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**Received:**  
January 05,  
2023

**Revised:**  
March 11,  
2023

**Published:**  
June 10, 2023

**Journal of Politics and International Studies**  
*Vol. 9, No. 1, January–June 2023, pp.121–133*

## **A Culturalist Explanation of Democratic Deficit in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The failure to ensure smooth democratization and uninterrupted institution-building process has been explained by scholars in different ways. Both structural and rationality paradigms have been used to explain democratic deficit in different political and social settings. The variants with in structural paradigm focus on historical explanations, class structure and role of institutions. Though, the predominant intellectual theme in case of Pakistan has been the role of the military as an institution in political processes, which ultimately hinders democracy. Scholars of rationality paradigm point out civilians' (i.e. both elite as well as voters) indifference towards the participatory governance system. This paper challenges these arguments and fulfills the gap in literature by offering a culturalist explanation to frame Pakistan's democratic deficit. This research focuses on how the culture with traits like revered authority and unconditional submission tends to end up becoming anti-democracy. The paper tests whether a centralized family system, predominance of clan/tribe/caste system and a culturally convenient interpretation of religion creates an environment, which hinders democracy.

**Key Words:** Democracy, Political Culture, Individualism, Collectivism, Democratic Deficit, Political Order, Family System, Clan/Tribe, Caste System, Religion, Islam, Cultural Paradigm, Democratization, Pakistan Politics, Civil-Military Relations

### **Introduction**

There have been several attempts to explore and understand Pakistan's inability to institutionalize a democratic political order. Multiple arguments, normative assertions and (conspiracy) theories emerged in the academic literature to explain it. However, these studies generally remained focused on 'dominant themes' of the field. For example, much of the attention has been given to civil-military relations to explain Pakistan's failure to democratize. Although civil-military paradigm holds significant theoretical importance, yet it lacks substantive understanding of

how countries democratized or can democratize in structurally complex socio-political settings. Hence, there are plausible reasons to look beyond civil-military paradigm to explore Pakistan's political evolution.

This paper deals with the existing theoretical and conceptual debates within the field of democratic theory. There is no single definition of democracy because of its fluid nature and practical complexities. Several efforts have been made to develop an agreed-upon definition but multi-dimensional sociopolitical realities always challenged theoretical certainties. To infer an inclusive definition of what constitutes a democracy, this research deals with it through both procedural and substantive ways.

Our main theoretical argument is that democracy requires accommodative, pragmatic, and individualist social settings to get developed and institutionalized. Cultural individualism, in varying degree, is a necessary prerequisite to ensure democratic continuity. The available data shows that cultures where individual freedoms are ensured and protected, are likely to get democratized more rapidly than those having traditional social systems where primitive ideas regulate power sharing system. The primary pre-requisite for a society to become democratic is to accept the socio-political change, which is opposed and countered in collectivist social system e.g. Pakistan.

Pakistan is a classic example of collectivist society where a centralized family system, birdari and clan domination and religious reverence exists and an unconditional submission to authority is a norm. The social system in Pakistan encourages collectivism and demands individuals to revere traditional authority without any question e.g. religious authorities are respected and offered political support without any material demand. This research concludes that neither imbalanced civil-military relations nor any external factors are solely responsible for Pakistan's democratic deficit. On the contrary, the paper fills the gap in literature by arguing that it is the absence of cultural values (individualism), which creates an obstacle in the way of smooth democratization.

### **An evaluation of existing literature on democratization in Pakistan:**

Many scholars have attempted to study Pakistan's democratic journey from its inception in 1947 to the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those having a civil-military theoretical background have predominantly produced the literature on democratization in Pakistan. This led to a broader conclusion that civil-military bureaucracy or the military establishment is responsible for the rise of authoritarianism in Pakistan (Aziz, 2007; Giunchi, 2014; Rizvi, 1998; Shah, 2014). Structuralists support this argument by using historical evidences. To them, unlike India the colonial masters never developed the provinces of Punjab and KPK in Pakistan. Rather these provinces were only for military recruitments. It led to the creation of a non-democratic polity in the case of Pakistan (Oldenburg, 2010). Another interesting argument is that colonial masters had a unique strategy to ensure their rule in India. It was pivotal for the colonial forces to develop a strong state apparatus to manage and control the indigenous classes (indigenous bourgeois, the Metropolitan neo-colonist bourgeoisie and the landed masses). Institutions of bureaucracy and military were developed to maintain order and ensure the survival of the colonial rule. As a result, Pakistan got an over-developed state apparatus (military and bureaucracy) and under-developed agrarian and

industrial classes (Alavi, 1972). Though this argument put undue focus on the power of military in the 20<sup>th</sup> century India and diminished bureaucracy's role (Essays, 2013).

These accounts have been challenged by another group of scholars who attempted to find out some other causes of military intervention in the political process of Pakistan. Unlike the earlier arguments, the rationalist studies suggest that it was not military mind or institutional design, which urged military to capture political power. Rather it was the civilian leadership's 'indifference' towards democracy, which invited the military to step in (Afzal, 1976; Ahmed, 1987; Ali et al., 2015; Bora, 2010; Rizvi, 1987). Class structuralists for example argue that Muslim majority province Punjab was dominated by the Unionist party, which was relying on the support of landlords (Talbot, 1998). When these landlords learnt that the Muslim League was new a force in the town, they managed to become its part (Waseem, 1994). As a result two kinds of elites: landlords belonging to Muslim majority Punjab and the leadership of Muslim League from the Muslim-minority province i.e. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh made an alliance which each other. It created essentially an undemocratic force in which each focused on their class interests (Jaffrelot, 2002). The resultant dominance of landed aristocracy in political institutions i.e. founding political party Muslim league and first legislature of the country hindered all political/democratic and land reforms. This small but powerful social group of elites always considered democracy as a threat to their class interest. Hence the system remained non-inclusive, which ultimately caused a hindrance to the development of democracy in Pakistan as compared to India (Tudor, 2013).

Be it landlords or military elite, both played an imperative role in the making of political culture of Pakistan. They are not just the ones who control a specific area; rather both make up socio-economic systems, which develop a particular culture that shapes the behaviors of individuals. In Pakistan, colonial legacy along with feudalism and powerful military created a culture, which was not receptive of any political change. The above-mentioned authors have conveniently ignored these broader contexts, which shaped the said culture for the political arrangements. The above mentioned works reflect that there has been no serious study which offers a comprehensive analysis of how is politics shaped and influenced in larger cultural context, which will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

### **Culture, culturalist perspective and democratization:**

The existing literature on democratization reveals that it is largely economy or politics-centric. Until 1980s, scholars of Comparative Politics and democracy focused very less in exploring the cultural determinants of democracy. There has been some discussion about the necessity of civic participation and development of democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963). But due to its supposed undefined scientific rules of inquiry (King et al., 1994), it remained theoretically marginalized. Cultural paradigm has complex theoretical kits and offers theories to explore and understand the social reality beyond economic determinism. The cultural perspective also challenges the fundamentals of methodological individualism (Ross, 2000). Interpretation and narratives help not only in understanding complex issues of the day but also in deconstructing most contested concepts of

the field. Despite less attention of cultural paradigm in Comparative Politics with regard to democratization, it offers theoretically rich explanatory mechanisms for understanding, explaining and analyzing the political phenomena (Merelman, 1991). Owing to its rich explanatory power, this paper uses cultural paradigm to explain process of democratization in Pakistan.

According to Marc Howard Ross (1997), cultural paradigm helps us in understanding and making better sense of all the processes developed or shaped by it in five ways. One, culture significantly provides the context in which politics takes place. Two, it links individual identities with the collective/group identities. Third, culture determines organization of actions within culturally defined boundaries. Fourth, it offers a comprehensive framework to interpret the behaviors and actions of others. Fifth, the most important contribution is that it offers resources for both political organization and mobilization.

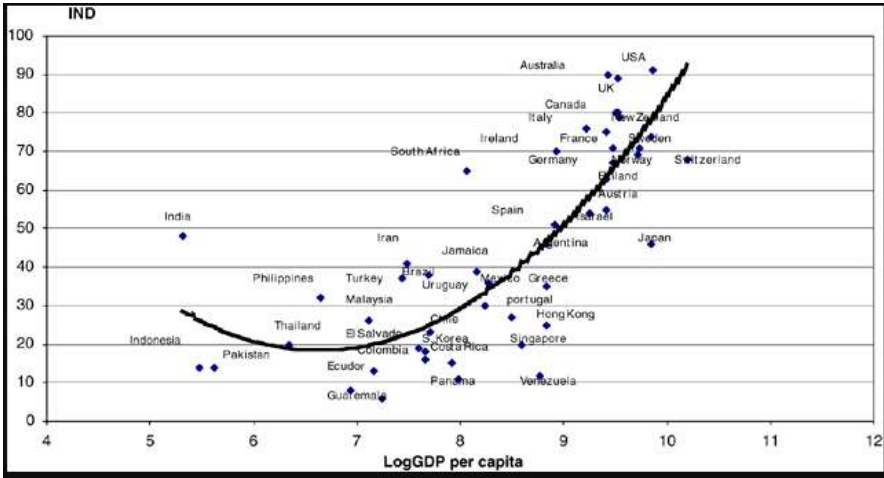
Methodologically, culture is both a cause and an effect (Lim, 2010). Culture determines individuals' behavior and actions. Similarly some institutions not only impact the culture but also develop and transform it. This study, however, takes **culture as a cause** (independent variable), **in order to understand its role in shaping a political setting where one system gets democratized while other doesn't**.

This study uses a formal model of democratization developed by two professors of University of California, Berkeley Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gerard Roland (2015). The model is based upon cultural parameters and offers an empirically grounded explanation as to why some countries democratize while others don't? The model is based upon theoretical claims that societies having individual freedom, freedom of expression and other individualistic tendencies are more likely to democratize. On the contrary, collectivist societies where conformity and group thinking dominates, democracy is less likely to take place. The authors note that collective actions (revolution or social movements) are possible in collectivist societies but they tend to replace a bad autocrat with a good one. Social movements demanding any change usually fail in culturally collectivist settings, because a collectivist culture demands standardized level of conformity and opposes individual freedoms and institutional innovations, in order to maintain existing social order.

On the contrary, an individualist culture welcomes change, innovation and encourages individual freedoms. Traditional authority is not revered in such societies.

Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gerard Roland argue that culture dominates economic activity and political processes in a given society. To assess the causal relationship between individualism and democracy, the authors used two instrumental variables whereby one is "a measure of genetic distance between countries based on differences in frequencies of blood types within countries," and second variable "is a measure of historical pathogen prevalence". They explained the persistence of collectivist culture and its impact on social stability.

**Figure 1.** Individualism and Democracy



Adopted from: (Tang & Koveos, 2008)

Figure 1 demonstrates the empirical evidence used by the authors for validation of their theoretical assertions. As a matter of fact, Hofstede’s remarkable work on index of individualism notes that countries with high scores are more individualistic and vice versa. Now as a matter of fact, third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) and its dynamics reflect the aforementioned trends. Countries with high rate of individualism become democracies and countries with collectivist tendencies are either not democratized or still struggling to become genuine democracies.

Pakistan’s social structure and cultural beliefs suggest that it is largely a collectivist society with underlying aspirations to protect its stability and shared social order. Therefore, Pakistan’s collectivist social order always remained a big challenge to democratization.

This study contributes to the existing literature by pointing out the mechanisms and process, which takes place in facilitating or constraining the process of democratization. The study attempts to outline the dynamics and various factors, which allow or hinder democratization in collectivist and individualist societies.

**Pakistan’s social system and the basis of political order:**

This part of the paper chiefly focuses on social hierarchies and power relations in Pakistani society. The underlying assumption is that there exists a causative link between social structure and political processes of the country. Framing of a state constitution and citizen state relationship depends entirely upon its social system, cultural trends and historical context. Pakistani society is a strictly collectivist, having interdependent social system. The self in this society is perceived as part of the collective rather than being seen as strictly autonomous. Moreover, obedience and conformity in this society is highly valued. Pakistan’s social system and cultural history has significantly impacted its political processes. Hence, there

exists a significant relationship between sociological realities and political preferences.

Before moving on, it is important to understand meaning of social structure. A social structure is a complex whole, which shapes and develops behavior of individuals towards life, sets their preferences and gives basics to the process through which such meanings and system of thoughts are attained or created. Precisely, it is a complex web of internal and external factors, continuously acting and reacting to shape human behavior.

This study has taken three independent variables i.e. family system, birdari system and religion in order to understand their role in shaping a collectivist social structure which lays the foundations of authoritarian political tendencies in the country or makes an autocratic rule acceptable. The theme line is that Pakistan's centralized family system, birdari politics, and role of religious clergy are the key factors in developing a culture, which is principally anti-democracy.

Moshadi Shah and Shehla Amjad (2011) conducted a study using methodologies devised by Hofstede. The research shows that on Individualism Index (IDV), four provinces of Pakistan namely Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and KPK scored 31.94, 40.77, 3.75 and 18.08 respectively. Masculinity Index rates of these four provinces are also highly patriarchal. The provinces scored 80.38, 74.84, 67.69 and 62.50 respectively. This is reflection of lack of femininity or values, which oppose the widespread male-dominated culture in Pakistan. Overall, the researchers concluded that Pakistanis society has collectivistic social settings where individual freedoms are discouraged and group loyalty is rewarded.

Pakistani culture unlike the western social system (where democracy has been consolidated) places focuses on obedience and harmony between and among groups. Individuals are not trained as independent subjects with some fundamental rights and inherent responsibilities to achieve their goals. On the contrary, freedom and autonomy are seen as social evils.

### **Family system in Pakistan: authority, infallibility and children:**

The word family is derived from Latin word familia, which generally refers to close relationships. Sociologists do not have an agreed upon definition of the term family but it is generally referred to a primary groups consisting of a husband, wife and their children (Ford, 1994; Macionis, 2016). But in the contemporary world single parent family, gay-lesbian marriages and their legal recognition have substantially posed questions to traditional understanding of the idea of marriage and family (Crowder & Teachman, 2004). However, the present study does not intend to dig into the idea of family and its varying nature. It treats family as a social institution, which plays primary role in the socialization of its members.

There are two broad types of family: extended family which refers to a household consists of husband and wife living along with their parents and nuclear family system typically found in urban areas where only husband and wife live with their offspring (Macionis, 2016).

In Pakistan, there has never been a disruptive industrial revolution, which would have potentially impacted cultural basis or moral disposition of the society. Therefore, it is generally argued that Pakistani society unlike the one in the

Western world is primarily focused on joint family system (Baig, Rehman and Mobeen, 2014). Although a new pattern is in the full swing in urban areas yet its pace is slow and widely opposed by socially conservative forces.

In Pakistani culture, children are socialized to be obedient and submissive which are taken as tokens of respect and well upbringing. Different interpretations of religion are used in order to create submissiveness. Riffat (2014) argues that Islam plays an important role in the socialization of children in Pakistan as it offers a socially acceptable cultural ethos to structure the self and its relationship with the family. Muslim values embedded in cultural idioms are found to be prevailing in Pakistan with the single purpose; produce morally elevated individuals. Similarly, a special focus is placed on the concepts like duty (mostly moral), obligations (generally cultural but in religious vocabulary) and respect.

### **Caste and clan system in Pakistan:**

In developing societies, there are several identities markers, which play instrumental role in shaping and controlling citizens' behavior. The caste or what is typically called birdari is the most important and fundamental force, which helps shaping individuals' preferences and overall worldview.

The word birdari is derived from a Persian word bardarm, which literally means 'brotherhood' (Awan & Kokab, 2016). As the meaning of the word reflects, birdari refers to collective identity which ensures that those belonging to the same ancestors make-up an organized community to ensure political supremacy and cultural homogeneity. Birdaris are generally closed groups whereby new entries are neither accepted nor encouraged.

In the case of Pakistan where religion is said to be the primary source of political unification and public morality, Anatol Leiven (2012) challenges such assumptions and argues that it is the birdari, which matters the most. It is important to clarify at this moment that in the present research birdari or brotherhood is being used in its widest sense. It implies that feeling of oneness in form of tribes or other social groups fall within the framework of brotherhood. For example, in Balochistan, Sindh and KPK there are tribes e.g. Marri, Bugti, Pitafi, Bhutto, Wazir and Mehsud etc. These groups offer collective identities whereby individuals become an integrated part of a complex whole. It is often clear from the last names of individuals like Khan, Malik and Sardar, which indicate their identity and social position (Rehman, 2013).

In this regard, Punjab, Pakistan's largest province in terms of population, offers interesting perceptive. Since the days of colonialism, Punjab has been under the influence of landlords, feudal lords and powerful men having political influences and state patronage. After the partition of Pakistan, unlike India, there have been no substantial land reforms, which did not change power dynamics in Punjab. The dominance of landlords in Punjab remained unchanged mainly due to alliance of the Unionist Party, chiefly representing landlords, with Muslim League. There is voluminous literature available on the role of birdaris in Punjab (Ahmed, 2009; Wilder, 1999). The academic literature suggests that the role of biradari-based factional politics is significant throughout the electoral process. Birdari is considered as primary determinant of political/voting behavior (Wilder). There are

some prominent and politically the most relevant castes in Punjab e.g. Jatts, Rajputs, Araiens, Gujjars, and Sayads etc. Social prestige coupled with political relevance make these castes most powerful groups while determining the future course of political process in the country.

Furthermore, in a study Dr. Ahmed Usman (2016) explores the relationship between caste hierarchy and rights to political participation. Dr. Usman focused on zamindars (landowners) and kammis (service-providers) and argued the former have the control over political process whereas the later are barred from contesting or participating in elections for being socially at lower strata. Moreover, he identifies that birdari plays a fundamental role throughout the electoral process in rural Punjab. Despite his narrow understanding of political participation, limiting it to elections only, the author considerably demonstrates that birdari is key in nominating, campaigning and winning an election. Dr. Usman argues that “in elections, zamindar biradaris show unity by taking a collective decision whether to contest election or support a candidate in local bodies’ or general elections.”

In a recent study, conducted in a district of Punjab, the researcher found that 53.2% male and 39.0% female believe that the birdari is the primary institution in our political system. Only 19.3% male and 14.6% female said no. The data shows that it is wide held opinion, an established belief, that politics in the province is considerably influenced by collectivist identities and the birdari is among others the most prominent and powerful one (Awan & Kokab, 2016).

Moreover, birdari is a collectivity, which not only plays an important role in the political decision making process rather its significance and utmost importance in social sphere is also profound and overreaching. According to a recent quantitative analysis, 22.9% male and 12.2% consider birdari as the extremely effective element to solve disputes. There are 38.5% male and 41.5% female who consider that the role of birdari is effective. It demonstrates the underlying social power of birdari as a mechanism of control and order whereby trivial familial issues and complex political matters are deliberated and decided collectively (Awan & Kokab, 2016). The trends at social as well as political level in Punjab establish the assumption that there is a greater role of collective identities to shape and determine political preferences and behavior of the members concerned.

### **Religion, infallibility and the birth of collectivism:**

There are various studies, which intend to explore the role of religion and politics in Pakistan (Azhar & Muhammad, 2015; Mahmood, 1995). The focus of almost all-available scholarship remained exclusively on the trends of religio-political parties and their electoral performance. But there has been a dearth of academic literature on how religion plays a role of creating a submissive culture, which leads to unconditional political support to Pirs (faith-healers). The present work is looking at the role of religion in creating a particular mindset, which demands unconditional submission and unwavering political commitment to an imagined or real spiritual authority. This research does not attempt to explore the empirical evidence that religious parties have historically been unable to appeal the political reasoning of masses in a religiously conservative society. Our argument does not rely on a quantitative explanation of electoral results. This research attempts to elaborate the role of religion in shaping a particular social and political behavior in



qualitative terms.

There has been a deep role of religion in socio-political development of Pakistan. Historical background in this regard needs to be understood. Official version of the state of Pakistan and considerable academic scholarship maintains that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam (Richter, 1979; Malik and Humayoun, 2010). The claim is further backed by the statements of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, who frequently argued that Muslims in sub-continent needed a separate, independent political settings in order to frame their lives according to the teachings of Islam (Khan, 2010; Yousafi, 1966; Zarrin, 2013). Muhammad Ali Jinnah's focus on Islam helped him creating a spiritual association with the masses who unconditionally stood behind by him. A religious discourse developed and nurtured in pre-partition subcontinent framed the socio-political canvass of a newly born state i.e. Pakistan. Therefore, there has been a dominant role of religion in Pakistan's public sphere. To demonstrate such effect, a study carried out by Dr. Mathew Nelson (2006) concluded that 41pc Pakistanis believe that good education refers to one which heavily relies on Islamic principles and inculcates Islamic ethics in the minds of students. It confirms the general observation that there exists a tilt or total focus towards predominance of Islam in public sphere of Pakistanis.

In the last elections, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan and Chairman of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) were seen visiting holy places just days before the general elections (Dawn, 2018). The leaders were carefully photographed with an underlying intention to convey two messages. Firstly, the one is able to show off the faith and believe in Islamic philosophy, which is politically useful to attract religiously conservative segment in Pakistani society. Secondly, the leader is getting the blessing of a blessed-man. It becomes convincing to vote for, and stand by, such an incredibly faithful man.

Punjab, with a major chunk of population, is an interesting example of Pirs and shrines, and their political influence. In a recent study, researchers found that 64 shrines in Punjab have direct political connections to maintain their electoral supremacy. While explaining the historical origin of the Pirs in Punjab, the researchers argue, "when the British opened the political arena, the pirs, as spiritual and feudal lords, were natural contenders for power... Azhar, M., & Muhammad (2015). The combination of religious and landed power, in particular, is a vital political asset in a milieu where, in the words of Anatol Lieven (2012), 'it is not wealth alone, but wealth plus either kinship or spiritual prestige, or both, that gives political power.

Similarly, in KPK, Sindh and Balochistan a traditional social structure contains fundamentals of religion Islam in its ideological composition. Particularly in KPK there is a strict adherence to Islamic principles and spiritual association, which was demonstrated in the elections in 2002 when an alliance of Islamic parties were managed to proclaim the electoral win. Madrassas, traditional schools exclusively for religious studies, have been a part of Pakistan's society but during the 1980s with the aid of Middle Eastern States. Since Madrassas are old kind of educational institutions where focus is placed on moral and ethical development of an

individual. The special focus remains on the tenets of respect and reverence to elders and those given the charge of religious positions.

Islam as a religion focuses on the rights of parents and bars offspring from questioning the parental authority except if they (parents) compel their kids to turn their back to something holy under the light of the holy Quran. In simple terms, the ones having greater reverence towards their parents and elders are the ones who will get a higher position during the day of the judgment. These principles whereby unconditional submission is demanded ultimately lead to the creation of a culture where reverence predominates and the ability to question or negate the authority fades away. Pakistan and particularly Punjab are the classic examples of such collectivist behavior.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan has been making attempts to institutionalize a democratic political order since its inception in 1947. This research reveals that Pakistan's democratic deficit has been considerably a result of an anti-democracy culture. A culture, which neither recognizes independent self nor encourages individuals' right to freely apply their mind while making decisions in the public life, tends to create a social context where democracy cannot sustain. Pakistan needs to review its cultural base in order to institutionalize a sustainable democratic political order.

Democracy tends to flourish in cultures where individualism is encouraged and preserved. This argument presented by Gorodnichenko and Gerard Roland (2015), validates the case of Pakistan. A centralized family system in a patriarchal context places significant focus on submission and reverence as opposed to liberty and independent application of mind over complex socio-cultural questions. Secondly, birdari system is an extended expression of familial values; it expects the in-group members to place a special focus to identities than any other factor while offering support in the political realm. Thirdly, religion has a greater role to play in Pakistan's political process; it provides families several theoretical explanations to socialize children who become morally strong and, at the same time, faith healers demand their followers' a complete submission.

Finally, based upon the works of Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gerard Roland, this study highlights that: a) democracy requires certain cultural settings to evolve; b) Pakistan has a collectivist social system which opposes democratic values; c) democracy is unlikely to be institutionalized without popular support and careful institutionalization at the social level. Though, this research suggests the scholars to revisit the existing literature and adequately frame Pakistan's democratic deficit in order to effectively address it.

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