

## IMPACT OF AMOTEKUN OPERATIONS ON LOCAL CRIME RATES AND SECURITY MECHANISMS

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### Abstract

*This study examines the ramifications of Amotekun operations on local crime statistics and security frameworks in Ondo State, Nigeria, utilizing a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the corps' efficacy in bolstering community safety. Quantitative analyses indicate that 47.1% of participants perceive Amotekun crime prevention strategies as effective, with an additional 20.6% deeming them very effective. Noteworthy is the fact that 25.8% extol Amotekun crime-fighting effectiveness, 38.8% emphasize their swift emergency response, and 36.0% recognize their dedication to comprehensive case resolution. Qualitative understanding substantiate these conclusions; interviewees report substantial declines in crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and cult activities, crediting this achievement to Amotekun officers' extensive knowledge of local terrains and their relentless pursuit of offenders, often in partnership with military forces. However, concerns have emerged regarding their methods, proposing that their strategies may engender fear rather than authentic deterrence, and accentuating issues associated with transparency and potential covert operations within the organization. The study concludes that Amotekun operations have markedly bolstered security in Ondo State, culminating in a discernible decrease in various criminal activities and enhanced community safety. Their entrenched community connections and proactive methodologies have been integral to these successes. Nevertheless, it is imperative to address concerns regarding operational transparency and ensure compliance with constitutional mandates to maintain public confidence and the corps' enduring effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** Amotekun, community policing, crime prevention, Ondo State, security mechanisms.

### Introduction

Security constitutes a pivotal requirement for the stability and advancement of society, exerting a profound influence on governance, economic development, and the overall quality of life. On a global scale, the strategies for crime prevention and control have undergone

significant evolution, characterized by a multitude of policing approaches that integrate both formal and informal security frameworks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022) emphasizes that community-oriented security initiatives have gained prominence as a response to the inadequacies of traditional policing frameworks, particularly in developing countries where law enforcement institutions frequently face resource limitations. Nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom have successfully incorporated community policing and neighborhood watch initiatives to augment security at the local level (Skogan, 2019). In a similar vein, in the African context, countries like South Africa and Kenya have formulated hybrid security frameworks, amalgamating state policing with community-driven security initiatives to address the escalating crime rates (Baker, 2021). In Nigeria, the intricate nature of criminality and insecurity has prompted the formation of regional security entities as adjuncts to the traditional policing framework. The inception of the Western Nigeria Security Network, commonly referred to as Amotekun, in the year 2020, signifies a pivotal transformation in the security paradigm within Southwest Nigeria. Its establishment was catalyzed by the surging security challenges, encompassing armed robbery, abduction, and rural banditry, which have significantly strained the Nigeria Police Force (Oluwakemi & Adebayo, 2021). The operational framework of Amotekun underscores the importance of localized intelligence acquisition, community participation, and swift intervention in criminal occurrences, thereby fortifying security systems in the region (Ajayi & Fashola, 2022).

The ramifications of Amotekun on local criminal activity and security frameworks continue to be a focal point of scholarly examination, necessitating an empirical assessment of its efficacy in deterring crime and enhancing public safety. While certain studies contend that Amotekun has played a role in diminishing crime rates by augmenting formal security institutions (Akinyele, 2022), others raise concerns about operational challenges, including issues of accountability, legal legitimacy, and inter-agency conflicts (Ojo, 2023). This study seeks to examine the extent to which Amotekun has influenced local crime trends and security structures in Southwest Nigeria, situating its operations within the broader discourse on community policing and security sector reforms

## **Literature Review**

### **Global Perspectives on Community-Based Security Mechanisms**

The prevention of criminal activity and the management of security have increasingly depended on community-oriented policing as an ancillary strategy to traditional law enforcement frameworks. Globally, diverse models of community policing have been instituted to address specific security issues at the local level. In the United States and the United Kingdom, initiatives such as neighborhood watch programs and problem-oriented policing methodologies have been utilized to bolster public safety through active community engagement (Skogan, 2019). These methodologies underscore the importance of collaboration between law enforcement entities and community members in the realms of intelligence collection, crime reporting, and conflict resolution (Gill et al., 2018). In a similar vein, countries in Latin America, including Brazil and Colombia, have embraced community policing and urban security initiatives aimed at mitigating elevated instances of organized crime and gang-related violence, with varying degrees of efficacy (Ungar, 2020).

In the African context, hybrid security frameworks have been created to mitigate the limitations posed by formal law enforcement agencies. South Africa, for example, has instituted community policing forums that incorporate local vigilante groups into state security initiatives (Baker, 2021). The Nyumba Kumi initiative in Kenya, a community-driven surveillance program, has significantly contributed to enhancing intelligence gathering and crime prevention in both rural and urban settings (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2022). These frameworks exemplify the increasing acknowledgment of localized security systems as essential complements to centralized policing structures, particularly in areas where state resources are inadequate to confront escalating security challenges.

### **Regional Security Frameworks in Nigeria**

Nigeria has persistently contended with multifaceted security threats, encompassing armed robbery, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and insurgency. Notwithstanding the constitutional mandate of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to uphold law and order, obstacles such as insufficient personnel, corruption, and logistical inadequacies have impeded its operational effectiveness (Olonisakin, 2020). In response to these challenges, various informal and regional security formations have arisen, including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast, Hisbah in the Northwest, and Amotekun in the Southwest (Ojo, 2023). These security entities function primarily to augment conventional policing efforts and enhance grassroots security through community involvement and intelligence-led operations.

The establishment of the Western Nigeria Security Network, referred to as Amotekun, in 2020 represented a pivotal transformation in Nigeria's security framework. This entity was created by the six states within the Southwest Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti to confront the increasing prevalence of rural banditry, kidnapping, and armed robbery (Ajayi & Fashola, 2022). In contrast to traditional security agencies, Amotekun operates with profound community engagement, drawing upon indigenous knowledge systems, local informants, and swift response methodologies to address criminal activities (Akinyele, 2022).

### **Impact of Amotekun on Crime Rates in Southwest Nigeria**

A multitude of scholarly investigations have scrutinized the efficacy of Amotekun in the realm of crime prevention and mitigation. Empirical evidence indicates that Amotekun has played a significant role in the observed decline of crime rates within the jurisdictions it serves. For example, an evaluation performed in Oyo and Ondo States revealed a reduction in incidents of abduction and armed robbery subsequent to the strategic deployment of Amotekun personnel in key locations (Oluwakemi & Adebayo, 2021). The operational framework of this security entity, characterized by its dependence on local intelligence and its adeptness in traversing challenging terrains, has been recognized as pivotal to its accomplishments (Ajayi & Fashola, 2022).

Conversely, certain academics contend that the operations of Amotekun have engendered apprehensions regarding its legality, adherence to human rights, and the emergence of inter-agency discord. Documented instances of extrajudicial measures, power abuses, and ethnic profiling have surfaced in various communities, prompting criticism from civil society entities (Ojo, 2023). Moreover, the absence of a cohesive regulatory structure governing regional

security apparatuses in Nigeria has exacerbated tensions between Amotekun and federal security bodies, notably the Nigeria Police Force (Akinyele, 2022).

### **Challenges and Future Prospects of Amotekun Operations**

Although Amotekun has exhibited its potential in confronting localized security dilemmas, its sustainability and efficacy are contingent upon the resolution of specific structural and operational impediments. Scholars underscore the necessity for augmented training, legal endorsement, and inter-agency cooperation to bolster its legitimacy and operational efficiency (Badejo, 2022). Additionally, the incorporation of technological advancements such as surveillance drones and forensic databases could significantly enhance Amotekun's capabilities in crime prevention (Olonisakin, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper is anchored on Routine Activity Theory (RAT) by Cohen and Felson (1979). This theory suggests that crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. When one of these elements is disrupted -particularly through the presence of effective guardianship-crime rates are likely to decline.

For years, communities in Southwest Nigeria have struggled with rising insecurity, from armed robbery to kidnapping and herder-farmer clashes. Residents lived in fear, and local businesses suffered due to the uncertainty of safety. The creation of Amotekun in 2020 was a response to this crisis, offering a localized security structure designed to complement federal law enforcement. Amotekun operatives, drawn from the communities they protect, act as the capable guardians described by RAT, increasing surveillance and deterring potential offenders. Their presence in rural and urban areas disrupts criminal opportunities, making it harder for offenders to act without consequence.

Empirical evidence supports this claim. In Ondo State, for instance, Amotekun has been credited with reducing highway kidnappings through constant patrols and intelligence-driven interventions (Ajayi & Fashola, 2022). Similarly, in Oyo and Ekiti States, their rapid response to security threats has restored a sense of safety, allowing farmers and traders to resume economic activities without the persistent fear of attacks (Ojo, 2023). This aligns with Felson's (1987) argument that effective guardianship does not necessarily require an increase in police personnel but rather strategic security measures that prevent crime from occurring in the first place.

However, Amotekun's effectiveness is not without challenges. Concerns over human rights abuses, operational overlaps with federal security agencies, and allegations of ethnic profiling have sparked debates on its legitimacy (Badejo, 2022). While the security outfit has helped fill the policing gap, its long-term success depends on proper oversight and coordination with formal law enforcement. If these elements are strengthened, Amotekun can serve as a sustainable model for community-driven crime prevention, proving that enhancing local guardianship remains a key strategy in addressing crime in Southwest Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

This investigation utilizes an exploratory research methodology, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research frameworks. The research was executed within the confines of Ondo State, situated in the southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Ondo State is recognized as one of the Yoruba states within Nigeria's national framework. It is comprised of 18 local government areas and is geographically positioned between longitudes 4°30' and 6° East, as well as latitudes 5°45' North, thereby rendering it entirely within the tropical climate zone (DAWN Commission 2021).

The state is flanked by Ekiti and Kogi States to the northern boundary, Edo State to the eastern frontier, Oyo and Ogun States to the western limits, and the Atlantic Ocean to the southern edge. Encompassing an area of 14,788.723 square kilometers, Ondo State recorded a population of 3,460,877 in the year 2006, comprising 1,745,057 males and 1,715,820 females. The population is anticipated to reach 4,883,792 according to projections from the State Bureau of Statistics (Ondo State Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Ondo State represents a coastal region characterized by a diverse demographic composition. A significant portion of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, fishing, and trade. The cultural legacy of Ondo State is notably rich, with numerous antiquities and artifacts preserved within local palaces. The predominant language utilized is Yoruba, supplemented by several indigenous dialects. The state possesses arable land conducive to the cultivation of crops such as maize, yam, kola nut, palm oil, and cocoa. A report disseminated by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2013) in the year 2013 designated Ondo as one of the foremost producers of cocoa and palm oil within Nigeria. Ondo State has experienced a range of security challenges, including conflicts between herders and farmers, incidents of kidnapping, and communal violence. The state was intentionally selected as the focal area for this study due to its central geographical location within the region, along with the proactive initiatives of the state government in advocating for the establishment of Amotekun and its ongoing support for the security force.

The study's population encompasses police officers, community leaders, members of local communities, and Amotekun personnel operating within Ondo State. Amotekun officers are pivotal in shaping and comprehending the dynamics associated with the Amotekun phenomenon. A multistage sampling technique that integrates venue-based and convenience sampling methodologies was employed to derive 45 samples from the identified population. A total of 800 questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data, while key informant interviews were utilized for qualitative data collection. The quantitative data were analyzed through the application of frequency tables, whereas thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative data examination. The interview data underwent transcription and evaluation by two experts in qualitative research, who provided corrective feedback based on their observations and recommendations. Subsequently, pertinent themes were coded for streamlined identification.

## Discussion of Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 800)**

Category	Level	N (%)
Gender	Male	370(46.3)
	Female	430(53.8)
Age	18-30 years	478(59.8)
	31-40 years	176(22.0)
	41-50 years	108(13.5)
	51-60 years	38(4.8)
Marital Status	Single	478(59.8)
	Married	308(38.5)
	Divorced	14(1.8)
Ethnic Background	Yoruba	687(85.9)
	Igbo	46(5.8)
	Hausa	13(1.6)
	Others	54(6.8)
Level of education	No formal education	14(1.8)
	Primary education	4(0.5)
	Secondary education	111(13.9)
	Tertiary education	671(83.9)
Monthly Income	No response	36(4.5)
	10000 – 50000	532(66.5)
	51000 – 100000	159(19.9)
	101000 – 300000	73(9.1)
Religion	Islam	113(14.1)
	Christianity	679(84.9)
	Traditional	8(1.0)

### Field Survey, 2024

The survey, which targeted 800 respondents, provided demographic composition of the study population. The findings revealed a slightly higher representation of females (53.8%) compared to males (46.3%). A significant proportion (59.8%) fell within the 18–30 age bracket, followed by those aged 31–40 years (22.0%), 41–50 years (13.5%), and 51–60 years (4.8%). Marital status distribution indicated that the majority (59.8%) were single, 38.5% were married, while a small fraction (1.8%) were divorced.

Ethnic representation was predominantly Yoruba (85.9%), with smaller proportions of Igbo (5.8%), Hausa (1.6%), and individuals from other ethnic backgrounds (6.8%). Overwhelmingly majority (83.9%) had tertiary education, while 13.9% had secondary education, and a very small percentage had primary (0.5%) or no formal education (1.8%).

Income distribution showed that most respondents (66.5%) earned between ₦10,000–₦50,000 monthly, while 19.9% earned ₦51,000–₦100,000, and 9.1% received ₦101,000–₦300,000. In terms of religious affiliation, Christianity was the dominant faith (84.9%), followed by Islam (14.1%), with a small fraction (1.0%) identifying as traditional worshippers.

### **Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Interviewees (Amotekun officers, community leaders, and police officers)**

**Table 2**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender:</b> Male	23	55.5%
Female	22	45.5%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age:</b> 20- 44years	6	10%
45- 54years	12	30%
55-75 years	27	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status:</b> Married	39	90%
Never Married	6	10%
	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Religion:</b> Christianity	33	80%
Islam	9	15%
African Traditional Religion	3	5%
	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Qualification:</b> Level	12	30%
OND/NCE	9	15%
HND/B.Sc.	18	47.5%
Post Graduate	6	7.5%
	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Occupational Cadre:</b>		
Superior police officer/Amotekun officer	6	10%
Civil Servant	12	30%
Retiree	24	57.5%
Student	3	2.5%
	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

**Field Survey, 2024**

**Table 3: Impact of Amotekun Operations on Local Crime Rates and Security Mechanisms (Effectiveness) in Ondo States (n=800)**

	Frequency	Percent
Effective	377	47.1
Very effective	165	20.6
Not effective	258	32.3
Areas where they are effective	206	25.8
Combating crime	80	38.8
Quick response to emergencies	75	36.0
Pursuing case to logical conclusion	51	24.7
No response	594	74.3

**Field Survey, 2024**

The quantitative data pertaining to the efficacy of crime prevention, as delineated in Table 3, indicates that 35.8% of the participants acknowledged their awareness of the impact of Amotekun operations on crime control mechanisms, whereas 64.3% indicated a lack of such knowledge. Furthermore, 8.3% of the respondents indicated that the initiatives have fostered tranquility within their households, while 27.5% noted a reduction in criminal activities. A total of 47.1% of the respondents affirmed that the Amotekun crime prevention strategies are effective in their locality, 20.6% characterized them as very effective, while 32.3% expressed the view that they are ineffective. Additionally, 12.8% of the respondents indicated uncertainty, while 25.8% reported on the area of crime intervention.

The results derived from both qualitative and quantitative analyses underscore the multifaceted ways in which the operations of Amotekun have influenced crime control in Ondo State, Nigeria, which has been deemed significant, as articulated by Ajayi and Badru (2021). According to a report by Vanguard Newspaper, there has been a discernible decline in the incidence of violent crime in regions where Amotekun is operational. Specifically, the occurrences of kidnappings and armed robberies have reportedly diminished in certain areas of Oyo and Ondo states, attributable to the proactive initiatives undertaken by Amotekun operatives.

An interviewee validated the preceding assertion and emphasized the rationale behind the capacity of Amotekun officers to exert an influence on crime control. He articulated the following:

*. . . Crime rates in the region have experienced a significant reduction due to the ongoing operations of Amotekun. Instances of incessant kidnapping, armed robbery, and cult activities have notably decreased. However, pockets of such crimes still persist, as evidenced by a kidnapping incident between Owo and Ibese in Ondo State three weeks prior to 3/11/2023. This indicates that certain forms of violent crime have not been entirely eradicated. The interviewee further contends that the effectiveness of Amotekun officers, who are integral members of the community possessing intimate knowledge of its nooks, crannies, and the surrounding forest, has played a crucial role.*



*They have proven adept at pursuing criminals, particularly herders, from the forest, leveraging their experience as former hunters. This involves extended periods of staying in the forest to combat criminals, sometimes with the collaboration of the army. The interviewee argues that such feats are beyond the capabilities of the regular police force.* **KII, male, High Chief, 77 years, Ondo State**

Another interviewee affirmed that:

*. . . The farmers/herders clashes, a previously unfamiliar occurrence in this region, involved herders wielding AK47 rifles, allowing cattle to trespass onto people's farms, graze on their crops, and engage in criminal activities such as rape, kidnapping for ransom, and, in some instances, maiming or even murder of their victims. She emphasized that hardly a week passed without incidents of kidnapping being reported between Owo and Ifon in Ondo State. However, with the implementation of the Amotekun Operation, these incidents have significantly decreased to the barest minimum.* **KII, female, market leader, 52 years, Ondo State**

The research aligns with Cohen and Felson's (1979) Routine Activity Theory, which asserts that criminal activity transpires when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge. In Southwest Nigeria, escalating insecurity has rendered daily existence perilous; however, Amotekun has emerged as a capable guardian, obfuscating criminal opportunities through patrols, intelligence acquisition, and prompt responses. By addressing deficiencies in conventional policing, Amotekun serves to deter crime and bolster community safety. Nonetheless, the long-term efficacy of these initiatives necessitates appropriate oversight, legal endorsement, and community collaboration to maintain its impact and ensure ongoing reductions in crime.

Conversely, another interviewee expressed a divergent perspective. He contended that:

*. . . The Amotekun operation's control mechanisms and crime prevention efforts have not proven to be effective; rather, they appear to suppress crime by instilling a fear that individuals with such intentions seek to evade. The rationale behind this evasion is the apprehension that once arrested by Amotekun, individuals will be subjected to trial by ordeal. The interviewee contends that there is an expanding clandestine network within Amotekun and similar regional security outfits, such as Ebube agu in the southeast, where members undertake an oath of secrecy, a traditional oath of commitment. He argued that if these security personnel had pledged allegiance to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the situation might be different. The interviewee questions the need for secrecy, suggesting that if the goal is to prevent crime, transparency with the public would be more appropriate* **KII, male, community leader, 52 years, Ondo State**

## Comparing the Effectiveness of the Amotekun Corps with other Informal Securities in the Study Area?

**Table 4:**

(n=800)	Frequency	Percent
More effective	412	51.5
Less effective	177	22.1
No difference	211	26.4
State the areas of effectiveness	756	97.4
Peace promotion	200	26.0
Combating crime	250	33.0
Intelligence gathering	200	26.0
Responding to emergencies	106	14.0
No idea	44	5.5

### Field Survey, 2024

The data pertaining to inquiries that juxtapose the effectiveness of Amotekun with that of other informal security entities within the study area has yielded the following from the quantitative analysis. Table 4 illustrates that 51.5% of the respondents asserted that the Amotekun Corps is more effective in comparison to other informal security measures in their vicinity, 22.1% reported it to be less effective, whereas 26.4% noted no discernible difference. Moreover, 91.9% of respondents indicated that the effectiveness observed within the area is employed for crime mitigation, while 2.6% reported its utilization for the promotion of peace. The data suggests that Amotekun appears to be more efficacious in combating crime relative to other informal security measures, as indicated by the quantitative findings, and a Key Informant Interviewee corroborated this stance, further elucidating the reasons underlying this assertion:

*. . . The establishment of Amotekun has garnered significant support from both the people and the government. This support is attributed to the fact that members were drawn from various informal security groups, including hunters (ode) and vigilantes, whose past experiences contribute to their effectiveness in performing their duties. Their reliance on charms, coupled with the enthusiasm they bring to the task of protecting lives and property, has enabled them to succeed in combating kidnapping and other crimes. While there is still work to be done, they have performed better than other security initiatives thus far.*

*KII, female, market leader, 57 years, Ondo State*

Another interviewee, however, has a contrary view and he asserted that:

*... Ah I have not observed any noticeable reduction in crime in my area attributed to the effectiveness of Amotekun. This is mainly because they are seldom visible, and other security forces are more prominent and actively carrying out their tasks. Because of this, I find it challenging to assess the performance of Amotekun.*

*KII, female, market leader, 45 years, Ondo State*

## **Findings**

The socio-demographic profile of the interviewees delineates a demographic composition of 55.5% males and 45.5% females. In relation to age distribution, 60% of the participants are situated within the 55-75 year age bracket, 30% are aged between 45-54 years, and 10% fall within the 20-44 year range. A substantial majority (90%) of the respondents are married, while 80% identify as adherents of Christianity. With respect to educational qualifications, 47.5% possess Higher National Diploma or Bachelor of Science degrees, whereas 30% hold Ordinary National Diplomas or National Certificates in Education. Pertaining to professional backgrounds, 57.5% are classified as retirees, 30% are employed as civil servants, and 10% hold positions as superior police or Amotekun officers.

The investigation into the operational effectiveness of Amotekun in Ondo State elucidates a significant impact on local crime statistics and security mechanisms. Empirical data indicates that 47.1% of respondents perceive Amotekun's crime deterrent strategies as effective, with an additional 20.6% categorizing these initiatives as very effective. Notably, 25.8% of participants highlight Amotekun's capability in crime suppression, 38.8% praise their prompt emergency responses, and 36.0% recognize their dedication to thoroughly pursuing cases to their logical conclusions.

Qualitative assessments further substantiate these findings. One respondent, a septuagenarian High Chief from Ondo State, remarked on a significant decrease in criminal activities such as abduction, armed robbery, and cult-related offenses. He attributes this achievement to the Amotekun officers' extensive knowledge of local topography and their relentless pursuit of offenders, often in collaboration with military entities. In a parallel observation, a 52-year-old female market leader noted a marked reduction in conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists, which had previously been widespread and frequently violent. She credits the restoration of peace and security in the affected areas to the operations of Amotekun.

Nevertheless, certain concerns have been expressed. A 52-year-old male community leader articulated skepticism regarding the methodologies employed by Amotekun, suggesting that their strategies may instill fear rather than genuine deterrence. He also emphasized issues related to transparency and the potential for covert operations within the organization.

## **Conclusion**

The operations conducted by Amotekun have substantially enhanced security in Ondo State, culminating in a significant decline in diverse criminal activities and improved community safety. Their ingrained community connections and proactive approaches have been instrumental in achieving these outcomes. However, to maintain public confidence and ensure enduring efficacy, it is imperative to address concerns regarding operational transparency and compliance with constitutional mandates.

## Recommendations

1. Establish explicit protocols and transparent communication channels to alleviate apprehensions regarding clandestine operations and ensure that activities conform to constitutional frameworks.
2. Cultivate partnerships with local communities through regular forums and feedback mechanisms to guarantee that security strategies are community-focused and address specific local requirements.
3. Provide ongoing training for Amotekun officers to uphold human rights standards, legal frameworks, and best practices in community policing.

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