



# **Are Zimbabweans Revolting?**

**Report produced by the Mass Public Opinion  
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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Zimbabweans, just like many other Africans, may be described as ‘voters’ but not yet ‘citizens’ (Bratton & Logan, 2006). Mahmood Mamdani’s (Mamdani, 1996) classic thesis about citizens and subjects in late colonialism seems to have no greater application than to Zimbabwe, a country in which the voice of the citizen has been largely non-existent since the colonisation in 1897. The idea that citizens are at the heart of the state has never been a central notion for the state in either Rhodesia or Zimbabwe. The majority of the population were denied political voice of any significant kind virtually until the end of the settler state, forced into a brutal and bitter civil war after 1965, and were largely relegated to the minimalist role of mere voters since independence in 1980.

Surprisingly, studies have shown that Zimbabweans are a citizenry with high demand for democracy, high participation in elections, but very low demand for accountability. What might explain this? Is this “*risk-aversion*” (Masunungure, 2006), or is it something deeper in the Zimbabwean political psyche, what some might call Zimbabwe’s “*political culture*”?

To unpack some facts about the Zimbabwean citizens, RAU and MPOI looked at the findings of the Afrobarometer surveys since 1999, all six rounds up to 2014. The results reveal that Zimbabweans consistently favour democracy, reject all non-democratic alternatives, are discontent with the kind of democracy that prevails in Zimbabwe, mostly vote in elections, but a minority are active in other ways. The most telling statistics is in the small numbers that will participate in demonstrations or protest. This is usually attributed to fear, as in the fear to express opinions in public, but mostly to fears of political violence. Two theories can be advanced in order to explain this lack of agency: political culture and risk-aversion.

## Political Culture

The term “*political culture*” is defined by the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences as the “*set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system*”. There has been enormous interest in the concept since the early outlining of it by Gabriel Almond in 1956, and expanded by Almond and Sidney Verba in their important work, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963). The concept has drawn both support and criticism over the years, but nonetheless provides an interesting model for examining the structural nature of Zimbabwean politics.

The term can be explained relatively simply. Three kinds of political culture are argued to form a *civic culture*: *parochial*, *subject* and *participant*. No country’s political culture is entirely composed of just one of these, and it is the mix of the three that gives each country a distinctive civic culture.

The citizens that compose a civic culture, and one of the three subcultures – *parochial*, *subject* or *participant* – approach to world of politics through various different orientations: either intellectual (cognitive), emotional (affective) or informed (evaluative). These micro aspects of a political culture need not concern us for present purposes. We are interested in the more macro aspects of political culture and how these might apply to Zimbabwe.

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*Parochial* political cultures citizens are insular and have a limited or narrow outlook, with very little awareness of central government, concerned mostly with narrow family interests. Essentially, these are citizens with little interest in politics, and only those issues that directly concern them.

A *subject* political culture is a notch higher than the parochial one. As Almond and Verba put it, for the subject “*the law is something he obeys, not something he helps shape*”. For example, a majority of Zimbabweans value democracy highly, have a good understanding about what is democracy, but most do little apart from voting to ensure that the government adheres to the principles of democracy. Many political commentators hence see Zimbabweans as unduly passive and accepting, and extremely law-abiding.

Over-simplistically, we might make a distinction between rural Zimbabweans as *parochial* and urban Zimbabweans as *subject*.

A *participant* political culture has active citizens: these are citizens that have many of the virtues of the subject, but they also expect to take part more widely in political life and have some say in the development of policies and the making of decisions.

Thus, a civic culture will be a mix of citizens belonging to all of these, and the relative mix will be definitive of a country’s civic culture. In trying to understand Zimbabwe, the mixture is instructive, and the interest in doing so is to try to see why Zimbabweans seem content merely with voting only as a way of dealing with political crisis.

The tragedy of the Zimbabwe situation was that after the country went through a relatively protracted period of very high citizen participation (and attendant risk-taking) during the decade-long liberation war, the population relapsed into a subject political orientation. This was manifested in the prolonged period of citizen quiescence for two decades post-1980, followed by brief moments of citizen (mostly urban) eruptions at the end of the 1990s before this went dormant again for the next one-and-a-half decades.

Post-2013 elections, and especially from the beginning of 2016, the country has witnessed a resurgence of active citizen participation (albeit largely restricted to urban centres, particularly Harare) which manifests itself in various forms, most prominently as social media-based movements – the so-called hash tag movements.

### **Risk Aversion**

As pointed out above, there may be an explanation other than *political culture* to explain Zimbabweans apparent tolerance of poor governance, and this relates to the political violence leading to *risk-aversion*. As Masunungure pointed out in 2006, if a government is prepared to be *risk-taking*, then citizens have one of two strategies: either they become risk-averse, and minimise the dangers to themselves, or they become risk-takers themselves, and this can lead to very explosive results.

A small historical illustration may help here. When the settler government of Southern Rhodesia persisted in denying political rights to the majority population of the country, and then took the intemperate step of taking an illegal independence in 1965, the generally risk-averse nationalist struggle, previously committed to peaceful struggle, moved quickly to the risk-taking alternative of armed struggle. This clearly led to independence, but also had the consequence of an extremely nasty civil war.

However, and perhaps because of the knowledge that citizens have about how risk-taking can lead to violent outcomes, and because the government since 1980 has shown that it is not averse to the use of violence in maintaining political power, have Zimbabweans now become risk averse?

Risk-taking seems a reasonable strategy for political leaders, where accepting losses might lead to being voted out of office, and hence may be willing to take greater and greater risks in order to stay in political office. Here one thinks about political leaders making short-term decisions that are only beneficial in the short-term in order to affect elections, but also resorting to rigging elections and even violence in order to avoid losing political power. However, what operates for leaders may not be the same for ordinary citizens. For example, and in relation to uncertainty, what is the risk response to risk-taking leaders?

Ordinarily, and when the risk-taking by leaders does not generate fear, through say resorting to violence, one can imagine that people resort to either *voice* or *exit*, through mobilising or protest, or, alternatively, by changing political party affiliation or even not voting (Hirschman. 1980). But, equally important, Hirschman also points out people may remain *loyal* despite the perception of apparently negative consequences. For example, given the adverse publicity about the effects of smoking, non-smokers may campaign about smoking and the risks of passive smoking (*voice*), smokers give up smoking (*exit*), and some people continue to smoke (*loyalty*).

In respect of Zimbabwe, Zimbabweans will vote, but not join demonstrations or protests; and, more seriously, will generally reduce their public participation to very low risk issues and events. They are not strong members of communities, apart from churches, rarely join other to raise issues, and express reluctance even to voice their opinions in public or have political discussions with intimates. They also exit in very large numbers. Table 1 illustrates some of the risk-averse characteristics of Zimbabwe citizens derived from the six Rounds of the Afrobarometer, but many more could be described.

**Table 1: Participation in politics**

	1999	2004	2005	2009	2012	2014
"When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters?" (Never/occasionally)	72%	48%	79%	75%	80%	83%
"How interested are you in public affairs?" (Not at all/not very interested)	-	70%	43%	37%	41%	46%
"In this country, how often: Do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?"(Often/always)	-	83%	88%	83%	89%	81%

Thus, the two major characteristics of agency, voice and participation, are greatly reduced in Zimbabweans.

What then describes the Zimbabwean citizen? Is it the civic culture, of largely *parochial* and *subject* sub-cultures, that results in the apparent passivity in the face of very poor governance? Or, is it that the experience of political violence, both recent and old, that has made citizens risk-averse? We tested these ideas using the six surveys conducted by the

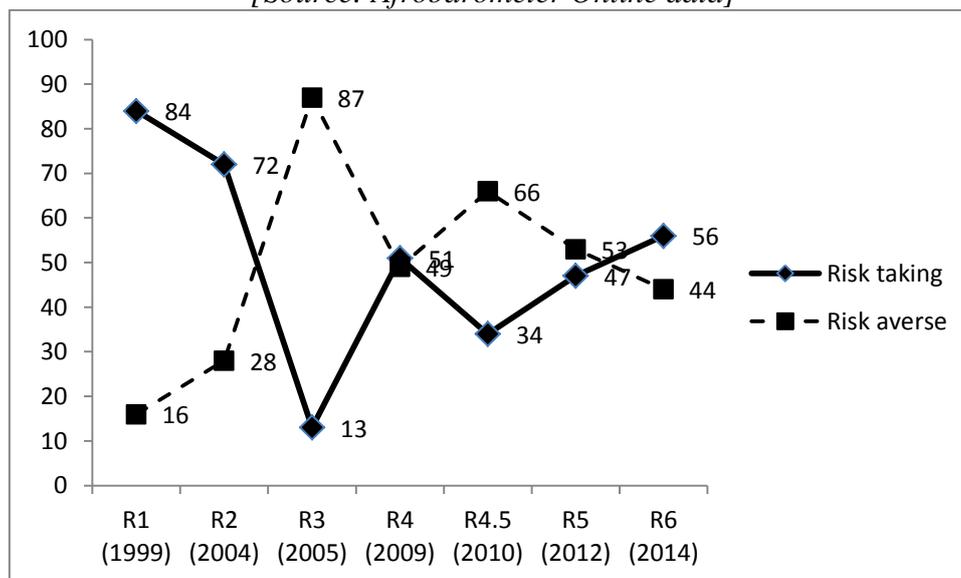
Afrobarometer since 1999 by developing a measure of risk-aversion, and seeing whether this described the Zimbabwean citizenry.

### Study Methods

MPOI and RAU developed a risk-aversion index based on four items selected from the Afrobarometer surveys conducted in the country from 1999 to 2013. The research team identified items that were deemed to be measuring risk-taking behaviour. In addition to that, for all six Rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys (1999, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014) in Zimbabwe, plus the two ancillary surveys (2010 & 2013), there are various significant events that may or may not have influenced the responses by individual Zimbabweans. We speculate that the events conspired to determine or co-determine risk orientations.

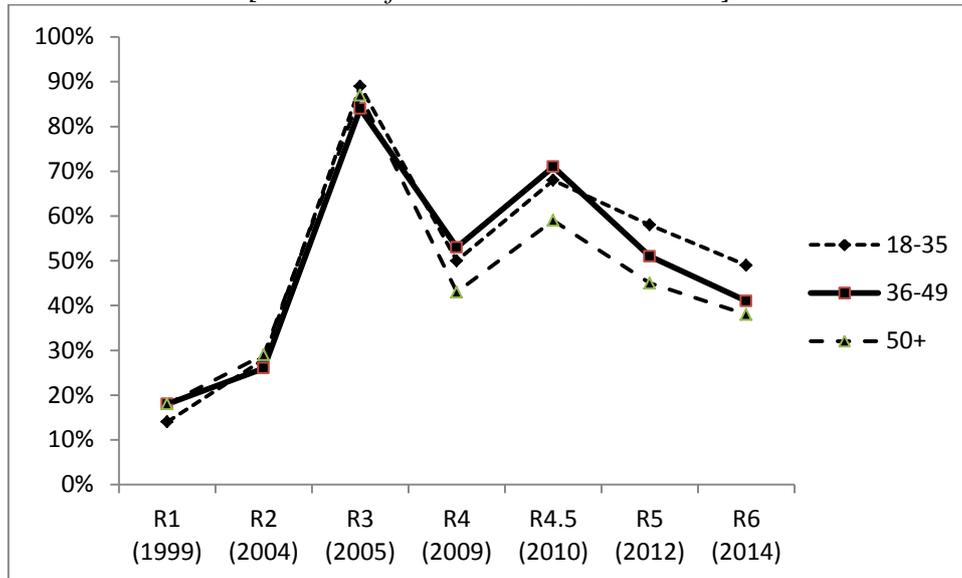
As can be seen in Figure 1 (over), Zimbabweans showed a tendency to being risk takers during the first and second rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys in the country. During the inaugural survey of the Afrobarometer Network in 1999 and the second round in 2004, more citizens revealed that they were risk takers while 72% declared the same during the second round survey.

**Figure 1: Risk-taking over time, Round 1 (1999) to Round 6 (2014)**  
*[Source: Afrobarometer Online data]*



However, significant change is noticed during the third round of the survey in 2005 when an overwhelming majority indicated that they were now risk averse; i.e. had assumed a subject political cultural orientation. This is the evident effect of the nation-wide displacements that occurred during Operation Murambatsvina. There was a drop in risk-aversion by Round 4 before increasing again in 2010. This trend towards diminished risk-aversion (and increased risk-taking) continued from 2010 to 2014: by 2014 the majority of adult Zimbabweans expressed the sentiment that they were risk takers compared to those who expressed risk-aversion.

**Figure 2: Risk-aversion due to age, 1999 to 2014**  
 [Source: Afrobarometer Online data]



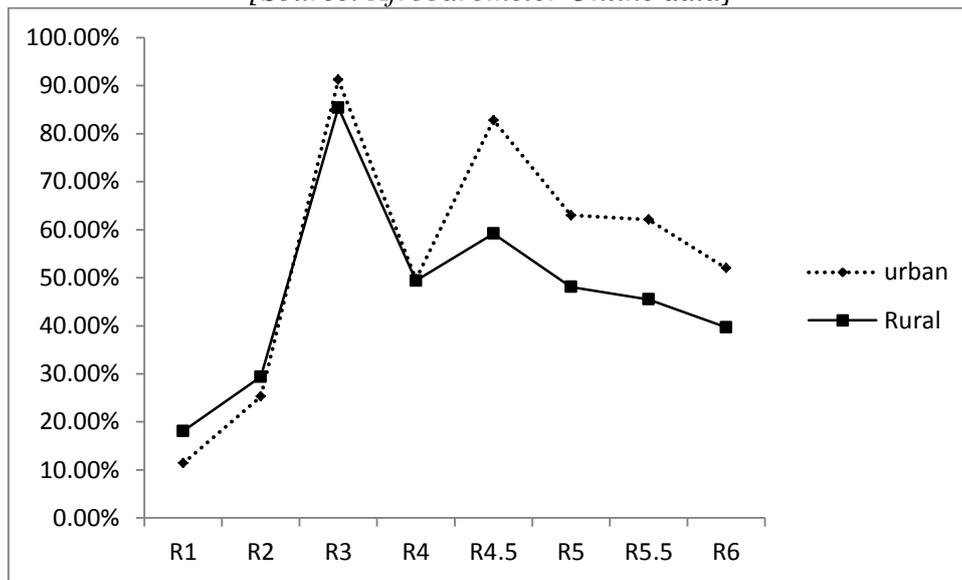
The data also suggest that risk-taking behaviour does not only differ among the age groups but also that the age groups' propensity to take risks changes over time (Figure 3). Prior to 2005, for example, young adult (18-35) and middle-aged Zimbabweans (36-49) were more likely to take risk than the older generations. The last two Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2012 and 2014 show a reversal of this propensity to take risk. A new trend begin to emerge were the older generations (36-49; 50+) are more likely to be risk-takers. There is a general finding that women are more likely to be risk-averse than men, with perhaps well-educated women in high level occupation being different.

Education proves another anomaly for Zimbabwe. The higher the level of education, the greater the aversion to risk becomes. Employment status does not seem to have much bearing on the level of risk-taking by Zimbabwe in most instances. Overall, employment as used here as a possible indicator of wealth seems to be too crude to determine differences in risk-aversion.

In the first two rounds (1999 and 2004), more urbanites were risk-taking compared to their rural counterparts (Figure 3). However, this pattern was reversed as more people from the rural areas started reporting tendencies of being more risk-taking compared to those from towns and cities.

**Figure 3: Risk-aversion due to place of residence (rural or urban), 1999 to 2014**

[Source: Afrobarometer Online data]



A breakdown of data by province reveals that risk-taking and risk-aversion tendencies vary markedly by province. Disaggregating the data on the basis of ethnicity shows some interesting findings, especially when taken together with the findings on Provincial trends. Over time, Manyika respondents are the most risk-averse, whilst the Ndebele are the least.

There are also differences in risk-aversion due to political party affiliation. Supporters of ZANUPF are consistently the least risk-averse of all groupings. Over time the MDC, and then the MDC-T after the party split in 2005 are generally the most risk-averse, but those claiming to be unaffiliated or members of other parties are also risk-averse. Nonetheless, belonging to an opposition political party would seem more risky than belonging to ZANU PF.

### **The effect of the external environment on Risk Taking in Zimbabwe**

Risk-aversion is obviously not merely a personality characteristic of Zimbabweans, but, as we pointed out earlier, is affected by the external environment, the kinds of experiences that people encounter.

The effect of the external environment is seen in virtually all the cross-tabulations, but the massive, and often violent, displacement during *Operation Murambatsvina* produced the highest levels of risk-aversion seen in any of the six Rounds. If the explicit aim behind *Operation Murambatsvina* was to deter citizens from political participation, and reinforce the notion that Zimbabweans are or ought to be *subjects*, the action was highly successful according to the findings.

Related to this is the finding that rural citizens became less risk-averse than their urban counterparts from 2005 onwards. Since rural citizens were much less affected by *Operation Murambatsvina*, which more or less wholly focused on urban residents, it is interesting that rural citizens show a steady decline in risk-aversion from then onwards.

Although risk-taking and risk-aversion are obviously affected by the external environment, people also vary considerably in how they deal with the events they experience. Here it was very interesting that the finding that the older group in 2014, and increasingly from 2009, and presumably over time from 1999, was possibly a younger group growing up in the more open and liberal era of the 1980s and 1990s. This might suggest that this group loaded strongly on *perceived self-efficacy*, inculcated by education, the influence of their parents who were the beneficiaries of successful anti-colonial struggle, and the experience of the growth of civil society and a human rights culture in the 1990s. The notion behind self-efficacy is simply that nothing succeeds like success, and citizens that experienced the successes of the civic activism of the 1990s acquired strong personal agency, were able to believe in the value of risk-taking.

## Conclusions

We raised the issue about political culture in Zimbabwe, and pointed out that Zimbabweans evince strong aspirations for living in a democracy, rejecting all non-democratic forms of rule, but also do not show much evidence of having political efficacy. And, despite some recent trends towards public protest, and possibly because of the violence attendant on political activity in Zimbabwe, Zimbabweans elect to be minimalist citizens, as voters only. Are Zimbabweans *parochial*, *subjects* or *participants*, or are different groupings in Zimbabwe exemplars of all forms? Are rural Zimbabweans more likely to be parochial, dominated by the traditional forms of socio-political life, and are urban citizens more likely to be participants? A worrying additional speculation is whether there is a growing bifurcation in Zimbabwean society along the lines of residential location, and an end to the formerly easy movement between town and country.

Furthermore, what lies behind the apparent adherence to one form of political culture or other? And finally has the exclusionary history of settler Rhodesia and the centralised and commandist rule of ZANU PF reduced all to being subjects?

We also raised the issue about risk-taking in the political domain, and tried to test this using a composite measure of risk-taking and the polar opposite, risk-aversion, in order to see how and possibly why Zimbabweans adhere to different forms of political culture. We think the measure was satisfactory, but perhaps some of the variables being tested – age, gender, education, employment, residence and political affiliation – were sometimes too crude for meaningful analysis.

However, the gross findings are still very interesting and suggest fruitful areas for more investigation. What to make of the finding that, over time, older Zimbabweans – 41 years and above – seem to be less risk-averse than the younger age groups. Does this suggest that once people are risk-taking in the political domain – support democracy, is interested in politics, attend community meetings, etc. – they are likely to remain so over time? Were those that were active in the “open-society” era of the 1990s likely to remain active in the fear-ridden post-millennium period?

This might be an alarming finding. The older Zimbabweans, displaying the characteristics of a participant culture, are demographically a minority in a country where nearly 70% of the population are under the age of 35, and where nearly half of the young have grown up in an era of controlled information, deep and wide political polarisation, and high levels of coercive governance. Have the young been reduced to inhabitants of a subject culture?

Recent events might seem to gainsay this speculation, but it is also the case that many hundreds of thousands of the young have also dealt with the socio-political environment by dint of migration and not by participation other than voting for those that remain, if allowed to do so. In Hirschman's theory, the youth choose "*exit*" rather than "*voice*", and clearly some (probably rural youth) remain *loyal*. However, recent events suggest that youth seem to have chosen voice, certainly through the use of social media, but also the even more active behaviours of protest and participation.

As regards other findings, women are no less risk-taking or more risk-averse than men overall, and the more educated, irrespective of gender, were more risk-averse than the less educated, with an increase in risk-aversion as the level of education rose. Whilst the second finding may have a simple explanation – education allows a person a better appraisal of risk – the first may be less simple. Women are not a homogeneous population in Zimbabwe, and there may well be differences due to residence, say being rural or urban, that may be masked in this finding. As was seen (Figure 3), rural citizens as a whole have become less risk-averse than their urban counterparts since Round 4 (2009). Understanding what political culture means to women clearly requires further disaggregating women along potential lines of difference – age, residence and education would be obvious starting points – but the pervasive nature of the rural-urban divide is obviously a variable that needs more sophisticated statistical analysis.

Political party affiliation provides no surprises. Belonging to an opposition political party would seem more risky than belonging to ZANU PF, and all other groups, including the *unaffiliated*, display high levels of risk-aversion.

Finally, we need to tie together a number of the other findings.

Firstly, it is important to point out the effect of a major national adverse event, *Operation Murambatsvina*. As was seen in Figure 1, and the effect is seen in virtually all the cross-tabulations, this massive, and often violent, displacement produced the highest levels of risk-aversion seen in any of the six Rounds. The targets may have been alleged to be the urban supporters of the MDC-T – then MDC – but the effects were indiscriminate and also affected supporters of ZANU PF. If the explicit aim behind *Operation Murambatsvina* was the deter citizens from political participation and reinforce the notion that Zimbabweans are or ought to be *subjects*, the action was highly successful according to our findings.

Related to this is the finding that rural citizens became less risk-averse than their urban counterparts from 2005 onwards. Since rural citizens were much less affected by *Operation Murambatsvina*, which more or less wholly focused on urban residents, it is interesting that rural citizens show a steady decline in risk-aversion from then onwards.

Secondly, and pointing out the effect of national intervention seen with the aftermath of *Operation Murambatsvina*, it becomes important to examine all the variability due to residence. There is marked variability over time and within Provinces, as well as marked variability between Provinces. Furthermore, there are differences due to ethnicity that seem to co-vary with Provincial residence. Much of the difference found may well be due to local events occurring in the Provinces in the six months prior to each survey being conducted, and this requires much closer examination of the historical record for each of the Provinces over time. This will be the subject of a second report.

Thirdly, there remains the complex question of what exactly is risk-aversion independent of the external events that produce all the changes seen in the variability between and within Provinces over time. Risk-taking and risk-aversion are obviously related to external events and the appraisal thereof, but rationality and cost-benefit estimates by individuals are also subject to fear. Kasperson has argued that, in the political world, fear is reduced by trust in institutional agents (Kasperson. 1992), and, in Zimbabwe, there is evidence that trust in state agents varies considerably according to political party affiliation (RAU. 2015): ZANU PF supporters have more trust in the police, the army and the courts, whilst MDC-T supporters have little. This would seem to bolster the continuous finding over the all the Afrobarometer surveys on Zimbabwe that the overwhelming majority of Zimbabweans are careful about what they say in public.

They are also inherent properties of an individual, and this seems to be suggested by the finding that the older group in 2014, and increasingly from 2009, and presumably over time from 1999, was a younger group growing up in the more open and liberal era of the 1980s and 1990s. This might suggest that this group loaded strongly on *perceived self-efficacy*, inculcated by education, the influence of their parents who were the beneficiaries of successful anti-colonial struggle, and the experience of the growth of civil society and a human rights culture in the 1990s. Does this show the translating of self-efficacy into *political efficacy*? This deserves more examination.

As regards the young, there is also the suggestion that *anger* in men will facilitate risk-taking, which seems to be exactly the case currently in Zimbabwe, and certainly young men between the ages of 20 and 35 have had little to celebrate in their lives in the past 20 years. Here, it has been argued that youth bulges are not central in the development of instability (Goldstone et al. 2010), but we might advance in contradiction the findings elsewhere that suggest rather that youth bulges do matter (Urdal. 2006: Urdal. 2006). Zimbabwe is often an anomaly in its politics, and perhaps the youth bulge will matter, and the influence angry young men should not be underestimated in the way in which political events will unfold in coming years.

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