POLITICAL CRISIS, SOCIAL CONFLICT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Democracy is described as majority rule over the minority the values of democracy which are although relatively fair also can be tyrannical in the face of the minority with virtually absolute authority in the hands of the higher number under a democracy, a group's worth is based on the result of political and economic competition. There is a very close relationship between the concepts of democracy and conflict. The democratic system of governance is based on representatives with as many interests as are found in society representation to a very large extent has been a major source of positive transformation and negative fracture of many developing societies. The liberal theory was adopted. John Locke made a tremendous contribution to the theory of classical democracy. He regarded the consent of the people as the basis of political power. He also opines that people in the state of nature had three natural rights: the right to life, liberty and property. The research contends that the government of Africa should adhere to the rules of law and good governance.

Keywords: *Political, Democracy, Conflict, Development and Governance*

Introduction

Africa is a continent with 54 nation-states; each one is quite varied and diverse. These states have strikingly different patterns of democratization and equally different patterns of violence. The diversity of histories, politics, traditions, religions, geography,

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identities, education, structures and principles among others are factors that must be considered in understanding trends in democracy and conflict in Africa.

As a concept and form of government, democracy is quite old. The ancient Greek city-states and the city of Athens, in particular, are widely regarded as the birthplace of democracy. It is common knowledge that the word *democracy* was derived from the Greek words *demos* which means "the people", and *kratia* which means "to rule". Simply stated then, democracy is a system of government of the rule of the people. Theoretically, it is a system of government by the people for the people, as opposed to rule by one or a few, as is the case in autocracy or oligarchy respectively. Since ancient Greece, however, the concept of democracy has remained elusive. Despite centuries of democratic governance across the world, there is currently no univocally accepted definition of the term.

Appadorai (1968) defines democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or indirectly or through representatives periodically elected by them. Newly democratized African states have consistently struggled with systems of government of the rule of the people and violent conflicts. The effects of this situation have affected the continent's societies, polities and economies and deprived them of their potential for development and progress.

Grasas and Mateos (2010), state that violence has been a recurring reality in the analysis of African states. The causes of violence and conflicts in Africa are not only complex but the challenges of resolving them are equally as difficult.

In seeking to explain violence and armed conflicts on the African continent, they constantly have been linked with issues such as identity (ethnic, religious, cultural), the scarcity or the abundance of natural resources, the extreme fragility and sometimes the collapse of the African postcolonial state, or the prevailing economic underdevelopment in many of these contexts. While these narratives have provided an explanatory basis for understanding the violence and conflict in Africa; this mono-causal dimensional view neglects the

importance of developing an explanatory analysis that recognizes not only interrelated internal factors but also external factors of various kinds as well.

Conceptual Clarifications

To understand existing trends in democracy and conflict in Africa, we must have a basic understanding of democracy and conflict in Africa.

Democracy

There is no universally accepted definition of democracy and countries who have been practicing democracy for more than two hundred years continue to debate various interpretations of key democratic precepts. There are almost as many definitions as there are authors on democracy and its precepts.

Recognizing that the practice of democracy around the world is culturally and contextually embedded, it is important to highlight several essential features that help distinguish democratic societies from those that are not. At its foundation, a democratic society is one where the people can exercise civic and political rights and elect government officials to represent their interests in local and national political structures. A democratic system of government can take many forms and is fundamentally based on the principles of participation, representation, rule of law, protection of citizens' freedoms and liberties, limitations on the government's power in the private and public spheres, free and fair elections and an independent and transparent judiciary system.

Duverger (1964) states that democracy is a completely artificial notion forged by lawyers based on eighteenth-century philosophical ideas - ideas such as 'government of the people by the people', and 'government of the nation by its representatives' were quickly dismissed as merely fine phrases with an empty ring. Democracy, understood in a very general way, means rule by the people. This seems to be a common element to all usages of the word and claims a long heritage stretching back to the Classical age (Held, 2006). Definitional consensus is important despite the nearly impossible goal of arriving at

a single universally accepted definition of democracy in some very basic sense.

At its most basic level, there are certain attributes of a democracy which include but are not limited to; frequent, fair and free elections, universal adult suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of association, inclusiveness, and participation. More substantive definitions of democracy, however, while building on the basic attributes of democracy, give more prominence to the role and importance of accountability and legitimacy.

Conflict

The African continent is a vast land, richly blessed with natural resources and great potential for investment and opportunity. However, her economic and political development has been hindered by conflict. The conflict has afflicted Africa and serves as a major cause of poverty, hunger, and unemployment. Nation-states, societies, communities, kingdoms, families and individuals have been involved in one form of conflict or another from pre-historic times, during the colonial era, the Cold War and the post-Cold War era as well. Conflict is inevitable but violence (physical, psychological, structural or cultural) is avoidable.

Conflict, according to Miller (2005) is derived from the Latin for 'to clash or engage in a fight'. Conflict is further described as a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends. Conflict may be either manifest, recognizable through actions or behaviours, or latent, in which case it remains dormant for some time, as incompatibilities are unarticulated or are built into systems or such institutional arrangements as governments, corporations, or even civil society.

Alli (2006) explains conflict as a social necessity and a normal and functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies. Conflict is an attendant feature of human interaction and cannot be eliminated; however, its proper management and transformation are essential for peace and progress in human society. Africa has been described as the world's theatre of conflict and in the

last few decades it has acquired a reputation as a hotbed of violence and warfare. Conflict and violence in Africa are also complex subject and an issue of concern. While it is useful to identify trends in African civil violence, it is also a common mistake to make misleading generalizations and offer them as explanations for civil wars in Africa. Conflicts that take place within a society may be the result of several factors explanations for social conflicts, whether on a small or large scale, whether resulting from interactions between social groups or caused by external factors have been an issue of common concern (Faleti, 2006).

According to Hagg and Kagwanja, (2007), following the end of the Cold War, Africa became a theatre of violent conflicts from Burundi to Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Sierra Leone, Somalia to Rwanda and Guinea to Sudan. These conflicts are usually linked to identity issues, particularly ethnic identity. While there are many identity markers such as race, nationhood, kinship, class, religion, language, gender, age, geographic location, cultural preferences, and occupation – such as military function or herders and tillers – by and large ethnicity is identified as the dominant axis about which conflicts have revolved.

Democracy and Conflict Trends in Africa

Democracy has arguably been described theoretically as the best form of government ever devised, but this does not mean that every democracy does well in practice. Many democracies are nothing more than elected governments with an absence of a democratic tradition and are held back by problems such as poverty, crime, corruption, environmental degradation, violence and civil strife. Democracy is flexible, both in theory and practice, which makes it highly complex to understand and practice. Understanding it requires consideration of context. The development of institutions, rights, and procedures cannot be assumed outside the context of their application, hence the justification for non-uniformity in the application of democracy as a system of rule (Olateju, 2013).

As democracy spreads around the world, the realization is growing that a nation's political future, security, economic strength and identity will be shaped by the creation of better, more transparent governments. It is difficult to identify general trends in democracy for the continent as a whole. In the broadest terms, Africa is certainly more democratic and holds more free and fair elections today than several decades ago, but while some countries have made remarkable democratic gains, some other countries seem to have retrogressed, while a number have remained democratically stagnant since independence.

Therefore, to understand recent democratic trends in Africa, it is helpful to examine individual countries along with those others who have shared similar experiences and will thus face similar challenges and opportunities in the coming years. An examination of Anglophone and Francophone African democratic and conflict trends serves as a case in point. These various experiences can serve as positive examples or critical warnings to other countries in Africa and can help the international community more effectively engage, strengthen and consolidate democratization processes across Africa by learning from past failures and successes.

In the last decade, the majority of conflict-related deaths and injuries in the world have occurred in Africa, and large numbers of people continue to suffer from insecurity and fear of violence. Violent conflicts in Africa have hampered political stability, economic prosperity and the socio-economic development of the continent. Preventing and reducing violent conflict has become a key priority for African governments in a democratic era.

Conflict and persistent insecurity became more prevalent on the African continent after the attainment of independence by many African countries. Civil wars in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda as well as different forms of civil unrest have also plagued Africa. More recently, revolutions have caused a change in government across North Africa in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Libya, and most recently in Mali where the Army removed the

president and replaced him with a new head. The Central African Republic also witnessed episodes of violence.

Characteristics of Democracy

i. Democracy possesses important features which make it different from other forms of government.
ii. The franchise means the right to vote and be voted for.
iii. Independence of judiciary This means that the judiciary should be free from any form of control either by the executive or legislature.
iv. The sovereignty of the people is basic to democracy, it must be people-centred, and it must start with people and end with people, in a democratic setting nothing matters more than the people.
v. In a democracy, authority to govern is based on the consent of the people, people must give their consent as to who and who will govern them. People must bless those- intending to be in a position of power before they will be qualified and run a democratic government.
vi. The consent of the people is usually given through elections. Though it is possible to have elections without democracy there cannot be democracy without elections. Elections are very central to democracy as such a basic ingredient to the system.
vii. Once elections are conducted, there has to be a majority rule. The decision of the majority must have its way, but the minority must not be suppressed. The majority must have its way but the minority must have a say.
viii. In a democracy, basic human rights must be safeguarded such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of worship, freedom of assembly and association, and people of like minds are free to meet, discuss and interact.
ix. Right to due process and fair trial before a competent court of jurisdiction, every

the suspect is innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt before he can be convicted or punished, The suspect on trial is also entitled to a lawyer to defend him if he so wishes.

x. There are constitutional limits to the governments. The Constitution must protect the citizens against the government to avoid tyranny, arbitrariness and anarchy.

xi. There should be political, social, and economic pluralism, there should be freedom to operate in large groups, politically, socially and economically, in the state, it shouldn't be few individuals in large of the various sectors of the state and there should be more than one political party as a one-party system is not synonymous with democracy.

xii. There has to be mass participation of people in all aspects of the system 'as it is people-centred. For example, in voter registration exercises, campaigns, the casting of votes to the announcement of election results by the electoral commission.

The conflict has been a recurring decimal in Africa's history and development, dating as far back as pre-historic times, during the colonial era, the Cold War and the post-Cold War era. During the colonial era, the African state was carved out of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural entities, which gave the state a pluralistic configuration. The African state was and is still to this day largely a composite of distinct ethnic units many of which would likely have described themselves at the time of colonization as nations in their own right. The tendency of colonial powers to treat certain groups and regions preferentially in the development of political and economic policies led to considerable disparities among ethnic groups in the shaping and sharing of power, national wealth, social services, and development opportunities and effectively sowed the seeds for future conflict among indigenous groups (Deng, 2011).

Colonial legacies helped to shape the trends of democracy and conflict in Africa. The British policy of indirect rule, the French policy of assimilation and the Belgian policy and patterns of exploitation were all colonial legacies that affected the processes of democratization and sowed seeds for conflict production in Africa. According to Coexistence International (2008) the partition of Africa by Western colonial powers and the imposition of political structures which undermined traditional forms of leadership and participation left behind many unresolved challenges when it comes to sharing power in contemporary African states. The most enduring legacy of the colonial "divide and rule" policies was the deepening of ethnic and clan divisions within the artificially crafted boundaries resulting in today's identity-based politics which are at the heart of most electoral and political crises in Africa. Conflicts in Africa are often referred to in interchangeable terms such as civil war, violent conflict, civil strife, hostility, war, and political instability, without any attempt at describing or defining the different conflicts.

According to Adetula (2006), in many circles, conflict is regarded as a characteristic feature of political processes in Africa. Historical and contemporary data on African conflicts support this assertion especially as scarcely has any part of Africa escaped the scourge of violent conflict in the past four decades. These conflicts exhibit some features that seem particular to them. Typologies of conflicts in Africa show that there are conflicts of secession, ethnic sub-nationalism, self-determination, military intervention and political legitimacy or national liberation, religion, and over territory or boundaries.

Ethnic sub-nationalism and underlying ethnic cleavages in African states are considered the primary sources of instability, insecurity and conflict. Rebel groups, political parties and democratic institutions are often organized on ethnic lines; leaders and politicians often play upon ethnic differences to rise to power. Conflicting parties are usually quick to frame their grievances in terms of ancient hatred between different ethno-religious identities or groups. The mobilization of ethnic identities using existing structures is a trend in both Anglophone and Francophone democracies for the production of

conflict. These trends may differ slightly in the case of Francophone countries where there is a desire for singular control of state resources by one individual while such competition largely exists among groups in Anglophone countries.

Ethnic grievances have existed in Africa for thousands of years among dozens of religions, hundreds of ethnic and language groups, and probably thousands of familial groupings. While these grievances and differences are necessary causes of conflict, they are not sufficient enough to lead to violence. Aggrieved parties and groups have hardly settled their differences by fighting as most groups found indigenous ways to cooperate most of the time. Contemporary conflicts in African societies are frequently characterized as ethnic conflicts usually as a result of state failure even in democratic states. Ethnic loyalties can claim primacy over other forms of group loyalty and protagonists in conflict can more easily be mobilized in conflict situations. As critical as ethnicity to conflict, however, it is not a source of violent conflict but can be used as an instrument of conflict. This is not to suggest that there are no purely ethnic-based conflicts. African societies are replete with ethnic conflicts between ethnic and cultural groups, pastoralists and agricultural groups, but these are hardly the arenas of the systemic breakdowns and cataclysmic violence that engulfs entire countries and regions; and even these are exacerbated by the failure of governance mechanisms having to do with conflict resolution.

The presence of strong traditional institutions and eventually strong state systems and institutions create an environment for peaceful outcomes between various groups. But when these state systems and institutions grow extremely weak, like in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Liberia, an environment for the achievement of peaceful outcomes is no longer possible. This state failure means that rather than being completely absent, state systems and institutions such as military and police forces are present and allow local tensions to escalate unchecked. In many instances, state military and police forces are active participants in the violence and civil wars fought on the continent. Additionally, apart from being absent when violent conflicts spontaneously break out, African governments are often deeply

implicated in fomenting ethnic violence between groups. One group's uncertainty about the intentions of the other group leads to a cycle of mistrust, eventually leading to conflict. Since it is assumed, that no group knows the other's intentions; each has an incentive to build up its stores of weapons to protect itself from attack by the other group. But since militias armed with light, cheap weapons (e.g., machine guns, axes, farm tools, machetes) can attack their neighbours at any time, a defensive build-up can appear threatening.

Violent conflicts and institutional failure in Africa are caused by a mix of poor governance (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000), overly centralised governance structures, the use of military resources in support of arbitrary and autocratic governance and the implementation of policies and practices that sustain rent-seeking, mismanagement of land and natural resources, declining economic conditions, poverty and famine among others. In multi-ethnic and diverse African societies, democracy offers strong prospects for managing social and political conflicts. In societies that have endured long-lasting divisions, as well as in consolidated democracies, the sustainability of conflict-prevention efforts and inter-communal coexistence relies on democratic practice informed by principles of inclusion, participation, and respect for diversity.

Where democracy is not properly managed, it becomes a trigger for conflict, when it is properly managed however; it is an instrument for the mediation of conflict. Democracy enables greater societal reconciliation to take place via many routes, including increased civic engagement, the rule of law, an independent judiciary system, equality legislation, and the recognition of both the collective rights of minorities and the individual rights of citizens. Although democracy-building in war-torn societies is often correlated with peace and reconciliation processes, neither non-violent management of societal conflicts nor inter-communal coexistence can be achieved by simply 'launching' democracy as has been the case in many African countries.

It is idealistic to assume that democracy-building is in itself a conflict-free process and that democracy as an end goal is effortlessly realized, or provides the panacea to a conflict or post-conflict society.

Many African societies, especially those emerging from one form of violent conflict or another, struggle with how to manage deep-rooted societal divisions. Such democratic "essentials" as elections, constitutional and security-sector reforms, and political-party formation can intensify and exacerbate identity-based divisions. Democracy can facilitate the development of multiple and complementary political identities, and yet it can also polarize them and lead to violent conflict.

Conflict arises for a multitude of reasons and invariably, in all cultures, is effectively controlled by the conflict management systems in place. The democratic process represents perhaps the best known of these management systems to deal with conflict in a heterogeneous and pluralist society. However, as has been experienced in many African states, the rooting of effective democracy has not yet taken place. Neither could it be expected to do so in the same way as in the Western states, owing to the differences in points of origin and the length of time these have had to be institutionalized in society. This then represents a challenge for conflict management in Africa as alternative mechanisms need to be identified, developed and institutionalized, whether they be based on indigenous systems or adaptations of effective structures from other states. It is through the continued and advanced analysis of conflict and, for that matter, peace that it is possible to develop these systems and implement them in such ways as to effectively manage conflicts and prevent them from becoming deadly (Bowd & Chikwana, 2010).

Three Other Broad Trends Worth Noting about Violence in Africa

First, contrary to the jarring images of violence and famine that tend to characterize Western imaginations, violent civil conflict is quite a rare phenomenon in Africa. Virtually all of Africa's states had their borders drawn by colonial powers, and today contain substantial ethnic minority groups. Most have gone from independence to the present day without falling prey to civil war, despite extraordinary ethnic, religious, and tribal diversity.

Second, while internal conflict - civil war - is somewhat more common among African states than states in some other parts of the world, it is worth noting that since independence there have been very few wars between African states. Clashes between rebels and government militias are the most common form of armed conflict, and pitched battles between state armies are virtually unheard of. The recent 1998 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is one of the few exceptions to this rule. The defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) was effective at creating a strong norm of non-interference by African countries in each other's internal affairs, which has prevented cross-border conflicts from escalating. These borders usually are thousands of miles long, undefended, and permeable, making smuggling and migration impossible to police.

Third, since the 53 states of Africa are quite varied and diverse, it is important to note that they have produced strikingly different patterns of civil violence. Africa has been home to wars of decolonization, secessionist struggles by minority groups, long-running guerrilla insurgencies, coups, urban unrest in sprawling slums, clashes between paramilitary thugs with ties to political parties, simple criminal banditry, coordinated mass murder by state authorities, and anarchic state failure.

The Nexus between Democracy and Conflict in Africa

The relationship between democracy and conflict in Africa is too important not to be critically examined. The failure of democracy and governance in Africa has its roots in several sources, the principal among which are the legacy of colonialism, the nature of the independence struggle, and the character of the post-colonial state and their leaders.

Independence struggles around Africa required mobilization and produced movements in which, with few exceptions, decision-making was largely based on the will and consent of the people. At independence, however, African countries maintained over-centralized state institutions that reposed enormous powers in the hands of a few.

As Ake (1996) states, democracy was not a significant item on Africa's post-independence governance agenda.

Similarly, Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) after conducting a rigorous empirical study to determine the cause of civil wars in Africa, assert that the most important factor causing Africa's conflicts is poor governance. They find that Africa's dearth of democratic institutions is one of the significant factors causing civil war in Africa.

Collier (2010) asks the question of whether the spread of democracy has affected the proneness of political violence. There is an obvious expectation that democracy should reduce the proneness to political violence, due to the complementary and reinforcing attributes of accountability and legitimacy that are attributes of a democracy. Accountability causes a government to perform because it is accountable to voters; on the other hand, a legitimate government has a mandate to do what it said it would do. Accountability and legitimacy should thus doubly deliver against violence as there is less objective basis for grievance, and for any given grievance it should be harder to persuade people to resort to violence.

Third, Africa's pronounced failure to develop strong democratic institutions has compounded other problems and significantly increased the risk of political violence in the continent. The confident assertion that democracy is the answer to violence almost prevents a researcher from testing the evidence whether this assumption is right. The peace-promoting benefits of democracy are one of the few unifying beliefs across different political spectrums.

As African states began to democratize, it was expected that the relationship between democracy and violence would promote peace on the continent. However, according to Collier and Rohner (2008), democracy had the opposite effect in poorer countries than that in richer countries. In low-income countries, with $2,700 per capita per year, or around $7 per person per day, democracy made society more dangerous. In countries with middle-income levels, democracy systematically reduced the risk of political violence. At higher levels of income, societies are safer. In societies that are not poor, democracy enhances their already safer conditions, in poor societies, democracy

amplifies the already severe dangers. Indeed, it is more striking that in the absence of democracy, as a society starts to get rich it becomes more prone to political violence. Democracies get safer as income rises, whereas autocracies get more dangerous.

According to McCandless and Schwoebel (2011: 276),

> *Democracy is not always associated with peace. Many theorists agree that the process of democratization often generates considerable violence within states. In particular, elections can be risky where competition for power through the ballot box sharpens differences, often along ethnic lines, despite the recognition that elections are acknowledged as critical elements in moving towards the systems of nonviolent conflict management that democracy should rest upon. At another level, democratic peace theory, which suggests that democracies rarely go to war with each other, has elicited notable critiques and observations: Democracies have led and fuelled proxy wars in Africa, especially during the Cold War. Moreover, intra-state wars are now far more common than inter-state wars in Africa, rendering the democratic peace theory somewhat irrelevant to the continent.*

Collier (2010) further explains that political violence has become a variant of the struggle for power in African states. In high-income societies over the past century, however, the principles of democracy have been internalized and have come to be regarded as universal. Political violence as a variant of the power struggle is regarded as illegitimate and might not make a right. Ballots, not bullets should pave the route to power.

African countries are increasingly susceptible to civil violence because their colonial and post-independence history has left their governments extraordinarily weak. Levels of wealth tend to be low, stagnant, and unequally distributed. The challenge of democratization as well as maintaining peace and ensuring security on the African continent has remained one of the major preoccupations of African governments since they gained independence. These efforts have

continued with varying degrees of success and failure. The peace-building capacities of African states are generally weak but there are some signs of improvement in recent years. This is particularly important given the increasing challenges that many African countries are facing. In the absence of the conflict-mitigating effects of a broad-based, proactive civil society with substantial stakes and personal interests in maintaining the system, elite rivalry, out-group resistance, and entrepreneurial violence can be expected to further complicate the inherent problems of manageability in African societies (Marshall, 2006).

Conclusion

Democracy in Africa goes beyond just the process of conducting elections and understanding the context, actors and incentives that drive each conflict is of critical importance in the search for solutions. Democratization and conflict resolution cannot be addressed in whole through using just one prescription nor can they be resolved through quick-fix solutions. As both democracy and conflict in Africa also have global aspects, much more than a local solution is needed.

As stated earlier, contrary to popular belief, Africa's civil wars are not due to its ethnic and religious diversity. Using recently developed models by Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) of the overall prevalence of civil wars in 161 countries between 1960-1999, drawing lessons with special reference to Africa, showing that the relatively higher prevalence of war in Africa is not due to the ethnolinguistic fragmentation of its countries, but rather to high levels of poverty, failed political institutions, and economic dependence on natural resources.

Recommendations

The best and fastest strategy to reduce the prevalence of civil war in Africa and prevent future civil wars is to institute democratic reforms that effectively manage the challenges facing Africa's diverse societies. To promote inter-group cooperation in Africa, specially tailored political governance and economic management institutions are

needed. Africa's ethnic diversity helps it not impede the emergence of stable development as it necessitates inter-group bargaining processes. These processes can be peaceful if ethnic groups feel adequately represented by their national political institutions and if the economy provides opportunities for productive activity.

There is also a need for African leaders to ensure good governance, strict adherence to the rules of law and respect for the fundamental rights of the citizens.

In the same vein, this study also recommends the need for the creation of a more balanced judicial institution, free and independent from the influence of the executive and the legislature, both financial and appointment, so doing it will go a long way in ensuring that those in power will follow the rule of law when it comes to political governance.

Similarly, this study also recommends that political parties should do away with the ideology of imposition of candidates, there should be more direct primaries whereby the public who are members of political parties can vote to select candidates to represent their political parties in general elections. Finally, there is a need for the transformation of our electoral umpire to merge the global standard, first of all by making it independent from the executive both in terms of financing and appointment of its chairman, also the needs to migrate to e-voting whereby someone can vote from the comfort of his/her home, beyond this the election shouldn't be one-day activity but rather a one-week event as it is practised in most advance societies.

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