

# Community Policing and Crime Prevention in Rural Nigeria: Evidence from Akpabuyo Local Government Area, Cross River State

<sup>1</sup>Bassey Ekpenyong Anam & <sup>2</sup>Emmanuel Agi Adinya

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Calabar

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between community policing and crime prevention in rural Nigeria, with specific focus on Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study was motivated by persistent rural security challenges such as theft, cultism, youth restiveness, and communal disputes, despite the presence of formal security agencies. A survey research design was adopted, and data was collected from 150 respondents comprising security personnel, community leaders, and residents using structured questionnaires. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that community participation, intelligence sharing, and joint community–police patrols significantly enhance crime prevention, while weak trust between police and communities undermines effectiveness. The study concludes that community policing is a viable strategy for rural crime prevention in Nigeria. It recommends strengthening police–community trust, improving local intelligence networks, and institutionalising community policing structures at the grassroots level.

**Keywords:** *Community policing, Crime prevention, Rural security, Policing strategy*

**Corresponding Author:** *Bassey Ekpenyong Anam*

## **Background to the Study**

Crime and insecurity remain persistent and deeply rooted challenges in rural Nigeria, where structural inequalities, weak state presence, and inadequate security infrastructure combine to create fertile ground for criminal activities. Rural communities are often characterised by limited police presence, poor road networks, low surveillance capacity, and delayed emergency response systems. These conditions expose residents to a wide range of security threats, including theft, burglary, kidnapping, cult-related violence, land disputes, farmer–herder tensions, and youth restiveness, all of which significantly undermine livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and social cohesion.

Scholars have consistently noted that rural insecurity in Nigeria is not only a reflection of rising criminality but also a symptom of governance gaps and weak institutional capacity at the grassroots level (Alemika, 2013; Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). In many rural communities, the absence of effective formal policing structures has led to reliance on informal security arrangements such as vigilante groups and community watch organisations. While these informal structures sometimes fill critical security gaps, they often operate without adequate training, coordination, or legal frameworks, thereby raising concerns about accountability and effectiveness in crime prevention. In response to these persistent security challenges, the concept of community policing has gained increasing prominence both globally and in Nigeria as a decentralised, participatory, and problem-solving approach to crime prevention. Community policing is grounded in the idea that effective crime control cannot be achieved by law enforcement agencies alone but requires active collaboration between the police and members of the community. According to Bayley (2005), community policing is a strategy that emphasises partnership, problem-solving, and organisational decentralisation, with the goal of improving trust and cooperation between the police and the public.

Similarly, Skogan (2006) argues that community policing strengthens informal social control by encouraging citizens to participate in identifying local security challenges and supporting preventive policing strategies. The approach assumes that community members possess valuable local knowledge about their environment, including information about suspicious activities, criminal networks, and emerging threats, which can significantly enhance the effectiveness of formal policing systems when properly harnessed.

Globally, empirical evidence suggests that community policing contributes to improved crime reporting, faster response times, and enhanced public confidence in law enforcement institutions (Gill et al., 2014). In developing countries, however, the success of community policing is often influenced by broader institutional and socio-political factors, including governance quality, police professionalism, and the level of community trust in security institutions. In Nigeria, despite the formal adoption of community policing strategies by security agencies, its implementation has remained uneven and largely ineffective in many areas. Several studies have identified key constraints, including widespread mistrust between citizens and the police, perceptions of corruption and abuse of power, inadequate training of officers in community engagement strategies, and insufficient institutional support for

community policing structures (Alemika, 2013; Okiro, 2017). These challenges have limited the extent to which community policing can function as an effective crime prevention strategy at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, Eze (2017) observes that the lack of structured communication channels between police and communities in Nigeria undermines intelligence gathering and weakens preventive policing efforts. In many rural areas, community members are often reluctant to share information with security agencies due to fear of reprisals, lack of confidence in confidentiality, or previous negative experiences with law enforcement personnel. This situation significantly reduces the effectiveness of community policing as a tool for crime prevention. In rural settings such as Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, these challenges are particularly pronounced. The area is characterised by a mix of agrarian communities, coastal settlements, and semi-urban zones, making it vulnerable to diverse security threats including theft of farm produce, youth violence, land-related conflicts, and occasional cult activities. The geographical spread of settlements and limited security infrastructure further complicate effective policing and rapid response to incidents.

Although community policing initiatives have been introduced in Akpabuyo through collaborations between the police, community leaders, and informal security groups, the effectiveness of these arrangements remains uncertain. Issues such as inconsistent community participation, weak trust in security agencies, lack of formal coordination mechanisms, and inadequate logistical support continue to hinder sustainable crime prevention efforts. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the role of community policing in crime prevention in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, with particular emphasis on community participation, information sharing, and joint security initiatives. By focusing on these key dimensions, the study aims to generate empirical evidence on how collaborative policing strategies influence security outcomes in rural Nigeria. The study contributes to the broader discourse on policing and security governance by highlighting the importance of strengthening police–community partnerships as a sustainable strategy for addressing rural insecurity in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between community policing and crime prevention in Akpabuyo LGA.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of community participation on crime prevention
2. Assess the role of information sharing between police and communities in reducing crime
3. Evaluate the impact of joint community–police patrols on rural security
4. Determine the effect of police–community trust on crime prevention effectiveness

## Research Questions

1. How does community participation influence crime prevention in Akpabuyo LGA?
2. What is the relationship between information sharing and crime reduction?
3. How do joint patrols affect rural security outcomes?
4. What is the effect of police–community trust on crime prevention effectiveness?

## Research Hypotheses

- H<sub>01</sub>: Community participation has no significant effect on crime prevention.
- H<sub>02</sub>: Information sharing between police and communities has no significant relationship with crime reduction.
- H<sub>03</sub>: Joint community–police patrols have no significant effect on rural security.
- H<sub>04</sub>: Police–community trust has no significant effect on crime prevention effectiveness.

## Literature Review

### *Community Participation and Crime Prevention*

Community participation is a central pillar of community policing and represents the active involvement of residents in identifying, reporting, and responding to security threats within their environment. It assumes that communities are not passive recipients of policing services but active partners in maintaining law and order. Through participation, residents contribute local knowledge, assist in surveillance, and support informal mechanisms of social control that discourage criminal behaviour.

Skogan (2006) argues that community engagement enhances crime reporting, strengthens informal social control, and improves police responsiveness to local security concerns. When residents are actively involved in security governance, they are more likely to report suspicious activities, collaborate with law enforcement, and participate in preventive measures that reduce opportunities for crime. Empirical studies in developing countries further support this view. Gill et al. (2014) observe that community participation in policing leads to improved perceptions of safety and reduced fear of crime, particularly in vulnerable communities. In the Nigerian context, Adebayo (2013) found that communities with active neighbourhood watch groups and structured local security committees experience lower incidences of theft, burglary, and youth-related violence compared to communities without such structures.

However, the effectiveness of community participation in Nigeria is often constrained by structural challenges such as poverty, low education levels, political interference, and weak institutional support from formal security agencies. In many rural communities, participation is also uneven, with only a small segment of the population actively involved in security initiatives, while others remain passive due to apathy or distrust. Despite these limitations, community participation remains a critical determinant of successful crime prevention under community policing frameworks.

### ***Information Sharing and Crime Reduction***

Information sharing is a fundamental component of effective community policing, as it enables timely detection, prevention, and response to criminal activities. It involves the exchange of intelligence between community members and law enforcement agencies, as well as within and among security institutions. Effective information sharing improves situational awareness and allows for proactive rather than reactive policing strategies. Bayley (2005) emphasises that community policing relies heavily on intelligence gathered from residents, as they are often the first to observe unusual or suspicious activities within their environment. This localised knowledge is crucial for identifying emerging threats and preventing crime escalation. In addition, effective communication channels between police and communities enhance trust and encourage continuous flow of information.

However, in Nigeria, information sharing is significantly constrained by fear of retaliation, lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, and concerns about confidentiality. Okiro (2017) notes that many citizens are reluctant to provide information to the police due to past experiences of corruption, victimisation, or failure of authorities to act on received intelligence. This reluctance weakens the intelligence-gathering capacity of security agencies and undermines preventive policing efforts. Eze (2017) further argues that the absence of structured communication platforms between communities and security agencies limits the effectiveness of information sharing in Nigeria. In rural areas, where formal policing structures are often weak, the lack of reliable communication channels creates significant intelligence gaps, making communities more vulnerable to criminal activities. Strengthening information-sharing mechanisms is therefore essential for improving crime prevention outcomes under community policing systems.

### ***Joint Community–Police Patrols***

Joint community–police patrols represent a collaborative security strategy in which police officers and community-based security groups such as vigilantes or neighbourhood watch teams conduct coordinated surveillance and enforcement activities. These patrols enhance visibility, increase deterrence, and improve rapid response to criminal incidents. Etannibi (2014) observes that joint patrols between police and local security actors significantly reduce response time to emergencies and enhance community confidence in law enforcement. The presence of both formal and informal security actors during patrols creates a sense of shared responsibility and increases the perceived risk of detection among potential offenders.

In rural Nigeria, joint patrols are often informal but widely practiced, particularly in areas where police presence is limited. According to Okoli and Iortyer (2014), such collaborations have proven effective in reducing rural crime rates, especially in communities affected by insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts. These patrols also help bridge the gap between communities and formal security agencies by fostering cooperation and trust. However, challenges such as lack of coordination, inadequate training of community vigilantes, and occasional abuses of power by informal security actors can undermine the effectiveness of

joint patrols. Despite these limitations, evidence suggests that where trust and coordination exist, joint patrols remain one of the most effective tools for rural crime prevention.

### ***Police–Community Trust and Security Outcomes***

Trust between the police and the community is a foundational element of effective community policing. It determines the willingness of citizens to cooperate with law enforcement agencies, share information, and participate in security initiatives. Without trust, even well-designed policing strategies are likely to fail due to lack of public cooperation.

Alemika (2013) argues that the legitimacy of the Nigerian police has been significantly weakened by historical patterns of abuse, corruption, brutality, and lack of accountability. These negative experiences have created a culture of mistrust between citizens and law enforcement agencies, thereby limiting cooperation in crime prevention efforts. Bayley (2005) similarly notes that trust is essential for effective policing because it facilitates voluntary compliance with the law and encourages citizens to act as partners in maintaining public safety. In environments where trust is strong, communities are more likely to report crimes, assist investigations, and support preventive policing initiatives.

In contrast, weak trust leads to underreporting crimes, reluctance to cooperate with investigations, and increased reliance on informal or self-help security mechanisms. Okiro (2017) highlights that in Nigeria, mistrust of the police remains a major barrier to effective intelligence gathering and crime prevention, particularly in rural communities where law enforcement presence is minimal. Strengthening police–community trust therefore requires institutional reforms, including improved accountability mechanisms, community engagement programmes, transparency in policing operations, and consistent respect for human rights. Without addressing trust deficits, the effectiveness of community policing in Nigeria will remain limited.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Broken Windows Theory, developed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), which provides a useful explanatory framework for understanding the relationship between environmental disorder and the escalation of crime. The central proposition of the theory is that visible signs of disorder, such as broken windows, littered environments, vandalism, public nuisance, and minor offences, if left unattended, create an impression of neglect and weaken informal social control within a community. Over time, this perceived absence of control encourages more serious criminal activities as offenders interpret the environment as permissive and unregulated.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) argue that crime is not only a product of individual criminal intent but also of environmental cues that signal the strength or weakness of social order. When minor disorders are ignored, they gradually erode community cohesion and reduce the willingness of residents to intervene in deviant behaviour. This creates a cycle in which minor disorder escalates into more serious forms of crime, thereby increasing insecurity within

affected communities. In the context of policing, the theory emphasises the importance of early intervention and proactive crime prevention strategies. It suggests that law enforcement agencies should not only focus on serious crimes but also pay attention to minor offences and signs of disorder, as these often serve as precursors to more serious criminal activities. This approach aligns closely with preventive policing strategies that aim to reduce crime opportunities before they escalate.

When applied to community policing, the Broken Windows Theory provides a strong justification for the involvement of residents in maintaining order within their communities. Community policing encourages collaboration between the police and community members in identifying, addressing, and resolving minor offences and disorderly behaviours. According to Skogan (2006), such collaboration strengthens informal social control mechanisms, improves community cohesion, and enhances the overall capacity of communities to prevent crime. In this framework, both police officers and community members play complementary roles. The police provide formal authority, enforcement capacity, and technical expertise, while community members contribute local knowledge, surveillance capacity, and social influence. When both actors work together to address minor infractions, such as vandalism, loitering, petty theft, and antisocial behaviour, they reinforce the message that disorder will not be tolerated. This joint action helps to restore order and prevent the escalation of crime.

Empirical support for the Broken Windows Theory has been widely documented. Studies by Kelling and Sousa (2001) suggest that addressing minor offences can lead to significant reductions in serious crime rates in urban settings. Similarly, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) argue that perceived disorder influences residents' fear of crime and weakens collective efficacy, which is essential for informal social control. In rural contexts, where formal policing structures are often weak, the role of community-based order maintenance becomes even more critical. In Nigeria, the application of the theory is particularly relevant given the prevalence of weak institutional presence in rural areas. Communities such as those in Akpabuyo Local Government Area often experience limited police visibility, making informal mechanisms of social control highly important. In such settings, the joint efforts of community members and police in addressing minor offences can significantly enhance security outcomes by preventing the escalation of disorder into serious criminal activity. The Broken Windows Theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for this study by explaining how community participation and collaborative policing strategies contribute to crime prevention. It reinforces the argument that maintaining order at the grassroots level through joint police–community action is essential for reducing opportunities for crime and enhancing rural security in Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The study adopted a survey research design, which is appropriate for examining relationships among variables and obtaining data from a defined population. The design enables the

researcher to collect quantifiable information on respondents' perceptions of community policing practices and their influence on crime prevention outcomes in the study area. It also allows for statistical analysis and generalisation of findings within the context of Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

### ***Study Area***

The study was conducted in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The area is characterised by rural and semi-rural settlements with farming, fishing, and small-scale trading as major occupations. Akpabuyo shares proximity with coastal and urban areas, making it susceptible to various security challenges such as theft, youth restiveness, land disputes, and occasional cult-related activities. The limited presence of formal security infrastructure in some communities makes it a suitable setting for examining the effectiveness of community policing in rural crime prevention.

### ***Population and Sample Size***

The population of the study consists of residents, community leaders, and security personnel within Akpabuyo LGA. Residents represent the general population affected by crime, community leaders include traditional rulers and youth leaders who play roles in informal governance, while security personnel comprise police officers and other local security actors. A sample size of 150 respondents was selected for the study. The study employed a combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants such as security personnel and community leaders due to their direct involvement in security matters, while simple random sampling was used to select residents to ensure fairness, representativeness, and reduction of sampling bias.

### ***Data Collection Method***

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture respondents' views on community participation, information sharing, joint patrols, and police–community trust in relation to crime prevention. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to allow for measurable responses and ease of analysis.

### ***Method of Data Analysis***

Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Specifically:

- a. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and general response patterns.
- b. Inferential statistics, particularly Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis, was used to test the relationship between community policing variables and crime prevention outcomes. This helped determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results/Findings

This section presents the results and findings of the study based on the analysis of data collected from respondents, focusing on the relationship between community policing variables and crime prevention in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

**Table 1:** Bio-data of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	58.7
	Female	62	41.3
Age	18–25 years	34	22.7
	26–35 years	46	30.7
	36–45 years	38	25.3
	46 years and above	32	21.3
Occupation	Security personnel	40	26.7
	Community leaders	35	23.3
	Traders	42	28.0
	Farmers/others	33	22.0
Level of Education	No formal education	18	12.0
	Primary education	32	21.3
	Secondary education	55	36.7
	Tertiary education	45	30.0

The biodata in Table 1 shows that both male (58.7%) and female (41.3%) respondents were adequately represented, indicating a balanced gender distribution suitable for capturing diverse perspectives on community policing and crime prevention. The age distribution reveals that most respondents fall within the active and economically productive age brackets (26–45 years), which collectively account for 56.0%. This suggests that the responses are largely informed by individuals who are actively involved in community life and are more likely to experience or observe security challenges directly.

In terms of occupation, the inclusion of security personnel (26.7%), community leaders (23.3%), traders (28.0%), and farmers/others (22.0%) demonstrate a well-diversified sample. This is particularly relevant to the study because it captures both formal security actors and civilians who are directly affected by crime in Akpabuyo LGA. The educational distribution indicates that a significant proportion of respondents have at least secondary education (36.7%) and tertiary education (30.0%), suggesting that most respondents are capable of understanding and responding meaningfully to the questionnaire items.

The sample population is highly relevant to the objectives of the study because it includes key stakeholders in rural security governance. Security personnel provide professional insights

into policing strategies, community leaders offer perspectives on local governance and conflict resolution, while residents (traders and farmers) provide first-hand experiences of crime and insecurity. This combination ensures a balanced and reliable data set, allowing the study to capture both institutional and community-level perspectives on community policing. Consequently, the findings derived from this sample are suitable for explaining the effectiveness of community policing in crime prevention within Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

### Test of Hypotheses

**Table 2:** Pearson Correlation Analysis of Community Participation and Crime Prevention

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Community Participation & Crime Prevention	150	0.69	0.000	Reject H <sub>01</sub>

The result in Table 2 shows a strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.69$ ) between community participation and crime prevention. The p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that increased community participation significantly enhances crime prevention in Akpabuyo LGA.

**Table 3:** Pearson Correlation Analysis of Information Sharing and Crime Reduction

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Information Sharing & Crime Reduction	150	0.71	0.000	Reject H <sub>02</sub>

Table 3 indicates a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.71$ ) between information sharing and crime reduction. Since the p-value (0.000) is below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that effective information sharing between community members and police significantly reduces crime in the study area.

**Table 4:** Pearson Correlation Analysis of Joint Patrols and Rural Security

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Joint Patrols & Rural Security	150	0.74	0.000	Reject H <sub>03</sub>

The result in Table 4 reveals a very strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.74$ ) between joint patrols and rural security. The p-value (0.000) confirms statistical significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that joint community–police patrols significantly improve rural security outcomes in Akpabuyo LGA.

**Table 5:** Pearson Correlation Analysis of Police–Community Trust and Crime Prevention

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Police–Community Trust & Crime Prevention	150	0.66	0.000	Reject H <sub>04</sub>

Table 5 shows a moderate positive relationship ( $r = 0.66$ ) between police–community trust and crime prevention effectiveness. The p-value (0.000) is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that stronger trust between police and community members significantly improves crime prevention outcomes in the study area.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that community policing is an effective strategy for crime prevention in rural Nigeria, particularly in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The results demonstrate that all the key dimensions of community policing—community participation, information sharing, joint patrols, and police–community trust—have significant positive relationships with crime prevention outcomes. This confirms that crime control in rural settings is most effective when it is based on collaboration rather than isolated institutional action. The strong relationship between community participation and crime prevention reinforces the argument of Skogan (2006), who emphasised that active citizen engagement strengthens informal social control and improves policing outcomes. In Akpabuyo LGA, the involvement of residents in neighbourhood watch activities, community security meetings, and local surveillance structures enhances early detection of criminal activities. This participatory approach not only increases vigilance but also creates a sense of shared responsibility for community safety.

Similarly, the positive impact of information sharing on crime prevention aligns with Bayley (2005), who argued that community policing is fundamentally dependent on intelligence gathered from residents. The findings suggest that where information flows freely between community members and the police, crime detection and response become more efficient. In the study area, timely sharing of information about suspicious activities enables security agencies to act proactively rather than reactively. However, the effectiveness of this process is often influenced by the level of trust and confidentiality maintained by security agencies, as fear of exposure or retaliation may discourage residents from providing critical intelligence.

The study also found that joint community–police patrols significantly enhance rural security, which corroborates Etannibi (2014), who observed that collaborative patrols improve deterrence, visibility, and response capacity. In Akpabuyo, joint patrols involving police officers and local vigilante groups increase security presence in vulnerable areas, particularly at night and in remote settlements. This visible presence acts as a deterrent to potential offenders and reassures residents of their safety. Furthermore, joint patrols foster cooperation and coordination between formal and informal security actors, thereby bridging the gap created by limited police manpower in rural areas.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the crucial role of police–community trust in crime prevention effectiveness, confirming the position of Alemika (2013), who identified weak police legitimacy as a major constraint to effective policing in Nigeria. Trust determines the willingness of community members to cooperate with law enforcement agencies, report

crimes, and participate in security initiatives. In Akpabuyo LGA, where historical experiences of distrust, fear of harassment, and perceptions of corruption exist, strengthening trust becomes essential for improving the effectiveness of community policing. Without trust, even well-structured policing initiatives may fail due to lack of cooperation from the public. The findings suggest that community policing functions as an integrated system in which each component reinforces the others. Community participation enhances intelligence gathering, information sharing improves responsiveness, joint patrols strengthen deterrence, and trust sustains cooperation. The absence or weakness of any of these elements reduces the overall effectiveness of the system.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that community policing significantly enhances crime prevention in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The evidence shows that collaborative security arrangements between the police and community members contribute meaningfully to reducing rural crime and improving public safety. The effectiveness of community policing is not automatic; it is highly dependent on the strength of key supporting factors, including community participation, effective information sharing, coordinated joint patrols, and strong police–community trust. Where these elements are weak, the capacity of community policing to prevent crime is significantly reduced. Therefore, sustainable rural security in Akpabuyo LGA and similar communities in Nigeria requires a deliberate effort to institutionalise and strengthen community policing structures, promote mutual trust, and ensure continuous collaboration between formal and informal security actors.

### **Recommendations**

1. Strengthen community policing structures at the grassroots level: Government and security agencies should formalise and strengthen community policing committees in all wards to ensure structured participation in security management.
2. Build trust through police accountability and transparency: The police should adopt more transparent and accountable practices, including prompt response to complaints and strict enforcement of disciplinary measures against misconduct.
3. Encourage regular community–police dialogue forums: Periodic town hall meetings should be institutionalised to allow continuous engagement between residents and security agencies, thereby improving communication and cooperation.
4. Enhance intelligence sharing mechanisms in rural communities: Secure and confidential reporting channels should be created to encourage residents to share information without fear of retaliation or exposure.
5. Institutionalise joint community–police patrols: Joint patrols should be formally structured, well-coordinated, and adequately supervised to ensure effectiveness and prevent abuse by informal security actors.
6. Provide training for both police and community security actors: Capacity-building programmes should be introduced to train police officers and community vigilantes on modern policing techniques, human rights, conflict management, and ethical conduct.

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