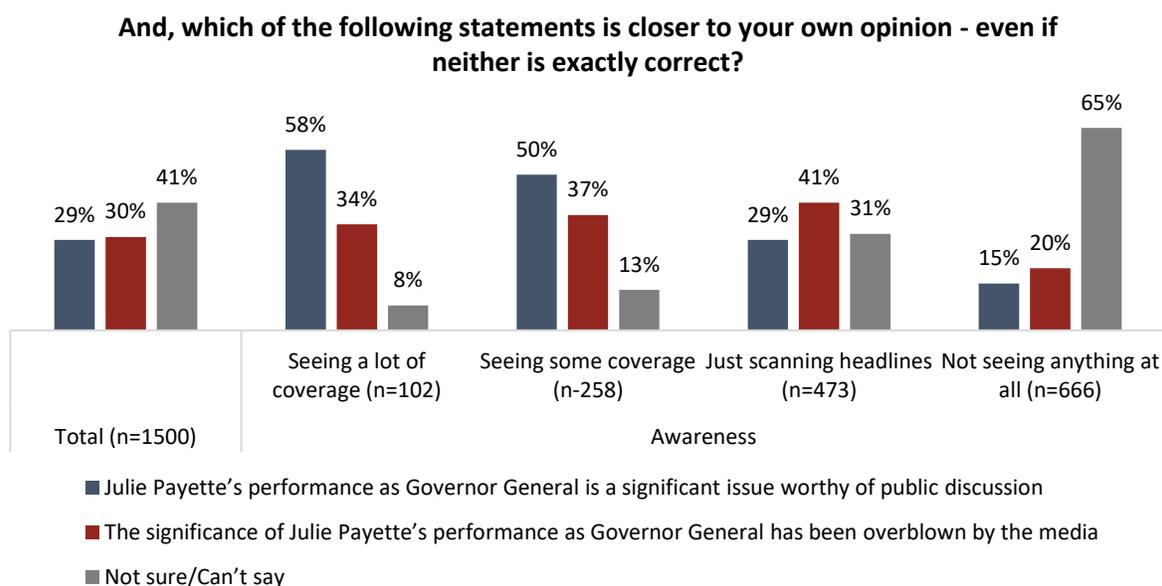
Which of these perspectives is closer to your own - even if neither is exactly correct?



Significant issue or overblown?

Asked whether they feel Payette’s performance as Governor General is “a significant issue worthy of public discussion” or an issue that has been blown out of proportion by the media, Canadians are again divided, with three-in-ten choosing each side of this face-off and 41 per cent uncertain, as seen in the graph that follows.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those paying the most attention to the issue are most likely to say that it has merit, while those who are just scanning the headlines are more inclined to see coverage of Payette’s first year as much ado about nothing:



Notes on methodology

Since early 2015, the Angus Reid Institute has been asking Canadians a standardized question about how closely they are following the topics of ARI polls. To facilitate easy comparisons across disparate topics, ARI researchers have developed an Engagement Index based on respondents’ answers.

For each issue, respondents are asked to say whether they are “following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family,” “seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation,” “just scanning the headlines,” or not seeing or hearing anything about the issue.

The index is based on the average response to this question over the years, with greater weight given to the highest level of engagement on the scale, and lesser weight given to the “having the odd conversation” and “just scanning headlines” responses. An “average” issue scores a 50 on the index, with scores higher than 50 representing above-average engagement and scores lower than 50 representing below-average engagement.

On this particular topic of Julie Payette’s first year as Governor General, just 7 per cent say they are “following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family.” Another 17 per cent are “seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation.” One-in-three (32%) are “just scanning the headlines,” and more than four-in-ten (44%) haven’t seen or heard anything about this story.

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Responses on this topic equate to a score of 26 on the ARI Engagement Index, which is tied for the lowest score recorded so far in 2018.

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by awareness of this issue, [click here](#).

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