

MIGRATION POLICIES OF THE UNITED STATES: TRENDS AND IMPACTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICA.

Adekunle Alaye, PhD.

Fellow, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).

Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract: Migration crises have become very critical challenges with North America, particularly the United States, being a central destination for displaced populations. This study examines the multifaceted impacts of the "Zero Tolerance" policy, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Title 42, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which are significant shifts in policy direction, particularly between the Trump and Biden administrations. U.S. administrations have developed, implemented, and modified policies to manage migration flows, regulate asylum procedures, and accommodate refugees while balancing national security concerns, economic demands, and humanitarian obligations. The study adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on a review of secondary sources including government documents, policy briefs, and executive orders. We shall also explore sources like academic articles and reports from international organizations. Key public policy responses are analyzed within the framework of political ideology, international cooperation, and domestic legal systems. Additionally, the research assesses the impacts of these policies on migrants, asylum seekers, and broader U.S. immigration trends. Findings revealed that while Biden administration has sought several measures in promoting more humanitarian and inclusive immigration policies, Trump administrations in a sharp twist however, reversed some of the policies as he emphasized deterrence and border enforcement. Political opposition, administrative challenges, and recurring crises at the southern border have complicated implementation. U.S. foreign policy and international aid initiatives have attempted to address the root causes of migration, particularly from Central American countries. Despite efforts to create legal pathways and promote regional stability, gaps remain in the coordination and effectiveness of policy responses. The study concludes that public policy plays a crucial role in managing migration and refugee issues, yet outcomes are heavily influenced by political will, public opinion, and international cooperation. It recommends a more integrated and sustainable approach to immigration reform—one that balances security with humanitarian principles, ensures legal clarity, and builds resilience through international partnerships. By doing so, the United States can better fulfill its global leadership roles in refugee protection and uphold the values embedded in its historical identity as a nation of immigrants.

Keywords: America, Asylum, Immigrants, Policy, Migration, Refugee.

Introduction

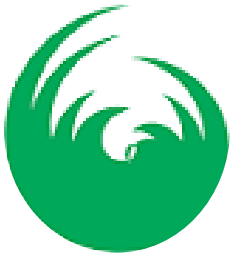
United States has long been a primary destination for migrants and refugees, shaped by its historical identity as a nation built by immigrants. However, in recent years, particularly from 2015 to the present, migration and refugee issues have become some of the most hotly debated and politically charged topics in U.S. public discourse. This period has witnessed significant shifts in

immigration policy, shaped largely by differing political ideologies between the Trump and Biden administrations. Under President Donald Trump, immigration policy focused on deterrence and enforcement. Key policies included the "Zero Tolerance" initiative that led to family separations, the attempted termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the travel ban on several Muslim-majority countries, and drastic reductions in

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refugee admissions—from 110,000 in 2016 to just 15,000 by 2021 (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). These policies were justified on grounds of national security and border control but were heavily criticized for their humanitarian implications and legal controversies (Chacón, 2017).

In contrast, the Biden administration adopted a more liberal approach, aiming to restore the U.S.'s humanitarian leadership. Efforts have included raising refugee caps, reinstating DACA protections, halting border wall construction, and ending the "Remain in Mexico" policy for asylum seekers (Meissner et al., 2021). However, these actions have faced numerous obstacles, including legal challenges, logistical constraints, and continued surges in migration, particularly at the southern border. Title 42—a COVID-era policy that allowed for immediate expulsion of migrants—remained in place until mid-2023, highlighting the ongoing tension between public health concerns and asylum rights (Rosenblum & González-Barrera, 2023).

Moreover, the U.S. has engaged in regional partnerships and foreign aid to address root causes of migration from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. These efforts, though essential, have shown limited results due to corruption, insecurity, and poor governance in the source countries (Wasem, 2020). As such, while public policy has played a crucial role in shaping migration patterns, its effectiveness remains subject to political shifts, public opinion, and international dynamics.

Public attitudes toward refugees vary. While many people worldwide support refugee rights, skepticism remains about their legitimacy and ability to integrate (IPSOS, 2019). In countries like India, Turkey, Sweden, and Serbia, majorities support closing their borders to refugees. Politicians often exploit these sentiments, leading to inadequate policies and support systems. For instance, the Trump administration reduced refugee resettlement numbers from 110,000 in 2016 to just 18,000 in 2019 while imposing travel bans on several Muslim-majority nations (Shear & Kanno-Youngs, 2019). Meanwhile, the European Union allocated over €23 billion between 2015 and 2019 to manage migration, but how this was used varied—some countries focused on resettlement, while others prioritized border control (European Commission, 2019). Hungary,

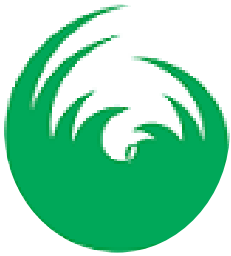
under Viktor Orbán, has adopted a strict anti-refugee stance, prompting criticism from the UNHCR (2018b).

Despite being seen as economic burdens or security risks, refugees can contribute positively to host countries. Studies show that over 20 years, working-age refugees in the U.S. paid about \$21,324 more in taxes than they received in benefits, making them a net fiscal benefit in the long run (Evans & Fitzgerald, 2017). They also tend to outperform other migrant groups in employment, income, and language acquisition (Cortes, 2004).

Historian Sarah Coleman presented a detailed and careful analyses of the contentious fight over the rights of migrants to the United States since the 1960s. The immediate spark to this battle stems from the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. This law formally put an end to the National Origins Formula embedded in the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which essentially limited immigration through a national origins quota from Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, and other places. In effect, the law was designed to preserve the American ethnic/racial homogeneity by promoting immigration from Northwestern Europe. Consequently, the 1965 law changed the US immigration system by doing away with national quotas in favor of a supposedly equalitarian approach.

Looking further Coleman focused on efforts to limit immigrants' rights within the US through domestic policy, and not on attempts to stop immigration at the border. She discussed the federal, state, and local levels of government, who touselled with each other over who has the authority that make critical decisions that impinge on the lives of immigrants.

Continuing its trend of lowering the refugee admissions authorization in each successive year, the Trump administration lowered the ceiling to 18,000 for fiscal year 2020, which represents the lowest level in the history of the U.S. refugee admissions program. Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020, Nov. 1. 2019, Refugee Ceiling and Allocations (Nov. 7, 2019), (noting that under the Trump administration, refugee ceilings have been set at "much lower [levels] than in previous years" and that the administration "has reduced the refugee ceiling each year"). The United States "has admitted about 76,200



refugees so far under the Trump administration (Jan. 20, 2017, to Sept. 30, 2019). By comparison, the U.S. admitted nearly 85,000 refugees in fiscal 2016 alone, the last full fiscal year of the Obama administration.” Jens Manuel Krogstad, Pew Research Center, Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S. (Oct. 7, 2019).

Beginning in fiscal year 2022, the Biden administration raised the refugee admissions target to 125,000. Anthony J. Blinken, The Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2022 (Oct. 8, 2021), Actual resettlement was slow to match this target, as in the first six months of fiscal year 2022 only 10,742 refugees were resettled in the United States through the standard refugee resettlement channels. Center for Immigration Studies, Low Refugee Admission So Far in FY 2022 (May 11, 2022), The target for fiscal year 2024 is again 125,000 and “admissions now are nearing a monthly pace that will, if sustained over the course of a year, enable arrival of 125,000 refugees, a 30-year high.” U.S. Dep’t of State, Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2024, (Nov. 3, 2023), other groups have been allowed to enter the United States on humanitarian grounds, largely through ad hoc procedures outside the normal refugee resettlement process. Under the Operations Allies Welcome program, 76,000 Afghans entered the United States with humanitarian parole. Julian Montalvo and Jeanne Batalova, Migration Policy Institute, Afghan Immigrants in the United States (Feb. 15, 2024).

United States is far from the top country for Afghan migrants. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that there were about 5.7 million Afghan refugees worldwide as of 2023, the large majority of whom were in Iran and Pakistan (3.4 million and 1.9 million, respectively). Meanwhile, approximately 187,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the United States through the Uniting for Ukraine program. Camilo Montoya-Galvez, In 2 years since Russian’s invasion, a U.S. program has resettled 187,00 Ukrainians with little controversy, (April 24, 2024)

Another 350,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the U.S. outside the sponsorship process since the start of the Russian invasion, mainly through temporary visa, according to DHS.. Many of these arrivals have been granted parole as

a short-term measure, and both Afghanistan and Ukraine have been designated for Temporary Protected Status. USCIS, Countries Currently Designated for TPS, But more lasting solutions for these populations are uncertain. Welcoming Afghans and Ukrainians.

A significant amount of research has been conducted on policy analysis, leadership during crises, and crisis management (Boin et al., 2005), but the connection between these areas remains largely unexplored. This special issue aims to address that gap. While the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) has previously focused on assessing efficiency in times of scarcity, migration was not considered a key issue, despite being influenced by more than just resource limitations.

Thranhardt (2004) previously highlighted the paradox of immigration: countries seek highly skilled professionals and wealthy investors while simultaneously attempting to restrict those perceived as economic or security risks. Given that migration crosses national boundaries, purely national policies are ineffective. A transnational or supranational strategy is necessary to manage migration and its broader effects. Consequently, the European Union prioritizes immigration on its political agenda to coordinate migration flows effectively.

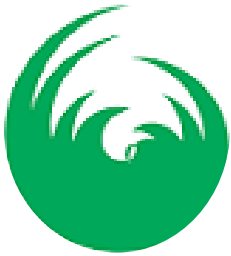
This special issue examines how policy analysis has influenced responses to the migration crisis. Key questions include how policy analysis can assist governance amid rapidly changing institutions and how it can adapt to uncertainty and unpredictability in migration trends. Addressing these issues is both academically and socially important, as policy analysis offers opportunities for learning and adaptation during crises.

The articles in this issue adopt a comparative approach, drawing theoretical insights from cross-national perspectives on migration and integration policies. They analyze different aspects of policy analysis, including the role of boundary organizations (Boswell & Hunter), the use of knowledge in policymaking (Caponio, Hunter & Verbeek), the interactions between researchers and policymakers (Geddes & Scholten), and the relationship between knowledge production and application (Entzinger & Scholten). These studies focus on various European

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contexts, including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, and the EU level, offering a broader understanding of how policy analysis shapes migration governance.

Statement of the Problem

Migration and refugee crises have become major challenges for the United States, especially between 2015 and 2024. Policies aimed at managing migration often face political, economic, and social complexities. The U.S. government has struggled to balance national security concerns with humanitarian obligations, leading to shifting policies such as the travel bans, border wall expansion, and changes in asylum procedures. The problem lies in the inconsistency of public policies, their enforcement, and their impact on migrants and refugees. Understanding how these policies have shaped migration trends and affected both refugees and host communities is essential.

Historical Overview of U.S. Migration Policies

The U.S. has a long history of migration policies that have evolved based on economic needs, security concerns, and humanitarian obligations. Early policies, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Johnson-Reed Act (1924), reflected racial and ethnic biases in immigration restrictions. The Immigration and Nationality Act (1965) abolished these quotas, leading to a more diverse influx of migrants. The Refugee Act of 1980 established a formal refugee resettlement system, setting the foundation for modern asylum policies. Scholars such as Massey (2005) and Ngai (2014) argue that U.S. migration policies have historically been shaped by shifting political ideologies rather than consistent humanitarian principles.

Border Security and Enforcement Policies

One of the most contentious aspects of U.S. migration policy is border enforcement. Studies by Meissner et al. (2013) highlight the increasing militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly through the expansion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Border Patrol, and the construction of physical barriers. Policies like Title 42 (used during the COVID-19 pandemic to expel asylum seekers) and the Remain in Mexico policy have raised ethical and legal concerns. Researchers argue that stringent

border policies often fail to deter migration but instead push migrants towards more dangerous, irregular migration routes (Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005).

Refugee Integration and Challenges

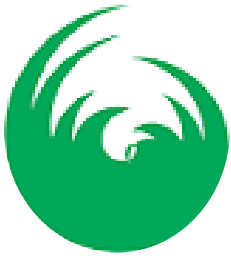
Successful refugee integration depends on access to employment, education, healthcare, and social services. Scholars like Bloemraad (2006) emphasize that refugees who receive early support, including English language training and job placement programs, integrate more successfully. However, restrictive policies, such as delays in work permits for asylum seekers, create barriers to economic stability. The literature also highlights disparities in integration outcomes, with refugees from Latin America and Africa facing higher unemployment rates compared to European refugees (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

Economic Impacts of Migration and Refugees

Economic studies have shown that migration can have both short-term costs and long-term benefits for host countries. Research by Evans & Fitzgerald (2017) found that refugees in the U.S. contribute positively to the economy, paying more in taxes than they receive in public benefits over a 20-year period. Additionally, migrant labor is essential in industries such as agriculture, healthcare, and technology. However, some scholars argue that migration policies that prioritize high-skilled workers, such as the H-1B visa program, create imbalances that disadvantage lower-skilled migrants.

Public Perception and Political Debates

Public attitudes toward migration and refugee policies are influenced by political narratives and media representation. Studies by Hopkins (2010) suggest that economic downturns often lead to increased anti-immigrant sentiment, while humanitarian crises (such as the Syrian refugee crisis) can sometimes generate public sympathy. The rise of populist rhetoric in U.S. politics, particularly under the Trump administration, reinforced fears about migration as a national security threat. However, research also shows that communities with



direct exposure to immigrants and refugees tend to have more positive attitudes toward migration (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Migration and refugee crises in the United States is deeply rooted in various policy-driven and theoretical perspectives. Understanding these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of how public policies are shaped, implemented, and assessed. This section presents five theoretical concepts that are applicable to this issue and each of these them provides insight into the motivations behind migration policies, the role of institutions, and their long-term impacts on both migrants and host communities:

1. Public Choice Theory

Public Choice Theory applies economic principles to political decision-making, suggesting that policymakers often prioritize policies that align with their personal or political interests. In the context of U.S. migration policy, this theory explains why policy shifts occur with changes in government administrations. For example, the Trump administration (2017–2021) implemented restrictive immigration policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and Title 42 expulsions, responding to political pressures from conservative voter bases concerned about national security and economic competition. On the other hand, the Biden administration adopted a more humanitarian approach, reversing some of these policies and increasing refugee quotas to meet international commitments. Public Choice Theory highlights how electoral incentives and interest groups shape the direction of migration policies rather than purely humanitarian concerns.

2. Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory explores how formal structures, laws, and institutions influence policymaking. U.S. migration policies are shaped by institutions such as Congress, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and the courts. These institutions establish regulations, enforce

policies, and interpret immigration laws. For instance, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, introduced during the Obama administration, faced multiple legal challenges, reflecting how institutional checks and balances impact policy implementation. Institutional Theory also explains why migration policies evolve slowly due to bureaucratic inertia and the influence of long-standing legal frameworks such as the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965.

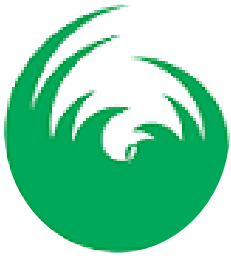
3. Human Security Theory

This theory shifts the focus of migration policy from national security to the well-being of individuals. It argues that migration policies should prioritize protecting individuals from threats such as war, persecution, poverty, and climate change. In the U.S., this perspective justifies granting asylum and refugee status to individuals fleeing violence in countries like Afghanistan, Syria, and Venezuela. The Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program embodies this approach by allowing migrants from crisis-hit nations to remain in the U.S. until conditions in their home countries improve. Human Security Theory challenges policies that prioritize border enforcement over humanitarian assistance, advocating for more inclusive and rights-based approaches to migration.

4. Policy Feedback Theory

Policy Feedback Theory examines how past policies shape future policy decisions and public perceptions. Migration policies in the U.S. have long-term effects on both migrants and society, influencing debates on future policies. For example, the **Refugee Act of 1980** established a framework for refugee resettlement, and its effectiveness has influenced discussions on expanding or restricting refugee admissions. Similarly, the enforcement of **family separation policies** at the U.S.-Mexico border under the Trump administration led to significant public backlash, prompting later administrations to reconsider family detention practices. This theory explains why some policies, even controversial ones, create lasting legacies that shape future policymaking.

5. Governance Theory



Governance Theory highlights the roles of multiple actors and government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society in managing migration. Unlike traditional top-down policymaking, governance in migration management involves coordination between federal and state governments, humanitarian organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and advocacy groups. The response to the Afghan refugee crisis in 2021, where NGOs and local communities played a critical role in resettlement efforts, demonstrates how governance extends beyond government actions. This theory underscores the complexity of migration policy, emphasizing the need for collaboration across different levels of governance.

Methodology of Study

This research will employ a qualitative approach, analyzing government reports, policy documents, and academic literature. A comparative analysis of different policy periods (Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations) will be conducted. Secondary data sources such as UNHCR reports, U.S. Department of Homeland Security publications, and scholarly articles will be reviewed. Case studies of major policy shifts, such as the 2017 travel ban and the Title 42 border policy, will be examined to understand their implications.

U.S. Public Policies on Migration and Refugees (2015–2024)

The Trump Administration's Immigration Policies (2017–2021)

The Trump administration adopted an aggressive stance on migration, focusing on border security and deportation. Key policies included:

- i. Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP):** Required asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while awaiting U.S. court hearings (Congressional Research Service, 2023).
- ii. Title Expulsions: Implemented during COVID-19, allowing quick deportations on public health grounds (BBC News, 2022).
- iii. Travel Ban (Executive Order 13780):Restricted immigration from predominantly Muslim-majority countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

- iv. Family Separation Policy (Zero Tolerance):Led to thousands of migrant children being separated from their families at the border (Pew Research Center, 2022).

The Biden Administration's Immigration Policies (2021–2024)

Biden's administration aimed to reverse restrictive policies while balancing border security and humanitarian commitments (The Washington Post, 2021). Key policies included:

- i. Termination of MPP: Allowed asylum seekers to remain in the U.S. while their cases were processed (UNHCR, 2023).
- ii. End of Title 42: Restored asylum procedures, though migration surges led to criticism of border management (Congressional Research Service, 2023).
- iii. DACA Expansion: Provided legal protections for undocumented migrants brought as children (Pew Research Center, 2022).
- iv. Refugee Admissions Expansion: Increased resettlement quotas, especially for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees (Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

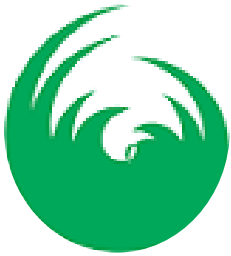
Challenges in Managing Migration and Refugee Crises

Despite policy reforms, several challenges persist:

- i. Political Polarization: Immigration remains a divisive issue, with Congress struggling to pass comprehensive reforms (Betts, 2013).
- ii. Border Security Concerns: Increased migrant surges strain federal and state resources (Massey et al., 1993).
- iii. Asylum Backlogs: Legal processing delays result in prolonged uncertainty for asylum seekers (USCIS, 2023)
- iv. Humanitarian Crises: Conditions in migrant detention centers have been criticized by human rights organizations (UNHCR, 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reaffirm that migration policy is a critical determinant in shaping the experiences of migrants and refugees in the United States. Policy shifts over the years have largely been reactive, with



administrations prioritizing different aspects of migration control and integration. While stringent policies have been effective in reducing unauthorized border crossings, they have also raised ethical and humanitarian concerns. Conversely, more accommodating policies have promoted inclusivity but have faced challenges in enforcement and public acceptance.

It is evident that a balanced approach is required—one that upholds national security while fulfilling humanitarian obligations. The inconsistencies in migration policies demonstrate the need for a unified, long-term strategy that transcends political transitions. Effective migration management requires coordinated efforts between federal, state, and local governments, as well as international organizations, to ensure that policies are sustainable, enforceable, and aligned with human rights standards. Furthermore, this study concludes that an evidence-based approach to policy formulation, driven by data and research, is crucial in mitigating the challenges associated with migration. Addressing these issues holistically will foster a more stable, fair, and efficient migration system in the United States.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed:

Comprehensive Policy Reforms: The U.S. government should develop and implement a long-term migration policy that balances national security concerns with humanitarian obligations. A comprehensive framework should include pathways for legal migration, border security measures, and asylum reforms to ensure fairness and efficiency.

Enhanced Coordination: among Stakeholders: Improved collaboration between federal, state, and local governments, as well as international agencies, is essential for effective migration management. Policies should be harmonized to prevent contradictions in enforcement and implementation.

Public Awareness and Education Initiatives: The

government should invest in public education campaigns to counter misinformation about migrants and refugees. Awareness programs should highlight the contributions of migrants to the economy and society, fostering a more inclusive and informed public perception.

Streamlining Asylum and Immigration Procedures:

The asylum application and legal immigration processes should be reformed to reduce backlog and waiting times. Efficient processing mechanisms will help avoid undue hardships for asylum seekers and promote a fairer immigration system.

Strengthening Refugee Integration Strategies: Policies should include structured programs for the integration of refugees and migrants into society. This includes language training, employment support, and access to social services to facilitate their transition and contribution to the economy.

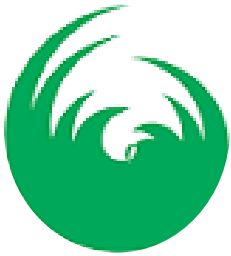
Data-Driven Policy Formulation: Policymakers should utilize research, data analytics, and impact assessments to formulate evidence-based migration policies. Data-driven decision-making will enhance policy effectiveness and adaptability to changing migration trends.

Diplomatic Engagements for Regional Cooperation:

The U.S. should strengthen diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries and international organizations to address the root causes of migration. Multilateral agreements should be explored to ensure a cooperative and humane approach to migration governance.

Human Rights-Based Approach to Migration: Policies should align with international human rights standards, ensuring that migrants and refugees are treated with dignity and fairness. Mechanisms should be established to monitor and prevent human rights violations at borders and detention centers.

Investment in Border Security Innovations: Rather than solely relying on physical barriers, the government should invest in technology-driven border security solutions, including surveillance systems, AI-based monitoring, and



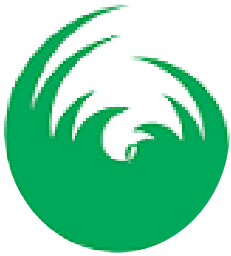
data-sharing mechanisms, to enhance border management efficiency.

Legislative Reforms for Policy Stability: Congress should enact bipartisan legislative frameworks that ensure consistency in migration policies across different administrations. Long-term legislation will prevent abrupt policy shifts that disrupt migration management and enforcement.

By implementing these recommendations, the United States can develop a migration system that is both effective and humane, balancing national security needs with international responsibilities. A forward-looking, adaptive, and research-based approach will ensure that migration policies remain responsive to emerging global challenges while safeguarding the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees.

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